

DESTINATIONS

Destinations is the official newsletter of Valley Metro



Valley Metro Rail Receives Federal Excellence Award

Valley Metro Rail has received the Transportation Planning Excellence Award, a prestigious national award from the top federal transportation agencies for its joint effort with the city of Phoenix to encourage smart land use planning near light rail stations.

The award is presented jointly by the Federal Highway Administration and Federal Transit Administration, in conjunction with the American Planning Association. It recognizes organizations nationwide that have undertaken outstanding initiatives to develop, plan, and implement innovative transportation planning practices.

More than 240 applications were submitted in 10 award categories. Valley Metro Rail received the award in the category of Transportation and Land

Use Integration for its Comprehensive Program on Transit Supportive Land Use. Developed by the city of Phoenix, the program is designed to encourage transit-compatible land uses that complement plans for light rail in the area. Highlights of the program include a transit overlay zone near light rail stations that encourages people-oriented uses, modification of the building code to provide the opportunity for additional accessible housing, and a market analysis to understand the development potential around the stations.

The goal of the program is to ensure that future development is compatible with light rail and to make light rail stations and nearby areas people-friendly, thereby encouraging use of the system. "Through this program, Phoenix is

helping to ensure the success of its upcoming light rail system," according to the award selection panel.

Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon, who chairs the Valley Metro Rail Board, emphasized the city of Phoenix's efforts to be proactive in encouraging transit-supportive uses around light rail before the METRO system is built. "Light rail is a valuable investment in the future of the city of Phoenix and our entire region," said Gordon. "We are maximizing our investment in light rail by ensuring smart development happens near rail stations."

"It is an honor to be recognized for our efforts by the federal agencies who oversee our nation's transportation system," said Valley Metro Rail CEO Rick Simonetta. "This award is a symbol of our community's dedication – See *Excellence Award*, page 2

Below: Photo simulation of a light rail train at Central Avenue and Osborn Road.



Bus Riders Log On to Plan Trips

Valley Metro is a political subdivision of the state of Arizona overseen by a 12-member board of local elected officials. It was created by voters in 1985 with the passage of Proposition 300.

For the hearing and speech impaired, transit, rideshare, and ADA information is available on TTY by calling (602) 495-0936.

Visitors to Valley Metro's Web site are finding out just how easy it is to plan their next bus trip with the Online Trip Planner. Compliments have poured in since the service became available in January and users began creating itineraries and viewing schedule information online. The Online Trip Planner also allows them to see which routes serve a location and how close they are to a bus stop.

Internet-savvy Valley Metro riders had asked for a comprehensive, interactive tool that would give them schedule information and

allow them to plan a trip, explained Scott Wisner, Valley Metro customer service and marketing manager.

"We took the same tools we use in the call center and provided them online," he said.

The number of new, regular, and visiting bus riders who have taken the time to provide feedback on the new service speaks to its success. "I am very impressed!" wrote a first time Valley Metro rider. "It gave me two different options that will both work very well." To see how the Online Trip Planner works, go to www.ValleyMetro.org and click on the "Custom Bus Trip Planner" link.



A new print ad promoting the Online Trip Planner will be featured in local publications.

Valley Metro's Semester Pass Answers Students' Transportation Needs

Students have a lot to think about without having to worry about parking or high gas prices. Valley Metro's Semester Pass meets students' transportation needs by giving them access to the Valley any time, anywhere local buses travel—without the parking woes—and it saves them money at the same time.

The Semester Pass is available to full time students and graduate assistants attending participating colleges and universities. For just \$120, students enjoy discounted bus travel from Aug. 15 to Dec. 31, saving

significantly over regular monthly bus passes.

Passes are available at the beginning of each semester at the ASU cashier's office, ASU West's parking services, Grand Canyon University's personnel office, Tempe Transit Store, and at all Maricopa Community College bookstores.

Students can find out more about the program by visiting the Valley Metro Web site at www.ValleyMetro.org.



Excellence Award

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to making METRO light rail the best system possible."

Valley Metro Rail is a non-profit, public corporation overseeing the design, construction, and operation of the light rail system. Major construction will begin this fall. The system is scheduled to open in late 2008. For more information about the Valley's light rail system, visit www.ValleyMetro.org or call (602) 534-1807.



Since 2000, ridership on Valley Metro buses has increased 35 percent.

Bus Ridership Continues to Rise

Ridership on Valley Metro buses has reached its highest level ever. According to Valley Metro's newly published Bus Ridership Report, there were 54 million boardings systemwide between July 1, 2003 and June 30, 2004. That's a 7 percent increase over the previous fiscal year.

"Increases in population, higher gas prices, and transit service improvements due to dedicated tax money in specific cities—along with enhanced system connectivity—are the main reasons for this year's higher numbers," said Ken Driggs, executive director of Valley Metro/RPTA.

Since 2000, boardings have increased 35 percent, indicating growing support for public transit among Valley residents. Cities and towns experiencing the largest ridership gains in the past four years include: Avondale at 97 percent, Gilbert at 24 percent, Chandler at 19 percent, and Glendale at 16 percent.

Also driving the trend in increased ridership is the commuter transit service, RAPID. According to Debbie Cotton, acting public transit director for city of Phoenix, bus ridership typically declines during the summer months, but a growing number of RAPID riders have found the service to be more convenient than driving, regardless of the season. RAPID ridership for June of this year was 60,687, up 15 percent from 52,600 in May.

For transit information, including trip planning assistance, please visit www.ValleyMetro.org or call (602) 253-5000. For TTY text telephone service, dial (602) 261-8208.

New East Valley Transit Contract Awarded

The Valley Metro/RPTA Board of Directors recently awarded the Valley Metro East Valley transit service contract to MV Transportation, which also operates Phoenix Dial-a-Ride. Based in Fairfield, California, MV is the largest domestically held, minority-owned transit management firm in the nation, with more than 125 transportation contracts and over 6,000 employees.

The transition of service to MV Transportation will occur in three phases. The first phase, which took effect August 30, includes all of the services currently operated by private contractor ATC-Mesa (routes 30, 96, 104, 120, 128, and 136) and the Mesa express routes operated by private contractor ATC-Phoenix (routes 531, 532, and 533). There will be no service changes on the local routes. The express routes will see several changes, but these will not affect routing.

The articulated buses, owned and operated by city of Phoenix, will serve the city's local routes that have high demand. In order to compensate for the reduced capacity on the Mesa express routes, Valley Metro has increased the number of trips on those routes.

Phase two will occur on January 1, 2005, when MV will begin operating East Valley Dial-a-Ride. Phase three will begin on April 10, 2005, when most of the services operated by ATC-RPTA—routes 61, 72, 81, 112, and 156—will move into the East Valley facility. In addition, Chandler express routes 540 and 541 will transfer to the East Valley from ATC-Phoenix. As with the first phase, there will be no change in local service, but the expresses will have additional trips to compensate for the loss of articulated buses.

Valley Metro Rail Awards Largest Contract for Rail Project

A \$57.6 million contract to construct the Valley Metro Rail maintenance and storage facility was awarded to Sundt/Stacy & Witbeck. It is the single largest construction contract for the METRO light rail project.

Construction of the maintenance and storage facility is expected to begin in the fall. The 35-acre facility will be located near the junction of State Route 143 and Loop 202 in east Phoenix.

The facility includes two main buildings to maintain and repair vehicles and store maintenance equipment. The Maintenance of Equipment building is the larger of the two measuring 136,000 square feet, approximately the size of two football fields placed side by side.

The site also includes a five-track storage yard capable of storing up to 40 light rail vehicles, with expansion capabilities of up to 100 vehicles. More than 100 people will be employed at the facility, including light rail operators and maintenance staff.

“In addition to providing needed transportation infrastructure to retain our quality of life and economic competitiveness, light rail construction will boost our economy by providing good-paying jobs to local workers,” said Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon. Construction of the 20-mile METRO light rail system is projected to generate more than 50,000 local jobs.

Phoenix-based Sundt Construction has constructed numerous major local projects and the California-based Stacy & Witbeck has constructed other light rail systems nationwide.

For more information about METRO light rail, visit ValleyMetro.org or call (602)534-1807.

Artist rendering of a facility building.



Hamilton Sundstrand's Todd Bringlinger (far left) and Hollis Sanders (far right) receive the Best Workplace for CommutersSM award from Win Holden, Greater Phoenix Chamber Chair and Robin Snyder, EPA.

Cities Designated “Best Workplaces for CommutersSM”

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has designated the cities of Chandler, Glendale, Peoria, Phoenix, and Tempe as Best Workplaces for CommutersSM. More than 60 local employers were recognized by the EPA as organizations that provide innovative commuting solutions for their employees. The prestigious national designation recognizes the organizations for demonstrating a commitment to reducing traffic and air pollution and improving the quality of life for commuters by offering solid rideshare and flexible work options.

“These companies are setting the standard for all companies and are paving a path for all Valley commuters,” said Win Holden, chairman of the board for the Greater Phoenix Chamber of Commerce, a Valley of the Sun Best Workplaces for CommutersSM coalition member.

The Best Workplaces for CommutersSM program is sponsored by the EPA and the U.S. Department of Transportation as a voluntary partnership between businesses and federal, state, and local government. For more information on the program, go to www.ValleyMetro.org or to find out if your company qualifies, visit www.bwc.gov.



Regional Transportation Plan Envisions Improved Commuting Options

The average commuting distance and time in metropolitan Phoenix is increasing. It takes the average commuter more than 23 minutes to travel about 13.5 miles to work. Just two years ago, travel time was less than 12 miles in about 20 minutes. At this pace, where will be in 20 years—besides stuck in traffic?

After spending time in their cars on local streets and freeways during rush hour, Valley residents are looking for other options.

Additional bus service, more HOV lanes, extension of the light rail system and the creation of new park-and-ride lots are all part of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) that will give commuters the options they seek. The RTP will be put into place if an extension of the current half-cent sales tax for transportation is approved by Maricopa County voters on November 2.

Many Valley residents are already experiencing easier commutes thanks to public transportation, and they look forward to the continued benefits of a multi-modal transportation system.

“The top benefit of riding the bus is not dealing with traffic, just letting someone else do the driving,” said Bob Petrillo, senior transportation engineer at Wood,



Even with four cars at his disposal, Bob Petrillo chooses to ride the bus and leave the driving to Valley Metro.

Patel & Associates. “I’ve also gotten a lot of work and studying done over the years.”

Though he has four cars at his disposal, Petrillo finds that he's able to get just about anywhere in the metropolitan region using the bus.

Another commuter in Phoenix found that he saved \$270 each month on gas after starting a vanpool with seven other people. Mike Kidd, Maricopa County Sheriff's

Office detention officer, said, “Vanpools are a great way to go, and I look forward to seeing this type of program grow.”

Petrillo, Kidd, and many others have chosen to ride the bus or use other alternatives modes to reduce stressful commutes, save money, and lighten the load on the Valley's overburdened freeways. The RTP will help more people find alternatives as bus service increases, light rail service is extended, and more carpool lanes are added to our freeways.

For the RTP, the metro Phoenix region is divided into four sub-areas: the East Valley, West Valley, Central Valley, and Northeast Valley. Plans for transportation improvements in each of these areas are detailed at www.mag.maricopa.gov. For group presentations on the Regional Transportation Plan, call (602) 254-6300.

Valley Metro Unveils Updated Logo

Valley Metro has added the words “Smart move” to its logo to help define who Valley Metro is and how the transportation organization serves the community. Residents are not familiar with the name “Valley Metro” with awareness levels of the Valley transit system's name measuring 23 percent. The new tagline, “Smart move,” was developed by R&R Partners, the advertising and public relations firm that has been developing marketing campaigns for Valley Metro transit and Rideshare services since January 2004.

“The word ‘smart’ really defines the planning side of Valley Metro and how it considers its riders, local businesses, and the community when providing transportation services for the short and long terms,” said Denise

Draper, account executive for R&R Partners.

The word “move” is a natural choice to depict mobility and transportation services. Putting the two words together creates an identity for Valley Metro that will heighten awareness and foster a positive image of the overall transportation system.

“Smart move” is being used in print advertisements, radio and TV spots, the bus book, and many other collateral pieces distributed throughout the Valley Metro service area. A branding and image campaign will begin October 2004, utilizing the “Smart move” tagline to help increase public familiarity with Valley Metro and to reinforce the services it provides.



Route Scout Helps Transit Users Reach Their Destinations

A new bus messaging and tracking system for the entire bus system in metro Phoenix was introduced this summer. Route Scout announces bus routes, stops, and destinations through an automated voice-announcement and text display system using GPS (Global Positioning System) technology.

Route Scout announcements and text messages are prompted by specific GPS locations called trigger points. While the service benefits all passengers, it is also a great aid to those who are hearing or sight impaired.

Valley Metro buses have been equipped with satellite technology and modern communications equipment. Together, they constitute the



The new vehicle management system will soon send real-time bus arrival messages to electronic signs at RAPID stations.

new vehicle management system (VMS). This system is also being installed on dial-a-ride vehicles, as well as the future METRO light rail trains.

“The VMS is a next generation improvement in transit service,” said Phoenix Vice Mayor Peggy Bilsten, chair of the city’s Transportation Subcommittee and Valley Metro board member.

Valley Metro’s customer service department is also connected to the VMS, helping them provide callers with up-to-the-minute information on where buses are in their routes. The main benefits of the system are more efficient service and improved communication with customers, and between bus operators and field staff.

Destinations is the official newsletter of Valley Metro. It is published with a circulation of approximately 6,000 copies. We welcome your letters, comments, and suggestions.

Destinations is also available on audiotape. If you know of anyone who might be interested in receiving Destinations in that format, please call Valley Metro’s Pat Dillon at (602) 534-1806.

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