

# DESTINATIONS

DESTINATIONS IS THE OFFICIAL NEWSLETTER OF VALLEY METRO



Summer 2009

## Bus Rapid Transit Projects Keep Moving Mesa's BRT stations and new transit center reach mid-point

"Now the excitement for this project begins," said Jim Book, project manager of the Mesa Main Street Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) stations and Superstition Springs Transit Center. "When people begin to see the work above ground, you know something is happening because it's new and different."

Book is referring to the construction of new stations and a transit center that will complete the Mesa Main Street LINK bus service that began operating in December 2008.

The success of the project has been attributed to weekly meetings between the contractors, city of Mesa and Valley Metro RPTA staff. According to Book, regular and ongoing communication has helped solve little issues that could have become larger ones.

Traveling on Main Street, most of the 26 stations have their steel frames upright. Currently being installed are the shading elements: resin louvers that provide maximum shade while allowing visibility and safety. Unique features also include special lighting and dynamic message signs giving next bus arrival.

The Superstition Springs Transit Center, located south of the mall and just off of US 60, is advancing as well with a lot of below ground work including the addition of a new culvert that will help level the area to add parking spaces. The Center will be adding above ground elements later this summer.

"There are a lot of things going on and when you put them all together, it adds to the quality of the service," said Book.

The half-cent countywide sales tax approved by voters in 2004 is providing \$7.4 million dollars for both construction projects. Completion is set for October.



BRT station in Mesa under construction.

## Next Stop: Bus Rapid Transit on Arizona Avenue and Country Club Road

Fueled by federal stimulus dollars, the next BRT route to make an appearance on the transit map will travel between the Chandler park-and-ride and the Sycamore Station in Mesa. Still in the design phase, the \$22.5 million project narrowly missed indefinite delays due to severe sales tax revenues creating a major funding shortfall for new programs.

Coming to the rescue, the American Reinvestment and Recovery Act (ARRA) is providing \$15 million to make the project come to fruition. In April, the Valley Metro Board of Directors approved the special funding for this project.

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# TRANSIT LIFE CYCLE PROGRAM

## Board Determines Direction for Balancing Transit Plan Budget



Voters gave their approval for enhanced regional transit nearly five years ago. It was anticipated that more than \$8 billion dollars (2006 dollars) would be provided with one-third of the countywide half-cent sales tax (Proposition 400) providing new and enhanced bus service, regional transit centers, park-and-rides and 28 miles of light rail extensions. Expectations for a complete regional transit system by 2026 were kept afloat by a rosy economy as sales tax revenues climbed above estimated projections for more than 18 months.

Then the economy took an unforeseeable nosedive. Collection of sales taxes dipped and revenues to fund projects and services started to evaporate. According to expert forecasts, the decline in revenues between now and 2026, when the sales tax sunsets, is slightly more than \$1 billion. The loss to bus related projects and services is \$568.4 million and it leaves light rail with a \$433.6 million deficit. The impact to future services and projects is serious, meaning that what was once a part of the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) will be delayed, modified or deleted.

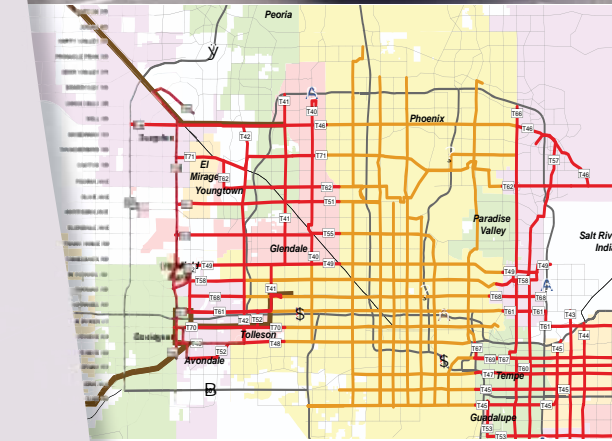
Five alternatives were developed that would provide the opportunity to balance the regional public transportation fund budget. Discussion on the alternatives has occurred at the RTPA committee level since March, and has culminated into a final recommendation as a placeholder that the Board approved on June 18.

The placeholder alternative includes the following elements:

- Delays projects in order of how they are shown in the current RTP
- Implements new service that will not take precedence over building facilities and other capital projects
- Maintains existing service levels
- Delays new arterial bus rapid transit (BRT) routes beyond 2026, with the exception of Arizona Ave./Country Club Dr. and Main Street
- Delays of projects occur according to cash flow
- Delays could occur anywhere from four to 18 years
- Should the 20-year tax be extended beyond 2026, initial estimates show that all projects in the current plan would be completed no later than 2040.

Efforts will continue through the rest of the calendar year to re-evaluate assumptions and priorities to develop an acceptable budget-balancing plan to replace the "placeholder" plan.

Balancing the transit portion of public transportation funds is required by the federal government as the Maricopa Association of Governments updates the long range plan and the Transportation Improvement Program.





# 1 FUNDS SOUGHT FOR “GREEN” PROJECTS

The RPTA is hoping to get two projects funded by the federal government that will not only help reduce the transit system’s greenhouse gas emissions, but also energy use.

The Federal Transit Administration has requested proposals for a discretionary grant called Transit Investments for Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction, a.k.a. TIGGER. RPTA has thrown its hat in the ring to receive federal dollars that would benefit the agency, as well as the community.



## Benefits fan out from users to manufacturers

First on the grants wish list is an electric cooling fan system that would be placed in the engine compartment of each of the 155 existing transit buses at the Valley Metro Mesa operations and maintenance facility on Greenfield Road. The system is known as a mini-Hybrid Thermal System, or MH8. The MH8 offers affordable fuel economy while lowering emissions without modifications to the current operations. The electric fans, which are grouped in a collection

of eight per bus, are 95 percent efficient in turning electricity into air movement.

Besides being efficient, the cooling system is smart because it communicates with other internal bus systems. For instance, it can sense when the bus is in an idle condition and forces the fans to be in a “quiet” mode during passenger loading and deboarding.

## Benefits of the cooling system include:

- Savings in fuel usage of nine percent annually for both Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) and diesel buses
- Reduces pollution by eliminating 1.8 million pounds annually of carbon dioxide and particulates in the air
- Offers more reliable operations, especially in the hotter summer months
- Reduces maintenance costs
- Helps create jobs in Arizona and at the manufacturing site in Michigan

Testing of the MH8 system has been proven in the extreme heat, with a system currently in place on four RPTA buses since May 2007.

# 2 FUNDS COULD HELP SUN POWER FACILITY IN MESA

The second of two projects submitted for TIGGER funds would take energy from the sun to create energy for the Valley Metro



Mesa operations and maintenance facility. After consulting with Salt River Project’s (SRP) Sr. Engineer of Sustainability Initiatives and Technologies, installation of solar panels would be a feasible option to save costs and enhance the environment.

If installed, the solar panel system would generate enough power for 71 homes each year, which is more than 1 million watt hours. It would also reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 12,650 tons and lower energy use by 42 percent annually over a 22-year period.

“In addition to using clean fuels and installing particulate traps in our vehicles, we are always seeking out new ways to try to reduce our carbon footprint,” said David Hyink, Program Supervisor at Valley Metro RPTA. “Besides generating energy, purchasing and installing the solar panels could help generate local jobs with manufacturing firms in the vicinity.”

Any excess power generated by the panels would be purchased by SRP at daily wholesale rates. SRP is the nation’s third largest municipal utility.

## Next Steps

If grant funding is received, contracts would be awarded as early as this fall. The project amount requested for the electric cooling fan system is \$3,875,000. The solar panel request is budgeted at \$7,000,000, which includes design, equipment and installation.



## New Transit Fares For Bus and Light Rail

**B**us and light rail fares increased on Wednesday, July 1, 2009. Riders can save money by planning ahead, especially for purchasing an All-day pass on the bus. Passengers who purchase an All-day pass at a fare vending machine or at one of 150 transit sales locations prior to boarding a local bus can save \$1.75 off of the on-board bus full-fare price.

The cost for a one-ride trip on the Valley Metro local bus, METRO light rail and the LINK bus is \$1.75, and an All-day pass is \$3.50. Purchasing an All-day pass on-board the local/LINK bus will cost \$5.25. An express bus or RAPID (commuter bus service) All-day pass will be \$5.50 in advance, or \$7.25 on-board.

### FARE SAVINGS

EFFECTIVE JULY 1, 2009

Save more by purchasing your All-day pass at all light rail stations, transit centers, retail locations or online at [ValleyMetro.org](http://ValleyMetro.org)

**LOCAL ALL-DAY PASS \$3.50**

**VS.**

**LOCAL ALL-DAY PASS (ON-BOARD BUS) \$5.25**

### OTHER WAYS TO SAVE

Multi-day passes and reduced day passes will also increase except for the 7-day pass. A passenger purchasing a 7-day pass will get seven days of rides for the price of five. Getting on the bus with pre-purchased fares, such as an All-day, 3-day, 7-day, or 31-day pass means faster boarding, which helps keep the bus on schedule. Passengers can also pay now with \$5 bills at the farebox, but the machines on-board the bus won't give change.

"We would prefer that the fares didn't go up, but we are facing declining sales tax revenues and a 41 percent increase in operations costs since 2004" said David A. Boggs, Valley Metro Regional Public Transportation Authority (RPTA) executive director. The base fare of \$1.25 has not increased since 1994 and with a goal of funding 25 percent of operations costs from passenger fares, the Board of Directors have asked that the fares be increased. At the same time, Valley Metro's primary funding source, which is based on sales tax revenues, has declined significantly.

To keep pace with bus/light rail fares, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) Dial-a-Ride fares for East Valley and Phoenix are increasing. For details on the new fares, go to [ValleyMetro.org](http://ValleyMetro.org).

# City by City

TRANSIT UPDATES FROM  
ACROSS THE VALLEY  
METRO SERVICE AREA

## Neighborhoods linked via Scottsdale Trolley



The Scottsdale Neighborhood Trolley runs free service every twenty minutes, both clockwise and counterclockwise.

Since 2006, Scottsdale residents have enjoyed the benefits of the free Neighborhood Trolley service to get them to and from work, school, shopping, running errands and connections to other transit routes. The free service runs every twenty minutes, both clockwise and counterclockwise. The initial route was a great success with approximately 96,000 riders in the first year of service.

Scottsdale added six additional miles to the popular route in April

2008. This extension provided residents access to more of Scottsdale's popular destinations and community centers, and also connected with Tempe's Orbit system. Ridership increased to over 140,000 during the 2007/2008 fiscal year with the expansion of the route.

Ridership on the Neighborhood Trolley continues to show support from the community with over 300,000 riders in the first ten months of the 2008/2009 fiscal year.

## Purchase lands new Surprise park-and-ride

With Proposition 400 funds provided by the RPTA, Surprise City Council approved the purchase of land located at the southeastern corner of Grand Avenue and Bell Road for future use as a transit park-and-ride. After the final phase, it will have a capacity of 500 spaces, which will accommodate express bus riders, vanpool and carpool riders, and potentially, commuter rail passengers.

We are happy to have a permanent park-and-ride that joins the network of regional facilities in the Valley Metro service area," said Randy Overmyer, Surprise senior transportation planner. "It will provide options for residents who are concerned about better utilizing their commute time."

Express bus routes 571 (downtown Phoenix) and 572 (Scottsdale) currently serve the park-and-ride site at the Surprise Aquatic Center (Bullard Avenue and Tierra Buena Lane). Once the new facility is constructed, the express routes will switch to the new site.



*"We are happy to have a permanent park-and-ride that joins the network of regional facilities in the Valley Metro service area."*

**Randy Overmyer**  
Senior transportation planner  
City of Surprise





## New Transit Book Announces Service Changes

**Stop, look and listen!** There may be changes to your bus route beginning Monday, July 27. The new issue of the Valley Metro Transit Book will announce upcoming changes to bus and light rail service beginning the last Monday of July.

- Changes, including a schedule update for METRO light rail, can also be viewed online at ValleyMetro.org.
- More than 40 bus routes, including bus circulators in Phoenix, Scottsdale and Tempe are experiencing schedule changes. This includes elimination of some weekday evening trips or routes that now operate hourly.
- Two Valley Metro bus routes are being discontinued: Route 7L (7th Street Limited), and Route 156 (only the portion of the route on Chandler Blvd. serving Ahwatukee).
- A significant shortfall in sales tax revenues that fund local and regional bus service has forced the reductions in bus service.
- The new Transit Book will be available on July 20 at transit centers, libraries and city halls.

## New 2009 Destinations Guide Available Soon

Summer is a prime time to get out and about. Take a breather from your usual stomping grounds and see all the beauty, activities and fun the Valley has to offer! What will it be? Tossing a ball at spring training in 2010? Visiting the wild side at the zoo? Tuning in to a one-of-a-kind performance?

Valley Metro's 2009 Destinations Guide will be available soon. Pick up your copy at transit centers, park-and-ride lots, city libraries and local hotels and see where Valley Metro can take you.



# UPDATE: Regional Paratransit Study

With approval of a nearly 400-page Regional Paratransit Study in April 2008, the Valley Metro Board of Directors asked that the agency take incremental steps to improve the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit service (Dial-a-Ride) in the region.

The first step involves the process for ADA paratransit eligibility determination. Under consideration is a significant change to the application process, which would switch from the current paper application process to an in-person interview for every ADA applicant. For some customers, additional functional assessments may occur. These assessments are a tool to help understand a person's ability to use the local transit system.

## Reasons for recommending change

Under the current program, ADA eligibility is valid for a maximum of three years. Under the proposed program, the standard length of certification would be increased to five years.

Some customers will qualify for lifetime eligibility.

Customers who are able to use Valley Metro bus and METRO Light Rail for some trips will be offered an ADA bus and rail pass. This photo-ID pass will be provided at no cost to the user and will be good for unlimited rides on buses and on light rail, providing travel flexibility.

Under the proposed program, each customer will be assigned a transit case manager, who will provide customers with personalized services, travel options and resources.

With the help of transit case managers, some application decisions can be made immediately. The proposed program will generally speed up the decision making process for all applications.

A more efficient process will be in place to reduce the significant number of incomplete applications.

For more information and answers to frequently asked questions, visit [ValleyMetro.org](http://ValleyMetro.org). Informational presentations are available to any interested group by calling 602-262-7433.

## Track your daily contribution to pollution



A new carpool and vanpool matching program, called ShareTheRide, allows residents to find commuting partners for their daily travel as well as track precise distances, types of commute modes, and pounds of pollution they emit when driving solo.

ShareTheRide uses Google maps to determine the shortest route between a user's home and work locations. Stops can be added or adjusted to find new commuting partners or reflect their personal commuting preferences. After a trip is made, the calendar documents the commute and calculates fuel consumption and pollution impacts.

To learn more and create a free ShareTheRide account today, please log on to [ShareTheRide.ValleyMetro.org](http://ShareTheRide.ValleyMetro.org) or [ValleyMetro.org](http://ValleyMetro.org).





# METRO LIGHT RAIL

The METRO light rail system's success is evidenced by the ridership numbers, which in May totaled more than 928,000 passengers and in April exceeded one million riders. The average daily ridership is 33,553 on weekdays, with an average of 27,176 ridership on Saturdays and 20,219 on Sundays and holidays. Solid weekend ridership indicates that Valley residents are also using light rail for leisure.

METRO also receives a ridership bump when special events occur along the 20-mile line. Anywhere from 10 to 15 percent of an event's attendees choose light rail as their preferred mode of transportation. Another 1,000 people per day access Sky Harbor Airport from the shuttle available near the 44th Street and Washington light rail station.

For information on METRO, visit [metrolightrail.org](http://metrolightrail.org).



The METRO light rail system's success is evidenced by the ridership numbers, which topped out in April with more than one million passengers.

## Continued from page 1 **Next Stop: Bus Rapid Transit on Arizona Avenue and Country Club Road**

"Like Mesa Main Street, the newest LINK service will have limited stops and special passenger amenities like shaded bus stations," said Ratna Korepella, Valley Metro Transit Planner. In fact, more than 25 stations are planned for the route with stops

approximately every mile. Construction is planned to begin this fall with a completion date scheduled for June 2010, just in time to pick up its first passengers on July 26, 2010.

**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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