aggressive "staff-brokering of decisions" at Metro. "...It is not hard to imagine the odor of a smoke-filled backroom, hear the clatter of chips and the shuffle of the cards as Metro deals the deck and local officials play their hands for parochial stakes."

The League accepted Metro's argument that "a new corridor would be needed in downtown Seattle sooner or later. Why not save ourselves time and money... particularly while there is some hope for federal financial aid?" The *Issue Brief* continued with an additional concern, "the absence of a key civic value in Metro's planning and decision-making: regional accountability."

While this paper drew angry rebuttals from Metro officials, it won surprisingly strong endorsements from the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* and others, who joined the League in calling for ways "to ensure that when Metro next gambles for stakes of this magnitude and significance, the regional citizen has a seat at the table."

If the Metro staff's technocratic self-confidence was beginning to undermine its political credibility, the Metro Council stood firm. It ordered construction to proceed. On March 6, 1987, a prototype dual-propulsion bus burst through a curtain at Union Station to signal the official beginning of excavation and the boring machines took their first bites of downtown clay.

The first year went surprisingly smoothly. Contractors completed one of the trickiest phases of the project by passing beneath the Burlington Northern rail tunnel. The boring advanced 3,200 feet during the year, while crews excavated the pit which would house the future Pioneer Square station and began to excavate the Pine Street portion of the tunnel. The project budget rose to $444 million, which was a modest increase given its scale and complexity.

One contributor to this increase, although not necessarily unwelcome, was City Councilmember George Benson's successful push to install tracks in the tunnel in anticipation of future light rail. The tunnel had been designed with such a conversion in mind, although the federal government did not smile on making an overt commitment to rail. As the new Chair of the Metro Council's Transit Committee, Benson succeeded in finding $5 million in local funds for the tracks and the Metro Council approved their installation in April 1988. Benson's advocacy was backed up by vocal support from Penny Peabody and Tom Gibbs, then director and president respectively of the King County Economic Development Council, and by Aubrey Davis, who was retiring from UMTA to become CEO of Group Health Cooperative of Puget Sound.

George Benson had more than underground rails on his mind during this time. He had been the leading champion for preserving the Monorail as a feature of the new Westlake Center. Construction of this shopping mall and office tower was well along when planners realized that the westernmost Monorail cars could not clear the corner of the new Westlake Center as they approached the new terminal. This was not Metro's fault, as the project was engineered by the City and private developers, but it operated the 1962 World's Fair souvenirs and it helped to develop a solution to squeeze them around the Westlake Center. George Benson helped to solve another Monorail design problem by suggesting the retractable ramps which now serve the eastern track at Westlake. Monorail service resumed in October 1988.

The tunnel encountered a few tight spots of its own during 1988. The mechanical moles bogged down in wet, sandy soil below Pike Street and had to pump out the remnants of a prehistoric spring, which in turn caused several neighboring buildings to settle precipitously. Some construction workers walked off the job because of stagnant air and safety complaints. It should be noted that the tunnel work ultimately claimed one worker's life, Alan Sandbow, and two other people died in non-work accidents on the site.

The boring of the two main tubes was completed on April 8, 1988. Transit Director Ron Tober chose this happy occasion to resign to take over the Greater Cleveland Regional Transit system. Technical Services Director Richard Sandaas became acting director while Metro searched for a permanent successor.

The tunnel passed another major milestone on November 1, when the lidding of Westlake was finished in time for holiday shoppers and a year ahead of schedule. Tunnel construction manager Vladimir Khazak boasted that the tunnel would be completed on time and within 5 percent of its original $415 million budget. "I will be modest," he told the press in early 1989, "this is absolutely unprecedented for a transit project in the United States."

Despite -- or because of -- the progress on the tunnel and other downtown construction, Metro ridership slipped to 61.4 million in 1987, and mid-1988 indications showed it was still dropping. Acting Transit Director Dick Sandaas launched a "Drive for Excellence" to involve his employees in devising new strategies to attract 500,000 new riders. Employee teams came up with such ideas as the painted "Zoo Bus" and a "Strawberry Express" on Vashon Island. Other employee suggestions included recruiting school children to paint murals on bus stops, which resulted in a dramatic reduction in graffiti and vandalism. Metro also launched a new radio

promotion featuring Mayor Royer and novelist Tom Robbins, among other celebrities, singing the ditty, "the wheels on the bus go 'round and round...."

Because of -- or despite -- this advertising, Metro's ridership made a phenomenal recovery to 67.6 million passenger by the end of 1988. It augured well for the arrival of Paul Toliver, who assumed his duties as the new permanent Transit Director in October 1988. A 20-year veteran of transit and former deputy director for operations at the San Francisco Street Railway, Toliver is the first African-American to head a major Metro division. Little did he know that an issue of race relations halfway around the globe was about to shake Metro to its foundations.

Rock Slide

The saga of what was soon dubbed "Granite-gate" began in December 1988 when long-time African-American activist Eddie Rye, Jr. discovered that $480,000 worth of granite planned for the Westlake tunnel station had originated from quarries in South Africa . This violated official Metro policy prohibiting purchase of goods "manufactured or fabricated" in the homeland of apartheid, which was then the object of passionate public opprobrium and official "disinvestment" policies in Seattle and elsewhere.

The policy against purchase of South African material had grown out of an earlier incident involving the tunnel. On August 31, 1987, Metro staff disclosed that a tunnel contractor had "inadvertently" used steel beams manufactured in South Africa for temporary shoring in building the Pioneer Square station. The beams were promptly replaced, but Ron Sims, the only African-American member of the County Council, told the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, "I'm deeply offended" by the lapse in judgment.

Sims joined with City Councilmember Norm Rice to advocate a policy expressing "Metro's strong objection to the use of South African steel in all Metro construction endeavors." The adopted policy was broadened to ban all goods "manufactured or fabricated" in South Africa, but this proved to be not broad enough.

Eddie Rye took his complaint about the South African granite directly to Gibbs, who advised the Metro Council of the "error" on January 5, 1989, and proposed to sell the material and order replacement granite. He told the Council that while taking delivery of the granite, which

waited on an Italian dock, would not be illegal, "it would violate the spirit of our policy and would be an affront to the community." Tunnel project superintendent David Kalberer took full responsibility. "I'm the one who made the decision," he told *The Seattle Times*.

Kalberer explained that it was impossible to screen everything for South African content because the country was a major supplier of minerals and other raw materials which could show up in many innocent products. He said he had been led to believe that only a small amount of South African granite would be used in Westlake Station artwork, and approved it on that basis. Only later did he learn that plans called for some 24,000 square feet of "Verde Sontaine," a rich black and green stone found only in South Africa. Rye later commented the specification of Verde Sontaine "should have been enough notice," that the boycott was being breached, but most were willing to accept that an innocent error had been made and corrected.

This might have been the end of the issue, but documents which Gibbs released to the Metro Council showed that tunnel staff had in fact been aware of the likely violation of Metro policy as early as June 1988, when the granite's Italian supplier advised them of the nation of origin. In September 1988, staff sought counsel from the utility's private attorneys to determine if "mining" fell within the scope of the ban. Since the stone had only been quarried in South Africa and was being dressed in Italy, the tunnel staff reasoned that it did not fall within Metro's prohibition against "manufactured or fabricated" goods.

Granite-gate now became an issue of who knew what when. Did Gibbs know about the stone's origin six months before Eddie Rye contacted him? Had staff set itself up as the final arbiter of Metro Council policy? Who was in charge? And was there a cover-up?

Dick Sandaas, who was acting Transit Director when the granite issue first arose, dismisses that last suggestion, but he grant's Rye's point. "Staff had been alerted by the (supplier's) submittal, but Legal (department) said it was a raw material" and permitted under the boycott policy. Dave Kalberer took the question to the DSTP oversight committee. It almost approved the purchase, but the labor representative raised a red flag. "It was being bumped to the Transit Committee when the issue blew up." Sandaas adds, "The key mistake was not to ask the Metro Council for an interpretation" immediately.

The issue became even more confused when staff suggested that Gibbs might have been informed of the granite issue in the course of these internal discussions, but failed to pay attention.

It didn't help the staff's position when the Bush Administration decided to kibitz and challenged the Metro Council's anti-apartheid policy as too strict.

All of this apparent stonewalling enraged Ron Sims anew, and he fumed, "buying products from South Africa is like buying products from Nazi Germany." Having first accepted that the purchase was an innocent error, Sims told *The Seattle Times*, "I feel particularly manipulated. I feel lied to." He was not alone.

Alan Gibbs apologized to the Council in writing on February 6. Almost immediately afterward, it was revealed that three days earlier a transit mechanic had noticed that replacement bus windshields were labeled "Made in South Africa." Then, on February 9, the *P-I* revealed that the new dual mode buses exceeded their maximum axle weights by 5,000 pounds.

This was too much for even a Metro loyalist like Transit Committee chair George Benson, who admitted to the press, "It's just incredible. I can't keep up." In a February 10 letter to Metro Council chair Gary Zimmerman, Benson declared that "the trust has been broken" between the Metro Council and staff and he called for a special Metro Council meeting for February 16 which "should result in a purge that will give a basis for a soundly run system...."

Three days before the session, the *P-I* editorialized, "If Gibbs and the Metro staff are allowed to get away with no more than a public apology without an explanation for the granite fiasco, then the council by default will demonstrate that it accepts the status quo: the staff rules Metro's roost." Despite this, Gibbs did survive with only an apology and no new answers, but just barely.

That same day, a tunnel worker accidentally connected a compressor hose to a water pipe and turned every toilet in the King County Court House into a geyser. *The Seattle Times* joked editorially, "as least everyone SAYS it was an accident," but no one on the Metro Council was laughing. Its members approved a formal probe into the sequence and chain of command leading up to the granite issue and other apparent improprieties. In doing so, the Council had to face up to the organizational reality that it directly commanded only two members of Metro's 4,000-plus staff -- its own clerk, and Alan Gibbs.

The ground had been crumbling beneath Alan Gibbs' feet for some time. He had guided Metro through its largest and most wrenching capital decision, greater even than the tunnel, by

prevailing in the location of the new secondary treatment plant at West Point. Like the tunnel, this was perceived as a major political defeat for Seattle and Mayor Royer in particular. As Neil Peterson understood in his own tenure at Metro's director, "You only get to break that much china once," and Gibbs lacked his predecessor's personal charisma and political acumen.

Beyond these shortcomings, a series of disappointments and controversies had tarnished Metro's once bright reputation: The new articulated trolleys proved to be dangerous in emergency braking, and had to be recalled from service in November 1987 (they were redeployed the following year). The rise of youth gangs posed a new security challenge for both bus drivers and riders, and downtown passengers complained that the large number of transients taking advantage of the Free Zone had turned the service into a "Bum's Rush." Finally, an investigation by *Seattle Times* reporter Joe Quintana revealed serious lapses in bus maintenance and aired sensational charges that mechanics knowingly sent unsafe coaches onto the streets. A subsequent internal investigation faulted Gibbs' "insistence on performance" for creating a system "closed to people who wanted to talk about problems."

Meanwhile, costs doubled and deadlines slipped by years on the 1981 program to install a transit radio communications system, and the highly touted "STARS" computer system had to be scrapped notwithstanding repeated staff assurances that everything was fine. Ridership plummeted to fewer than 61.5 millon in 1987, and when Metro paid Gibbs and other executives large "merit" bonuses (actually intended to hold down regular salary increases), the public criticism started to get personal. It also didn't help matters that peak-hour fares rose by 10 cents in February just as the Metro Council's Rules Committee prepared to launch a deeper probe of the granite controversy.

With his agency on the verge of tearing itself apart and its public esteem sinking deeper than the tunnel, Gibbs took the only honorable course available. On February 23, he tendered his resignation, effective the following August. "The buck stops with me," he announced.

The issue quickly sank from view. On March 9, the Metro Council's Rules Committee reported on its investigation into Granite-gate. It exonerated Gibbs of any knowledge of the granite's origin before December 1988 and concluded that lower-echelon staff had received sufficient reprimands. Former Mercer Island Mayor Fred Jarrett credits then-Seattle City Councilmember Norm Rice with using the investigation to prompt Metro to evaluate its sensitivity to diverse cultures and communities.

The Bush Administration wasn't quite so quick to forgive and forget the issue, however. UMTA threatened to block new funding unless Metro relaxed its South African boycott. The Metro Council refused, and the issue bubbled until Congressman Norm Dicks pushed through a new law proscribing federal reprisals against local governments and agencies whose anti-apartheid zeal exceeded that of Washington, D.C.

After The Dust Settled

The balance of Gibbs' tenure was calm -- relatively speaking.

The regular 1989 Legislative session began with genuine optimism that Metro and other transit systems might win substantial new subsidy as part of a plan promoted by Dick Page and Chuck Collins and a new coalition, "Washington Citizens for Improved Transportation." They won bipartisan support for raising the gas tax to fund both roads and public transportation, but then Governor Booth Gardner threw an unexpected curve ball. He sent word that he would not sign a gas tax hike unless the Legislature also approved his plan for comprehensive tax reform. To no one's surprise, Republicans (who controlled the State Senate) balked at this, and two special sessions failed to break the impasse.

Tunnel construction proceeded without major complications, and on March 15, 1989, a prototype dual-propulsion bus made its first underground trip from the International District to the Convention Center. The construction budget rose to $434 million, but a 5.8 percent overrun was negligible for a project of such complexity. The news was less sanguine for the projected annual operating budget, which increased from $2 million to more than $5 million, with much of it dedicated to security.

Although work on the tunnel, Westlake Mall and several of Seattle's largest office towers was now winding down, downtown still looked like one giant hard hat zone. Frustrated citizens joked about Seattle's newest sister city -- Beirut. One foreign visitor actually commented, "You have such a lovely city. Why are you tearing it down?" Downtown merchants were not amused, and as shoppers stayed away in droves, many faced bankruptcy. Metro responded with an aggressive promotion program in conjunction with the Downtown Seattle Association, including newsletters, signs, and trouble-shooting by Seattle City Councilmember George Benson, which helped retailers survive the construction siege.

Urban design activists became increasingly annoyed with the pace and scale of downtown development. The cynosure of this discontent was "Westlake Mall," which was a relic of Seattle's early streetrail development.

Remember that Westlake had been cut diagonally across Seattle's existing street grid from Pike Street to Lake Union in 1890 expressly to accommodate L.H. Griffith's Seattle Electric Railway. When Seattle pulled up the rails in 1941, it left a broad but lightly travelled thoroughfare which terminated in an awkward void bounded by Fourth and Fifth Avenues and Pike and Pine. Construction of the Monorail's southern terminal in 1962 did little to improve this increasingly shabby triangle in the heart of the retail district.

What to do with Westlake Mall became a perennial issue as some of Seattle's best architects, notably Fred Bassetti, proposed numerous plans for a park or plaza. Because these ideas usually entailed blocking Pine Street to traffic, they were fiercely opposed by auto-dependent retailers who dreaded the loss of a single lane or parking space in their fight to survive competition from outlying shopping malls.

Paul Schell, who served as Seattle's Director of Community Development in the mid-1970s, came up with a solution which combined a shopping mall with a new home for the Seattle Art Museum. Former television news commentator Charles Royer demanded a full fledged park, and he made Westlake a major issue when he faced Paul Schell in the November 1977 general election for mayor.

After his election, Royer scrubbed Schell's plan but he couldn't win support for an open-space alternative. With the unlikely assistance of Victor Steinbrueck, Royer finally forged a fragile compromise combining a paved public plaza with a new mall and office tower, Westlake Center, to be developed by the Rouse Company. When final plans were unveiled soon after Steinbrueck's death in 1985, his allies suspected that they had been the victims of a new shell game.

Steinbrueck's son Peter joined with Margaret Pageler, then president of Allied Arts and a future City Councilmember, to form "People for an Open Westlake." When City Hall rebuffed their plea to cancel the contract with Rouse and build an open park, POW's leaders sat down around a kitchen table in 1988 and drafted a "Citizens Alternative Plan" to "CAP" future downtown

development. They gathered enough signatures amid the chaos of downtown Seattle's torn-up streets to force an election, which was scheduled for May 16, 1989.

Actually, the 1986 repeal of the federal investment tax credit had already bled the steam from the engine driving office construction, and most projects were nearing completion, but the CAP initiative served as a lightning rod for public frustration with downtown "deconstruction." After a brief and rancorous debate, voters endorsed CAP by a margin of nearly two-to-one.

Miraculously, Metro avoided being drawn directly into this issue, although its tunnel plans were a key element of the Westlake scheme and a proximate cause of much downtown disruption. Metro's attention was focused elsewhere that May when a new study reported that minority drivers were the targets of 61 percent of all disciplinary actions, a number far out of proportion to their representation on the work force. Paul Toliver responded quickly with new procedures and better training for supervisors and managers.

Metro Transit laid an old demon to rest in July when it retained a new consultant to start over on its bus radio system. The new budget was $13.8 million. Meanwhile, Metro and the former contractor pressed their suit and counter-suit, which were not settled out of court until June 1990 for $2.2 million. It was an expensive lesson in the perils of "lowest bid" contracts for complex electronic systems, but the experience led to better design and management procedures.

Not long after, morale at Metro was rocked anew when UMTA required random drug-testing as part of the "War on Drugs." Metro's policy was to test for drugs only when warranted by specific evidence, and it resisted UMTA pressure until it became clear that its federal funding was at risk. Metro then drew up plans which immediately elicited protests from the Amalgamated Transit Union. With Metro's tacit approval, ATU sued and the State Supreme Court found that random drug testing violated state constitutional protections of privacy, which are more explicit than the U.S. Constitution's. The federal government appealed to the U.S. District court and prevailed, but the U.S. Court of Appeals overturned the ruling in January 1990, and Metro escaped the onus of imposing the tests.

On August 11, 1989, Metro proudly showed off its new Westlake Station. The mezzanine was mobbed with visitors and the art works drew rave reviews. Things were not so rosy above ground, however. The City of Seattle had laid down an elaborate pattern of granite paving blocks for Westlake Park which extended across Pine Street to the new Westlake Center complex. These

did not take traffic well and the City had to close the street while it devised a new approach.

Alan Gibbs must have sighed in relief that this latest granite scandal had nothing to do with Metro or him. He took his leave to join the faculty of the University of Washington's Graduate School of Public Affairs (he now heads a transit institute at Rutgers) and the Metro Council tapped an old friend, Richard Sandaas, as the new Executive Director.

Sandaas's experience with Metro dated back to 1969, when, as Mayor of Yarrow Point, he was chosen to represent King County's smaller cities on the Metro Council. The aerospace recession compelled Sandaas to bail out of Boeing in 1973 and he joined Metro's staff as an engineer the following year.

On September 7, 1989, Sandaas became Metro's seventh Executive Director. He had no idea he would be its last. The following month, four local citizens and the state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union filed a federal suit challenging the constitutionality of the Metro Council's system of representation. This action, which can be traced in part to the fallout of Granite-gate and other Metro policy controversies, ultimately led to voter approval in 1992 of the merger of Metro with a reformed King County government. This story needs to be told in one piece, and so it will wait, appropriately, until the end of this chapter.

The drama of the merger still lay ahead as 1989 drew to a welcome close. A year which had begun so dismally ended on an up beat as Metro opened its Burien Transit Center, and ridership set a new record with 70.4 million passengers. A booming economy produced dramatic surges in Metro's tax revenues which permitted it to limit its total bonding for the tunnel to $160 million, greatly reducing the agency's future debt service.

"The wheels on the bus go 'round..."

As 1990 began, workers unearthed a relic of public transportation's distant past. As the Pioneer Square tunnel station was being completed in January, the contractor opened a large underground vault sealed since 1940. Workers expected an empty chamber. Instead, the first flashlight beams to pierce the long-dead air illuminated a giant iron wheel measuring 11 feet in diameter.

It turned out to be the "terminal sheave" which marked the western end of the Lake

Washington Cable Railway. The great cable curved around this to begin its return trip back east, while the cable cars coasted to a stop. It had not turned since August 9, 1940, when Seattle abandoned its street railway system. The artifact is now displayed in the Pioneer Square station as evidence of another generation's transit dreams and engineering audacity.

Metro's own audacious dreams were also unearthed as it entered the target year of the Transit 1990 Plan and began to sketch new "futures" for the year 2000 (which will be reviewed in the next chapter). The MetroTRANSITions vision of 138 million annual riders had proved to be a fantasy, dashed by the return of cheap gasoline and the surge of development and employment in the "edge cities" east of Lake Washington. Even the Midrange Program's revised goal of 115 million passengers proved to be wildly optimistic.

Thanks to budget constraints, Metro was never able to follow through with the dramatic increases in transit services contemplated at the beginning of the decade. Instead of offering 4.5 million hours of service a year, it could only afford 2.7 million. Even peak-hour service, which was Metro's bread and butter, fell 300,000 hours short of the 1990 goal of 1.5 million annual hours.

On the capital side, Metro ended up with less than half of the $1.9 billion budgeted in 1980, although it fared better than the gloomy Midrange assessment. During the decade Metro invested $900 million in new rolling stock and facilities. Of 2,300 coaches planned in 1980, it operated fewer than half, and it fielded only 264 vans of a proposed 1,800. Metro was able to develop only 11 transit centers out of the 23 originally contemplated and it opened a little more than half of a planned 23,500 park-and-ride stalls. It never expanded the trackless trolley system beyond the 55 miles extant in 1980, and thanks to the state's own budget woes, only a third of the 124 miles of planned HOV lanes were available to help buses bypass freeway gridlock.

Even with these shortfalls, Metro's planners commented, "we have created the capacity to carry many more riders than have chosen to ride." Chief among the reasons for lower than projected ridership were the failure to complete two-thirds of the HOV lanes which would let transit and vanpools offer faster service than private automobiles and the dispersal of new jobs chiefly at suburban facilities providing free parking, and thus, economic incentives for commuting by car. "In short, the region has not or could not create conditions which would allow public transportation to achieve a significant competitive edge and increase its market share," transit planners concluded.

These limitations notwithstanding, Metro made important progress during 1990. In January, it and the Bellevue Transportation Management Association inaugurated a "Metropolitan Bellevue" circulator to link the business district with nearby park-and-ride lots, and in March, Metro accepted delivery of the first production model dual-propulsion buses.

The agency received a rare bit of good news from Olympia. Governor Gardner signed a 5 cent gas tax increase which promised additional funds for transit and HOV improvements. The Governor also approved new laws which finally promised the kind of rigorous growth management essential to the success of public transit and set the wheels in motion for a multi-county regional transportation authority which became the focus of Metro's long-range planning (see next chapter).

At the same time, the State Court of Appeals overturned Metro's prohibition against drivers carrying firearms. This stemmed from the 1987 dismissal of John Cherry. Metro's position finally prevailed a year later in an appeal to the State Supreme Court.

Also in March 1990, Mercer Island City Councilmember Fred Jarrett took over the chair of the Transit Committee from George Benson, who focused on his new duties as president of the Seattle City Council but remained active in transportation issues. Wild horses could not have dragged him from the June 23rd opening of the Waterfront Streetcar extension to the International District. This additional six blocks of rail cost more than twice the $3 million required for the original route, which indicates the modern technical complexities of duplicating a service that was routine sixty years ago.

In May, Seattle's new mayor, Norm Rice, settled the Westlake controversy once and for all. Soon after his election, Rice had announced his intention not to reopen Pine Street, which was closed while workers replaced its balky granite pavings. This horrified the business community and scuttled Metro's route plan for downtown. The City Council passed an ordinance allowing limited transit travel on Pine, which Rice vetoed in May. An override failed, and Seattle finally got the open Westlake plaza it had long dreamed of.

In June, Penny Peabody staged the first and only electoral challenge to a seated chairperson of the Metro Council. A former director of Metro's Public Service Department and immediate past president of the Seattle-King County Economic Development Council, Peabody was a formidable

opponent for Gary Zimmerman, who had served since 1980. Zimmerman was faulted publicly by some Council members for failing to engineer consensus and for using his vote too often to break close votes.

It should be remembered, however, that Zimmerman presided over two of Metro's most divisive issues, the siting of the West Point secondary treatment plant and the transit tunnel, not to mention the uproar over "Granite-gate." For his part, Zimmerman believes that he was undone by "structural issues" and "our inability to resolve the representation issues" raised by Metro reformers and the ACLU suit.

Peabody cast her candidacy in positive terms. "I very much wanted to put a regional transit plan on the ballot in 1991," she explains. After other candidates, including former King County Executives John Spellman and Randy Revelle, failed to excite interest, the contest came down to Zimmerman and Peabody. She won in a "landslide" vote of 27 to 11 on June 21, 1990, which did not divide along any discernible jurisdictional or ideological lines. Peabody's dreams of putting a new transit system on a fast track were derailed three months later when a federal judge declared that the Metro Council's federated system of representation was unconstitutional (see below).

The passage of the federal Americans with Disabilities Act, which required provision of transit services to everyone who asked, posed an ironic challenge for a transit system which had pioneered wheel-chair lifts. Although Metro's fleet was better than 90 percent accessible and its "Reserve-a-Ride" vans had provided some 147,000 trips for the disabled during 1990 -- a record unmatched in the nation -- Metro knew that total accessibility could increase the demand for special services by five to ten times its current level.

This would require major innovations and no small expense, and costs were rising overall. Fortunately, so was ridership, and the Metro Council took the opportunity to try to restore the 1-to-4 ratio of operating income to costs by raising peak-hour fares 10 cents.

Any outcry over this was muffled by the mounting anticipation as Metro prepared to unveil the jewel in its crown, the downtown transit tunnel. While workers completed the final touches, Metro previewed the new stations to an expectant public. On September 9, 1990, it hosted the Bon Marche's charity run/walk, which gave pedestrians their first annual opportunity to navigate the tunnel. Five days later, Metro staged a "Grand Opening" which attracted thousands, and on September 15, regular service began.

Unfortunately, this proved not to be as regular as hoped. Because key elements of the downtown transportation system, such as direct links to I-90 and I-5 Express Lanes were years behind schedule, and general ridership was far below target, Metro cut back its planned bus order by half. It also limited tunnel operations to weekdays and Saturdays.

The dual-propulsion buses fell prey to a host of debilitating mechanical gremlins. Inspections in February 1990 revealed cracks in the buses' frames, and their differentials later proved inadequate to handle the torque of the 49,500-pound behemoths. Drivers also needed a long time to get used to the dual-propulsions' peculiar handling characteristics.

Most embarrassing of all, the tunnel leaked. The seepage was minor and hardly unusual for such a facility, but it dampened the initial public enthusiasm. This was trivial compared to the humiliation of I-90 contractors when the original Mercer Island Floating Bridge sank during a violent storm on Thanksgiving Day, 1990.

Metro weathered a different kind of storm in December when its drivers shut down services for five hours to attend a membership meeting on the stalled negotiations for a new contract. This attempt at political compression failed to ignite new progress, and the talks dragged on for many more months.

The year ended with a rewarding surge in ridership, which reached 73.4 million.

Culture Shock

The two years leading up to Metro Transit's 20th anniversary were remarkably productive given the mounting uncertainty over the agency's political future.

Paul Toliver took an important step toward realizing his vision of a "consumer-friendly" transit system by joining with Seafirst Bank to offer bus passes through automatic teller machines, a service which debuted in October 1990. Nearly a year later, students at the University of Washington approved the innovative "U-Pass" system which Metro devised with Snohomish County's Community Transit and U of W Planners.

U-Pass built on the pioneering "U-Trans" plan developed by U of W facilities planner

Gordon Burch in the 1970s. It combined disincentives for auto use with a guaranteed 20 percent increase in Metro Transit services and extensive ride-sharing, offered free or at discounted fares through a single pass held by students, faculty and staff. Metro extended at least a sample of the same idea to the rest of its ridership when it joined the Bullitt Foundation in offering free fares on "Oil Smart Wednesdays" once a month and it instituted a special program to serve the medical community on Seattle's First Hill.

Metro continued to complete the final elements of its current capital plan. In 1991, it opened its new Central Operating base and on June 8, the long-stymied North Base welcomed its first buses. Work proceeded on the Northlake Transit Center, the last of eleven in the approved budget.

Meanwhile, Toliver instituted new computer and management systems to break down bureaucratic barriers, and Dick Sandaas pressed an aggressive program to promote sexual and cultural sensitivity and communication, stemming from earlier complaints of harassment against minority and women drivers. The context of these reforms made it all the more shocking when, on August 15, 1991, Atlantic Base mechanic Charles Wright discovered a hangman's noose lying on his tool box. Wright is an African-American.

In his 15 years at Metro, Wright had never before encountered such an ugly expression of apparent racism. "It really stunned me at first," Wright told the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, "but I'm not intimidated by that. Maybe they intimidated people years ago, but not today." The transit union joined with Metro in a thorough investigation, but they failed to find out who was responsible for the noose or if it had been put on Wright's tool box in error or with malicious intent.

Despite these inconclusive results, Sandaas decided that Metro's "corporate culture" needed rejuvenation from top to bottom. He felt that Metro's original technocratic ethos had never been fully integrated with the grittier operational and direct service missions it assumed with transit in 1972, and the Wright incident reinforced the lesson of the Granite-gate scandal of 1988 that the views and sensitivities of racial and cultural minorities were poorly appreciated within Metro. "On reflection, I'm amazed that there was no apprehension about the merger of cultures," Sandaas says, leaving a residue mentality of "410 West Harrison [Metro's original home] versus Atlantic Street [Seattle Transit's original bus base]." To help mediate this new pluralism, Metro retained the services of Kathie Dannemiller.

Transit Union president Dan Linville credits this effort with transforming labor-management relations and breaking the deadlock over Metro's contract negotiations. These were stymied "by both sides' very structural approach. The process itself led to the breakdown by being overly legalistic." After an unsuccessful arbitration in 1991, Linville, Sandaas and Metro Council chair Penny Peabody agreed to give "collaborative bargaining" a try with the aid of labor consultant Rhonda Hilyer. Linville credits Metro for "sending in a better team, people who could understand work place problems." It took the ATU membership a while to tune into this new spirit and it rejected the first contract proposal in January 1992. After union leaders "resolved the paranoia," a new contract was finally ratified in May 1992.

Peabody's endorsement of a new approach to labor relations turned out to be her last contribution to Metro. She underwent an operation for cancer in February 1992, and the demands of a long recuperation compelled her to tender her resignation on March 15. She has since made a full recovery and has put politics aside to devote her energies to writing. In August, The Metro Council elected Tom Kraft, a Bellevue attorney and Eastside Municipal League leader, to serve as its fourth and, as it turned out, final chairperson.

Leadership of the Metro Transit Committee also changed hands as County Councilmember Greg Nickels succeeded Fred Jarrett in February 1992. The latter had already been "loaned" by his employer, the Boeing Company, to work full-time in helping to plan a new regional transit system, which is discussed in the next chapter.

One of the first issues faced by Nickels was an April 1992 staff proposal that Metro commit to "clean diesel" to fuel its planned acquisition of 360 new buses intended to replace older vehicles. Beyond the self-evident merit of more environmentally-sensitive propulsion, Metro was obligated by the new federal Clean Air Act to reduce the pollution generated by its fleet. It experimented with 10 methanol powered buses, but staff opted for "clean diesel" systems which scrubbed engine exhaust before venting it into the air.

Nickels was skeptical of clean diesel, which involved an elaborate system to scrub engine exhaust, as a half-measure. Other major systems, notably Toronto, had already shifted to natural gas, and Pierce Transit was operating 15 NG-powered coaches. The staff cited the higher cost and logistical complexities of changing over to an entirely new form of fuel, but after nearly a year of study and debate, Greg Nickels prevailed and Metro committed itself to natural gas as "the fuel of

the future."

April 1992 marked a milestone for the downtown transit tunnel when its daily paying passenger use reached 25,000 trips, plus another 8,000 daily Ride Free Zone riders (for whom Seattle reimburses Metro on a formula). The tunnel now diverted 525 buses from downtown streets each workday.

On June 4, 1992, the Metro Council approved yet another fare hike to take effect the following February. Although the Council raised peak-hour fares to 85 cents for one zone and a $1.60 for two, it extended free service for up to four children under the age of five traveling with a parent and established a flat 75-cent fare for kids aged from five to 17 years. The new fare system broke with established policy by raising revenues less than inflation and by allowing operating revenues to slip to 23 percent of expenses. This compelled Metro to divert $16 million from its reserves. At the same meeting, the Metro Council extended employee benefits previously reserved for married couples to "domestic partnerships" regardless of their legal marital status.

Two days later, on June 6, 1992, the Northgate Transit Center opened to overflow demand. Its colorful tent-like pavilions architecture and whimsical animal sculptures evoke a caravan stop out of the Arabian Nights, and Northgate has proven almost too popular for the taste of some neighbors. Paul Toliver does not dismiss such complaints, but he adds, "It's nice when people want too much of your service."

Northgate was the 11th and final transit center contemplated by the revised 1990 plan. Its completion marked the end of the road begun more than a decade before with MetroTRANSITion.

As 1992 came to a close, Metro registered a gratifying gain of nearly 1 million new riders. Building on the 1991 surge fueled by the Gulf War and higher gas prices, which boosted ridership to 74.6 million passengers, Metro's 1992 count headed for a new record of 75.5 million riders.

The approach of Metro Transit's 20th anniversary was marked with one more piece of good news. On October 20, the American Public Transportation Association once again named it the best major transit system in the United States.

It was a bittersweet honor, for Metro would cease to exist as an independent agency in little more than a year's time.

A Shotgun Merger

When the merger of King County and Metro was proposed in 1979, the simple saw, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it," was enough to persuade three-fourths of the electorate to preserve Metro's independence. A decade later, at the height of the furor over the downtown transit tunnel, overweight buses, the West Point sewage plan, the North Operating Base, South African granite, and exploding Court House toilets, the same slogan would have elicited laughter or worse.

The bloom had been off Metro's daisy for some time. This was not a result of some sudden loss of competence or a ground swell of dissatisfaction with the quality of its services. Metro had simply become so large and prominent in the affairs of the region, and the cost and impact of its decisions had become so great and controversial, that it was bound to offend at least half the people half the time.

The grievances against Metro depended on who was complaining. Suburbs groused that Seattle, with one-third of the County's population, was getting the lion's share of transit services and investments. Seattle officials retorted that West Point and the downtown tunnel had been forced down their throats to treat suburban sewage and save suburban bus riders the inconvenience of a transfer. Every town and neighborhood was convinced that Metro was diverting its bus fares and sewer bills to subsidize somebody else's services.

This discontent focused on the Metro Council, which had grown from 15 members to 45 in three decades. The size of the panel made it cumbersome in the opinion of most, and even Metro's friends were disturbed by the influence which the staff wielded over the Council's part-time members.

Most reformers agreed that you could not fix Metro without fixing King County at the same time. During the 1980s, citizen discontent with King County services and anxieties over growth management gained force. The slow pace of implementation of the 1985 Comprehensive Plan further undermined public confidence in County government. This helped to fuel a rush for local incorporations and three new cities were formed between 1990 and 1992: SeaTac, Federal Way, and Woodinville (on the umpteenth try). Tukwila also completed a significant series of annexations, including the south end of Boeing Field.

The net effect of these incorporations was that King County officials were running out of things to do. With only a few county-wide responsibilities, chiefly in the unrewarding fields of criminal justice and social services, the County's primary historical function had been to serve as the "municipality" for unincorporated areas. As these dwindled, so did the County's raison d'etre.

Ideas for changing this had percolated for years. Elected officials came close to approving a "two-tier" County government recommended by Brewster Denny's Metropolitan Study Commission in 1972, which noted that King County had more units of local government and elected officials (851 at the time) than any other county in the nation. His group proposed a new county council which would make region-wide decisions and local districts which would perform municipal functions. Enablement of such a "city-county" was embodied in a 1972 amendment to the State Constitution, but efforts to implement it fan afoul of politics when Seattle Mayor Wes Uhlman and King County Executive John Spellman squared off to run for governor in 1976.

Following the merger's crushing defeat in 1979, the issue became dormant until 1985 when the Municipal League and others expressed new doubts about Metro's accountability in making regional investments and policy choices. This led in 1986 to the creation of new regional reform group, King County 2000, co-chaired by Wes Uhlman and Bellevue Mayor Cary Bozeman. It surveyed the region's projected capital needs, which then totalled $10 billion, and concluded that a new form of government was unavoidable to guide and finance these investments.

King County 2000 ultimately proposed that Metro be merged with King County under a new, non-partisan Council with six members elected by district and three elected at large, an idea very similar to the 1952 King County reform charter. Newly-elected County Councilmember Greg Nickels, who succeeded Bob Grieve in 1988, advocated a new merger plan under an expanded, non-partisan County Council.

Even Metro loyalists recognized that something had to be done to regain public confidence. A welter of competing proposals surfaced during the 1989 legislative session to shrink and reconstitute the Metro Council. The Metro Council itself proposed legislation to cut its membership to 23 while preserving its federated structure. Others called for directly electing some or all Metro Council members. None of the proposals mustered a legislative majority, and the issue was left to simmer.

Then, in March 1989, at the height of the furor over the downtown transit tunnel and South African granite, the United States Supreme Court rendered an historic ruling. It found that New York City's venerable Board of Estimate violated the principle of "one person, one vote." The BOE was a kind of municipal "senate" made up of the elected officials of New York's five boroughs. Each borough was accorded equal weight in BOE voting on key city-wide policies without regard to the size of its population. Thus tiny Staten Island's 400,000 residents enjoyed parity with Brooklyn's 2.5 millions.

When news of this ruling reached them, County Councilmembers Cynthia Sullivan, Ron Sims and Greg Nickels, and leaders of the Democratic Party asked the state chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union to investigate the applicability of the BOE precedent to Metro. The ACLU found many parallels and noted that the Metro Council's composition gave small cities such as Auburn and Kent the equivalent of one representative per 26,000 voters, while Seattle, Bellevue and unincorporated areas were entitled to only one representative per 144,000 residents.

To make its case, the ACLU recruited four "aggrieved" citizens: Valerie Cunningham, Imogene Pugh, Elizabeth Springer, and Monica Zucker. Each had a bone to pick with Metro, as reported by *The Seattle Times.* Cunningham opposed Metro's plan to spray treated sewage sludge in a forest near her home; Pugh opposed Metro's sewage tunnel from Renton to Seahurst Park; Springer had distrusted the "monolith of Metro" since she voted against its formation in 1958; and Zucker, a member of the state ACLU board of trustees, was alarmed that the Metro Council provided "no direct representation, no direct accountability to the people of the area."

The suit was filed on October 27, 1989, in U.S. District Court, and the case of "Cunningham et al. v. Metro" was assigned to Judge William Dwyer, a recent appointee who had enjoyed a long career of reform activism in Seattle. Metro responded that the principle of "one person, one vote" did not apply to it because it was not a government. It was a special purpose entity created and directed by other jurisdictions which were themselves directly and proportionately accountable to the electorate.

Judge Dwyer disagreed. In September 1990, he found that the automatic appointment of Seattle and King County officials and five suburban mayors upon their election transformed Metro into a defacto government, and that representation on the Metro Council disproportionately favored municipalities over unincorporated areas. He was unmoved by Metro's arguments for the efficiency of the federated approach, and declared, "That the buses run on time cannot justify a