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Metro Transit: 2nd largest in U.S.

by BOB LANE
Times staff reporter

Metro Transit is the fastest growing major bus system in the country.

And, counting combined bus and rail operations, it is second only to the Washington, D.C., transit system, which includes a popular, new subway.

Charles Collins, Metro Transit director, acknowledges that some of Metro's success is the result of gasoline prices and shortages. However, he insists, a good share of it is the result of better service, new routes and new buses, including the popular and comfortable 60-foot-long German-built bending buses.

Last month transit ridership here was 17.8 per cent greater than in July a year ago. And June ridership was 18.4 per cent above June, 1978. For the year to date, Metro is carrying more than 14 per cent more riders than during the same seven-month period of 1978.

Metro buses now are carrying nearly 200,000 riders every week-day. That total has climbed 40,000 a day in the past few months, contrasting with 1974, when a more severe gasoline shortage pushed ridership up, temporarily, by about 30,000 riders daily, Collins said.

"The question is how well are we growing," Collins said. "Do we provide quality service that will hold those new riders?"

By Metro's count, the system is doing better in several ways:

Revenue — Although it is not related to quality of service directly, the average fare has increased from 30 cents in 1974 to 36 cents today. That is the result of a lot of new full-fare, two-zone (60 cent) fares being paid, offsetting increasing use of discounted monthly passes (purchased by 30,000 riders last month).

Fare revenues this year "will be considerably larger" than we had forecast in the budget," Collins said.

Driver performance — In 1977 the average driver was ill and off the job 17 days a year. Through increased disciplinary action, that has been cut to 11.4 days this year, Collins said.

In 1977, the system received 5.6 complaints per driver each year. The gripes dropped to 4.3 per driver last year; so far in 1979 it is averaging 3.13.

The most frequent complaint was that a driver failed to stop. Metro is doing more to train

drivers in how to deal with their passengers. But it is difficult, Collins says, when the system has hundreds of new drivers "who are prone to make mistakes — such as getting lost."

Accidents — The accident rate has dropped from 70 per million miles of driving in 1977 to 64 this year, based on six months of records. The decline has occurred despite a large number of new drivers who are more likely to have accidents.

Only one third of those accidents are the fault of Metro drivers. Twenty-five per cent involve parked buses being struck by autos, Collins said.

Maintenance — In 1976, the system received trouble calls from drivers complaining about buses at the rate of one for every 1,533 miles driven. Today, the rate is one for every 2,488 miles operated.

In 1976 a mechanic could take care of two buses. Today the system has one maintenance man for every three buses.

Complaints — Metro is receiving more complaints from its riders about its equipment. In 1976 it received 135, most of them about buses. Last year, the total reached 480. So far this year, Metro has counted 404 complaints.

Most of the complaints today are about problems with shelters, Collins said. And most of the problems are caused by vandalism, not a lack of maintenance.

Metro will add 154,000 hours of bus service this year, with much of it scheduled to go into operation September 15. It will add 346,000 more hours of bus service next year.

Metro has been advertising for new drivers, to help provide all that new service.

By the end of this year, Metro will have 1,869 full-time and part-time drivers at work. It will hire an estimated 733 new drivers this year, and already has signed on more than 350, Collins said.

At the end of 1978, Metro had 1,249 drivers, Collins said.

Metro now is operating 650 buses during the evening rush hour. That total will increase as new buses arrive: an order of 243 new diesel Flyer buses is arriving from Canada and the coaches are being assigned to service; many of the system's fleet of 109 new electric trolleys are here and some will go into service September 15.

And, Metro is looking for federal aid to help pay for an order of about 280 more of the 60-foot bending buses.



A new Metro trolley on Queen Anne Hill.

Trolleys will be back on line soon

by BOB LANE
Times staff reporter

The trolleys are returning.

Some will be back on Seattle streets as early as September 15, and by early 1981 there will be 109 large, shiny new electric buses operating quietly under 55 miles of new overhead wire, hauling thousands of passengers daily.

A few years after that, there probably will be even more new trolleys, more miles of new routes and additional thousands of passengers.

Although the system now being built was thought to be all the city needed, or could afford, when it was planned several years ago, the scarcity and rising cost of diesel fuel are making electric buses seem a better deal.

In 1972, when it was seeking voter approval for a plan that would put it into the transportation business, Metro promised to keep the trolley system. Later, at the request of Seattle, which is helping pay for it, Metro agreed to expand the system.

The agency now is rebuilding 32 miles of trolley route overhead which it inherited from the old Seattle Transit System and will add 23 miles of new trolley routes.

Ironically, many miles of the new routes once were electrified, but the wires were ripped out after Seattle decided to rely heavily on diesel buses in 1963.

Now, with diesel fuel having gone from 36 cents a gallon last December to 80 cents, some city officials — principally Council members George Benson and Jeanette Williams — have urged Metro to consider further expansion of trolley service.

Transit planners are studying several schemes for providing "a significant expansion," Charles Collins, Metro transit director, said.

Arrested Taiwanese are released

Two members of the opposition in Taiwan whose arrests were protested by a Seattle group have been released, says a spokesperson of the Seattle Branch of the International Committee for Human Rights in Taiwan.

The Seattle Branch earlier asked President Carter to put

"I don't think a doubling is out of the question and it could be larger," he said.

Some of the plans include trolley routes serving suburban communities, using major arterials such as Aurora Avenue North and Rainier Avenue South.

Other plans consider expansion within the city; some envision using trolleys that might be able to operate with poles down for some distance.

But before it decides on additional expansion, Metro needs detailed information about how much it costs to operate new trolleys. That would be compared with the known costs of operating diesel buses.

Ted Mallory, Metro's director of technical services, said it will take a couple of months of operation before trolley costs are known. The principal unknown is exactly how much electricity the trolleys will use.

Statistics from the old fleet are not much help. The new trolleys are larger, heavier and will carry more riders.

Diesel buses in Metro's fleet average about 4 miles a gallon. But the real comparison is in operation on hilly routes where trolleys do best and diesels average less than 3 miles a gallon.

Additional expansion also will have to consider the cost of maintaining the new overhead wire. All Metro knows now is what it cost to maintain the old wiring system (built in 1940), which it began ripping down in January, 1978. And that information is of little help.

Construction costs are well known. The new wiring, 26 electrical substations and 109 trolleys are expected to cost about \$46.2 million by the time work is complete in early 1981. That is about 20 per cent more than Metro had estimated before it began work in January, 1978.

Mallory said Metro made two

errors in getting work under way. One was rushing into construction after waiting a long time for the city to decide where it wanted new trolley routes. Because of the rush, engineers did not find underground problems which contractors encountered later.

The second was trying to use Metro trolley overhead maintenance workers as inspectors on construction contracts. "They are good electrical linemen but it was not in their bag to be construction supervisors," Mallory said.

Changing city policy regarding removal of old trolley poles also will cost Metro more money, said Stuart Maxin, manager of the overhead wiring program.

Ninety-nine old trolley poles along First and Second Avenues are to be removed. Normally, Metro would cut them off six inches below the surface of the sidewalk and patch the hole.

Now, however, the city is demanding Metro remove the concrete bases on which the poles stand. That will cost about \$200,000, Maxin said.

As for the extra work found by contractors, which has increased costs and slowed the project, Maxin said: "It hasn't been all

bad. The system wouldn't have cost any more or less had we predicted it all up ahead."

Mallory reorganized the trolley project about a year ago. Maxin was named manager, and resident engineers, with authority to make decisions in the field, were hired to oversee contractors' work.

A continuing problem has been getting sufficient numbers of journeymen electricians. Many were lured away from Seattle by higher pay on transmission power line projects in Central Washington.

Although the Metro Council has continued to support the project despite the higher costs, a council subcommittee has challenged Mallory and his staff to keep the extra cost 10 per cent below the \$7.6 million they forecast several months ago.

Maxin said he believes the staff will meet that goal.

Seattle is one of few cities to give trolley buses a second chance. Many cities which built trolley lines in the 1930s and 1940s long since have ripped them out in favor of diesel coaches.

Vancouver, B.C., and San Francisco are the two other West Coast cities that continue to operate large numbers of trolleys.

Meetings scheduled to review plans for special freeway lanes

State plans for making exclusive lanes for buses and car pools on Interstate 5 between downtown Seattle and South Snohomish County will be reviewed in two public meetings this week.

One will be at 7 p.m. Tuesday in the Shoreline branch of the King County Library, Fifth Avenue Northeast and Northeast 175th Street.

The second will be at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the University branch of the Seattle Public Library, 5009 Roosevelt Way N.E.

Don Tranum, engineer for the state Department of Transportation, said details of the system will be described by the state's consultant on the project, Howard, Needles, Tammen & Bergendoff.

Main elements of the project include an exclusive southbound lane between 236th Street Southwest in Snohomish County and downtown Seattle and a new southbound entrance from Ravenna Boulevard Northeast to the express lanes of I-5.

Traffic lights would be installed at some on-ramps, but buses and

cars carrying three or more people would not have to wait for them.

An exclusive northbound lane would begin near Lake City Way Northeast and continue via the express lanes and the regular lanes of I-5 to 236th Street Southwest.

The southbound exclusive lane would move from the regular freeway into the express lanes at Northgate and end at Cherry Street.

Tranum said the state hopes to award the first construction contract by late summer, 1980.

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These free meetings will be held in Washington Rapid Reading Center's classroom, 615 Boston St., Seattle (N.E. corner of Queen Anne Ave. N. and Boston) 2nd floor, top of Queen Anne Hill at the following times:

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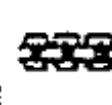
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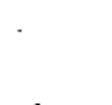
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Illustrations enlarged to show detail.