

March/April 2014

Busline

Busline Cover Transit Feature

City Of Santa Clarita Transit

Santa Clarita, CA

**Travel
Exchange**
A Hit In LA





Busline

M A G A Z I N E

MARCH/APRIL 2014

Published by
Rankin Publishing, Inc.
www.buslinemag.com

CONTENTS



◀ IN THIS ISSUE

**City Of Santa Clarita Transit
Serves LA County8**

UMA, NTA Unite For Large Motorcoach, Tour Show

Travel Exchange: One + One = A Whole Bunch18

Busline's Buyers Guide To Insurance & Finance.....26

- National Interstate 26 • Service Insurance Agency 28 • Lancer Insurance 30 • Protective Insurance 32
- Shriver Insurance Agency 34 • Transportation Insurance Brokers 35 • EUCLID Insurance Agencies, LLC 36

Busline's Buyers Guide To HVAC Systems.....38

***Busline Vehicle Showcase
PARATRANSIT/
SHUTTLE BUSES
& VANS
43 - 47***

RAPID RESPONSEPage 6

INDUSTRY NEWSPage 37

ON THE COVER:

City of Santa Clarita (CA) Transit Manager Adrian Aguilar and Santa Clarita Mayor Pro Tem Marsha McLean are helping grow bus transit services north of Los Angeles.
See page 8.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY 2014

May 4-7

**APTA Bus
& Paratransit
Conference**

Kansas City, MO
Info: 202-496-4800

JUNE 2014

June 7-11

**Canadian Urban Transit
Association (CUTA)
Annual Conference**
Gatineau, Québec
Info: 416-365-9800

June 8-13

**Community
Transportation
Association of
America
(CTAA)
Annual Expo**
St. Paul, MN
Info: 800-891-0590

JULY 2014

July 19-23

**National School
Transportation Association
(NSTA)
Annual Meeting & Convention**
Charleston, SC
Info: 518-220-9905

AUGUST 2014

August 3-8

**International Motorcoach
Group (IMG)
Summer Meeting &
Strategic Alliance Meeting**
Branson, MO
Info: 888-447-3466

August 13-17
**National Association
Of Motorcoach Operators
(NAMO)
Annual Conference**
Shreveport, LA
Info: 571-312-7117

SEPTEMBER 2014

September 15-17

BusCon 2014
Indianapolis, IN
Info: 800-576-8788

OCTOBER 2014

October 12-15

**APTA Expo 2014
& Annual Meeting**
Houston, TX
Info: 202-496-4800

JANUARY 2015

January 10-13

**American Bus Association
(ABA) Marketplace**
St. Louis, MO
Info: 202-842-1645

January 18-22

**United Motorcoach
Association (UMA)
Expo At Travel Exchange**
New Orleans, LA
Info: 800-424-8262

EDITORIAL & CORPORATE OFFICES

Rankin Publishing Co., Inc.

Don Rankin and Linda Rankin, Publishers
204 E. Main Street • P.O. Box 130
Arcola, IL 61910-0130, USA
Email: drankin@consolidated.net
Website: www.rankinpublishing.com
(800) 598-8083 (U.S.) • (217) 268-4959
Fax: (217) 268-4815

Editorial: Harrell Kerkhoff, Editor
Rick Mullen, Associate Editor
Design: David Opdyke
Reception: Misty Douglas

Advertising

Contact Kevin Kennedy @ 623-434-8959
Email: kevloraz@cox.net
Or

Don Rankin @ 800-598-8083
Fax: 217-268-4815
Email: drankin@consolidated.net

Busline Magazine is published 6 times a year by Rankin Publishing, Inc., 204 E. Main, P.O. Box 130, Arcola, IL 61910-0130. Publisher assumes no liability whatsoever for content of any advertisement or editorial material contained herein. Copyright 2014 Rankin Publishing, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form without written consent of Rankin Publishing, Inc. **Subscription Rates in United States:** 6 issues \$25. Single Copy rate: \$10 including postage/handling; **Buyer's Guide \$15 including postage/handling.** International rates: 6 issue annual Air Mail Subscription \$60 U.S. dollars net

City of Santa Clarita Transit

Serves LA County

By Rick Mullen
Busline Magazine
Associate Editor

Santa Clarita, CA, nestled in the scenic Santa Clarita Valley about 35 miles northwest of Los Angeles, is the third largest city in Los Angeles County, behind Los Angeles and Long Beach, encompassing about 60 square miles, with a population of more than 200,000 people.

Meeting the public transportation needs of the area since its inception in August 1991, **City of Santa Clarita Transit** assumed responsibility for local transit operations from the County of Los Angeles, commonly known as Los Angeles County or LA County. Santa Clarita contracts the service to MV Transportation. In the beginning, the transit service was called Santa Clarita Transit.

"We now provide 8 local fixed-routes, 7 commuter express routes to and from the greater Los Angeles area, 2 station links to Metrolink train stations, a summer special to Santa Monica Beach and 20 supplemental school routes," said **City of Santa Clarita Transit Manager Adrian Aguilar**, during a recent interview with *Busline Magazine*. "City of



City of Santa Clarita Transit has been meeting the public transportation needs of the area since 1991. Shown at left is Transit Manager Adrian Aguilar.

including local, commuter, and ADA (Americans With Disabilities Act) paratransit services— Dial-A-Ride and Access Services.

"We provide comprehensive fixed-route and Dial-A-Ride service throughout the city and surrounding unincorporated areas within the valley, in addition to service for our residents who commute to areas within greater Los Angeles.

"We have strong working relationships and partnerships with the County of Los Angeles and agencies such as Access Services, the prime paratransit service in neighboring communities that are not within the

boundaries of the city."

The City of Santa Clarita Transit's curb-to-curb Dial-A-Ride service is available to seniors over the age of 60 and persons with disabilities. After 6 p.m., the Dial-A-Ride service is open to the general public. There is no age requirement for riders with disabilities. Eligibility is based strictly on a person's inability to ride the fixed-route service, according to Aguilar.

City of Santa Clarita Transit currently operates 60 local fixed-route buses, 28 commuter over-the-road and 30 Dial-A-Ride/Access Services vehicles, primarily cutaways.

The transit system averages 2.7 million miles a year, with an annual average ridership of 3.5 million for local and commuter services and 115,856 passengers on its Dial-A-Ride and Access Services vehicles.

"Our commuter service is primarily used by white-collar professionals,"

Aguilar said. "This service travels to employment sites such as downtown Los Angeles, Century City, the Westwood area and Warner Center, which hosts a number of medical industries and companies. We also have service to North Hollywood, which is more of a feeder service that connects with the Los Angeles Metro Red Line and Orange Line services."

"Our biggest focus is maintaining the quality of life we have here in the Santa Clarita Valley, and we feel transit has a major role to play in this effort."

— City of Santa Clarita Transit Manager Adrian Aguilar

Santa Clarita Transit began with 300,000 riders, 8 fixed-routes and 13 vehicles painted in bright red, plum and gray, complete with oak trees blowing in the wind and gray hills rising in the distance.

"Under supervision by the city of Santa Clarita, MV Transportation is responsible for all transit operations and maintenance-related services

Adrian Aguilar photo: Esteban Pallares. All other photos: Evan Thomason.

According to Aguilar, plans are underway to expand City of Santa Clarita Transit services in August of this year by splitting an existing route to better serve the west side of the unincorporated areas.

"In the next 18 to 24 months, we anticipate expanding service to areas that were recently annexed into the city that may not have had the same level of service as other areas," Aguilar said.

In addition, the transit system will extend the hours of operation on weekend nights aboard the Commuter Express service to North Hollywood.

"The Santa Clarita Valley, though self-contained, is a large geographic area. Providing timely service throughout the entire valley can be challenging, especially during high-traffic peak hours. That being said, we have a very knowledgeable ridership. They know where they want to go and how best to get there, which helps limit consistent passenger delays."

Aguilar alluded to the challenge of operating the transit system in the semi-mountainous foothills of the region.

"We have elevation and hills that can cause a problem sometimes and, in the summer, it can get a little warm up here," he said.

According to www.santaclarita.com, the climate in the Santa Clarita area is classified as semi-arid or Mediterranean in the Koppen Climate Classification System. Santa Clarita is generally hot and dry through most of the year, ranging from 70 to 100 degrees during the summer, and 40 to 65 degrees during the winter. In addition, the region is known for its dry weather. Monthly precipitation ranges from zero to 5 inches, depending on the month. The wettest months occur between December and March, with very little rain in the Santa Clarita Valley from April through August.

According the Encyclopedia of Earth website, The Koppen Climate Classification System is the most widespread system used to classify the climates of places worldwide. The system was developed by German climatologist and amateur botanist Wildomar Koppen (1846-1940), who divided the world's climates into several major categories based upon general temperature profiles related to latitude.

"During the summer months, when combined with the heat and the hills, it can cause some operational challenges," Aguilar said.

CNG And Other Cutting-Edge Technologies Enhance Transit Operations

About 12 years ago, City of Santa Clarita Transit began the conversion of its transit bus fleet to compressed natural gas (CNG), with the purchase of 14 CNG-version buses. Recently, the transit completed the conversion of its fixed-route fleet from diesel-powered vehicles to CNG when it took delivery of 21 new buses.

"We have worked diligently to transition our fleet from gasoline and diesel over to CNG to the point that more than half of our Dial-A-Ride fleet is also CNG," Aguilar said.

For its over-the-road commuter fleet, City of Santa Clarita Transit still uses clean-diesel coaches.

"One barrier to the conversion of our entire fleet to CNG is the lack of high horsepower CNG engines," Aguilar said. "Today's CNG engines work great for transit-type operations, but when you are trying to move a 40,000-pound over-the-road coach, you need something with more horse-

power. Therefore, we have not been able to make the transition on the commuter side. It is something that we are looking at and we have been in close discussion with a well-known bus engine manufacturer and motorcoach company, and they tell us something is coming. We are anxiously awaiting the day when we can convert our commuter service to CNG."

Adjacent to City of Santa Clarita Transit's maintenance facility is its CNG fueling station, which is also open to the public.

"It works similar to a regular gas station where people can use a credit card and pump gas," Aguilar said. "We are seeing a growing number of folks here in the Santa Clarita valley with personal CNG-powered automobiles who are using the fueling station. We are also seeing a growing number of private fleets transitioning to CNG, and they are taking advantage of the public facility. This includes trash haulers here in the Santa



The use of QR codes, top left photo, and a CNG fueling station are helping the City of Santa Clarita Transit meet future customer needs.

Clarita Valley and local school districts, which have CNG-powered school buses."

As a part of its commitment to customer service and enhancing the riding experience of its customers, all of the City of Santa Clarita Transit's local fixed-route and commuter vehicles are outfitted with a state-of-the-art Real-Time Tracking System. The transit provider also offers SMS (short message service), which is the text messaging system found on today's smart phones. In addition, the vehicles are equipped with what officials call an Infotainment System.

"The Real-Time Tracking System, powered by GPS (global positioning system), is available to the public via the Internet," Aguilar said. "We have equipped our fleet with GPS tracking units. We have an AVL system, which allows our dispatchers and staff to track the location of vehi-

"A person can visit our website and pull up a map, which will list bus stops in the system. The customer can click on a bus stop and it will tell him or her, not only what route serves that stop, but also what buses will be arriving in 30 minutes."

cles. This technology has been helpful from a management and administrative standpoint.

"The system collects information that is valuable to our customers, such as actual locations of buses. It also provides predictive arrival information. Based on the speed of the bus and by analyzing past historical

trends, the system can predict how long it will take a bus to get to a particular location, given normal operating conditions.”

City of Santa Clarita Transit has also taken other steps to incorporate technological elements to make pertinent information available to riders.

“A person can visit our website and pull up a map, which will list bus stops in the system,” Aguilar said. “The customer can click on a bus stop and it will tell him or her, not only what route serves that stop, but also what buses will be arriving in 30 minutes. We have also installed QR (quick response) codes. These are like the little squares on the back of packaging, etc., that are scanned through a cash register. With a smart phone



Vehicles used by the City of Santa Clarita Transit include articulated buses.

ther expand the system’s efficiency.”

City of Santa Clarita Transit also recently began to provide free Wi-Fi access on its commuter coaches.

In addition, according the Aguilar, the transit system recently installed placards at each bus stop that contain a QR code and SMS text information, allowing riders to quickly and easily learn the estimated arrival time of their bus.

“This feature has reduced call volume dramatically and allows our customer service staff to spend extra time with customers with more complex issues,” Aguilar said. “This technology has also inspired the development of future tools to fur-

“When I talk to drivers, I emphasize that customer service is our main job. An employee may drive a bus, or turn a wrench, or answer phone calls, but their real job is customer service.”

equipped with an app, that can be downloaded for free just about everywhere, a person can scan that code and it will provide real-time information for a particular stop location.


“We also have an element that allows riders to text an individual bus stop number into our system. The system will then text back a response, telling which buses serve that location and when they will be arriving.”

“The Wi-Fi technology allows riders to kick back and connect to the Internet for work or pleasure throughout the duration of their ride. Wi-Fi is very much appreciated by riders,” Aguilar said. “We also conduct numerous workshops throughout the city to help attract those who traditionally drive their own vehicles, provid-

ing them with the information they need to make the choice to use public transportation.”

City of Santa Clarita Transit’s on-board Infotainment System provides riders with information about the route they are taking, and events soon to take place throughout the city.


“We have installed monitors on all our transit and commuter over-the-




Let Vanner customize a safe and reliable AC power system for your coach. Vanner offers electrical systems from 600W to 3500W, designed for your specific needs.

Vanner inverters and inverter-chargers safely provide power to the coach seats for your customer’s convenience. The system can also be designed to distribute AC power for onboard electronics. (TVs, DVDs, Stereos, etc.)


Allow your customers the unique experience and convenience of AC power at their seats.



AC Power



Inverter



Breaker Panel

Doug Adams
doug@vanner.com
cell phone 614-329-1604.

road coaches,” Aguilar said. “The monitors provide a visual announcement in terms of next-stop arrival information. If the bus is approaching First and Main, that information will visually display on the monitor, in addition to an audio announcement.

“In addition, based on the GPS — the actual location of the vehicle — we can program the system to display public service announcements and/or route-specific information. For example, if we have a bus that is approaching a shopping mall, two stops before the mall we can have the system display, ‘Don’t forget Santa will be at the mall this weekend.’

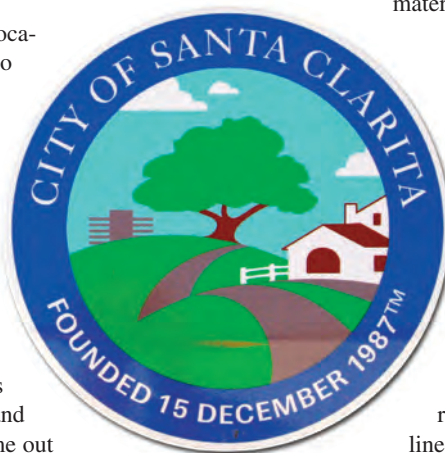
“We most often use this technology to alert riders to events at community centers, sports complexes and at the Santa Clarita Valley Senior Center. A typical announcement as a bus is approaching the Senior Center might be, ‘This weekend we will be doing wheelchair inspections and seminars on how to use the local bus service. Come out and join us.’”

Environmentally Friendly Projects Straw Bales And The Photovoltaic Canopy

The big bad wolf told the little pig who built his house with straw, “I’ll huff and I’ll puff, and I’ll blow your house in.” Everyone knows how that turned out. However, City of Santa Clarita Transit has a straw building that all the big bad wolves in the world cannot blow down.

According to Aguilar, the system’s Transit Maintenance Facility (TMF) is the first state-of-the-art “green” building for the city of Santa Clarita,

and one of the first LEED-certified straw-bale buildings in the world. The TMF was designed and constructed using a variety of high-quality, environmentally sensitive strategies and an unconventional use of materials.



“I’m sure everyone has heard the story of *The Three Little Pigs*. The walls of the TMF are actually made out of straw bales,” Aguilar said. “The walls were constructed by stacking straw bales. The bales are held in place by rebar, which keeps them from sliding. They are wrapped in chicken wire and then plastered with various layers of lime plaster that coats the exterior of the walls.

“The question that we commonly get is, ‘How would the straw hold up in case of a fire?’ Because the bales are encased in lime and the straw is so densely packed, no oxygen can get in. Even if the straw was to light, it would smolder rather than catch fire. Also, the exterior walls are lined with moisture sensors, which allows us to monitor moisture levels within the walls to make sure we don’t end up with mold or mildew issues.”

According to Aguilar, completed in May 2006, the TMF provides a cost-effective, healthy, resource-efficient facility, which demonstrates the city’s commitment to greener development and responsible public policy.

The energy-efficient facility also includes a 22,000-square-foot administration building, a 25,000-square-foot bus maintenance building, automated bus wash, diesel and CNG stations, and the on-street CNG fueling station for use by the general public. The facility is also designed to accommodate more than 150 buses and nearly 160 staff personnel with room for future expansion.

The facility received a “Gold” rating from the Leadership in Energy

CMI IS REVOLUTIONIZING THE DESIGN OF MOTORCOACH INTERIORS.

Traditional 85/15 wool seating surfaces to guarantee performance, combined with matching bolster and interior trim cloth produced from state of the art polyester fiber provide cost effective alternatives to the coach operators wanting to deliver the best looking, most comfortable and long lasting interiors.

Cosmic Collection

Designed & produced in North America for quick delivery



574.226.2977
SSCHROCK@CMIAUTOMOTIVE.COM
WWW.CMI-ENTERPRISES.COM



and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System in 2006, the city's first such award. LEED is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings.

Since its opening, the TMF has also received other awards, including the Architectural Award of Excellence for outstanding architecture in civic sustainability from the Los Angeles Business Council, in 2008, and the Excellence in Transportation award by the California Department of Transportation, in 2007.

"The posts and the beams of the TMF are made from recycled or reclaimed wood," Aguilar said. "They are manufactured beams that provide the support for the building, while the straw bales form the 'shell,' so to speak."

In 2011, with the help of a \$4.6 million grant awarded through the U.S. Department of Transportation's Transit Investments in Greenhouse Gas and Energy Reduction (TIGGER) program, the city of Santa Clarita installed a 65,000-square-foot photovoltaic canopy system at the TMF. More than 3,200 photovoltaic panels now cover the facility's four bus ports, generating enough electric power to offset nearly all of the facility's electric use.

"When the building was first constructed, we had one array of solar panels that we used to generate probably about 10 to 15 percent of the electricity that we were using at the facility," Aguilar said. "The canopy serves two major purposes. For one, it has created a shaded area to park buses. In the summer months it gets pretty warm here and the canopy helps keep the buses cool. Also, the solar panels generate electricity. It takes a lot of energy to run the CNG compressors at the on-site fueling

facility. We are now generating from 90 to 95 percent of the facility's electricity use.

"Our peak electric use is in the morning and in the evening. During the midday, whatever we don't use, is pushed back into the grid — that is, it goes back to our local utility and then we receive credit for that power."

The city of Santa Clarita's latest project was the construction of the McBean Regional Transit Center (MRTC).

"We incorporated a number of environmental design elements into the MRTC project as well," Aguilar said. "Included in the project was local

"Our peak electric use is in the morning and in the evening. During the midday, whatever we don't use, is pushed back into the grid — that is, it goes back to our local utility and then we receive credit for that power."

drought-tolerant landscaping that helps minimize water usage. The project was designed with a number of bioswales."

According to a United States Department of Agriculture website, bioswales are storm water runoff conveyance systems that provide an alternative to storm sewers. They can absorb low flows or carry runoff from heavy rains to storm sewer inlets or directly to surface waters. Bioswales improve water quality by infiltrating the first flush of storm water runoff and filtering the large storm flows they convey.

"The bioswales will collect water and will filter it naturally as it percolates back into the ground," Aguilar said. "To aid that process, a big portion of the lot is constructed with pervious pavement (paving material that allows water to penetrate to the ground below.)

"Instead of water running off a typical asphalt concrete lot, the water



Atlantic Detroit Diesel-Allison

DIESEL ENGINES & TRANSMISSIONS

The most profitable stop your bus can make!

Use the best quality factory authorized parts and service for reliability you can count on!

- Detroit Diesel Engines
- Exchange Engines
- Mercedes-Benz Engines
- Carrier Air Conditioning
- Allison Transmissions
- Complete Diagnostic and Repair Services
- Filters, Batteries & More
- All Makes Parts

For more information call Mike DeStefano: 201-489-5800 or call your nearest location:



**ATLANTIC
DETROIT DIESEL-ALLISON**



Lodi, NJ
Lodi, NJ
(Bus Service Center)
Piscataway, NJ

201-489-5800
201-291-8415
732-752-7100

Latham (Albany), NY
Ronkonkoma, NY
Middletown, CT
In Vermont call

518-452-0000
631-981-5800
860-632-0218
802-865-4672

**Diesel Emissions
Solutions Experts**

Reduce pollution with
EPA approved emission solutions
from ADDA. Call today!

Visit us online at: www.atlanticdda.com

Factory Authorized Sales, Service, Genuine Parts & Training

SOLVING TOMORROW'S SANITATION PROBLEMS TODAY!



#1 GREEN CHOICE REVOLUTIONARY NEW **DYNA-BACT**

Liquefies waste & tissue
Cleans tank system
Unmatched proven performance
Dramatic savings on dumping fees
Convenient toss in pack
ODOR CONTROL GUARANTEED!

TOP MOP

Concentrated Floor
/Surface Cleaner

Economical
Superior Fragrance
Industrial Strength
GUARANTEED PERFORMANCE!



BUS WASH

For Variety of Road-Related Soils & Stains
Attacks Dust, Mud, Diesel Exhaust
Pleasant Citrus Scent
Safe for automated systems

M5000

Toilet Deodorizer

High Traffic, High Heat
Superior Odor Control
Increased Color, Fragrance & Actives
Formaldehyde Free
Super Concentrate Formula



Experience the Monochem difference today call us 512-267-5190
or visit us at www.worldwidemonochem.com

actually gets soaked into the pavement. We have catch basins or bioswales that the water is channeled to and then is filtered naturally as it goes into the storm drains.

"It is technology that has been around for awhile, but hasn't been used widely in commercial development or construction, because of the cost that is involved in terms of the maintenance. Fortunately we have seen the cost of that technology come down rather significantly. I think the economic downturn helped us a little, in that we also saw construction costs go down.

"We also recently opened a large, environmentally friendly park and ride facility adjacent to the MRTC, which is a facility that acts as our centrally-located transfer depot.

"All of our routes pass through the MRTC, allowing riders to transfer routes seamlessly, or to use the park and ride and board our commuter service to Greater Los Angeles."

Customer Service — The 'Heart' Of The Matter

When it comes to customer service, Aguilar praised MV Transportation for the part it plays in making sure the riding public experiences the best in service.

"We have a very dedicated customer service staff on our contractor side who handle the majority of our calls," he said. "Our contractor puts them through intense training to make sure they handle every call with professionalism and grace."

"From my perspective, the key to being a successful employee here is attitude, and by that I mean the ability to focus on customer service."

The commitment to customer service is also a foundation of the Santa Clarita city government in all aspects of the services it provides to the people it serves.

"Customer service is something that is near and dear to us, and not only just with our transit service," Aguilar said. "Our overall philosophy is available on our city website, and is something we share with all city and contract employees. We take it very seriously and it is a big part of what we are and how we do things."

The philosophy statement says, in part: "As city employees, we are proud to say that we are the city of Santa Clarita. We take pride in our organization, our community and ourselves. Our mission is to deliver the best and most cost-efficient municipal service to the citizens and City Council of Santa Clarita." The remainder of the statement can be seen at www.santa-clarita.com, under the City Hall heading.

"The city of Santa Clarita is essentially a contract city. We contract the majority of our services, whether it is transit, police, fire, etc.," Aguilar said. "However, we do see our contractors as partners with the city. One of the things we stress with MV Transportation is they are an extension of the city. City and the contract employees all work together for a common goal — to provide the best customer service for our riders.

"When I talk to drivers, I emphasize that customer service is our main job. An employee may drive a bus, or turn a wrench, or answer phone calls, but their real job is customer service."

According to Aguilar, MV Transportation employs about 200 people to provide operations and maintenance. Santa Clarita manages the contract through the work of 8 dedicated employees tasked with general management, operations planning, budget management, marketing, systems management, bus stop management, data management and customer relations.

"MV does a wonderful job recruiting, training and retaining operators who are dedicated to providing superb service," Aguilar said. "From my perspective, the key to being a successful employee here is attitude, and by that I mean the ability to focus on customer service.

"We want people who are not just looking for a paycheck, but those who

desire to be a part of the community and give something back.

"Experience is good. We can teach a person to drive a bus or turn a wrench. We can teach a person how to answer a phone. What we can't teach is that positive attitude, that willingness to help and that cheery personality."

Aguilar told of one service put in place several years ago that highlights the transit system's continued effort to serve riders.

"We started offering free rides to our senior community on our local service," Aguilar said. "We were trying to move people off the very expensive and taxed Dial-A-Ride service over to the fixed-route service. Also, many times seniors want to maintain their ability to just pick up and go visit friends or go to the Senior Center without having to make plans in advance, as is necessary when using Dial-A-Ride.

"This program ties into our customer service philosophy, which is making sure the service is easy to use and meets the needs of the community."

While an important part of the system's marketing efforts is to focus on technology and social media, these strategies often play better to younger audiences.

"We are also making efforts to make sure we are reaching out to the senior community, as well as folks with disabilities — people who traditionally might shy away from using technologies such as smart phones or the Internet," Aguilar said.

Another program the transit system has put in place is called the Senior Ambassador Program. The initiative was launched in April 2011 to provide local seniors an opportunity to learn about the benefits and convenience of Santa Clarita's local fixed-route transit system.

The way it works, Aguilar explained, is a group of senior "ambassadors" are trained in how to navigate the system. They act as a bridge between the transit staff and the senior community at-large.

Each quarter, transit staff members and the Senior Ambassador team



Shown are staff members representing both the City of Santa Clarita Transit and MV Transportation.

conduct a field trip to popular destinations. During these trips, the ambassadors make a presentation to the new riders to teach them about City of Santa Clarita Transit.

"One of the biggest obstacles we have found for seniors making the transition from Dial-A-Ride to fixed-route service is the unknown," Aguilar said. "It is the fear of getting stuck somewhere and not knowing how to get home. By providing this training we have been able to address these initial barriers. The program has been a huge success. We have seen our senior ridership on our local service increase by leaps and bounds."

Another concern, not only for seniors, but the general public as well, is feeling safe while riding the bus. Aguilar said all of the system's service

Continued On Page 52

PRICED TO SELL — Attractive Lease Rates



(25) 1995–1998
35' and 40'
Low Floor
New Flyer
Series 50
Allison B-400R



(3) 1999
Neoplan
60' Low Floor
50 Series
Allison B500 Trans.
Thermo King
Lift-U lift

(11) '95-'02
Gillig
30, 35' and 40'
High & Low Floor
Series 50/Cummins
M-11
Allison B400R



(1) 1992 MCI 96 A3
6V92 DDECII
Automatic Trans.



Plus more on our website: www.midwestbus.com Call: 800-627-6627
Midwest Bus Corporation, 1940 W. Stewart Street, Owosso, MI 48867

vehicles — fixed-route, commuter and Dial-A-Ride — are equipped with on-board camera systems.

“We also have a contract and work closely with the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department,” he said. “Officers conduct foot patrols at transit centers. Also, they will ride the bus in uniform or in plain clothes. Oftentimes the deputies will patrol on Segway scooters.”

In still another effort to enhance customer service, as well as marketing the system, City of Santa Clarita Transit has dived deeper into the world of social media.

“It has been quite enlightening in terms of response and cost effectiveness,” Aguilar said. “Recently, we developed a campaign specifically for Twitter to promote awareness of the system and promote our technology. We have emphasized the fact that we have smart phone applications that allow people to follow us on Twitter. In addition, via Twitter, we have let people know they can go to our Facebook page to receive up-to-date service information. The response to the Twitter campaign was very, very positive and at a relatively low cost.”

Wild Weather In The Wild West

Because of its proximity to Hollywood, and because of its beauty and terrain, the Santa Clarita Valley, including the city of Santa Clarita, has been a favorite location for filming for both the motion picture and television industries. The area is often called “Hollywood North.”

While many movies and TV productions of all genres have been filmed there, right up to the present day, the valley is perhaps most famous as having been a go-to location for many classic westerns, dating back to the early 20th century. For example, legendary cowboy actors such as William S. Hart, Gary Cooper, Tom Mix, Roy Rogers, Bill Boyd, Gene Autry and John Wayne filmed westerns at the famous Melody Ranch Motion Picture Studio, located near Santa Clarita, according to www.melodyranchstudio.com.

While the “Wild West” exists only in fiction in the 21st century, the region’s “wild” weather-related events are all too real. The area’s topography, climate, and dry conditions have presented challenges for the residents of Santa Clarita and City of Santa Clarita Transit. The region is known as one of the prime areas in the country for wildfires.

According to news reports, last year’s Powerhouse Fire scorched 30,274 acres near Santa Clarita. The fire burned for nearly two weeks and destroyed 30 homes and damaged three.

“Santa Clarita is in a valley surrounded by mountains on three sides. Last year we had wildfires that caused some havoc in the area. We are still dealing with the aftermath of those fires,” Aguilar said.

In late February heavy rains fell in the area and there were mudslide warnings near Santa Clarita. The city is also situated near the San Fernando fault zone.

“Within the city of Santa Clarita, we go through mock exercises in terms of various disasters, such as earthquakes, fires and flooding,” Aguilar said. “We run through these scenarios at least once or twice a year. Our transit system has been called upon to use our resources to evacuate families during fires and floods.”

Aguilar’s career with the city of Santa Clarita began in 1994, when he worked for about a year as an intern.

“My first day on the job was the day after the Northridge earthquake,”

he remembered. “My first involvement with transit was kind of a ‘trial by fire’ in terms of my initiation.”

Following his time as an intern for the city, he went into the private sector, working for 13 years at a consulting firm that focused on public transportation.

“I came back to the city about seven years ago. I was initially hired as an analyst and about four years ago I was promoted to the transit management position,” he said. “I have been in the industry for more than 20 years now. It is one of those things that gets into your blood. It is rewarding to see projects through from the design to the funding to the construction to the implementation process. It is also very rewarding to see the positive impact public transportation has on the community.”

Support For Public Transit On A Positive Path

Public transportation within the Santa Clarita Valley and the greater Los Angeles area continues to gain positive public perception with each passing year, according to Aguilar. The region is committed to improving service and connectivity, and voters have helped the cause by backing projects that will expedite this process.

“Public transportation is also viewed positively within Santa Clarita,” he said. “Thanks to consistent outreach and our helpful staff, residents and riders are well-informed on how to use our service to get them where they need to go in a timely fashion.

“We are fortunate that our City Council is very supportive of public transportation. They understand the value that it brings and that it is really a quality of life issue. The reality is we are not unlike most communities in that fewer than 10 percent of residents use public transportation on a regular basis.

“However, people understand that, even if they don’t ride the bus themselves, they have or know children who use the bus to get to school. They may have elderly parents or relatives who use the service to get to the Senior Center.”

Environmental issues also come into play in the public’s realization of the benefits of public transportation in the region.

“People understand when they pass a commuter coach on the freeway carrying 40 to 50 passengers that it means fewer cars on the freeway, which has a positive impact on lessening pollution and traffic congestion,” Aguilar said. “There is a huge effort to raise and maintain that awareness in terms of the types of vehicles we operate such as cleaner burning CNG or alternative fuel buses. Also, there is a lot of emphasis placed on ride sharing and ride pooling.

“People also see the positive impact of riding the bus in their wallet. Unlike other parts of the country, our gas prices spike during the summer because of the additives put into the fuels to make them cleaner.

“Overall, I think things are moving in a positive direction. We are excited about the changes and technology that have been adopted by the transit industry.

“We are starting to see a lot more development that brings commercial, residential and retail into the same footprint, so people don’t have to make as many trips or are able use transit to get to work or school.

“Our primary goal is to maintain our ridership and continue to grow. Our biggest focus is maintaining the quality of life we have here in the Santa Clarita Valley, and we feel transit has a major role to play in this effort.”

Contact: City of Santa Clarita Transit, Transit Maintenance Facility (TMF), 28250 Constellation Road, Santa Clarita, CA 91355.

Phone: 661-294-1BUS (1287).

Website: www.santaclaritatransit.com.