New Coaches Hit the Road

In March 2001, Golden Gate Transit (GGT) received 14 new 40-foot buses manufactured by NovaBUS Corp. of Roswell, New Mexico. These buses seat 39 passengers with two forward-facing wheelchair positions. The state-of-the-art coaches demonstrate improved safety features and next generation diesel engines with exhaust recirculation technology that reduces emissions and increases fuel efficiency. Their interiors boast microprocessor maintained temperature controls and each has an ergonomically designed driver’s seat that allows adjustments for weight and height. Interior safety features include improved tie-downs for wheelchair security, while exterior safety features include brighter lights that can be seen more easily in adverse weather conditions. The 14 buses were purchased for $4.6 million, with 81 percent federal and 19 percent District funds. Their arrival brings the active fleet to 268.

Express Service Key to Congestion Management

Traffic congestion along the heavily traveled Highway 101 corridor continues to rise. To help improve traffic flow, the District embarked on two new innovative express bus service programs. In September 2000, express service for commuters traveling the 60-mile “long-haul” trip between Santa Rosa in Sonoma County and San Francisco was expanded to offer express trips during the morning commute hours. Ridership nearly doubled and buses began consistently running at capacity. In addition, in July 2001, MTC announced that GGT would receive up to $2.6 million in capital funds from Governor Davis’s Traffic Congestion Relief Fund Program to purchase six new buses as part of MTC’s Regional Express Bus Program. This program will improve congestion along regional traffic corridors by providing express bus service designed to reduce travel times and provide an attractive alternative to driving alone. The new buses, expected to arrive in late 2002, will provide much needed express service between Santa Rosa and major employment centers in Marin County, as well as expanded service between Santa Rosa and San Francisco.

Service Expansion Builds New Partnerships

In 1993, Route 40 began service providing the final public transit link allowing customers to successfully navigate the entire Bay Area via public transit. The route links the East Bay’s Contra Costa County via the Richmond San Rafael Bridge to central Marin County. Ridership immediately exceeded projections and has continued to grow. In spring 2001, the District was approached with the idea to improve transit service to connect workers living in Contra Costa County with available employment opportunities in Marin County. Public/private partnerships were formed with local businesses and public agencies on both sides of the Bay to help pay for the expanded service. MTC provided a grant through its Low Income Flexible Transportation Program and the grant was matched with funds from GGT, Contra Costa County, City of Richmond, Marin County, BART, Alameda-Contra Costa Transit District (AC Transit) and several Contra Costa County social service agencies. Expanded service began in September 2001 with a route realignment locating bus stops near major Marin County employers and an increase in the hours of operation. Connections to other regional public transit providers were also improved.
Clean Diesel for the Future

In 2000, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) set new clean air regulations giving transit operators two fuel path choices for future bus purchases: clean diesel fuel or clean alternative fuel. After a comprehensive and public evaluation of the two choices, GGT joined most other Bay Area transit operators in selecting the clean-burning diesel path. Grant funding for capital expenditures and public/private partnerships are expected to help finance the capital equipment required for the clean diesel path and to assist GGT in meeting the long-term goal of operating Zero Emissions Buses (ZEB) by the end of 10 years. Work is already underway to develop a ZEB demonstration project in partnership with AC Transit.

New Drivers Join the Team

Thanks to a sustained recruitment and training effort, 37 new bus drivers joined the team this year, up from 19 last year. To rev up recruitment, the Marketing Department created an award-winning campaign featuring the slogan, "Is your career stuck in park? Put it in drive with Golden Gate Transit." As a result of the promotion, the District has established an applicant pool of 300 from which to select new trainees. GGT remains steadfast in keeping staffing levels as close as possible to the authorized 322 full-time bus drivers and 40 part-time bus drivers to minimize service cancellations and overtime.

Marin Bus Stop Improvements

Improving bus stop safety and accessibility is an important goal for continued customer satisfaction. In spring 2001, federal and state funds supported a $164,000 project to upgrade several bus stops in Mill Valley, Larkspur, Fairfax and San Rafael.

A Winning Team

Each year the Marketing Department develops inventive ways to promote services and generate revenue. Their talent was recognized in September 2000 when APTA awarded the prestigious "Adwheel Award" to their effective bus driver recruitment campaign. The campaign won in the "Shoestring" category because the entire effort only cost $250.

This year the sale of advertising space on buses and ferry terminal kiosks generated nearly $1 million. To expand the revenue generation program, in March 2001, a contract was awarded for Bus Shelter and Kiosk Advertising. Over 40 bus shelters will be refurbished for display advertising along with 12 kiosks at ferry terminals and GGT transit centers.
Ferry Ridership Climbs

Ferry ridership climbed to a new high of 1,885,618, up from 1,862,151 last year. This increase comes primarily from the addition of our special Larkspur Ferry service to Pacific Bell Park for San Francisco Giants games. With effective marketing and public information, an advanced ticketing system, and customer-friendly alternative parking solutions, Pacific Bell ridership was just under 80,000.

New Ferry Arrives

Like a thoroughbred racehorse, the newest vessel in the Golden Gate Ferry fleet stuns the eye with speed, grace, and beauty. The M. V. (Motor Vessel) Mendocino, carefully crafted by Nichols Brothers Boat Builders of Freeland, Washington, is an improved version of the fleet's popular original high-speed catamaran, the M. V. Del Norte. Together, they provide smooth, rapid, 30-minute crossings between Larkspur and San Francisco.

Del Norte customers provided valuable input that enhanced the Mendocino's customer features. Most noteworthy are the increase in passenger capacity from 325 to 408, expanded protected bike storage, custom-designed interior, more flexible seating and improved access for passenger loading and unloading. Federal (80 percent), state (12.5 percent), and District (7.5 percent) funds financed its $10 million construction cost.

Well in advance of placing the M. V. Mendocino into service in September 2001, staff focused on achieving improved customer convenience by increasing the number of high-speed weekday crossings from 16 to 26, concurrent with a redesign of the free bus-to-ferry shuttle service. Additionally, extensive training, construction oversight and delivery logistics support was provided by Ferry Division staff.

Parking Set to Expand

With the September 1998 arrival of the M. V. Del Norte, ferry ridership spiked sharply. Since then, parking at the Larkspur Ferry Terminal has been at a premium with the lot often filling by 8 a.m. Along with the new September 2001 Larkspur schedule came a construction project to expand the lot by 210 additional spaces. Construction began in October 2001 and will be completed in January 2002. Additional measures to improve parking congestion include the promotion of carpools and biking to transit.

Dredging Ensures Safe Passage

The Larkspur ferry berths, turning area, and channel must be dredged periodically to ensure safe ferry passage. In fall 2000, berth dredging removed approximately 25,000 cubic yards of sediment at a District cost of $682,538. In fall 2001, affording the District great savings, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers began dredging the turning area and channel, removing approximately 400,000 cubic yards of sediment at a federal cost of $3.3 million. This portion of the dredging will be completed in spring 2002. All dredging is performed with care to coordinate with adjacent residents and local agencies on noise abatement measures, to ensure environmental preservation, and to integrate the project into the ferry schedule so that no ferry operations are curtailed.
Spaulding Engines to be Replaced

In March 2001, the District applied to the Bay Area Air Quality Management District for funds to replace the engines on the three Spaulding vessels with more efficient modern engines. The result was a $1.5 million Carl Moyer Program grant. Once installed in 2002, the new engines will substantially reduce emissions and extend the useful lives of the Spaulding vessels. Lifesaving equipment will be upgraded in a separate $150,000 project authorized in June 2001.

No Smoking Enforcement Program Launched

A program aimed at enforcing the "No Smoking" law was launched this year with positive results. Increased signage went up and the District contracted with County of Marin Sheriff's Department officers to ride ferries periodically and issue warnings and citations to anyone smoking aboard the ferry. Violators can receive fines of up to $250 and up to 48 hours of community service.

Website Use Grows

In 1995, the District established a web presence that has continued to grow. Two years ago we expanded this presence by creating four websites: www.goldengate.org, as an umbrella home page; Golden Gate Bridge information at www.goldengatebridge.org; Golden Gate Transit information at www.goldengatetransit.org; and Golden Gate Ferry information at www.goldengateferry.org.

Customers continue to visit the four websites in overwhelming numbers. In a typical week, more than 900,000 "hits," totaling over 48 million annually, are made to the four sites. More than 4,000 visitors are repeat customers. The most popular sites, receiving more than 80 percent of the traffic, are the www.goldengatebridge.org and the www.goldengate.org sites.

Several improvements to the transit websites were made this year, including a renavigation of content along with the expansion of content to make customer access easier.

In addition, a new user-friendly customer comment form was added in December 2000. In just six months, nearly 300 customers had used the form. Customers can also sign up to receive periodic service announcements via e-mail. This service continues to grow in popularity.

Health and Safety Programs Enhance Our Success

The District is committed to protecting the environment and the health and safety of its employees. Reducing work-related injuries and illnesses is key. Our strong safety focus has continued to impact the District’s three-year downward trend for accidents and injury rates. The importance of workplace safety has increased the role of employees in their own safety programs. This year special emphasis was placed on the implementation of a Districtwide ergonomics program to reduce the number of repetitive motion injuries for all occupations. The District also continues to manage its storm water pollution prevention programs, hazardous waste reduction, and air emissions to ensure the safety of the environment.

Ferry Terminal Superintendent Rebecca Wessling, December 2000 Employee of the Month, creates a positive work environment with her upbeat attitude and professionalism.

Ferry Operations/Maintenance Coordinator Frances Hofmann, July 2000 Employee of the Month, is renowned for her outstanding expertise, guidance and assistance on ferry-related matters.