Annotating

• **Highlight** the most important points and thesis statement.
• Identify key terms & define them if necessary.
• Underline things that are confusing or unclear THEN write your question(s) in the margins.
• Take note of your reactions. Emoticons are OK, but words are better.
• Mark where you agree AND disagree with the author.
• Comment on strengths and weaknesses.
• Note any points you want to remember or question.
By Tim Cavanaugh, Reason.com  
July 11, 2012

The dirty secret of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) is that it provides some of the finest public transit service in the country. With a network stretching over 1,515 square miles, the MTA runs a fleet of 2,723 buses every weekday, operates trains over 87 miles of tracks, and carries more than a million passengers a day.

The authority’s newest service, the long-anticipated light-rail Expo Line from downtown L.A. to Culver City, rides like a dream along its eight-mile route. Shortly after the Expo Line opened in late April, my colleague Scott Shackford and I found Expo Line riders enthusiastic about the train.

Unfortunately, we also found very few riders. Based on our counts and calculations, we estimated total daily ridership could not exceed 13,000 people. A few days after we rode the rails, Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky came up with an even smaller figure of 9,000 daily riders.

Here you begin to see how the MTA is simultaneously increasing operating costs, reducing operating revenue, cutting service for working-class and poor customers, and dismantling a functioning mass transit system, all in the service of a fantasy that was pushed on an unwilling L.A. by wealthy liberals.

Since 2009 the MTA has added eight miles of train service, at a capital cost of about $2 billion. These new trains, the Expo Line and an extension of the east-county Gold Line, carry a total of about 39,000 people a day.

In the meantime, the cash-strapped authority radically reduced bus service twice: It cut bus lines by 4 percent in 2010 and 12 percent in 2011. These cuts were made even though buses move more than four times as many Angelenos as trains do. In 2009 MTA buses carried about 1.2 million riders a day. Multiplying that by 16 percent, we can estimate more than 180,000 people had their service canceled, while fewer than 40,000 had service introduced.

Not surprisingly, the result is that fewer people are using mass transit overall in Los Angeles than in 2009 (about 5 percent fewer according to MTA statistics). This is a continuation of a long-term trend since the MTA began rail construction in 1985, more than 80 miles of railroads have been built, but mass transit ridership as a percentage of county population is lower than it was in 1985.

Bus riders get screwed in another important way: We have to pay for a ride, while train riders don’t. Every MTA bus has an enforcer, a driver who collects the standard fare of $1.50. Trains operate on an honor system in which fares are not collected. Although the MTA claims to conduct occasional spot checks and lay heavy fines on fare cheaters, its rail revenue numbers suggest very few train riders pay. (The MTA is planning to add gating at rail platforms later this year.)

Why would a public transit authority want to reduce its number of paying customers while adding costly, inflexible capacity that is destined to be severely underused? Part of the answer lies in the nation’s light rail obsession. New trains are being added or planned in Austin, Cincinnati, Minneapolis, and other cities around the country. But L.A. train buffs have a special complex rooted in the legend of the Pacific Electric rail system.

Would MTA reduce bus lines? 15,000 riders per day (of which few pay). The Expo Line, which carries people 83% more pro than the average LA rail line, would reduce ridership. It’s the nation’s obsession with rail riders.

How does this tie in with ride share? It’s about the nation’s obsession with rail riders. How does this tie in with ride share? It’s about the nation’s obsession with rail riders.

Questions: Why would MTA reduce bus lines? 15,000 riders per day (of which few pay). The Expo Line, which carries people 83% more pro than the average LA rail line, would reduce ridership. It’s the nation’s obsession with rail riders.