

Bus operators union will protest Metro bus cuts at meeting

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By [Steve Scauzillo](#), San Gabriel Valley Tribune

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EL MONTE >> Metro bus operators and union members will be speaking out against a plan to eliminate two major east-west bus lines through the San Gabriel Valley at a local transit council meeting here Monday.

The San Gabriel Valley Service Council, a local arm of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), will hear public comments starting at 6 p.m. at the El Monte Bus Station regarding the elimination of lines 190 and 194 that take passengers from El Monte to Pomona.

As part of its biannual service changes, Metro announced a plan to [discontinue the two, long-standing bus routes](#) that could be taken over by Foothill Transit, the public-private bus line based in West Covina.

The Sheet Metal, Air, Rail and Transportation (SMART) union, which represents about 5,000 Metro bus and rail operators, is opposed to the discontinuation, saying it could eliminate jobs and if there is a transfer, reduce the number of living wage jobs in the region.

Metro bus drivers earn between \$20 and \$28 an hour, while Foothill Transit's sub-contractors providing bus drivers pay between \$13.25 and \$13.65 an hour, said Andrew Gonzales, director of public relations for the SMART union. "We would be transferring jobs to below living wage standards," he said.

Gonzales said between 40 and 50 bus operators would be affected by the loss of the lines. However, those with seniority most likely would be transferred to other bus lines or even new Metro rail lines, he said. What happens in the next six months or a year could affect operators with less seniority, he said.

He said layoffs are an end result the union is trying to avoid. "Ultimately, that is what we are afraid will happen. We are trying to protect the work of the operators," he said.

Foothill Transit is talking with Metro and is interested in taking over lines 190 and 194. In an interview earlier this year, Doran Barnes, executive director of Foothill Transit, said his agency and Metro were working on a seamless transition that would not affect service or stops.

If the lines are released to Foothill Transit, it would represent the biggest expansion of the West Covina-based agency in 14 years.

Line 190 leaves El Monte Bus Station at Santa Anita Avenue and travels east along Ramona Boulevard, San Bernardino Road, Azusa Avenue, Citrus Avenue, Barranca Avenue, Grand Avenue and Temple Avenue, stopping at six high schools, Mt. San Antonio College in Walnut and Cal Poly Pomona University. Line 194 travels from Tyler Avenue down Valley Boulevard to City of Industry, Hacienda Boulevard, Stafford Street and Stimson Avenue in Hacienda Heights to Grand Avenue and Temple Avenue in Walnut, also stopping at Cal Poly.

Combined, they carry 7,114 riders on weekdays, 3,692 riders on Saturday and 2,536 riders on Sunday, according to Metro.

The Service Council meets at the El Monte Division 9 Building, third floor, Service Council Conference Room, 3449 Santa Anita Ave., El Monte, 91731. The council will receive a final recommendation on the line changes at its March 14 meeting, when a vote is scheduled. The council's vote is advisory. The Metro board will take up line changes on April 28 and could take effect sometime in June.