

SAN GABRIEL VALLEY TRIBUNE

Metro may cut fringe routes

By Steve Scauzillo
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A woman exits a Metro bus at the Workman Avenue and Second Street bus stop in West Covina in December. Foothill Transit would like to take over the three bus lines run by Metro. Keith Birmingham — Staff Photographer

Metro wants to discontinue three major bus lines serving more than 1.4 million customers per year in the San Gabriel Valley and southeast Los Angeles County, part of the mega agency's de-emphasizing of fringe-area bus routes, documents and interviews show.

A report on "proposed service changes" released in December calls on discontinuing lines 190, which runs from the El Monte Bus Station through El Monte, Baldwin Park, Covina, West Covina and Walnut — including major stops at Mt. San Antonio College and Cal Poly Pomona; and line 194, which runs south of the 10 Freeway mostly along Valley Boulevard through El Monte, City of Industry, La Puente and Walnut.

In addition, the report seeks to "discontinue service" on Line 270, which stretches more than 17 miles from Monrovia to Norwalk and includes stops at Rio Hondo College in Whittier.

The Metro report says the three lines are "possibly to be operated by another provider." Foothill Transit, a public-private bus-only agency with an annual budget of \$78.5 million, said last year it was interested in taking over the 190 and 194 lines. On Thursday, the agency said it is continuing talks with Metro over 190 and 194, as well as the 270 bus line. The latter was not part of discussions between the two agencies last December.

"We are working cooperatively with Metro," said Doran Barnes, executive director of Foothill Transit, on Thursday. Metro wants to implement bus line changes by June. Barnes, who would not give a timeline, said the goal of both agencies is to limit overlapping service areas. Both are working toward a seamless transition that will not affect service because routes and stops will remain the same, he said.

"Someone will operate them. The issue is, will it be us, or will it be Metro?" he said.

If the lines are released to Foothill Transit, it would represent the biggest expansion of the West Covina-based agency in 14 years. The agency last took over a line from the much larger Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) in 2002, when Foothill usurped the 699 line from Montclair to downtown Los Angeles.

Line 190 and Line 194 together carry 7,600 boarding passengers every weekday and 2,800 to 4,000 every Saturday and Sunday. Ridership measures 28 passengers per bus hour (PPBH) and 29 (PPBH) for Line 270. When ridership falls well below the system average of 50 PPBH, it is considered “poor performing,” said Kim Upton, Metro spokesperson.

“These are among the poorest performing lines in terms of ridership,” Upton said. “Cancellation of a route or route segment is usually considered as a last resort,” she wrote in an email.

Metro’s San Gabriel Valley Service Council would make the final decision, Upton added. Only one public hearing has been scheduled to date: 10 a.m., Feb. 6 at Metro Headquarters, 1 Gateway Plaza, Los Angeles, CA 90012.

Metro Executive Officer of Service Development Jon Hillmer that shedding lines 190 and 194 would save Metro money and could help the agency fill sorely needed train operator positions for the Expo Line Phase 2 from Culver City to Santa Monica, and the Foothill Gold Line Extension from east Pasadena to the Azusa/Glendora border. Both are scheduled to open this year.

Foothill will need between 30-40 additional buses, Barnes said. All Foothill buses run on compressed natural gas (CNG) or are electric, he said.

Fares on Foothill buses are \$1.25 a ride, as compared to \$1.75 a ride on Metro buses. So, riders would save money.

“That would be cool, if it was the same routes,” said Cesar Amaro of El Monte after he got off the 270 at the El Monte Bus Station Thursday.

Most riders interviewed said they didn’t mind if Foothill Transit took over the routes. But they feared Metro cancelling the routes.

“That would be a mess. I wouldn’t be able to get around,” said Erika Johnson, a 190 line rider.