

SC Bus System Needs More Riders

Permanent Stops, Fixed Schedules Now In Effect

Santa Cruz Sentinel

Friday, December 4, 1969

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People in droves are not riding the buses of the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District. The dearth of riders is not entirely unexpected: few bus systems anywhere in the United States do enough business to break even, let alone show a profit.

But directors of the local transit system do wish the bus line income could be brought somewhat nearer the break-even point. Since the district took over the bus system in February, revenues have varied between 30 and 35 cents per mile while the district's fixed contract payment to system owner Chester Smith is 57½ cents per mile.

"Financially," said District Secretary Joe Ringrose, "the district finds itself in much the same position as many of the senior citizens who use the buses. We live on a fixed income (an annual subsidy of \$30,000) and must shape our operation to fit those available dollars. We're unable to set up the operation as we'd like it, then find the money to pay for it."

There has been a slight drop in the number of riders on the buses since the district took over. Ringrose thinks the major factor in the decrease was the disrupting influence of downtown construction.

"It's just not very convenient

for people to go to take a bus and find the stop has been moved. Now, with permanent stops, fixed schedules and extra courtesy on the part of drivers, we're convinced we're providing the easiest way to shop downtown."

District income has, in fact, taken an upturn with the completion of the downtown construction. Most of the buses now are operating on an hourly schedule and benches have been provided at all stops. At the same time, the buses are kept off Pacific Avenue to minimize traffic delays.

Even with a fare hike from 20 to 25 cents, however, the buses continue to show a loss. Why, then, should the public pay a tax for a service nobody uses?

Ringrose calls it a payment for a stand-by service which the taxpayer hopes he won't need — much as fire and police protection.

He pointed out voters at the November, 1968 election had agreed to tax themselves for the formation and maintenance of the district.

"The choice at that time," Ringrose observed, "was not what type of transit we would have, but rather, whether there would be any public transportation at all. Chester Smith had stated unequivocally he was going out of business. But the voters in the proposed transit district said, yes, they wanted transportation maintained and were willing to tax themselves to the tune of five cents per \$100 of assessed valuation to support it."

"To the owner of a \$20,000 home, assessed at \$5,000, this means that, whether he uses the buses or not, he will pay \$2.50 per year to have the service available."

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however, San Jose Road, about a mile and a half from Soquel High School.

The headlights of a car driven by Larry Taylor, 21, of 6546 Old San Jose Road, caught the form of the animal and Taylor swerved to miss it.

He lost control of his car and smashed into a tree.

The tree toppled into a neighboring 4000-volt power line.

The lines shorted out against one another and suddenly 800 PG&E customers were without electric power.

A spokesman for PG&E said that 90 per cent of the 800 had power again by 8:07 p.m. Full restoration was made by 9:30 p.m. in the outlying areas.

Taylor was not injured.

Three Robbery Cases Reported

Three robberies were reported to law authorities Thursday.

Jean Morgan, 2203 Redwood Drive, Aptos, reported theft of a bicycle and a surfboard and rack from a carport.

Brack Stone, 4620 Bain Ave., reported that someone entered his home and took a portable TV set, valued at \$100.

Sister Mary Henry of Holy Cross school reported to police that a \$180 Sony tape recorder was missing from the school. She was not sure when it was taken.

Maps indicate the routes and downtown stops of the Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District buses. District directors hope public use of the buses will increase with the completion of downtown construction and the establishment of fixed stops and schedules.

will, of course, derive more than the \$2.50 in benefits. To those who don't use it, this can be considered a transportation stand-by in case their automobiles should be disabled."

It would be foolish to look at the bus system as a substitute for the private car, Ringrose thinks. "It is truly an emergency reserve, or back-up system provided for those too old, too young or too poor to provide their own private transportation. The private car is still Number One on the transportation hit parade in Santa Cruz and everywhere else."

"We hear much local talk about integrated transportation systems — whatever they are," Ringrose continued. "What we have is four buses operating over five routes. That constitutes little more than an absolute minimal supportive transit system."

While grandiose schemes of exotic transportation systems fill the air, Ringrose is concerned with the day-to-day task of keeping his four creaky buses in running order.

"We're giving mouth-to-mouth resuscitation to four aged vehicles," he said wryly. "What we need is a transplant. In March, the district filed a federal grant application which hopefully will provide the transplant in the form of five new buses, a bus barn and supportive shops."

With better equipment and facilities is there a chance the district ever will break even financially?

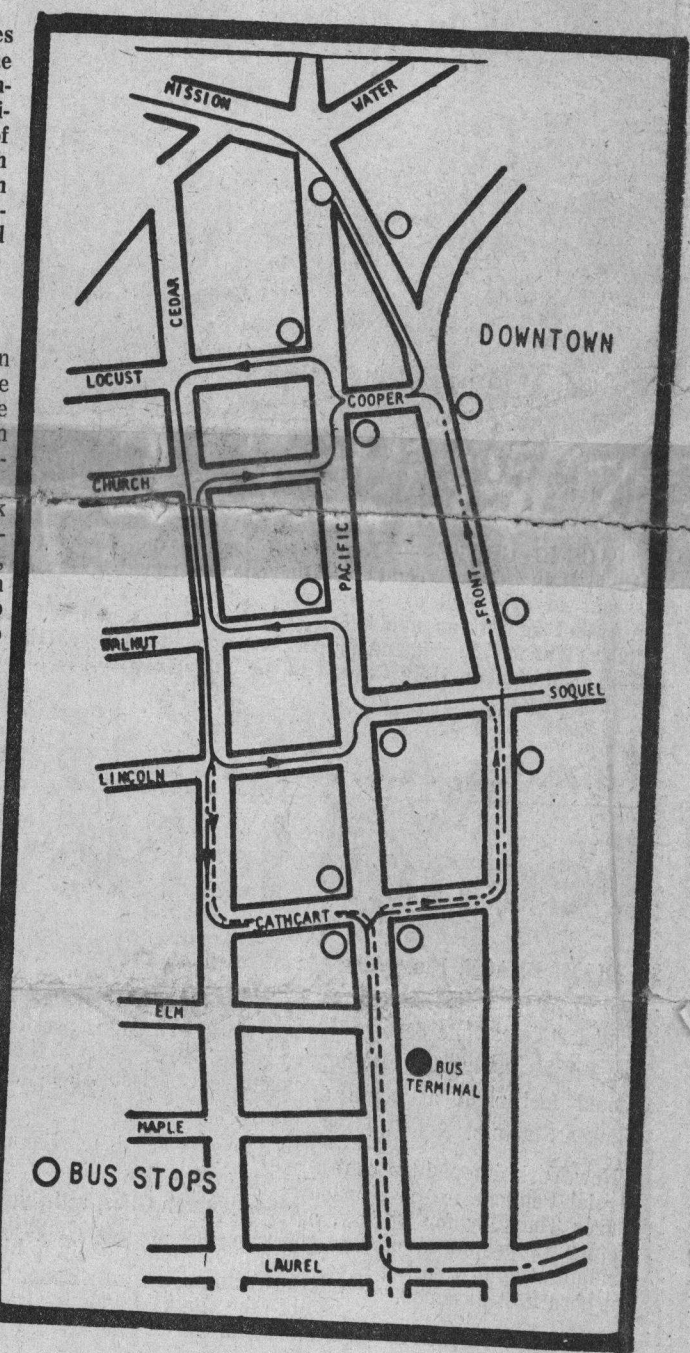
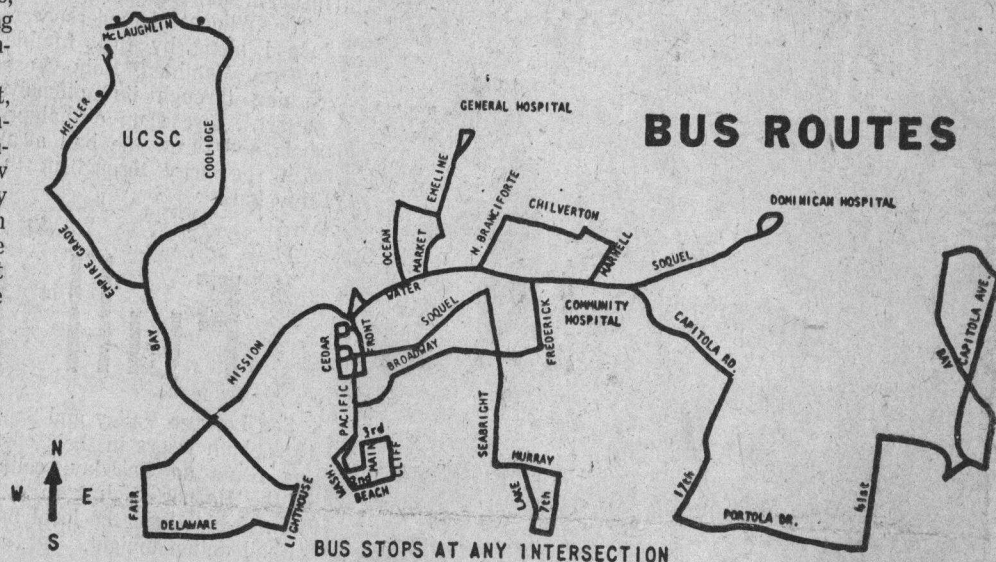
Ringrose doesn't think so. People just don't like to ride buses that well — not when there's a family car sitting in the driveway.

"It would take a 60 per cent increase in ridership to break even," Ringrose calculated. He thinks the district can make some long strides toward closing the gap, however, if it gathers a solid bank of data to guide route alignments and timing.

"The job essentially is to put the buses and routes where the people are and where they want to be, rather than trying to bring the people to the buses. The idea of running over the same routes at the same times just because they've always been run that way just doesn't make much sense."

While the system probably never will be self-supporting, Ringrose thinks that, within the accepted 5-cent levy "a good, minimal supportive system can be maintained."

BUS ROUTES



Swedish Journalist To Speak

A visiting Swedish journalist will speak on "Student Power, Swedish Style" and "The Future of Socialism" at Cabrillo College on Monday and Tuesday.

Michael Salzer, currently on an American assignment for a number of European newspapers, is the speaker.

Born in Vienna in 1908, Salzer went on his first foreign correspondent assignment to London in 1929.

He served with the R.A.F. in World War II, seeing service in North Africa, Italy, Yugoslavia, Germany and India.

After the war he went to Sweden, where he has been correspondent for Time, Life, The London Evening News and many European radio and television stations.

He will speak on "Student Power, Swedish Style" in the forum building room 450 at 7:30 p.m. Monday.

"The Future of Socialism" will be his topic Tuesday at 8:30 p.m. in forum building room 456.

Both lectures are open to the public and admission is free.

March of Dimes Seeks Volunteers

Volunteers are needed for the work involved in a fund-raising campaign.

The funds help to support a birth defects center at the Stanford Medical Center and at the University of California Medical Center.

More information is available by calling the Santa Cruz County chapter of the March of Dimes, 718A Capitola Ave., Capitola, phone 476-1656 or 439-2700.