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SunLine Earns High Marks from Transportation Leader

APTA President Cites Agency's Ridership Increases and Ability to Maintain Service Levels in Challenging Economic Environment

(Thousand Palms, CA) – American Public Transportation Association (APTA) President William Millar spoke to a packed ballroom at SunLine Transit Agency's Fourth Annual State of Public Transit Luncheon this week. His primary message to community and industry leaders: Investment in transit delivers a return that goes far beyond simply helping those that ride the bus.



The respected industry veteran delivered his remarks in Rancho Mirage where SunLine hosted a number of community and industry leaders who gathered to discuss transit trends and growth opportunities. During Mr. Millar's keynote address, he shared a number of compelling statistics that framed the industry's large contribution to the national economy. Among them: \$1 dollar invested in transit produces \$4 in public benefits; stimulus funding has put more than 12,000 buses nationally in to service and created an estimated 250,000 jobs; using public transit saves 4.2 billion gallons of fuel each year.

At the local level, Mr. Millar noted that SunLine managed to post an 8% gain in ridership over the past year, a considerably bigger number than in many other markets across the country. The APTA executive also shared research findings that show an estimated 84% of transit agencies nationally had to raise fares, cut service – or both – over the last year. Despite facing many of the same economic challenges, SunLine managed to avoid either scenario.

The State of Public Transit Luncheon got underway with a witty and thought-provoking presentation by Dr. John Wu, Director of the Leonard Transportation Center and esteemed professor at California State University San Bernardino. Dr. Wu, who

has worked with many large companies on international transportation issues and the development of “green” supply chains, encouraged attendees to re-think the way in which they define concepts such as inter-modal transportation. As an example, he talked about the increasing popularity of bike-to-work programs and ride-sharing and how they could help re-shape the commute of the future.

C. Mikel Oglesby, SunLine Transit Agency General Manager, followed Dr. Wu and briefed the audience on the Agency’s progress over the past year and discussed prospects for future service enhancements. The latter includes a proposed commuter route from the Coachella Valley to the Beaumont/Banning area, helping to facilitate a connection with the MetroLink train that carries passengers between Riverside and the Southern California coastal communities. If approved, funding would come from a grant SunLine is pursuing through the Federal Transit Administration.

Another highlight in coming months will be the rollout of the Agency’s seventh generation hydrogen fueled vehicle, the first all-American-manufactured hydrogen fuel cell bus. SunLine expects to unveil the state-of-the-art vehicle in the fall of 2011.

Mr. Oglesby said, “The Annual ‘State of Public Transit’ Luncheon provides a great opportunity to educate local stakeholders about the most significant issues and challenges facing the transportation industry, as well as the opportunities before us. Through this dialogue, we’re able to communicate the ways in which we can contribute to smarter community planning and, therefore, meet the future transit needs of our Valley. ”

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About SunLine Transit Agency

SunLine Transit Agency is a joint powers authority formed in 1977 to operate the Coachella Valley's public transportation system. Its vehicles travel more than 21 million passenger miles per year, covering 536 bus stops located throughout a 1,120 mile-service area. SunLine offers fixed route bus service and curb-to-curb paratransit for the mobility impaired.