A brief look at Tucson's transit service of the past follows.

Public Transportation in Tucson

In 1905, the company that would eventually be called Sun Tran -- the Tucson Rapid Transit Company (TRT) -- bought the existing horse-drawn streetcar transit system in Tucson. A year later it began an electric streetcar system, ending a 25-year era of animal-powered public transit in Tucson.

By the mid-1920s, the company recognized its existing streetcar system was not keeping pace with the needs of a growing town. Bus service was needed, and the company started two bus routes.

The 1920s brought another Sun Tran forerunner into the picture. Transit pioneer Roy Laos began the Occidental Bus Line with one bus. This service provided a critical service to Tucson's south side and his company expanded rapidly.

By the end of 1930, the versatility of the gas-powered bus was clear. On New Year's Day, 1931, TRT replaced all electric streetcar routes with buses.

Demand for bus service grew and a third competitor, Mountain View Bus Line, established service in 1936. Mountain View struggled to survive and eventually was bought out by TRT in 1941.

Gas-rationing during World War II caused ridership on Tucson's bus companies to skyrocket. Rapid post-war growth followed, and the bus service continued to expand. Larger, more modern buses were added to the fleets, and in 1945, seven million passengers were carried by the two systems.

Diesel buses were introduced in 1951 and gradually replaced all of the gasoline-powered buses. The early 1950s marked a period of steady decline and continued through the 1960s due to labor strikes and increasing competition from the automobile. By 1965, ridership had declined 63 percent.

Sun Tran's Beginning

In 1969, the City of Tucson purchased Tucson Rapid Transit and ridership grew dramatically. Sixty-five new buses were purchased with the aid of federal grants. The frequency and length of existing routes were increased and new routes were added. A contest ran in the newspaper to rename the system, and the winning name, Sun Tran, was adopted in 1975.

Meanwhile, Roy Laos' bus company operating on the south and west sides of Tucson, was having trouble keeping pace with the new expansion of the city system. The public in these parts of town wanted additional service the company could not provide, so Sun Tran purchased the company in 1978, and Tucson had a single public transit system.

Important Milestones

Now that Tucson was linked, it became clear that off-street terminals were needed to alleviate congestion problems. In 1983, Sun Tran spear headed the idea of several transit centers that would act as transportation hubs in Tucson. The first, named after Roy Laos, was opened on Tucson's south side in 1987.

Growing concerns about Tucson's air quality led Sun Tran and the city of Tucson to begin experimenting with alternative fuels. In 1987, Sun Tran converted a 35-foot GMC bus to use both compressed natural gas and diesel fuel. This was one of the first such buses in the country.

Important Milestones *(Continued)*

As the system continued to evolve with enhanced service and technological advances, Sun Tran achieved the apex of excellence. In 1988, the American Public Transportation Association honored Sun Tran with its America's Best Transit System Award.

In 1991, the Ronstadt Transit Center opened in downtown Tucson. The city opened a CNG-fueling station adjacent to Sun Tran, paving the way for the system's fleet to be alternatively fueled. Sun Tran purchased three dual-fuel buses, a first for the system.

Accommodating transit needs on Tucson's booming northwest side, the Tohono Tadai Transit Center was completed in 1994. It was the first transit center in Arizona designed under the Americans with Disability Act (ADA) guidelines.

Electronic fareboxes were installed on all Sun Tran buses in 1996. During the six-month period following the introduction of the fareboxes, passenger revenue increased by 7 percent.

By 1997, almost half of Sun Tran's fleet used CNG technology.

In 1999, Sun Tran completed installation of its Rockwell Transitmaster Automated Vehicle Location (AVL) system allowing Sun Tran to track every bus while in service.

This AVL system was integrated with Sun Tran's new automated annunciator system, which also met ADA guidelines.

Sun Tran made yet further advancements in November 1999 when Passenger Electronic Revenue Collector (PERC) units were added to its electronic fareboxes. This new technology enabled Sun Tran to convert paper tickets and transfers to magnetic passes and transfers and allowed for the development of new products such as day passes.

Scheduling, trip planning and operations became easier to manage when these functions were integrated with the addition of the new software system in 2000.

Operator and passenger security was enhanced in 2001 when digital video recorders were installed on most buses. Later that year, Sun Tran acquired 45 CNG-fueled Nova buses, making 100 percent of its fleet wheelchair accessible.

In the fall of 2005 Sun Tran received 38 new low-floor bio-diesel buses, and in the spring of 2006 obtained 12 more. Now 100 percent of the fleet is utilizing cleaner-burning fuel. Also at this time, Sun Tran's maintenance facility was the first U.S. transit maintenance facility to receive ISO 14001 certification through a program with Virginia Polytechnic Institute.

In June 2009, The City of Tucson Mayor & Council approved a transit fare increase effective August 1. Sun Tran's one-way full fare increased from $1 to $1.25, the express fare from $ to $1.50, & the Day Pass from $2 to $3. All economy fares remained unchanged.

Sun Tran Today

Named America's Best Transit System for 2005 by the American Public Transportation Association and Arizona's Best Transit for 2004 by the Arizona Transportation Association, Sun Tran is managed by Professional Transit Management, Ltd., and services more than 21 million passenger trips annually to destinations in and around Tucson.