



NEWS

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CONTACT: GARY WOSK/MARC LITTMAN
MTA MEDIA RELATIONS
(213) 922-2712/922-2700
WWW.MTA.NET/PRESS/PRESSROOM
E-MAIL: mediarelations@mta.net

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The Other Dr. Grant

THIS ONE PROVIDES THERAPY FOR THE METRO BUS AND RAIL SYSTEM

One of the chief architects behind the MTA's first major bus/rail passenger survey since 1996 once considered honoring a family tradition – working at a car manufacturing plant.

Dad was an engineer at Ford Motor Co. and both his grandfather and great grandfather were line workers at Pontiac until they lost their jobs during the Depression.

The change in career plans took place when Dr. David Grant, an MTA transportation planning manager since January and no relation to Toni, was an undergraduate student at the University of Michigan.

"I was just scraping by in calculus when several sociology classes I was also taking captured my interest," said Grant, now 37. "Classes on population and Latin American politics seemed more relevant to the world and people's lives than did calculus equations." Grant went on to earn three sociology college degrees, including a Ph.D from UCLA in 1998. Another career didn't quite get off the ground – he drove a taxicab as an undergraduate student.

He isn't the first member in his family, however, to deviate from the family automotive destiny. Older brother Gordon became a psychologist and older brother Eric is a biomedical engineer.

At the drop of a hat, Grant, can brain-freeze the average listener with

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a complicated discourse on the spatial skills mismatch hypothesis (you don't really want to know do you?), yet ask the Michigan native what was the main influence in his decision to enter the sociology field and the answer is relatively simple. His mom was involved in the civil rights movement back in the late 60s and cared deeply about social justice, as does Dr. Grant whose work at MTA involves determining how to help transit dependent, low income passengers based on survey data and focus groups, a perfect match.

The survey, MTA's first on-board survey of Metro Bus and Metro Rail passengers in the 21st Century, will assess how well the Metro System is working and measure customer satisfaction. A total of 65,000 surveys will be filled out. Final results are due in November and will be plugged into a computerized transit model. The data will be referred to for decision-making on bus and rail deployment, scheduling, marketing and customer relations.

The first batch of information is due July 1, but by November, the equivalent of 1,000 pages of data would have been analyzed.

"This is really a large project," said Grant. "Most surveys involve only 1,000 to 2,000 people. Something this large is unusual. A researcher doesn't get an opportunity like this very often.

"The bus and rail survey affects the transit dependent population in Los Angeles," continued Grant, an avid hockey player, mountain biker and hiker — he once climbed Mt. Whitney in one day instead of the recommended two days in order to become acclimated to the altitude. "The survey is exciting but it's a lot of work and you don't want to make a mistake. It's also a hard sell to the bus operators because they're already very busy."

The prospect of continuing similar research he conducted at UCLA while a graduate student wasn't the only thing that lured Grant to MTA from

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Cleveland State University where he taught sociology classes in demographics and race relations for 2 1/2 years. Suzanna, his wife, a California native, took a strong disliking to the harsh Ohio Valley winters.

"We love L.A., we wanted to start a family and really wanted to be here," said Grant, who found out about the MTA job opening from one of his former professors.

When all is said and done in his professional career, Grant said the topper would be to one day testify before Congress and share his transit survey and population study knowledge. "That would be great, that would be exciting."

Besides the survey, Grant's other major preoccupation these days is daughter Natalie, his first child born eight weeks ago.

"Suddenly changing diapers has become my most challenging job," he said with a smile.

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