



# NEWS

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(\* \* SPECIAL TO TRANSIT CALIFORNIA \* \*)

## **LACMTA HELPING SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA TRANSIT OPERATORS TAP INTO RECIPROCAL D/M/WBE CERTIFICATION AGREEMENT**

LACMTA's Equal Opportunity Department is reaching out over the sprawl of the metro Los Angeles area to establish a uniform method of certifying D/M/WBE firms that would be recognized by all participating public transit companies.

Frank Medina, the reciprocity project's manager for LACMTA, said he was inspired by the agreement forged in 1986 by the eight Bay Area transit providers who comprise the Regional Transit Association. The RTA's Minority Affairs Committee drafted a memorandum of understanding, honored by all eight properties, that in essence states that if one agency certifies a D/M/WBE firm, then it is automatically certified for the other seven as well.

"The process has worked very well there," Medina notes. "My goal here is not to create another RTA, but to put together a special organization that deals specifically with the issue of a common certification process for all area public transportation providers."

If consensus can be reached, Medina figures it will help all concerned. The participating agencies will save money on administrative and paperwork costs associated with the certification process. The MTA certifies D/M/WBEs for a wide range of transit projects, including construction of bus maintenance facilities,

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equipment procurements, building of rail lines and digging of subway tunnels. The disadvantaged and women-owned businesses applying for a certification won't have to go through the time-consuming process at every agency.

In May of 1994, Medina started an informal group, the Regional Certification Reciprocity Council (RCRC), to begin the process of meeting with other agencies and arriving at a certification application process that served everyone's needs. Medina began by talking with the people at RTA to get some of their guidance and experience. In September, an agreement was reached to allow MTA join the RTA's network.

"Any DBE/WBE firm certified by any of the eight RTA agencies is now certified for MTA also," Medina says. "We all share the same database of certified D/M/WBE firms. I'm now working to expand this network to include Southern California agencies, who have needed something like this for many years.

"That is not an easy task, however," Medina continues. "Every property has its own unique and individual needs. Everyone has a different application. Each adheres to federal regulations, but then adds its own bells and whistles depending upon what its special needs are."

Several years ago, a DBE coordinating council that included cities, private firms, transit and other government agencies was formed to discuss common certification problems. "It was a real mixed bag," Medina says. "It was a good start, but because of all the different regulations these various entities had to deal with, they rarely could come to any agreement on certification issues."

Medina expects it will take at least another year for true reciprocity to be achieved among Southern California's major transit agencies. "We've already cleared one major hurdle: the MTA Board has given its blessing to this

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program. Now our job is to convince other agencies that they need to be a part of this expanding network."

In addition to the LACMTA and the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), the two agencies spearheading the Southern California effort, current participants in the RCRC are Omnitrans, Riverside Transit, Long Beach Transit, San Bernardino Associated Governments, Sunline Transit, Victor Valley Transit, the City of Gardena and San Diego Transit.

"We are meeting with all of these agencies and trying to hammer out a certification application form that meets all of their needs simultaneously," Medina says. "We're also approaching non-participating agencies to rally their interest."

The DBE/WBE certification process in Southern California has long been a sticking point for many small businesses, who often feel overwhelmed by the specter of endless paperwork and impenetrable bureaucracies. Medina's goal is to change all that.

"We do not want to make it difficult for small firms to do business with us," says Gwendolyn W. Williams, director of MTA's Equal Opportunities Department. "Quite the opposite. There are regulations we have to follow to protect us and the contractor from front organizations and other fraud. But, as a whole, we want a reciprocity agreement to streamline the process for the small business while considerably lightening the workload for the agency."

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