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Bridge Partners: Metro Bus Operator Alfonso Chavez, center, meets with Metro Board members and community college officials at Executive Management and Audit Committee meeting Feb. 15. From left, CEO Roger Snoble; Dr. Tyree Wieder, President, Los Angeles Valley College; Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Lennie Ciufu, Director of Job Training, Los Angeles Valley College; Operator Alfonso Chavez; Metro Board Member John Fasana, Metro Board Chair Gloria Molina; Patricia Mitchell, Executive Director, Literacy Network of Greater Los Angeles, and Metro Board Member Zev Yaroslavsky.



Photos by Gayle Anderson

Metro Bus Operator Demonstrates Success of Bridge Program

- Graduates of Transit English classes at community colleges have filled 176 bus operator positions in Metro's quest to fill more than 300 vacancies.

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(Feb. 15, 2006) Alfonso Chavez stepped up to the podium to address members of the Metro Board, including the Board Chair Gloria Molina and Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, at the Executive Management and Audit Committee meeting Feb. 15.

Dressed in the crisp navy blues of the bus operator's uniform, Chavez, a recent graduate of the agency's Bridge Program and now a full-fledged Metro Bus operator, was there on his day off from Central City Division 1 to report to the committee on his success.

"The Bridge Program is a great program that helped me a lot," he said. "They taught me how to study in groups. They helped me to identify my strengths. They helped me to identify my weaknesses.

"At the end of the program, I got rid of all my weaknesses and I have nothing but

strengths now," he jokingly remarked.

The candor and enthusiastic gratitude from Chavez drew congratulatory comments from Board Chair Gloria Molina:

"Thank you, Mr. Chavez, we're very proud of you. I hope you enjoy working for us. We're looking for more people like yourself. We have an unbelievable amount of vacancies, but if we can get more folks like you, I think we're going to do very, very well."



Alfonso Chavez, center, and other graduates of the Bridge Program are backed by a team of partners from Metro and the Los Angeles Community College District. Clockwise: Patricia Mitchell, Executive Director, Literacy Network of Greater Los Angeles; Executive Officer, Administration, Don Ott; Gateway Cities General Manager Alex Clifford; Lennie Ciufu, Director of Job Training, Los Angeles Valley College; Dr. Tyree Wieder, President, Los Angeles Valley College, and Chavez.

Metro is doing very well and substantial progress has been made, reported Don Ott, Executive Officer, Administration. Ott said the number of vacancies has been reduced from a high of 315 in August to 161 as of Feb. 11.

The ongoing Bridge Program, which was created to support Metro's effort to fill nearly 300 bus operator positions, has produced 176 new operators who have been hired or are in the process of being hired, said Ott.

The Bridge Program is a partnership between Metro and the Los Angeles Community College (LACC) district, which conducts the five-week Transit English class for likely job candidates.

The language course concentrates on teaching enough English to allow candidates to successfully complete bus operator training, to safely operate a bus in LA's challenging environment, and to communicate effectively with dispatchers, supervisors, law enforcement officers and customers.