

CEO REPORT

Joseph E. Drew
MTA Chief Executive Officer

August 5, 1996

At this writing of the CEO Report, we have not yet reached agreement with our unions on the Social Security/PERS issue. This is a great disappointment to me, because the opportunity to provide employees—contract and non-contract alike—with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a great retirement benefit is at risk.

Our request of the UTU, ATU and TCU is clear: Give your members the right to choose. Let union employees decide whether they want to remain in the current MTA retirement plan with a lifetime cap on the "23 and out" benefit. Let them choose whether they prefer to move into PERS with increased take-home pay and a retirement COLA (cost of living adjustment), a benefit they don't now have.

If we make the switch to PERS, all employees covered by Social Security would receive a FICA refund that could range up to \$6,500 per person based on individual contributions since April, 1993. A Social Security Supplement

Plan will ensure that no employee will lose benefits as a result of leaving the Social Security Retirement Plan. I am sending a special bulletin on retirement plans to every contract employee to fully explain management's proposal.

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Talks on Social Security/PERS won't go forward until union members have told their leadership that they want the right to choose their retirement plan. In my view, refusing to give union members a voice in such an important personal matter is unfair. I hope we can work together to place this important proposal before them.

Big Bucks for Your Ideas

I'm pleased to report that as of August 1, we had received almost 100 entries in the "100 Ways to Improve Bus Service" contest. Based on this great response, I'm upgrading the contest to award \$500 in cash to the employee who submits the best overall idea!

We'll also award \$250 in cash to each of the six employees who submits the most practical, most innovative, customer-friendly, time-saving, cost-saving and image-building idea. All entrants in the top 100 will receive a contest T-shirt, a commemorative pin and an invitation to the "100 Ways" luncheon.

Brochures with the contest entry form on the back are available in the kitchens of all MTA work locations. The rules are simple and easy to follow, so send in your entry today. The contest ends August 30. For more information, contact Dominique Grinnell at 922-5641.

Problem Solvers in Action

It was a mystery. In mid-June, agents in our seven Customer Service Centers began reporting that callers using the direct phone lines to MTA Customer Information were on hold for 20 to 40 minutes. Customers frequently complained about lack of responsiveness of the direct phone system.

The situation was intolerable. The telephone trunk system was no longer giving priority status to the direct calls as it had prior to the move to the Gateway Building. Alerted by Gary Seyster of the MTA's Revenue Department, Paula Grigsby of Customer Relations and Janet Clark of Information and Technical Services took action.

Grigsby confirmed the lengthy call waiting times while Clark checked the system software for a possible solution to the problem. Together, the two decided that, if the trunk system wouldn't give priority to the direct calls, they would create a special phone queue with Customer Information agents whose first priority would be answering the direct calls. That worked. Customer Service Center phones are once again priority lines and patrons now have virtually immediate access to MTA Customer Information agents.

Total elapsed time to solve the problem: two days. This is an excellent example of teamwork focused on satisfying customer needs. I'm awarding "Problem Solver" buttons to all three employees.

Harbor Transitway Station Opens

The Harbor Transitway Station on the Metro Green Line opened August 1 to serve express bus lines operating on the I-110 Harbor Freeway. Currently, the station is being used by MTA lines 444, 445, 446 and 447, and by LADOT Commuter Express Line 448.

The MTA is offering a special six-month promotional fare to all MTA riders using the new station. The fare eliminates one express zone charge, saving bus patrons 50 cents each way—\$1 per round trip.

The Harbor Freeway's new HOV lane, funded through MTA efforts and built by CALTRANS, opened June 26. Stretching from just north of I-405 almost into downtown, it saves buses and carpools from 10 to 20 minutes in commuting time each way. Work still must be done to complete HOV transit stations at Slauson, Manchester, Rosecrans and Artesia and a transit center in Carson, and to finish on- and off-ramps at Adams Boulevard in Los Angeles.

CEO HotLine Inquiries

The CEO HotLine, which went into operation, June 26, is now averaging about one call a day. The questions, concerns and issues phoned in by employees are getting prompt attention from the staff. Here are three recent topics from the HotLine.

I spend too much time readdressing internal mail because employees aren't using the mail stop addresses in the MTA phone book. How can we tell people what the proper procedure is?

I'll try. Including the mail stop address on internal envelopes really speeds delivery and should be used. A new MTA phone book, due out this month, will have the latest mail stop listings. These may change as people move, so if you're unsure, call first. Many operating division employees don't have personal mail stop addresses. The address for a transportation employee at Division 8, for example, would be 8 - 1 - 32. For a maintenance employee at Division 8, it would be 8 - 1 - 33. Transportation is 32; maintenance is 33.

I'm told we're increasing the construction contract staff by 20 or more, even though we seem to have less work. I think the big problem is getting contract administrators into the field, not more staff.

An analysis by the Construction Division of its expected workload over the next three years indicated a need for 68 staff in the Construction Contracts Department - 28 more than authorized for FY 96. Factors included recommendations in the Arthur Anderson study, Pasadena Blue Line work, the need for a new Claims Branch and Assembly Bill 1869 requirements. I agree contract administrators should be in the field more. So, as of July 30, administrators assigned to MRL-2 and MRL-3 were relocated to the Resident Engineers' offices. This will help them exercise a "healthy skepticism" about the contracts they oversee.

The recent filming in the Gateway Building lobby and on the plaza disrupted our work and caused me to miss my bus. Also, the film crew was rude. Can't filming be scheduled during weekends or after work hours?

I regret any disrespect shown to our employees by the film crew. All future filming instructions to film companies will emphasize the requirement to show respect to employees. A voice mail prior to this filming asked employees to use alternate access routes into the building during the two days of filming. The use of MTA facilities by film companies reflects local efforts to keep the film industry in Los Angeles. The agency also earns significant revenue from the use of its facilities as film locations.

Gateway Wins Award

Our headquarters building has won the 1996 grand award in the nation's oldest and largest office/professional building design competition. More than 520 entries were submitted from the U.S., Mexico, Canada and many other countries. The Gold Nugget award honors distinctive architecture and land planning in residential, commercial and industrial projects.

The 28-story, 628,000 square foot building, which replaced rented office space at the old 425 and 818 buildings, will save taxpayers approximately \$36.3 million over a 30-year period. The \$145 million project was completed on time and within budget.

We should all be proud of our new headquarters, which quickly gained public acceptance, and which already has become one of the great public landmarks of Los Angeles.

The Need for Mentors

The July-August edition of Metro Family will be out later this month. In that issue is a story on the need for 280 to 300 employee volunteers to serve as mentors in TOP (Transportation Occupations Program) and TCAP (Transportation Careers Academy Program). I urge you to get involved with these programs and with the young people they're designed to benefit.

Let's think for a moment about the broader purpose mentors serve in a

large organization like the MTA. In the book, *Managers as Mentors*, by Chip R. Bell, effective leaders are described as those who care about the competence of their associates. Successful leaders are always on the lookout for ways to help their associates grow. In their capacity as mentors, leaders also are learners, learning with others and from others.

As organizations encounter greater challenges, their success hangs on their adaptability and resourcefulness, Bell writes. These traits are effectively practiced only in organizations that reward experimentation, support learning, and eliminate barriers to imagination. The leaders of these organizations—the mentors—will be those most adept at helping others learn.



Joe Drew

Correction: The July 29 issue of CEO Report said Operator Donald Dube, now the MTA's most senior bus operator, joined the agency in 1968. Dube was hired in 1958.

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Editor:	Bill Heard
Designer:	Terry McMahon
Executive Officer, Communications:	Rae James
Asst. Director, Internal Communications:	Phyllis Tucker
Manager, Printing Services:	Al Moore

