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LA County Sheriff's Motorcycle Team One of Best Safety Investments on the Metro Blue Line



By Ed Scannell

(August 17) They've become a familiar sight along the 22-mile Metro Blue Line alignment, and in just a few months the eight deputies from the LA County Sheriff's Motorcycle Team assigned to patrol the nation's busiest light rail line already have made an impact on the line's safety.

The team's charge is to assist in reducing the number of serious accidents and fatalities along the Metro Blue Line through vigorous enforcement of traffic laws. It's a role that complements a series of engineering improvements by MTA designed to increase safety, and MTA's stepped-up Metro Blue Line Safety Awareness Campaign, which includes community outreach, distribution of safety materials and the placement of safety banners at intersections.

Becoming a member of the team was no easy feat. Just 50 deputies met the minimum requirements, and a rigorous seven week training weeded out all but the eight who now call the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau their home away from home.



BLUE LINE SHERIFFS--Background from left: Deputies Edwin Roberts, Elton Simmons, David Wolf and Robert Green; Foreground from left: Deputy Marion Tucker, Sergeant Brad Wright and Deputy Governor Davis. Not pictured: Deputy Dave Veylupek

The eight completed 120 hours of additional Sheriff's Academy training and a one-month street "break-in" in which the deputies demonstrated proficiency on their "bikes" by maneuvering through more than 20 coned patterns. In addition, the motor deputies' skills were put to the test during simulations of extraordinary street conditions, and they received special training in emergency braking, weapons deployment and lock turns to negotiate heavy traffic, as well as training on a high-speed closed circuit race track.

"Motorcycles add flexibility to our law enforcement efforts on the Metro Blue Line," said Sergeant Brad Wright, leader of the Metro Blue Line contingent. "We can move in and out of heavy traffic much easier than a car, and if a driver fails to stop for a signal at a grade crossing, or makes an illegal left turn in front of a train, no one can overtake that driver as easily as we can."

"Our presence clearly has become a deterrent," added Wright. "When people see us they know they're going to get a ticket if they break the law. As a result, I believe our presence is helping to reduce the number of serious and fatal accidents on the Metro Blue Line."

In recent weeks the team's scope of work has been expanded to include response to incidents on station platforms and in nearby park-n'-ride lots.

Enforcing the law on a motorcycle isn't the easiest job. The deputies put up with near freezing temperatures in the winter and many 100-degree days in the summer with no air conditioning and no heater.

But it's all worth it, says Deputy Marion Tucker, the Sheriff's Department's only female motorcycle deputy.

"I wanted to join this team because I thought I could do it and that it would be fun," said Tucker who has ridden motorcycles since the age of five. "As a member of this team, I've been able to combine my love of riding with my job. It's the best of both worlds."

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Disability Insurance Premiums to Rise; Some Employees Could Be Affected

(August 26) Some non-represented employees may be affected by rising premiums for long-term disability insurance beginning in Calendar 2000.

The MTA Board approved a motion at its Thursday, Aug. 26, meeting to extend for one year the contracts of companies providing long-term disability, medical, dental and life insurance coverage. The cost of all but life insurance coverage will increase next year to cover higher premiums.

The PTSC Board, at its Aug. 24 meeting, approved an increase in employee contributions to the long-term disability insurance plan.

The increase in premiums will not affect employees who choose basic long-term disability coverage. Basic coverage, which the MTA provides at no cost to the employee, gives a disabled employee 60 percent of pay after a 180-day waiting period. Employees may select this plan during open enrollment periods.

The proposed premium increase will affect non-represented employees who select other than the basic coverage. An employee with a \$6,000 monthly salary, for example, who chooses a plan that provides 60 percent of pay after 90 days would pay \$26.40 a month for the coverage, a \$7.80 increase from the current cost of \$18.60 per month.

Medical, Dental Insurance to Rise for Some; No Changes Seen in Life Insurance Premiums

The annual cost to the MTA of medical and dental insurance for non-represented employees also will rise in 2000. The increases are required to cover higher premiums charged by the insurance companies.

Although some employees will see no increase in the cost of medical and dental insurance, others may see increases ranging from \$1 to \$5 per month. The MTA pays an average of 90 percent of the cost of medical and dental coverage, while employees pay an average of 10 percent.

No changes are expected during 2000 in life insurance premium rates, although some individual employees might see higher rates due to salary increases or because they moved into a higher age bracket.

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Combined Timetable Makes Using Harbor Transitway Quick and Easy

By Rick Jager

(August 26) The MTA has published a new combined timetable that highlights all Metro Bus service provided via the Harbor Transitway.

The new timetable was developed to show patrons how simple it is to use Harbor Transitway bus service and to emphasize that bus service operates in the HOV lanes.

The timetable shows the combined schedules of all Metro Bus lines that use the Transitway between Patsaouras Plaza and the Artesia Transit Center. It lists the approximate times for service at all intermediate stations. Two stations currently under construction at Pacific Coast Highway and Carson are not included, but will be added to the timetable when they are completed.

The timetable details service provided on Lines 444, 445, 446, 447 and 550. The new timetable is available at MTA Customer Centers or by calling 1-800-COMMUTE.

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Fare Evasion Citations Jump 146% on Metro Red Line

(August 26) LAPD citations for fare evasion or misuse of fare media escalated 146 percent on the Metro Red Line during July, topping out at 897 for the month.

Paul Lennon, managing director, MTA Safety and Security, said part of the increase in fare evasion citations can be attributed to a 54 percent increase in Metro Red Line ridership since the opening of the Vermont/Hollywood segment, June 12. Average daily ridership jumped from 38,250 in May to 59,000 in July.

"Because we have new riders who aren't fully acquainted with the subway system, the LAPD has increased fare inspections as a way to ensure the visibility of police presence," Lennon said.

An increase in fare inspections by Sheriff's deputies patrolling the Metro Green Line resulted in 12.5 percent more fare evasion citations in July, for a month's total of 278. Citations on the Metro Blue Line held steady at 915 for the month.

Meanwhile, LAPD officers and Sheriff's deputies made a total of 8,491 Metro Bus boardings in July, a 20 percent increase over June. There were 35 percent fewer arrests on buses, down to 279 in July from 428 in June.

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MTA Security Vehicles are Sporting New Logo, Slogan



MARK OF DISTINCTION--Senior Officer Rivers Jaques, left, and Officer Richard Nelson with new MTA Security logo.

(August 27) The cars driven by MTA Security Officers are showing a distinctive new design these days that distinguishes these vehicles from those used by other law enforcement agencies.

The first of the cars, which hit the road Thursday, Aug.26, also bear a new slogan promising "safety, security and service." Some 20 Security Department vehicles, which are used to patrol MTA bus and rail facilities and other properties, will carry the new markings.

The design was developed from a concept proposed by Security Officer Richard Nelson. Officer Norman Ayson won a department contest with his idea for the new slogan.

Designer Tuan Le of MTA Graphics completed the logo design and the South Park Sign Shop produced the decals. Division 4 Non-Revenue Vehicle Maintenance applied the designs to the cars.

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MTA to Reach Important Milestone at Universal City Station In September

Universal City Station -- This is an artist's rendering of the completed Universal City Station showing Metro Red Line entrances, bus plaza and parking lots. A six-lane overpass will connect Lankershim Boulevard, bottom, with Ventura Blvd.

(August 31) Metro Construction will reach an important milestone in September when it gives a contractor notice to proceed on a major construction project at the Metro Red Line Universal City Station.

Groundbreaking on the \$27.9 million project to construct parking lots, a bus plaza and a six-lane overpass above I-101 is expected in October, says MTA Engineering Project Manager Girish Roy. Taking priority in the project will be the 24-space bus plaza, two parking lots with a total of 516 spaces and a kiss-n-ride plaza. These portions of the project should be completed in time for the opening of the North Hollywood segment in May, 2000.

(Animated illustration shows system for drilling pilings for overpass bridge buttresses. This method will reduce noises created by pile drivers that might affect nearby residents during construction.)

The quarter-mile highway overpass, which will connect Lankershim and Ventura boulevards, is set for opening in December, 2000, according to Roy. The overpass will include on- and off-ramps for westbound I-101.

Caltrans has agreed to permit weekend, nighttime closing of freeway lanes during demolition of the existing two-lane overpass and during certain stages of construction.

MTA staff involved in the project include Laura Mohr, engineering project manager; Barbara Gatewood, senior contract administrator; John Higgins, third-party coordinator; and John Mazarella, public affairs officer.

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