



**Metro Rail crews worked through the night following Saturday's tragic accident to restore service on the Metro Blue Line. Photos: Bob Ogus**

#### **6 Killed in Line's Worst Accident**

### **Metro Rail Crews' All-Out Effort Restores Metro Blue Line Service for Monday Rush**

By Bill Heard, Editor

(November 29) Service on the Metro Blue Line was virtually back to normal for Monday's rush hour, following an all-out effort by Metro Rail maintenance personnel to recover from an accident late Saturday that injured the operator and took the lives of a cab driver and five passengers.

Trains ran on both north- and southbound tracks, Monday, but were observing a 10 mph speed restriction through the accident site. The slowdown was ordered to avoid stress on the overhead wires and rail ties until both can be fully repaired.



The accident happened at 11 p.m., Saturday, when a train, with no passengers aboard, was southbound through Compton at 55 mph en route to the Metro Blue Line yard.

**Metro Rail crews and law enforcement officers gathered at the accident scene.**

Witnesses said the cab, with a driver and five passengers, was driving southbound on Willowbrook Avenue. The cab suddenly turned left at Greenleaf Avenue and, bypassing the lowered crossing gate, attempted to cross the tracks ahead of the train.

The force of the collision derailed the train and split the cab in half. All

six passengers were pronounced dead at the scene. The Metro Blue Line operator, Donnette Burks, suffered minor injuries and was transported to Harbor General Hospital. She was released Sunday and is recuperating at home. Burks joined the MTA in 1991 as a Metro Bus operator and has been a train operator since March, 1999.

"The operator did everything she could to stop the train," said Paul Lennon, managing director, MTA Safety and Security. Noting that the crossing gate at the intersection was closed and that the bells and lights were working, he said, "With the efforts the MTA has put into education, law enforcement, engineering and legislation, it still requires the person crossing the tracks to obey the law."

It was the worst accident in the Metro Blue Line's nine-year history. There have been 10 fatalities involving automobiles and pedestrians this year and a total of 53 since the light-rail line opened in 1990.



In less than an hour following the accident, Metro Rail crews were at the scene and beginning the cleanup and repair operation.

**Rail Maintenance Specialists Alex Apodaca and Amir Tahvildaran handle downed power lines atop the damaged train.**

The train was partially derailed and its pantograph damaged, a power pole was sheered off at its base, traction power lines were sagging and 52 concrete railroad ties were damaged. The rails were not damaged.

"It was like a war zone with wreckage strewn everywhere," said Jack Eich, Rail Equipment Maintenance supervisor. "In 27 years on the job, this accident was the worst I've ever seen."



Despite the devastation, a vehicle maintenance crew under Rail Equipment Maintenance Manager Bob Ogus set to work with special hydraulic jack equipment to lift the train back onto the tracks.

**The damaged train waits to be re-railed and towed back to the Metro Blue Line yard. Broken catenary power wire dangles in the foreground.**

The car's wheel assembly and undercarriage were severely damaged, but the crew was able to tow it back to the yard.

Teams from MTA Quality Assurance and Rail Equipment Engineering later inspected the vehicle to determine the extent of the damage and what repairs will be required.

Beginning about noon, Sunday, a Wayside Systems crew removed the broken power pole and replaced a short section of overhead wire. The sagging wires were re-tensioned. Eight broken concrete ties were replaced Sunday night and other damaged ties will be replaced as the week continues.

"Considering the amount of damage," said Transit Operations chief Tom Conner after a visit to the accident scene, "it is a real tribute to the team's dedication and skill that they were able to restore partial service by Sunday afternoon and both track by early Monday morning."

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