

Rail Chief's Observations Suggest Commuting Patterns are Changing

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(July 11) The opening of the Metro Red Line's North Hollywood extension appears to be changing some commuting patterns in unexpected ways. And the MTA's Rail Operations chief says the rail system "is forming a high-capacity transit backbone that we haven't seen before."



Universal City is becoming a key station in the Metro Red Line system, according to Ralph de la Cruz, deputy executive officer, Rail Operations, who has spent hours riding the trains, talking with passengers and observing ridership patterns.

On two recent occasions de la Cruz followed crowds of commuters who converged on the Vermont corridor from the Westlake area and Wilshire/Western. By the time the trains reached Hollywood/Vine, there were standing loads of between 300 and 500 passengers.

The commuters continued on to Universal City, where de la Cruz estimates that 85 percent of the crowd transferred to Metro Rapid buses. Conversations with patrons indicated most were headed for their jobs in businesses along Ventura Boulevard and Van Nuys Boulevard.

Major distribution point

A large contingent of passengers who live near the Hollywood/Highland station also is riding the subway to jobs near the Universal City station. "That station is now a major destination and distribution point for riders," says de la Cruz.

See July 3 report: "1 Million Metro Red Line Boardings...."

In its first week of revenue service, Metro Red Line average daily ridership rocketed by 85 percent to 120,500 from a daily average of 65,150 in May, according to Ashok Kumar, director, Countywide Planning's Operations Data Analysis.

Patronage at the North Hollywood station also is growing quickly. On some days, the 840-space parking lot already is at capacity. During the "peak of the peak" period, upwards of 100 passengers will board the subway at the NoHo terminus, de la Cruz observed.

The new extension, which now links Hollywood with Universal City and other entertainment venues in the San Fernando Valley, also has boosted late-night subway ridership.

Late-night standing loads

"We have such interesting venues near the three new stations," says de la Cruz, "We're boarding a combination of tourists and workers on trains that are carrying fully seated - and in some cases standing - loads on some trains as late as 10:30 or 11 p.m. on the North Hollywood extension."

One morning, de la Cruz spoke with a number of commuters who normally ride Metrolink from Burbank into Union Station, then transfer to the subway to reach their final destinations. They had driven to North Hollywood and were riding the Metro Red Line to determine whether the subway would provide a quicker, cheaper commute.

"We have the potential to attract some ridership from Metrolink," de la

Cruz speculates. "We may be able to take passengers from the Valley stations to their destinations more directly and faster without their having to go all the way into Union Station and then head back west on the subway or a local bus. We also run much more frequent headways giving commuters more options on when to travel."

Extending the subway into the Valley appears to have boosted ridership on the Metro Blue Line by about five percent and on the Metro Green Line by about 10 percent. The Long Beach to LA line now transports a daily average of about 65,000 passengers, while the east-west light-rail line carries an average of about 27,000.

Some of these passengers continue on via the Metro Red Line to jobs at the medical centers along Vermont Avenue, while others ride all the way to the Valley, says de la Cruz.

[Back to MTA Report](#)