

Was a Regional Blackout Averted When the Trains Stopped Running?

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By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 20) Did the MTA help save Los Angeles from a blackout on Monday? With bus and rail operators on strike and trains out of service, the agency had no problem complying when California Edison requested cutbacks in electrical power to Metro Rail lines.

Monday's heat was edging toward a record when the power company instituted a "rolling brownout" to reduce power usage in the region. The MTA cooperates with Edison in such circumstances by taking certain Metro Rail traction power substations off-line.

"When Edison called and asked us to shut down four traction power stations, we said, 'No problem,'" said Ralph de la Cruz, deputy executive officer, Rail Operations. No trains had run since the strike began at midnight, Friday, and power had been shut off since early Saturday.

Later, as the power situation worsened, Edison called again and asked the MTA to shut down its entire Metro Rail power grid.

Again, the answer was, "No problem."

Other Notes from Metro Rail

Hot Boxes

The heat that plagued the region this week was especially hard on the electrical control boxes that operate the Metro Blue Line crossing gates.

The boxes normally are cooled by the frequent up and down movement of the red-and-white-striped arms. But, with no light-rail service in operation - and only an occasional Union Pacific freight train passing through an intersection - the control boxes were overheating.

"Our people were running around like one-armed paperhangers opening the boxes to ventilate the controls," said de la Cruz. "For public safety, it was important to keep the crossing gates in working order."

Squatters in the Subway?

With no Metro Red Line trains in operation, will the subway tunnels become home to squatters? Not if the MTA and the LAPD can help it.

On Sunday, de la Cruz and Safety Chief Paul Lennon walked the tunnel between Union Station and 7th and Metro to check the tracks and look into cross-passages. They found no one.

Since then, several "intrusion alarms" - which could indicate someone attempted to force their way through an emergency hatch - have been recorded.

But, LAPD officers are conducting a clean sweep of the entire subway system to check for unauthorized "inhabitants."

"It's a matter of safety," said de la Cruz. "Even though the power to the tracks is shut off, it would be unsafe for anyone to be in the system. They also could damage equipment that's vital to the safe operation of

the trains."

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