



Benita Horn and Rudy Chairez of Human Resources and Mary Jane West of Countywide Planning are among 90 Customer Information volunteers.

PHOTOS BY BILL HEARD

Volunteers Keeping Things Running During Strike; Learning Lots about Unfamiliar Areas of MTA



Supervisor Andrea Smith helps Doreatha Roberts of Management Audit.



Supervisor Wil Beard works with Lisa Martinez of Countywide Planning.



Elmo Ju of Internal Audit fields a customer call.

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 22) If it has accomplished nothing else thus far, the strike against the MTA has given many non-contract employees a look at areas of the agency they may not have been familiar with.

Take Mary Jane West, a transportation planning manager who's assigned to Customer Information. She and some 90 other volunteers are handling almost 5,000 calls a day

They're attempting to steer frantic commuters through an intricate network of municipal bus lines and commuter shuttles. And they're doing it while coping with an



unfamiliar computer program and poring over well-thumbed Thomas Guides.

West, who even dreams at night about helping callers, has heard lots of sad stories from people who just can't "get there from here." Others will put up with almost any circuitous routing to reach their destinations.

"One man needed to go to Santa Monica to attend a trade show," she remembers. "I routed him from Long Beach to Del Amo and then to LAX where he caught a Santa Monica bus. He didn't mind spending the three hours to get there, he was so grateful to be able to do it."

Dusting and sweeping

Or take Jeff Hadge, a systems analyst at the RRC who's been assigned to maintenance at the Arthur Winston Division. He and his fellow volunteers have dusted and swept out idled buses. They've kept the batteries fresh by starting up the coaches every day or so. They've removed graffiti, inspected tires and made coolant checks.

"We've done various things to keep the fleet ready for when the strike is over," says Hadge.

Over on the transportation side, TOS Laureen Lemon has been correcting payroll errors and making scheduling assignments. She misses her operator friends who are walking the picket line. "We have a great group of people here," she says.

Out at Division 15 in Sun Valley, John Takahashi, a Transit Operations administrative analyst, had just come in from starting up three rows of buses. Every day, he and his five colleagues rotate through the fleet.

Crossing the picket line

Takahashi, who lives in West Hills, has had a quicker commute these past few days and has experienced little problem getting through the picket lines and onto the Division 15 property. "I've noticed that they let you through in a couple of minutes if the division manager's there... otherwise you might have to wait longer."

TOS Barbara Maycott, whose regular daily assignment is to work in the Division 15 transportation office, has caught up on all her usual work of recording operator missouts and attendance, researching customer complaints and filing workers' comp reports. Now, she's helping the division's instruction department update Vehicle Transit Trailing records. "It's real quiet here," she says. "We're loving it."

John Neal, a TOS at Division 9, also is up-to-date on his normal work as the log keeper. So, he's using the time to "catch up on a lot of little things...it's sort of a refresher."

Despite the idle bus yard, Neal is happy to point out that Division 9 "made Number One in the system with the best on-time performance. It wasn't easy because we have the oldest fleet in town, but we also have excellent mechanics."

The 'real heroes'

Back in Customer Information, Supervisor Andrea Smith is one of those Mary Jane West calls "the real heroes. The supervisors are here when we arrive and when we leave and they're always cheerful with us and our questions."

Smith, who has been in Customer Information for 17 years and dates from SCRTD days, describes this past week as "hectic." She says callers want whatever routing that will get them close to their destinations. "If

we can just get them into the area, they're happy with that...even if they have to walk, they're willing to do it."

As for the volunteers staffing Customer Information, Smith says, "Everyone we have working with us has dug right in with minimal training."

And she notes that callers appreciate the volunteers' efforts. "The people who call realize the volunteers are doing the best they can. They thank us for trying to help them, even if we can't do anything for them."

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