



MTA'S SLEEPING GIANT-Division 10 buses get ready to roll.

PHOTO BY GAYLE ANDERSON

Waking LA's Mass Transit System from a 32-Day Strike

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Oct. 17) How do you wake up a mass transit system that's been asleep for 32 days? That's the situation the MTA's Transit Operations staff and others face now that a tentative agreement has been reached with the UTU and negotiations with the ATU and TCU are said to be near completion.

The UTU called a membership meeting for 6 p.m., Tuesday, at the LA Convention Center to ratify the agreement. The MTA Board scheduled a meeting at 2 p.m., Tuesday, for a possible ratification vote.

From a dozen or more interviews conducted for this story, it appears that although the prompt return of bus operators, mechanics, service attendants and supervisors is key, the equipment maintenance and upkeep performed by non-contract employees during the work stoppage will be a major factor in getting buses and trains rolling again.

"I'm optimistic that we can bring bus and rail service back quickly because of the efforts of the people who've been working during the strike to keep the vehicles and equipment ready to go," said Transit Operations Chief Tom Conner. "When this is ultimately resolved, we're ready to go back to work right away."

Rail is biggest challenge

Reactivating the rail system seems to pose the biggest challenge to restarting transit service because of the number of complicated steps required. The MTA's rail lines are integrated systems that include high-tech rail cars and a complex network of traction power, signals and

IN TODAY'S BULLETIN BOARD:

It's always nice to come home to a clean, orderly house -- and that's what non-contract employees at the Regional Rebuild Center are working to provide for union mechanics when the transit strike ends.

track systems.

Not only will rail cars on the Metro Red, Blue and Green lines require thorough safety checks, but MTA technicians will have to re-energize electrical systems, inspect overhead wires and test wayside signals, rail crossings and switching points from end to end of the 59.4-mile Metro Rail system.

"Our ability to quickly restore traction power and signals, as well as dislodging the rust build-up on the tracks, will be the driving factors in service restoration," said Ralph de la Cruz, deputy executive officer, Rail Operations. "We should be able to operate most trains on all three rail lines within about 36 hours, if most of our employees come back to work during that time."

He noted that the MTA also is required to file a service resumption plan with the California Public Utilities Commission that describes all the tasks that must be completed before passenger service can be offered. That plan will be filed as soon as the strike ends.



Purchasing's Carey Peck fuels up for rollout. PHOTO BY DIETER HEMSING

On the bus operations side

On the bus operations side, getting a sufficient number of operators back to work promptly will in large part dictate how much bus service the MTA can put on the street in the hours following the end of the strike.

"For us, it's a matter of available operators," said Dan Ibarra, deputy executive officer, Bus Operations. Following past strikes, the MTA has given operators a 72-hour "grace period" to return to work without being charged with a miss-out or absence. Division managers will attempt to contact the operators about returning to work immediately.

Ibarra predicted that enough operators will come back to work for the MTA to provide 85 to 90 percent of service the day following the end of the strike. He said division managers have been updating the operators' line assignments and reviewing records to see which operators need new licenses or need to update medical cards and training.

"We can put virtually 100 percent of our buses back on the road at a moment's notice," says John Roberts, the superintendent responsible for maintenance at Divisions 3, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 15.

Headquarters employees helped

Roberts said buses were serviced by mechanics and service attendants during their last shift before the work stoppage. Since then, non-contract maintenance personnel and Headquarters employees assigned to the divisions for strike duty have been keeping the buses in running order.

"We really appreciate the assistance of the Headquarters employees who answered phones and performed maintenance tasks," said Roberts. "They helped with our graffiti problems and freed up our staff to make the more technical repairs."

While bus and rail operations make their preparations, other departments also will have to gear up to serve returning passengers.

Facilities Maintenance employees must inspect and restart the

elevators and escalators at the rail stations. They also will have to check every operating division fueling station and bus washer. And when the rails are re-powered, technicians must ensure that the train control system at the Rail Operations Center is in proper working order.

Then, there's the fare collection system. The MTA's Revenue Department will have to remove the stainless steel covers that were placed over the ticket vending machines at the light-rail stations – a process that may take two days. Employees also must make sure bus fare boxes are operational before the buses can roll.

[Back to MTA Report](#)