

New Labor Contract Gives Life to Dormant Transit System

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Oct. 18) With the overwhelming support of union members and a unanimous vote by the MTA Board, approval of a new three-year labor agreement with the UTU, Tuesday, is breathing new life into a mass transit system that had lain dormant for the past 33 days.

Giving an official pre-dawn welcome to returning bus operators and maintenance workers, Wednesday morning, was Mayor Richard Riordan, who - along with MTA Transit Chief Tom Conner - arrived at Division 3 before 6 a.m.

Accompanied by a gaggle of media, the two boarded a Line 81 bus driven by 13-year veteran Operator Betty James, for a ride through downtown LA. The trip, which ended at the Pantry restaurant, gave the mayor an opportunity to talk with James and with passengers as they boarded the bus.

Good to see passengers again

"It was great watching the operators and mechanics arrive and the buses roll out," said Conner. "It felt really good to see the first passengers get on board and see how thrilled they were to have the service back."

The MTA is offering free rides for the first five days of service, through Sunday, Oct. 22. September passes will be honored for the remainder of October. November passes will go on sale, Oct. 25.

The first buses out following approval of the UTU contract provided "owl service" on 48 lines beginning about 9 p.m., Tuesday. Wednesday morning, Bus Operations reported rolling some 66 percent of Metro Bus service, providing coaches on all 185 routes if not on all runs. Ridership was said to be lighter than normal.

Approximately two-thirds of operators were back on the job for morning rollout, along with some 75 percent of division maintenance employees. Richard Hunt, deputy executive officer, Bus Maintenance, reported no mechanical problems during rollout.

Restoring rail service

Sweep trains made repeated runs, Wednesday morning, to bust a heavier-than-expected rust coating off lengthy stretches of light-rail track. Trains also were running the Metro Red Line tunnels to test electronic controls. By 11:30 a.m., trains were running at top speed on all three rail lines.



Mayor Richard Riordan greets first passengers on Line 81.

Photo courtesy of Frank Mateljan, Mayor's Office

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Working at top speed to safety-check train controls and wayside signal systems, Rail Operations personnel were expected to have restored about 20 percent of service by 4 p.m., Wednesday, on all three Metro Rail lines.

Ralph de la Cruz, deputy executive officer, Rail Operations, said he expects to increase Metro Rail service to about 75 percent by the Thursday morning roll-out.

"This is a complicated piece of machinery that's been out of service for a month," said de la Cruz, during a cell phone call from somewhere trackside. "We're overcoming the glitches. There are no show stoppers."

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