



MTA Guarding Metro Rail Patron Safety During State's Power Crisis

By BILL HEARD, Editor
(Dec. 21) How has the MTA coped with the region's recent "rolling brownouts" and what would happen to Metro Rail service in a full-scale power blackout?

Will power shortages strand Metro Rail patrons along portions of the Metro Blue Line and Metro Green Line corridors?

Those are the questions facing the agency during a season in which chilly weather and other problems have sometimes strained the Southland's electrical power grid to the breaking point. On Dec. 19, for example, the state imposed a Stage 2 alert when a power plant failure disrupted electrical transmissions.

Southern California Edison, which supplies most of the electricity for the MTA's light-rail lines, frequently must buy power from out-of-state companies to bolster the local supply. The MTA has a flat-rate contract with Edison, but the utility can pass along the higher costs when the demand for power is high.

On more than one occasion recently, power disruptions have occurred along portions of the Metro Blue Line and Metro Green Line corridors. Rail Operations Center personnel scrambled to manage the power distribution from electric sub-stations in unaffected areas to keep the trains moving.

MTA asks for a warning

With the possibility that serious power shortages could become more frequent, the MTA asked Edison to give Metro Rail warning before traction power is reduced or totally cut off.

"We would like at least 10 minutes' warning so that we can move all our trains to the nearest stations and avoid stranding our passengers," explains Ralph de la Cruz, deputy executive officer, Rail Operations. "Edison has agreed to provide that warning."

De la Cruz and his Metro Rail managers also have worked out procedures for sustaining rail traction power during brownouts.

Electricity, for example, can be fed into a low-power area from sub-stations on either side of the affected section of track. Sub-station maintenance is being scheduled to avoid having consecutive sub-stations off-line during a power crunch so that electricity could be fed to brownout areas.

Seeking a higher priority

The MTA is one of several California transit agencies concerned about the low priority given rail operations during power crises. They believe power must be made available as a passenger safety measure and to keep essential transportation moving during regional emergencies.

"Right now, hospitals, police and fire stations, prisons and military

facilities have top priority for emergency power," says de la Cruz. "Rail transit isn't even on the list. We've been advised to lobby the state Public Utilities Commission to be added to the priority list."

Meanwhile, Governor Davis, the Legislature, the PUC and federal energy agencies, as well as the state's utility companies, are struggling to find answers to the electricity crisis. As of this writing, however, there are no firm solutions on the horizon.

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