



As a Metro Blue Line approaches an intersection in downtown LA, all three rail safety signs are visible in this photo. The white signal, center, is for the train operator. The fiber optic sign warns of the train's approach, while the red arrow indicates a left turn is prohibited until the train passes. PHOTO BY LUIS INZUNZA

### New Signs, Cameras Reducing Accidents, Illegal Crossings on Metro Blue Line

By BILL HEARD, Editor  
(May 9, 2001) Between July 1990 and December 2000, Metro Blue Line trains were involved in 157 accidents at 19 intersections in Los Angeles – about 15 accidents a year.

For the first three months of 2001, there were no left-turn accidents at those intersections.

A second rail safety effort – the Metro Blue Line photo enforcement program – is credited with reducing by almost 50 percent the number of motorists violating rail crossings at 17 gated intersections along the 22-mile alignment.



Chart shows the number of motorists violating rail crossings (top line) trending downward since January 1998. Bottom line shows that the number of citations also has declined since photo enforcement cameras were installed at Metro Blue Line rail crossings.



Abdul Zohbi

Two changes in intersection signals have made the difference in reducing left-turn accidents at the 19 intersections where rail cars run at street level, says project manager Abdul Zohbi of Rail Operations Safety.

"Fifty percent of accidents involving the Metro Blue Line are caused by motorists making illegal left turns," says Zohbi. "The new signs are intended to increase the awareness of trains and prevent illegal or inadvertent left turns."

#### Silhouette of a train

The most noticeable feature at the 19 intersections these days is a large fiber optic sign that shows the silhouette of a train. It blinks to alert motorists when a train is approaching the intersection.

The MTA also reconfigured the railway signals that motorists sometimes mistook for left-turn indicators. Now located out of the motorists' line of

sight are three new signals.

Designed as vertical, diagonal or horizontal white bars, they tell a train operator whether to proceed, slow or stop at the intersection, but are meaningless to motorists. They take the place of the red, yellow and green "T" signals that may have confused drivers.

The photo enforcement program, which began in September 1995, uses state-of-the-art electronic cameras to photograph motorists who drive under or around the safety gates when trains are approaching a rail crossing. The cameras are mounted on stanchions at diagonal corners of the crossings.

In 1998, the cameras recorded 7,258 violations and 3,249 citations were issued. The following year, 4,738 violations were logged and 1,789 citations issued. In 2000, there were 3,786 violations and 1,637 citations.

### **Fewer violations, citations**

During the three-year period, that's 47 percent fewer violations and a 49.6 percent drop in citations for illegal rail crossings.

"Since the photo enforcement program began in 1995, we've issued 8,626 citations," says Zohbi. "We hope those are 8,626 people who will not do that again."

The difference in the number of violations and the number of citations issued includes instances when the vehicle had no front license plate, the plate or the driver's face was obscured or the camera needed servicing.

Recently, the MTA Board approved the purchase of six cameras for use at six additional crossings in downtown LA. The MTA also plans to extend both the photo enforcement program and the left-turn fiber optic sign program to Long Beach.

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