

Subway Closed as Precautionary Measure When Passengers Became Ill

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 27, 2001) Officials today are puzzling over the identity of an odor that sickened more than 25 Metro Red Line passengers and – as a precautionary measure – prompted suspension of subway operations for about two hours on Wednesday.

Two LAPD officers and an elderly woman were transported from the Wilshire/Western station to area hospitals for medical evaluations. Other passengers were treated at the scene for dizziness, nausea and shortness of breath.

The LA Fire Department's HAZMAT team thoroughly checked the Wilshire/Western station but found no evidence of a toxic substance. The station's alarms, which detect methane gas and hydrogen sulfide, did not trip during the incident, but fans were activated as a precaution to clear the station's atmosphere.

At the direction of the LAPD, controllers at the Rail Operations center halted all Metro Red Line service just after 5 p.m. and ordered evacuation of the 16 stations.

Streets around Wilshire/Western were closed to rush-hour traffic while the investigation was in progress.

Blue Line stopped at Pico

With the 7th/Metro station closed, Metro Blue Line service was stopped at the Pico station, but otherwise operated normally. There was no disruption of Metro Green Line service.

Metro Red Line service was restored at 7:05 p.m. and by about 8 p.m. subway trains were back in operation with five-minute headways. Some Metrolink trains were held briefly at Union Station to receive subway passengers who were delayed by the shutdown.

During the suspension of subway operations, the Bus Operations Control Center set up a bus bridge for Metro Rail passengers between Union Station and Westlake/MacArthur Park. From that point, passengers could use Metro Rapid Line 720 or Line 20 buses.

Supplemental service also was added to Line 156 to transport Metro Rail passengers between the San Fernando Valley stations and Wilshire Boulevard.

"We had excellent coordination between our Metro Blue Line operations supervisors and the Metro Bus supervisors," said Ralph de la Cruz, deputy executive officer, Rail Operations. "We were able to transport passengers by bus from Pico station to the North Hollywood station. It was an inconvenience, but we were able to move passengers."

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