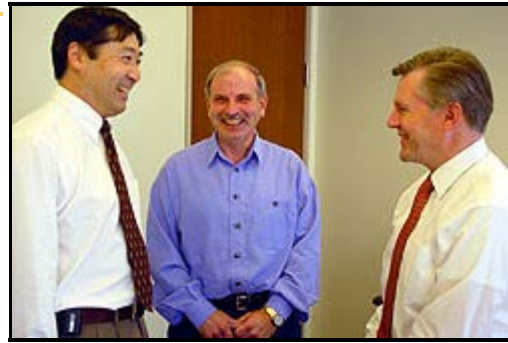


## Good Times and Bad, Charles Stark was Steady Hand on Construction's Helm

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Dec. 21, 2001) Through good times and bad for the past 10 years, Charles Stark has been a steady hand at the helm of major phases of the MTA's monumental subway construction project and, since 1997, as executive officer of Metro Construction.



Retiring Metro Construction chief Charles Stark, right, talks with deputy executive officers Dennis Mori, left, and Henry Fuks.

Now, Stark plans to retire from the agency at the end of December. First, he'll relax and get his bearings, then take a look around the nation for a management opportunity in a large rail project.

Known as an unflappable leader with a reserved demeanor and wry wit, the 52-year-old executive often was the calm center during controversies that beset the MTA at certain points of the rail construction program.

"Julian Burke and I always regarded Charles as a highly effective manager," says Deputy CEO Allan Lipsky. "He took over the most troubled element of the agency and turned it around. It was an amazing accomplishment that culminated in the successful completion of Segment 3 on-budget and ahead of schedule. He was a key figure in our effort to get the agency back on a solid foundation."



Charles Stark

### Headed an 880-member team

Stark joined the MTA in September 1991 to head the 880-member team responsible for Metro Red Line Segment 1 – the tunnels and stations between Union Station and MacArthur Park. A \$1.45 billion project, it was the largest he had managed since directing the \$375 million purchase of commuter rail cars for the Long Island and Metro North commuter rail lines in New York.

"My job was to get the Segment 1 team aligned and working together and to get the system open," he recalls.

The opening date had been pushed back to September 1993. Tunnels had been completed, but track, signals and system work remained. Despite the magnitude of the task, Segment 1 opened – not in September – but in January 1993, eight months early and \$32 million under budget.

Even before Segment 1 was completed, Stark and his engineering team already had plunged into the early stages of Segment 3, the North Hollywood Extension.

The project, considered a difficult engineering challenge, involved digging one set of tunnels through soft, sandy ground from North Hollywood to Universal City. A second set of tunnels started from Universal City and was dug through the solid rock of the Santa Monica Mountains to Hollywood.

### Most problematic portion

While work on Segment 3 progressed, Stark also was given responsibility for overseeing completion of Segment 2 – the stretch of tunnels that encompasses

subway stations between Wilshire/Vermont and Hollywood/Highland. Because of the surface settlement and the sinkhole that drew media attention, it also was the most problematic portion of the subway project.

Stark looks back on those days with regret, but points out that the lessons learned, "...heightened sensitivity and put everyone on notice that, on Segment 3, there was no room for error."

And, indeed, although the two-phase Segment 3 tunneling project posed substantial engineering challenges, the project was completed on-time, under budget and without encountering the sorts of problems that had plagued Segment 2.

The North Hollywood Extension opened to great fanfare and popular acclaim in June 2000. More than a quarter-million people rode the Metro Red Line on opening weekend and ridership immediately jumped from 82,000 to 120,000 daily boardings. Today, average daily ridership exceeds 130,000.

Stark cites as accomplishments improvements made in cost consciousness and the performance of Metro Construction and its contractors. One specific he particularly points to is a dramatic increase in safety awareness at MTA construction sites.

### **A rigorous safety program**

In 1998, well before the MTA began its recent push to improve on-the-job safety, he brought in the duPont team to institute a rigorous safety program for construction contractors and their workers, as well as for Metro Construction employees.

"As a result of this new safety awareness," Stark says, "our safety numbers became very good – much better than the national average."

As he prepares to leave the MTA, Metro Construction is in the planning stages for the Eastside light-rail extension. That line will connect the newly named Metro Gold Line from Pasadena with a line from Union Station, through East LA to First and Lorena. The route will include a two-mile long tunnel starting at the LA River.

And what's next after that? "I think the future of rail in Los Angeles is an ever-increasing system," Stark predicts. He sees an Exposition line that will extend to the ocean, a Metro Green Line that will take passengers directly to the center of LAX and will connect to the Southbay cities, as well as rail service on other rights-of-way owned by the MTA.

"Los Angeles' rail system is now number seven in the nation in terms of ridership and will go to number six when the Pasadena line opens," Stark says. "We're up there now with the major rail transit systems in the nation. That's a magnificent achievement in only 11 years."

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