



▲ Light rail training instructors Hector Gutierrez, foreground and Arnold Johnson, far left, keep class of trainees on track at Metro Blue Line Division 11.

- **Tough and Challenging, Light-Rail Operator Training Stresses Safety**

By ERIC RAPP

(April 9, 2002) If you've ever thought that operating a light-rail train would be easy, you've got another think coming.

Even before train operators can go on the job, they must complete eight weeks of intensive training at the Metro Blue Line Division 11 yards in Long Beach.

And that's just the beginning. Veteran operators say that just being safe on the line takes all their concentration, every minute that they are on the job.

Operators Lauren Young and Jesus Serrano say they must look out for many dangerous situations. One is pedestrians who try to make it through grade crossings before the train comes.

A particular problem they've both noticed lately is people sitting on retaining walls right next to the right-of-way. "If one of them fell backwards, that would be it for him," says Serrano.

With 210 tons of steel at their command, operators must be on their toes at all times.

- **Tough training**

It all starts in the classroom.

Trainees study four areas of light-rail operation: rulebook, standard operating procedures, vehicles, and operation proficiency.

Every day of training ends with a test. Prospective operators who score less than 70 percent on any test are immediately sent back to their original job. Trainees who score more than 70 percent but less than 90 percent get a chance to retake the test. If they don't score more than 90 percent on the retake, they too go back to their original job.

In addition to written tests, trainees also receive plenty of hands-on

experience.

Much practical instruction occurs in the yard. Trainees have to learn how to operate the rail cars. They also must learn how to diagnose and fix common faults in cars that have been set up by instructors. If they can't, they must leave the training program.

"Before they can even get in the cab, they have to learn a whole new language," says instructor Hector Gutierrez.

With these kinds of tough standards, it's no wonder that only about 50 percent of each training class actually makes it through.

"Our goal is to place well-trained, confident operators on board these trains to provide safe efficient service to our customers," says Duane Martin, manager, Light-Rail Division. "Although training standards are set high and the 'rail boot camp' is tough, hundreds of bus operators and supervisors have made it through successfully over the 12 years of the Metro Blue Line's operation."

- **Taking the Challenge**

A new class of prospective operators began on April 1. For them, all the tough training will be worth it if they can make it through.

"It's much more challenging than I thought it would be, but I'm happy to be doing something new," says Bruce Robertson, a 12-year MTA veteran.

Harry Schouten, another trainee, looks forward to being a train operator because he believes that "rail is the future of Los Angeles County." Like Robertson, Schouten says he has found the training very challenging and fun.

The final hurdles for these trainees and the others in their class will be the final day of training – an entire day of testing that will challenge the trainees to remember everything they've learned.

They also must accomplish two safe round trips between Los Angeles and Long Beach on the main line.

Trainee Garry Ngo is ready to take the challenge. He's hoping to gain experience with trains so that, some day, he can take that knowledge back to his native land of Vietnam.

"I want to help my country," he says.

[Back to Bulletin Board](#)