

## For David Armijo, New San Fernando Valley Sector Challenge is Déjà Vu

(June 5, 2002) For David Armijo, prospective San Fernando Valley general manager, the challenge of starting up a service sector from scratch is like – as Yankees catcher Yogi Berra once put it – “déjà vu all over again.”

In 1992, Armijo was hired to develop a transit agency for Santa Fe, N.M., a town that had no bus system. At the beginning, he was the only employee and city officials, who had seen three private companies fail, weren't optimistic that he would succeed. A year and many community meetings later, however, he rolled out a transit services plan.

Now, Armijo is faced with a similar situation, but this time he'll have a team of managers, schedulers and service planners, community relations people, safety specialists and others at his back, along with two Metro Bus divisions staffed by experienced operators, maintenance employees and office personnel.

“This is different and more challenging,” he says. For one thing, it will mean refocusing from a perspective of providing regional transit service to one of providing community-based transit services.

“Our goals are to improve on-time performance, reduce workers' compensation costs and improve rollouts to 100 percent, among others,” Armijo says. With the San Fernando Valley as the focal point of sector efforts, he expects to improve customer service and ridership.

### Preparing the sector office

Things will begin happening this month when furniture begins arriving and phones and computers are installed in the new sector office building at Topanga Canyon Boulevard and Marilla Street, about a mile north of West Valley Division 8. Staff will arrive starting mid-month to prepare for the opening of the sector, July 1.

“The first year will be a very challenging one for the staff because so many of the things we'll do will still be tied to Gateway,” says Armijo. “I think it will be a good six months before we'll see a full transition to the sector.”

Along with establishment of the sector office, San Fernando Valley employees can expect other changes.

With the opening of bus rapid transit service between the North Hollywood Metro station and Warner Center in about three years, Division 8 will be upgraded to accommodate some 72 articulated buses. With 158 buses already stationed at the division, the addition of the 60-foot vehicles will bring it to capacity.

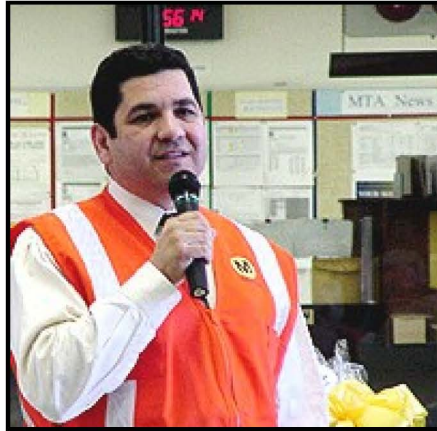
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For the past six years, David Armijo has served as director of operations for the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) where he managed the agency's bus and paratransit services, Metrolink commuter rail services and the Orange County Taxi Administration Program.

During Armijo's tenure at OCTA, bus ridership increased by 40 percent and commuter rail ridership doubled. He oversaw the start-up of a 232-vehicle liquid natural gas (LNG) bus fleet, as well as the design and implementation of a \$14 million computerized radio dispatch communication system with satellite automated vehicle location.

East Valley Division 15, meanwhile, is receiving the final coaches in the current CNG bus order and is winding down operation of diesel buses. The diesels could be replaced within the next three years by 30-foot coaches.



▼ Armijo leads 'Safety's First' rollout March 14 at East San Fernando Valley Division.

### May deploy 30-foot buses

"When you look at the edges of our service area where people are trying to make connections with Metrolink," Armijo notes, "we might do better to have 30-foot buses. We found the smaller buses to be very effective in Orange County and less intrusive to the community."

Armijo's concern for linking customers with other transit services meshes with his broader responsibility for overall MTA service planning and scheduling. The group charged with planning "Tier 1" systemwide bus service – Metro Rapid, long-distance bus lines, bus rapid transit – reports to him.

With these demanding tasks ahead, Armijo will be actively looking for ideas and employee participation. He envisions, for example, a route monitoring task force headed by a senior bus operator with other operators as team members. The group would meet regularly with schedulers to plan changes in bus routes and to ensure that schedules are customer-friendly.

Armijo also expects to talk frequently with employees "at tailgate meetings, on the shop floor" and in meetings with operators. "We need to understand each other."

"Employees are going to learn more about the goals and objectives, the core values, the things that are important to the MTA," he says. "Most importantly, what their role is and how they'll affect our mission. We'll all do this together." --Bill Heard, Editor

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