

Bus Operator Survey to Pinpoint On-Time Performance Problems

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 18, 2002) Why do some Metro Buses run late or ahead of schedule? Can bus operators improve their on-time performance? What should MTA management do? How do you define "on-time performance?"

These are the basic questions MTA hopes to answer through a confidential survey to be distributed at operating divisions later this month. All 4,400 bus operators will be asked to complete the three-part, 29-question survey. Management will use the survey statistics to guide improvements in on-time performance.

Nine employees drawn from Metro Operations and other departments took on the survey project as part of their Transportation Leadership Academy (TLA) training. They'll analyze the results this fall and issue a set of recommendations late this year. Survey results will be released to employees.



The TLA group will send copies of the survey to the operating divisions for distribution to all 4,400 bus operators. From left, seated, are Patricia Chen, Demetrius Jones and Rick Jager. Standing from left are George Trudeau, Edith Goff-Youngblood, Claudia Mino, Craig Smith and Collins Kalu. Below, Deputy CEO John Catoe, shown here with the sector general managers, supports the on-time initiative. From left are Metro San Gabriel Valley GM Jack Gabig, Metro Westside/Central GM Tracy Daly, Metro Gateway Cities GM Rich Rogers, Metro San Fernando Valley GM David Armijo, Catoe, and Metro South Bay GM Dana Coffey.



"The data will show us statistically what the problem is," says Collins Kalu of Corporate Safety. "The recommendations will be directed at that."

Perhaps the most important information the group hopes to learn from the survey is why some MTA buses run ahead of schedule. Operators call it running "hot" or "sharp."

25 percent of operators run 'hot'

"We know that about 25 percent of operators at any given time are running ahead of schedule," says George Trudeau of West Valley Division 8. "This creates major scheduling problems system-wide. We want to know what management can do to help."

Metro San Fernando Valley General Manager David Armijo, who has been charged with developing programs to improve on-time, on-street performance, sponsored the group's project.

"This survey will help us in developing meaningful programs to address our on-time performance," says Armijo. "I encourage all operators to fill out the survey honestly and to wear their 'On-Time' lapel pins proudly."

Before drafting the formal survey, the TLA group conducted face-to-face interviews last spring with some 100 operators.

"This survey is a refinement of the face-to-face interviews," says Rick Jager of Media Relations. "We want to find out how operators perceive on-time performance, whether they know what MTA's on-time policy is and whether there are any incentives that would encourage them to perform better."

Blessings of the UTU

The group's work has the blessing of UTU General Chairman James Williams, who was kept informed throughout the process and reviewed an advance copy of the survey.

A representative at each operating division will be responsible for distributing surveys to every bus operator, according to Edith Goff-Youngblood of Customer and Vendor Services.

Operators will be asked to complete the surveys and drop them into locked "ballot boxes" located for a week at the divisions. Operators who complete the survey will receive a specially designed commemorative lapel pin.

"We may learn some things, not only about running late or running sharp, but also about the way we schedule our bus lines or about the layover zones we choose," says Trudeau. "A lot of things could come out of this survey that aren't directly asked, but from which you could infer that we have a problem."

EDITOR'S NOTE: Members of the TLA survey group not available during the interview for this story are Patricia Chen of Countywide Planning, Demetrius Jones of Operations Central Instructions, Daniel Ramirez of the San Gabriel Valley Service Sector Office, Craig Smith of South Bay Division 18 and Claudia Mino of Organizational Development and Training (OD&T). The group's instructor is Manuella Abrahamian of OD&T.

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