

First 8 Months Were Busy for Rail GM Gerald Francis

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Oct. 4, 2002) Since joining MTA last January, Metro Rail General Manager Gerald Francis not only has had to learn a new rail system in a new town, he's been working to improve passenger service and upgrade maintenance of the rail cars – all while planning ahead for a startup on the Metro Gold Line.



Metro Rail General Manager
Gerald Francis

With substantial completion of the new LA-to-Pasadena line expected in February, Metro Rail already is in action. Cars have been placed on the rails for testing and, later this month, overhead catenary wires will be energized.

In June, eight rail operators chosen for the pre-revenue period began a training class. They're the first of a total of 40 who will be needed to provide service on the Metro Gold Line when it opens in mid-2003.

With the startup of the line, six more controllers will be needed at the Rail Operations Center and new status boards will be added to keep track of car movement. Other improvements include enhancements to the SCADA system.

Looking back, Francis reflects on several highlights of his months on the job, including early completion of a Metro Green Line track reconstruction project, continued growth in rail ridership, improvements in rail radio communications and a survey of rail employees.

Francis was impressed

The track reconstruction project at the Harbor Freeway station, last April, particularly impressed Francis.

The reconstruction project was necessary to correct ground settlement of nearly two inches beneath the tracks near the station. Tracks had to be leveled, extra ballast put in and the section restored to its original condition. Planned for 23 days, the project was completed a week early.

Francis credits Facilities Maintenance Manager Keith Kranda, Senior Engineer Wyman Jones, Schedule Manager Bruce Shelburne, Rail Division Transportation Manager Duane Martin and Construction Manager Dave Walker and their staffs for finishing the job ahead of time and on budget.

"They not only implemented the plan, they stayed with it every day," he says. "They made decisions on the spot, readjusting the game plan, and that helped expedite things."

He also gives great credit to MTA Public Affairs, whose staff communicated effectively with passengers before and during the project, and to the passengers, themselves, who remained upbeat and cooperative throughout.

The cooperation of employees in several departments also was key to

the success of a two-month project to improve rail system radio communications. Rail Communications, Construction, ITS Systems, ITS Engineering and Purchasing worked together to switch off a problem-plagued system and shift service to other radio channels.

During his tenure, Francis has seen patronage climb steeply on the Metro Blue Line. Newly lengthened platforms and the scheduling of three-car trains sparked a jump in ridership from 60,000 average daily boardings in January to 73,000 in July.

To keep up with the increase, he usually schedules 49 cars for daily use – 11 three-car trains and eight two-car trains.

Metro Red Line average daily boardings, meanwhile, have hovered between 130,000 and 140,000. On the Metro Green Line, which operates 10 two-car trains each day, boardings have fluctuated between 25,000 and 30,000.

Raising the bar

"What ultimately will determine the success of any transit system is providing quality service," Francis says. "Our rail fleet services section has accepted the challenge of raising the bar to increase vehicle reliability."

Coming up in October: an increase in late-night hours on all three rail lines and a change in policy to extend the hours when bicycle commuters can bring their bikes on board the trains.

With all that's ahead for the future, Francis looks to his rail team as the source of ideas for continued improvements in operations, maintenance and customer service.

He was pleased with the results of a recent employee survey, which received overwhelming participation. The survey was followed in August by employees meetings.

"We have a lot of good people who have great ideas, who are bright and energetic," says Francis. "We're getting to know each other and we're becoming a more cohesive unit. Our commitment to the future is to continue to focus on customer service, innovation and teamwork."

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