

PHOTO BY BILL HEARD



All aboard at Union Station.

'Squeeze'

was the Word as Riders Packed Gold Line Trains

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(July 29, 2003) Snapshots of the Metro Gold Line opening weekend:

- People waiting in line at the Highland Park station for the Metro Experience 3-D safety show.
- Four Chinese men in straw hats conversing in their native tongue on the southbound trip to Chinatown.
- The Sparkletts guy dispensing 500 gallons of water 3½ ounces at a time to thirsty patrons at Sierra Madre Villa.
- A guy in an "Ostrich Airlines" T-shirt at Mission station asking whether he can take his bike on the train.
- Happy kids riding the ponies at Heritage Square/Arroyo station.
- People trying to squeeze onto a packed train at Memorial Park station as a mother tries to push a baby carriage out the door.

In fact, "squeeze" was the operative word both Saturday and Sunday as the Metro Gold Line played to SRO crowds anxious to be counted among those who would be first to ride Southern California's newest rail line.

<See metro.net report>

[Moments from a Golden Weekend](#)

Metro Gold Line's Wild Ride

"I'm just truly, truly excited about the Gold

Line opening," said patron Joan Caron, as she boarded a train. "I was so excited I could hardly sleep last night. This is history and I wanted to be a part of it."

Rail Operations estimates 79,000 riders on Saturday and 80,000 on Sunday – a total of 159,000 – also wanted to be a part of history.

On the platform at Union Station, Monday morning, Transportation Manager Roman Alarcon acknowledged a few glitches in Saturday's operation, but by Sunday the operation was very smooth. "We had everybody on the same team."

Metro Rail Custodian Juanita LeRoux, assigned to four mid-route stations, was amazed at the number of people who came out for the weekend's free rides. "A lot of people," was all she could say.

Among the passengers was an eight-member delegation of officials from the Phoenix Public Transit Department who came to LA to experience a rail line opening. Phoenix is planning a 20-mile line connecting the downtown area with Tempe.

A carnival atmosphere



Long lines greet Gold Line train at Mission Station.



4-quad crossing gates guard Mission Station intersection.



Shady lane at Mission Station.

Heading north toward Sierra Madre Villa almost 14 miles away, the trains passed station after station where a carnival atmosphere prevailed. Food booths featuring kettle corn, hot dogs, shave ice and pizza were intermixed with booths for local museums and civic associations. Music and entertainment also kept crowds amused.



Artist Michael Stutz' bronze "walking man" joins the line for the train at Mission Station. Below, Chinatown Youth Association performs lion dance to scare away evil spirits at Chinatown Station.

Mid-morning Saturday, Transit Police Chief Capt. Dan Finkelstein and his wife, Ilene, a deputy sheriff, were observing the situation at Mission station. "Everything's going very smoothly and everybody's happy. It's a great time and opportunity to showcase the new system," he said.



On Monday, Sheriff's Lt. Mike Parker reported that, despite the enormous turnout, deputies had made only two arrests during the Metro Gold Line festivities – a drunk and a man who made the mistake of spitting on an undercover officer.

At the Highland Park station where people lined up for the Metro Experience safety show, Communications Officer Joanne Longsdon was encouraged that people were asking for Metro Bus schedules and wanted information about MTA's other rail lines.

'Not just a Gold Line event'

"When you think about it," she said, "it's not just a Gold Line event. It's for our whole system, because you can't take one without the other."

Olivia Martinez, who lives on Avenue 57, said she plans to use the system as soon as she can find a job. A resident until recently of Mexico City, she enjoys using mass transit and plans to use LA's Metro system.

Mark Anthony Williams, a young sight-impaired man, said he'll use

the Metro Gold Line to travel from his new independent-living home to the college he's planning to attend.

At Heritage Square station, children took rides on a mini-train and bounced in two big jumpers. Families joined the surrounding community to enjoy the sounds of mariachi bands and the music of the Franklin High School Band.

"There are over 30 booths sponsored by community organizations, so it's an opportunity for the community to know what kind of resources are available," said Yvette Robles, senior communications officer.

In Chinatown, people crowded narrow College Street to feast on a variety of Asian cuisine and experience the essence of Chinese culture. Vendors presented a range of colorful products – from intricate beaded jewelry to four-foot high tahlia flowers.

Gyrating to the drumbeats

Spectators marveled at the lion dance – a traditional Chinese custom performed to ward off bad spirits and bring good luck and prosperity. Dancers wearing a long, white lion costume moved about the street, gyrating to rhythmic drumbeats.

"We want people to know that the Gold Line has opened and the station is just a few feet away from the heart of Chinatown," said Holly Barnhill of the Chinatown Business Council.

Crowded with more people than the 5 o'clock rush hour, Union Station became a hotbed of excitement and activities. MTA volunteers in gold T-shirts serenaded riders with the oldies song, "Do the Locomotion," on the karaoke machine.

Thousands of people eager to take their first ride on the Metro Gold Line formed a line that stretched from Track 1 to the P-1 parking structure beneath the Plaza.

Nearby, members of MTA's Communications Department spent all day handing out plastic goodie bags and information to a never-ending line of riders.

Deputy Executive Officer Warren Morse estimated 5,200 bags had been distributed by 4 p.m., Saturday, with another full day of free rides to go.

"Everyone's in a very good mood," he said. "Many people are coming by and saying, 'Thank you, welcome to the neighborhood!'"

Interns Lisa Huynh, Adrienne Figueroa and Franklin Holman contributed to this article.

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