

Long rows of buses stand idle in the Division 18 yard.



## **With Strike in Full Swing, Non-Striking Employees Pitch In**

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Oct. 15, 2003) With the strike against MTA in full swing, Wednesday, non-striking employees pitched in wherever they could to assist stranded commuters.

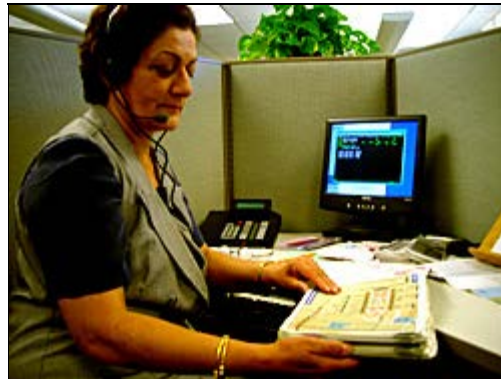
On Tuesday, more than 50 employees from departments throughout the agency volunteered to augment supervisors working the phones in the Customer Information Center. They answered thousands of 1-800-COMMUTE calls from patrons seeking a ride to work or school.

Many of the volunteers had worked in Customer Information during the 2000 strike, but others were given a quick training course to learn the system, said Communications Manager Tom Longsdon. Customer Information will be open weekdays from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. and on weekends from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

MTA Service Development employees have been working frantically to fill the gaps in the "lifeline" bus service they've managed to stitch together in the past two days, according to Deputy Executive Officer Rod Goldman.

They've also been in constant contact with local transit agencies about beefing up service to carry extra passenger loads. And they worked closely with the Metrolink staff to set up the

PHOTOS: BILL HEARD



Epi Chawdhry, a senior secretary in Environmental Services is one of those who volunteered to staff the Customer Information Center.



Pickers demonstrate at the South Bay Division 18 gate.



Red Line “emulator” service from Union Station to downtown LA.

### **Passenger communications**

Buses await repairs in the Division 18 maintenance garage.

Meanwhile, community relations officers, communications officers and Metro Rail employees drove from bus stop to bus stop, rail station to rail station posting service cancellation notices at elevators, platforms, stairwells and ticket machines.

Communications Manager Mike Barnes provided rail service information signs developed by MTA’s Design Studio and briefed AMTRAK and Travelers Aid volunteers.

Community Relations Manager Jody Litvak hit Metro Rapid stops along Wilshire Boulevard. At each stop, she was bombarded with questions from patrons.

While Community Relations Officer Barbara Burns was posting signs in West Hollywood, she also gave rides to four people – including two tourists from Sweden.

### **MTA Security**

Transit Police Chief Capt. Dan Finkelstein said MTA Security officers and more than 100 Sheriff’s deputies and had been posted at MTA facilities and were patrolling Metro Rail lines to prevent vandalism at the shuttered stations.

He said the deployment of security personnel is being reassessed daily to determine where personnel can best be stationed. “Until this strike develops its own ‘personality,’ we need to have everyone out there to make sure all the bases are covered.”

Finkelstein said employees may experience some delays when crossing through lines of picketers at MTA facilities, but he noted that strikers have a right to demonstrate and he counseled employees to be calm and have patience with the situation.

### **At the operating divisions**

At San Gabriel Valley Division 9, as at other operating divisions, management and the sector staff are starting the buses every other day and driving them around the yard to keep them ready for service when the strike ends. They also are making minor repairs, changing batteries, cleaning and fueling the buses.

At East Valley Division 15, the staff is thinking ahead to when striking employees will be back on the job. The management staff has set out chairs and tables for the picketers and arranged a barbeque.

Venice Division 6’s maintenance management staff has taken the

opportunity while the bus bays are idle to clean the facility.

### **Metro Rail activities**

Meanwhile, at Metro Rail, managers have been alternating 12-hour work shifts maintaining daily administrative functions, including operator assignments, so employees can go right back to their schedules when the strike ends.

"All the people that came back to work are ready at a moment's notice for the strike to end and to resume working," says Rail Division Transportation Manager Hector Guerrero.

Managers at the Metro Green Line are monitoring the yard and making regular security checks. They also start trains once or twice a day and will wash them once a week.

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**Interns Lisa Huynh and Frank Holman contributed to this story.**

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