

Volunteer Customer Info Agents Help Commuters Find Alternative Routes

By LISA HUYNH

(Oct. 23, 2003) About 75 employees from all over MTA have volunteered to work as Customer Information agents to help commuters get to work, school, recreation and home.

With only 15 to 20 minutes of training, the temporary agents learned to use the computer database to find alternative routes for callers inconvenienced by the strike



Planning Administrative Aide Lisa Martinez finds working as an information agent rewarding.

The agent can enter the caller's location, destination and travel time to trace every possible route to accommodate a customer's needs.

"Right now, there aren't very many choices or routes because we pulled all of the MTA services out of the database," says Customer Relations Manager Tom Longsdon.

Agents also can find alternative routes by using maps, the Thomas Guide and brochures. Commuters are relying on municipal bus lines, such as LADOT, Foothill Transit, Montebello Transit and Santa Monica's Big Blue Bus.

Sheriff's Department Security Assistant Ivan Moreno has been a Customer Information agent for a couple of days and found it was stressful in the beginning.

"Fortunately, I haven't gotten any bad or rude calls," says Moreno. "Everybody is just desperate about finding information on how to get to their destination. People have been polite and patient, so it's a good thing for me."

Planning Administrative Aide Lisa Martinez, who has been working as an information agent for about a week, says helping out customers during the strike is rewarding.

"It seems like they're very appreciative knowing that there's someone on the other side of the line that is willing to help and go the extra mile to find alternative routes," says Martinez.

Martinez also says that, although some callers are frustrated because it can take a few hours and up to five buses to get where they need to go, they are thankful for the service.

"The volunteers are doing an incredible job," says Longsdon. "To come here with minimal amount of training, go into a strange environment, and be as cheerful as they are, I can't say enough good things about them. They've been fantastic."

Then and Now:

- Normally, there are about 95 full-time Customer Information

agents. During the first week of the strike, there were about 30 volunteer Customer Information agents. Now, there are about 75.

- During the first week of the strike, the average wait time for a caller to get to an agent was about 15 to 20 minutes. Now, the wait time is less than a minute.
- Before the strike, the Customer Relations Department received about 7,000 calls per day. Now, they get about 5,000 calls per day.
- Before the strike, MTA's website received about 25,000 hits per day. Now, it gets 40,000 hits per day.

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