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Photo Credit: Photo by Kim Sim

Metro Bus Operator Alfred Portillo and his main form of personal transportation - his bicycle.

Bus Operator Brings New Meaning to Alternative Transportation

By KIM SIM

(March 2, 2004) Alfred Portillo drives enough already, spending close to 40 hours a week navigating the streets of Los Angeles as he picks up and drops off riders on Metro Bus Lines 18 and 745.

So when it comes to getting to work, Portillo opts not to drive. Instead, the 53-year old veteran bus operator bikes, jogs or rides the bus to get from his home in Montebello to Central City Division 1, where he works.

It's a routine he has kept up for almost 22 years.

"I like to keep myself in shape," Portillo says. "I like the idea of working out before I get to work. There's less stress on your body when you're driving the bus. It just brings you up."

The tradeoff for a pre-work workout is waking up early. Portillo, whose bus assignment is Monday through Friday starting at 4:47 a.m., has to leave his house by 3 a.m.

That gives him enough time to take a shower and get ready for work. He estimates it takes 55 minutes to travel the 10 miles by bicycle, his preferred form of transportation.

Biking in the dark

Having to hit the road when it's still dark doesn't worry Portillo.

"I've never really had any trouble out there, riding the bike to work," he

says. "Everyone tells me to take the car but I'm trying to keep myself in shape. It's a fun thing to do. I feel good inside."

His wife, Rose, says she's used to this by now.

"At the beginning, I would get all nervous that something would happen to him," she says. "Now, if he wants to do it, let him do it."

She does, however, tell him that if he insists on the bike, to at least "go buy a new one, go buy a better one."

It isn't as if the Portillos don't own a car. In fact, they have four — one for each member of the family. Portillo just prefers not to drive to work.

Some ridicule him

"Some of the drivers ridicule me," Portillo says with a laugh. "They say, 'Don't you have a car?' They look at me like I'm strange, like I'm from another planet."

Although fellow bus operators do joke about Portillo's habits, they say they're impressed.

"I wish I had that kind of enthusiasm," Operator Steve Moreno says. "I couldn't do it and he does it every morning."

Portillo's physical activities go beyond biking and jogging. He heads to the gym regularly after work. He swims. He plays golf. He's even trying to break into the Senior PGA Tour.

And he doesn't like to waste an opportunity to work out. During breaks, Portillo does pull-ups in the bus.

"I've just got a lot of energy, it's unreal," Portillo says. "My goal is to stay in shape all my life. I just enjoy working out. I can't see anybody having to miss out."