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PHOTOS: AJITH PEIRIS



Solar panels installed at Division 15, like these shown on the roof of the transportation building, will provide 20 percent of the division's power needs.

Solar Power Project at Divisions 15, 8 Will Save Big Bucks

- 1,648 solar panels is most of any U.S. transportation agency
- Average 20 percent savings on division energy needs

By ERIC RAPP

(Feb 3, 2005) The largest solar power installation of any transportation agency in the United States is underway at Metro Bus divisions 15 and 8 in the San Fernando Valley. It will be the 20th largest green energy-producing installation ever built in the United States.

The 1,648 solar panels, once in operation on the roofs of the transportation and maintenance buildings, are predicted to produce 425 kilowatts of power at peak, saving Metro up to \$150,000 a year in electricity costs.

Based on a yearly energy consumption cycle, the installations will produce average savings of 20 percent of the total energy needs of each division.

The shade produced by the panels, which will cover about 70 percent of each roof's surface area, is also expected to reduce heating and cooling costs, and prolong the life of the roof itself.

Two-phase project

The installation at East Valley Division 15, located appropriately enough in Sun Valley, is almost complete. The project at West Valley Division 8 in Chatsworth will start construction next week.

Facilities Operations staff members check the solar panel installation on the roof of the Division 15 transportation building.



The installations are a pilot project that will be extended to other Metro operating divisions if it is successful and the savings are verified.

"Metro has had some hard financial times over the last years, and there has been a big push to pinch pennies and find cost savings wherever we can," says Tim Lindholm, Facilities Operations project manager for the solar panel installation. "This project just made complete sense, both financially and environmentally."

The panels cost \$1.5 million per division to fabricate and install, but Southern California Gas Company is providing rebates for half of that cost, or about \$750,000 dollars per division.

Seven-year payoff

Those rebates mean that the investment in solar panels should pay off in seven to 10 years, providing huge future savings for Metro.

"Facilities Operations has made a commitment to incorporate sustainable design and construction techniques wherever feasible," says Lindholm. "This certainly qualifies in that regard."

Lindholm's team, which includes Engineer Ajith Peiris and Senior Engineer Cesar Robeniol, has worked with contractor and designer Sol Source Energy to make the project go smoothly.

John Roberts, Division 15 Maintenance manager, says, "This project team has been one of the best I have ever worked with. It has been an excellent construction project, with virtually no impact to the operation of the division."