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DriveCam's two cameras provide a unique vantage point of simultaneous action inside and outside the bus.



Photos: Jimmy Stroup

Division 3 Testing High-Tech Video Recording Device on 215 Buses

- 'DriveCam' monitors action inside and outside a bus
- Could change accident investigations, help train operators

By JIMMY STROUP

(Nov. 16, 2005) North Los Angeles Division 3 has begun a 90-day pilot program that could end up changing the way Metro investigates accidents, trains its operators and even how much it pays in insurance premiums.

DriveCam, a video recording device mounted on the windshield near the rearview mirror, records the action inside and outside the vehicle just as the driver sees it. And starting this week, DriveCam units will be recording the events inside and outside the 215 buses based at Division 3.

When General Manager Jack Gabig and Scott Boim, senior safety specialist for the San Gabriel Valley Service Sector, visited ATC Transit in Chula Vista last February, they learned about a device ATC had placed in all its vehicles that had greatly reduced operating costs.

It was then that Gabig and Boim thought DriveCam might also be a

good idea for Metro.

Installation of Division 3's DriveCam units was finished Nov. 3. The system is expected to be fully implemented and operational starting this week.

Not costing a cent

The pilot program, which will continue at least through the beginning of February 2006, isn't costing MTA a single dollar—Gabig and Boim negotiated a deal with DriveCam that requires the San Diego-based company to pick up all expenses for the 90-day trial.

Used in other transportation industries, DriveCam has been effective in reducing operating costs due to negligence and accidents by up to 50 percent, a pattern Division 3 hopes to emulate.

The way DriveCam works is this: the units are activated by any erratic change in vehicle movement, such as an impact, a sudden speed-up or slow-down, or a sudden bump—like going over a curb.

The 10 seconds before and the 10 seconds after the unit is activated are recorded and later downloaded from the device for review. DriveCam's memory is large enough to save 12 events before it must be downloaded.



Maintenance Manager Bill Grunwald (left) and Transportation Manager Mike Greenwood at a Division 3 maintenance station that has been outfitted with a long USB cable. The USB cable attaches to the DriveCam for downloading at the division's service island.

Reviewing the events

"Every day when the bus is fueled and cleaned, it'll get downloaded," said Mike Greenwood, Division 3 transportation manager. Greenwood and his staff will review the events daily and determine what actions, if any, need to be taken to improve accident prevention and operator performance.

Cameras in buses aren't new to Metro, but this system is unique, Greenwood said, in that it provides a clear record of both the action in front of the bus, and a simultaneous record of what the passengers and operator are doing inside the vehicle.

"The big advantage to this system is the forward-facing lens," he said,

which enables managers to review an incident from the operator's perspective frame-by-frame.

Greenwood hopes DriveCam will increase safety and decrease the number of incidents in his division. He also said the units will be helpful in identifying training deficiencies that need to be corrected before the behavior becomes a real problem.

Senior Safety Specialist Boim echoed that sentiment, noting that the record of what's going on inside the bus will be invaluable in protecting operators from false customer claims.

'Protecting the operator'

"Right now, everything's in a gray area," he said. "This is protecting the operator."

Installation of the units—which would normally cost about \$1,200 each—began in October.

The DriveCam modules have actually been recording since their final installation Nov. 3, but haven't been downloaded because of software challenges, said Division 3 Maintenance Manager Bill Grunwald.



Division 3 Transportation Manager Mike Greenwood inspects USB cable staff uses to download images from the DriveCam. He and his staff will review the DriveCam footage daily.

Currently, DriveCam data is downloaded using a long USB cable installed at maintenance stations. Should MTA extend the program beyond its scheduled termination, there may be an easier method that will save time and effort for maintenance crews.

"They're equipped for wireless transmission, but the software's not ready for that yet," Grunwald said. "Once that's done, it will be completely independent—our people won't have to do anything at that point."

Grunwald is excited about the new program and said he's noticed people taking an interest in the installation.

"I think the curiosity factor has gotten to the point where people want to see it," he said.

