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Henry Mendez of Stops & Zones applies a new limited service Line 330 decal to a Metro Bus stop sign at 1st and Evergreen in East Los Angeles.



December Shake-up was Biggest Job for Stops and Zones Since 2003

- Crew members delayed Christmas party to make 2,000 bus stop changes, twice the usual number

BY JIMMY STROUP

(Jan. 26, 2006) Considering the nearly 18,000 bus stops under Metro's domain, Facilities Manager Pete Serdienis and the Stops and Zones crew have a challenging job just to keep up on day-to-day maintenance.

But twice a year, Stops and Zones is responsible for adjusting any of the information at bus stops that is no longer accurate because of line changes the Shake-ups bring.

December's Shake-up proved to be the most demanding since the one that preceded the July 2003 opening of the Metro Gold Line—and more than 10 percent of Metro's bus signs needed to be adjusted because of it.

"This past December was heavy because four of the five sectors implemented major route and service frequency changes. We had to change approximately 2,000 stops," Serdienis said, adding that a normal Shake-up will usually call for only half that many changes.

Just before the December Shake-up, the San Fernando Valley Sector

took the October opening of the Metro Orange Line as an opportunity to do their Shake-up early, so Stops and Zones' December work was lightened by one sector.

"Luckily, San Fernando Valley timed their changes with the October opening of the Orange Line," Serdienis said. "So we concentrated all our manpower on handling their changes and then redeployed our 13 maintainers to the other four sectors for the December Shake-up," Serdienis said.

More to it than you'd think

But changing the information on a bus stop sign isn't as easy as you might think. A month prior to the time the signs are scheduled to go in, Stops and Zones maintainers are out on the effected routes placing notification "hoods" over the tops of the signs to keep riders up to date on changes to their regular routes.

If it's a new signpost going in, Stops and Zones has to get location approval from the municipal traffic engineer. Then they have to obtain a "dig alert" number—so they can be sure the dig area isn't over any phone, water, fiber optic, sewer or gas lines.

After marking the proposed site, they wait three days for the utility companies to mark their underground utilities to be sure there aren't any problems when Metro installs the new bus stop post and sign.

Every change isn't that complicated, thankfully, and most only require simple adjustments that can be made using the luminescent decals or service qualification stickers crafted by the Metro Sign Shop in South Park.

"Where we don't have to change out a sign, we'll just add a new destination decal or service qualification sticker to denote the new type of service a route operates at the existing stop," Serdienis said.

"For each Shake-up, we concentrate on installing bus stops for brand new lines first, then making changes to the signs along the heaviest patronized lines, and finish everything up by the effective date," he said. "Then we come back and go through the stop locations that were abandoned and remove the hooded posts and signs."



Christmas in January> Stops and Zones team finally takes a break.

Delayed gratification

Anticipating the extra workload, Serdienis’ team decided to delay their Christmas party until after the Shake-up work was done—they didn’t have it until after the New Year.

“What is really a blessing is that I’ve got such dedicated crews that they arbitrarily decided to delay the Christmas party until after the Shake-up was done,” he said.

But this kind of selflessness has become a staple in Stops and Zones, and Serdienis views it as just another part of his team’s daily routine.

“These guys are a close-knit unit. We’ve been together for so long we all know when it’s crunch time—when it’s the playoffs, it’s time to step up and get the job done,” he said, “and somehow, we always manage to do so.”