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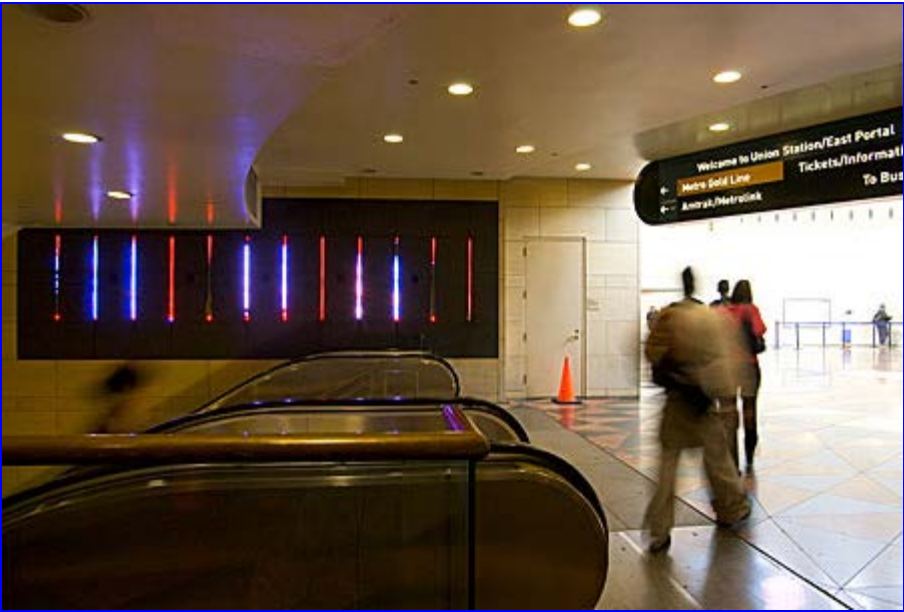
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[ARTIFAQs]

**Run your mouse over image** to see movie star passengers on board the "A-Train."  
Photos: Deniz Durmus



An 'A-Train' Primer

- Many visitors to the East Portal – even commuters who pass through daily – often stop to gaze in wonder at artist Bill Bell's light and sound creation "A-Train." Here's a behind-the-scenes look as this unique work of art as described by Bell in this Q and A. -- *From Gayle Anderson*

Q. What is the "A-Train"?

A. A 9-minute cycle of electronic imagery displayed on light bars mounted on a wall and operated by a computer.



Scene from "A-Train" > An eastbound Union Pacific passenger train crosses the light bar screen. Faces in the windows of the cars are just passing through. Photo by Deniz Durmus.

**Q. What do we see on the wall?**

- A.** Opening scene. We start out with some simple light play on the light bars – lights move up and down in different colors to attract your attention.
2. Light bars go dark and then we hear the whistle of a diesel engine in the distance. The sound gets closer and closer. Just as it gets up to you, a freight train appears. We see and hear the freight train go by.
3. We see an eastbound Union Pacific passenger train crossing the light bar screen. We see the passenger cars and faces in the windows of the cars. Now we see close-ups of those faces. Wait a minute! They're movie stars. They look awfully familiar. From the Golden Age of Hollywood movies: Charles Coburn, Marilyn Monroe, Gary Cooper, Burt Lancaster. They're going by so fast, you can't say their names fast enough. But you know you know them. On they go. Just passing through.
- 4) Interlude. Now we see a tiny train crossing the screen. It's pulling a mysterious load of letters, all jumbled up. Now a pause. Whoa! Here comes the tiny train back the other way, but this time the letters are assembled in the right order and now we see what it says: Hollywood. It's the Hollywood Sign being hauled into place.
- 5) Now we see a westbound passenger train. It carries more movie stars and they're coming back into town. But they're different movie stars along with a timeless assortment of celebrities. We see Harpo Marx, George Washington, a cave man, the tin man from the Wizard of Oz, and icons recognizable from old movies.
- 6) The train stops. We segue to an interlude of flashing lights.
- 7) The end.

Artist Bill Bell times the interlude from the other side of the escalators to the Metro Red Line station. Notice the plaque at right. What is it for?



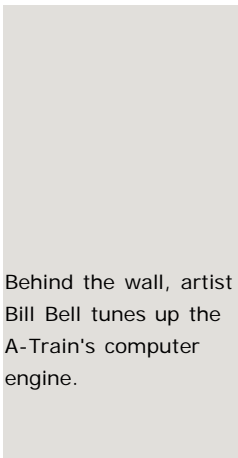
**Q. There's a plaque on the wall opposite the installation. What is it for?**

**A.** Discovery, and it doesn't come with instructions. Surprise is one of the elements of the piece. The plaque contains a microphone. Speaking certain phrases into it will trigger an audio response from the *A-Train*. Here are the phrases. Speak each one into the plaque and listen to what the A-Train says back...

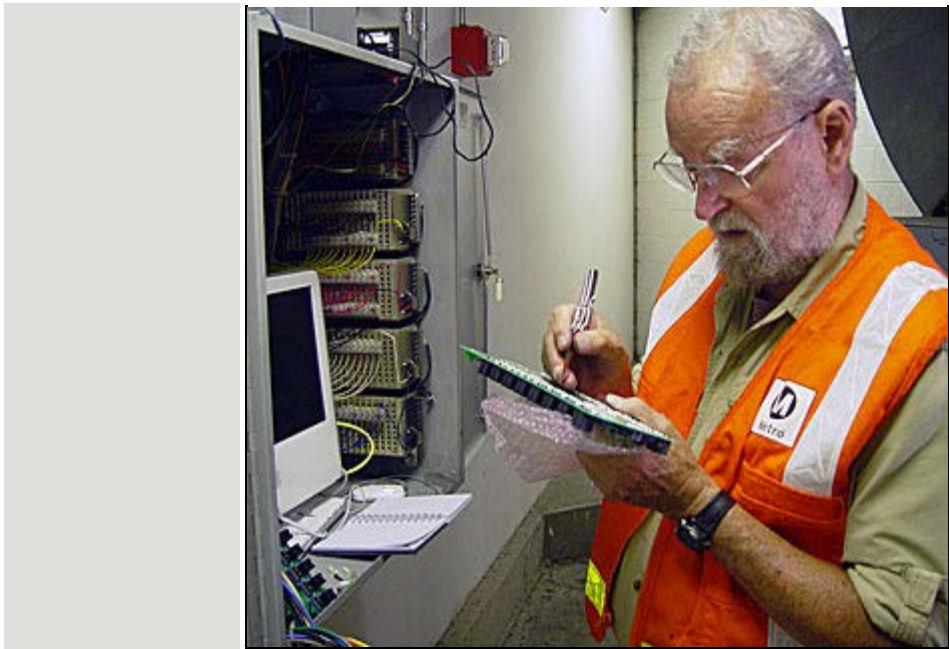
- Alexander Graham Bell
- Cheshire Cat
- Duke Ellington
- Harpo Marx
- Johnny Weissmuller
- Lassie
- Louie B. Mayer
- Marilyn Monroe
- Maureen O'Sullivan
- Rin Tin Tin
- Samuel Goldwyn
- What day is it?
- Yip Harburg (Who? He's a lyricist. (*Over the Rainbow, April in Paris, Only a Paper Moon and many, many songs from early Hollywood musicals ...*))
- You Tarzan Me Jane

**Q. What is the concept?**

**A.** Create a solid image with unsolid patterns of light.



Behind the wall, artist Bill Bell tunes up the A-Train's computer engine.



**Q. How does it work?**

**A.** The light show displays on light bars installed in the wall. The display is operated by a computer located in a utility room behind the display. Several computer programs create images and distribute data to the light sticks. The computer stores the data and operates the lights.

**Q. What is a light stick?**

**A.** A bar of light made out of LEDs. There are two different patterns on these light sticks: raindrops, and lights that grow and diminish in the bars.



**Quotables**

"It's one dimensional TV. With 1DTV, you get a full screen for the price of 5 percent of the full screen. Actually, that's the way video works. The image moves quickly from one set of lights to the next, thereby tricking the eye into following an apparent motion. The eye will actually see the apparent motion because it will fill in the gaps between the light sticks."

**Myths: The following statements are not true.**

- The longer you stare, the more you see.
- If you say a movie star’s name into the speaker, the image of that particular movie star will flash on the wall.

**Little known facts**

The number on the freight train engine in the opening sequence was my childhood telephone number.