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Metro to Offer ‘Transit English’ Classes to Help Fill Operator Ranks

- Safe operation, effective communication are program goals
- Metro to partner with LA Community Colleges

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(May 19, 2006) Facing an immediate need to fill almost 300 bus operator positions, Metro plans to reach out for candidates who might qualify for the jobs through participation in a new “transit English” program.

The language course, developed through a partnership between Metro and the Los Angeles Community College district, would concentrate on teaching likely job candidates enough English to successfully complete bus operator training, to safely operate a bus in LA’s challenging environment, and to communicate effectively with dispatchers, supervisors, law enforcement officers and customers.

“We believe there are a lot of people out there who just need a little help with the language, but could be great bus operators,” says Don Ott, executive officer of Administration. Ott, who is spearheading the program for Metro, hopes to see transit English classes by January 2007 or earlier.

Andrea Burnside, the Operations Administration managing director, first met with community college representatives about the program in 2005, says safety is a top concern.

Safety a top concern

“It would be a requirement that anyone who comes into the program through a transit English class can understand safety issues and communicate effectively enough to be a safe operator,” she says.

Metro’s transit English program would be part of a larger initiative by the City of Los Angeles Community Development Department, the state Employment Development Department and the LA Community College District to train people as longshore and warehouse workers and in safety and security, freight movement and logistics.

The group already has received \$25,000 in seed money to write a curriculum, recruit businesses that need workers, and write a grants package for federal funding. The grant application is due June 30.

Lenny Ciufo, director of job training at LA Valley College, says the English proficiency of Metro job candidates would be assessed to determine how much transit vocabulary training each would need. Depending on proficiency level, classes could range from 40 hours to 75 hours or more.

Job prospects, prescreened by Metro for employment eligibility, would be referred to the transit English program. They could be hired by the agency for operator training once they had successfully completed the language classes.

The federal grant would cover the cost of the classes which also might include study skills, time management, note- and test-taking and critical thinking. The classes would be taught either at a local community college or at other convenient locations, Ciufo says.

"We hope this will offer people in our community career opportunities at Metro," says Ott.

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