

[Metro.net](#) (web)

Resources

► [Safety](#)

► [Pressroom](#) (web)

► [Ask the CEO](#)

► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#)
(web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/ Library](#)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

Metro Info

► [30/10 Initiative](#)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

Need e-Help?

Call the Help Desk
at 2-4357

[Contact myMetro.net](#)

On board one of Metro's fully equipped tow trucks, Field Equipment Technician Keith Nielsen inspects Cummins engine.



Photos by Ned Racine

On the Run: Field Equipment Technicians Keep Metro Buses Rolling

- FETs work under pressure from operators, motorists, impatient riders and cops

By NED RACINE

(Feb. 9, 2007) Beneath Metro's network of buses and trains that move thousands of passengers across Los Angeles County every day works another network of dispatchers, mechanics and technicians who keep hundreds of vehicles ready for service.

Field equipment technicians (FETs) are the trapeze artists of that supporting web, repairing vehicles that failed during their workday, sometimes slowing the traffic flow the vehicles are intended to reduce. FETs often labor under the glare of bus operators, riders and motorists. Law enforcement officers encourage the FETs to move Metro's vehicles from freeways and roads quickly.

Manny Zaragosa, who works from the Regional Rebuild Center (RCC), has 30 years with Metro, 24 years as an FET. Zaragosa works the p.m. shift beginning at noon. "Most every guy that's here has a



FET Manny Zaragosa checks the assignment board at RRC.

lot of time [with the agency] because the job is very interesting," he said. "It's something different every single day."

The FETs also take professional pride in the speed with which they can get

a broken bus moving from roads and freeways.

1,800 service calls each year

When Zaragosa began working as an FET, three were assigned to the a.m. shift and three assigned to the p.m. shift. Now each shift has seven FETs, Monday through Friday. The RRC FETs handle approximately 1,800 service calls each year from the South Bay, Hollywood, San Fernando Valley, East Los Angeles and all bus terminals.

Mickel Dobravolskis, also an FET, finds a different reward. "When there's a bunch of people standing there on the side of the road because the bus broke down, you fix it; everyone gets on the bus, and they all cheer, and it's very rewarding."

"A lot of times, by the time Control has the call, if we're monitoring our screen, we can actually see the call come up," explained Oscar D'Agostino, a mechanic. "Operators can use the M3 program to view the history of a bus. It gives us an idea, so we're prepared mentally, by the time we get there."



FET Oscar D'Agostino at the wheel.

Major failure

On Jan. 30, Keith Nielsen, a mechanic A, towed an articulated bus that had basically broken in two. Equipment Maintenance Manager Patrick Astredo called the breakdown a major failure. Working with the Division 5 maintenance crew, Nielsen was able to get the bus back to the division.

"So, he is kind of a go-to guy when things are really bad," Astredo said of Nielsen, a Metro employee for 27 years, 10 of those spent towing buses.



Mechanic A Keith Nielsen's 31,500-pound tow truck, one of 11 Metro owns, can tow any bus.

Nielsen's 31,500-pound tow truck, one of 11 Metro owns, can tow any bus. A recent addition to the fleet, the tow trucks feature a mechanical arm, called a "reach." With the reach, Nielsen's truck only needs to be within five feet of a bus to be able to tow it.

"It's a major concern for the public and safety when a vehicle is on the side of the street or on the freeway or something like that, something other than is normally out there, that is a real problem for Metro," Nielsen said.

It's Friday afternoon and George Perez, an FET also working the p.m. shift from the RCC, is driving a GMC W4500, vehicle 20-1100. The passenger seat has been removed and replaced with computers and radios. This is not Perez's usual truck. His usual truck is being serviced at Division 4.

Providing a soundtrack to Perez's workday, his radio calls out service requests: *Control Nine to M152.*



FET George Perez arrives on the scene with his trusted repair truck to quickly diagnose then repair engine troubles of Metro Local 6387.

'Engine stalled. Thanks a bunch.'

Perez's first request for service, complete with the bus's location, appears on his computer screen at 1:09 p.m. The text describes the problem and ends with, "Engine stalled. Thanks a bunch," a sign of the camaraderie among the FETs and the bus control center dispatchers.

Just east of Vignes on 1st Street, Metro Local 6387 waits silently. Stranded are Eloise Allen, Division 10 operator, and approximately 25 riders. The stalled coach pinches the 1st Street traffic.

Perez springs from his truck and quickly diagnoses 6387's electronics. "No voltage," he says. "Dead time." he opens a service panel on the bus's right rear as another bus arrives to pick up the stranded riders.

Perez discovers the number 65 electronic control module has unscrewed itself. He tightens the offending electronics, and the bus is ready to be driven off by its relief operator.

Not all repair calls take the FETs far from base. Danny Haynes, a Division 18 operator, calls to report that the passenger-side mirror of his NABI articulated bus keeps slipping out of position, despite his adjustments. He meets Perez around 2 p.m. in the RCC parking lot.

Perez devotes 20 minutes to diagnosing and then tightening the mirror, despite its warped center bolt, and sends coach 8027 back to its Metro Rapid route. "If he's happy, I'm happy," says Perez, who is nearing 30 years with Metro.



Perez tightens the passenger-side mirror of Metro Rapid articulated coach out of South Bay Division.

Operator reports door won't close

Perez's next call concerns Metro Bus 5403, which should have been transporting riders on busy Line 200. Instead, Division 2 Operator Guadalupe Urrea waits for Perez at her layover zone at Hill Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard. Her front door will not close.

Opening a service door under the operator's side window, Perez explains that Urrea's bus will not go in gear unless there is air pressure to the door. Perez finds a problem valve in the air line. A replacement part would be in his usual truck, but there's not one in the reserve truck he drives this day.

While Perez returns to the RCC for the replacement valve, he receives a service request for Metro Local 5422, also parked in the Line 200 layover zone about 50 feet behind Urrea's bus.

Division 2 Operator Celestine Johnson reports coolant leaking from the rear of her coach. For Johnson and Urrea, these are their first mechanical problems on Line 200.

Bus stalled on the Santa Monica Freeway near the 405 with 18 passengers, the radio squawks.

"The reason you have to be really top-notch out there, is because when you get out there, you don't really have time to be guessing," Nielsen said.

"The people who appreciate what we do are the operators themselves, because they are the ones on the front lines, like we are," Perez said. "They are the ones who know if we help them or we don't help them."

Bus will not start. Stranded bus 5308. Low psi.

And FET George Perez is off on his next call.



It's always something. FET George Perez on the job.