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'Mystery Rider' Program is Gauging Metro Customer Service; Rewarding Good Operators

- 'We're trying to improve the quality of customer service.'

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(March 23, 2007) How does Metro's bus and rail service stack up from the customer's perspective? That's what Transit Operations' "Mystery Rider" program is trying to find out – and it's rewarding operators who do a good job for their customers.

Started last December, the year-long pilot program sends "mystery riders" from a product research firm out to ride buses and trains to evaluate operator performance. The firm covers all five service sectors and Metro Rail.

Each month, the firm provides Metro some 100 surveys grading operators on such factors as safe driving, courtesy, passups, giving fare information, correct exterior headsigns, use of a cell phone or personal radio. The survey also grades bus stops and rail stations.

"We're trying to improve the quality of customer service," says Ed Clifford, director of Service Planning and Development. "This survey is absolutely not for disciplinary purposes."

From the survey results received, six operators already have been recognized for providing excellent customer service. Their names were drawn at random from those who qualified in each sector.

The program's first quarterly winners, each of whom received a \$100 Best Buy gift certificate, are operators Betty McClerkin, Division 10, Westside/Central; Victor Aguilar, Division 9, San Gabriel Valley; Marco Gonzales, Division 1, Gateway; Timoteo Aceves, Division 5, South Bay; Martin Nunez, Division 8, San Fernando Valley; and Rosendo Reyes, Metro Blue Line.

"Mystery Rider is an attempt to put light on a very important part of getting people to use Metro service," Clifford says of the \$21,000 program. "Good customer service can make a huge difference."

"And when you're giving good customer service," he continued, "it helps to know that you're being recognized and appreciated. We're trying with this program to give that more emphasis."

