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May Day Marches Posed Challenge for Metro Rail and Bus Operations

- Subway station closed during MacArthur Park melee; both rallies created bus detour headaches

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(May 2, 2007) Metro's response to the May Day immigrant's rights marches in Los Angeles reflected the nature of the rallies, themselves – relatively trouble-free for the first event, chaotic during the afternoon rally.

Metro Rail operated peak subway service throughout the day and scheduled additional cars on the Blue Line, according to Rail Division Transportation Manager Bruce Shelburne, but "in comparison with last year, ridership was very light on the trains."

The problem came when unruly marchers gathered at MacArthur Park jousting with police, who at one point fired foam bullets into the crowd. A number of marchers, media representatives and police suffered minor injuries. Some were transported to hospitals.

During that incident, Shelburne said, the MacArthur Park station was closed. Sheriff's deputies formed a perimeter around the entrance to keep people out, although the station doors remained open.

From about 6:30 p.m. until almost 8 p.m., east- and westbound trains passed through the station, but patrons were not allowed to disembark.

"Before we had to close the station, we were able to get a lot of families out of the area," Shelburne said. "We kept the station open as long as we could."

Morning march delayed

Both marches presented more difficulty for Metro Bus operations, according to Steve Rank, assistant Operations Control manager, beginning with about an hour's delay in the start of the morning march from Olympic Boulevard along Broadway to City Hall. During the march, Broadway buses and east-west lines crossing Broadway between Pico Boulevard and Temple Street were detoured.

"We had anticipated that we'd be done detouring most of our downtown bus lines by 12 or 12:30," he said, "but we didn't start putting buses back on their regular routes until about 1:30, and we didn't have everything back on regular route until about 3 o'clock."

The afternoon rally, for which march organizers had no permit, caused significant delays on Metro bus routes beginning about 4 p.m. A 12-

block section of Wilshire Boulevard between Alvarado and Vermont was closed and buses were detoured in that area between 6th and 8th streets.

None of those closures had been planned and “we were flying by the seat of our pants,” Rank said, but his group had prepared a series of contingency detours that the 13 road supervisors and two assistant managers working the May Day event helped put into effect as they were needed.

“Some of those detours lasted well into the evening,” he said. “We didn’t get all the buses back on regular routes until 9 o’clock last night.”

Metro’s response to this year’s immigrant’s rights marches, despite the subway station closing and unscheduled bus detours, went much more smoothly than the 2006 rally when all transit and law enforcement agencies were overwhelmed by the massive turnout, both Shelburne and Rank said.

“Our preparation was good,” said Shelburne. “We prepared for the worst.”