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As part of an Orientation Tour, Jennifer Mendoza and Jacqueline Martinez, administrative interns, use a Union Station map to explain the Metro Gold Line route to a group of elementary school children from Pasadena. Photo by Ned Racine.



Safety Education Program's Tours Popular Among the Younger Set

- 'A win-win situation for the schools and for us,' manager says.

By NED RACINE

(June 26, 2007) A program to introduce young students to the Metro Rail System has exploded in popularity.

A service of Metro's Rail Safety Education Program, the Orientation Tour program has been taking young students and their chaperones on brief trips on Metro's light and heavy rail lines since 2003. The tours last approximately 90 minutes and usually begin at Union Station, allowing students to ride the Metro Blue, Red and Gold lines.

Popularity of Tours Explodes	
Fiscal Year	Tours
2004	3,638
2005	6253
2006	7,937
2007*	14,000
*Estimated	

All students receive a safety presentation focused on safely using and living near heavy rail and light rail.

"It's a win-win situation for the schools and for us because they have limited funds to go places," explained Barbara Burns, community relations manager, who has led the Transit Safety group for four years. "For us it's great because: One, they get the safety presentation; two, they get used

to going fun places on public transit at an early age.”

Burns said she knows of no other transit agency that does this outreach effort to young students. Burns plans the same tours when the Metro Gold Line East Side Extension opens.

Elementary school children are the primary audience for the Orientation Tour program, although middle schools and several high schools have taken tours. Children must at least be in the first grade. The Orientation Tour staff has also conducted special education and Spanish-speaking only tours.

Why the dramatic growth in participation of the tours? “In 2005 the Fare Media Committee decided that they would make our tours official; they were written into the Fare Media Policy as Safety Education Orientation tours,” said Burns.

10,000 have taken the tour

Jacqueline Martinez and Jessie Sanchez, bi-lingual administrative interns, split the duties of leading the tours. Martinez estimates she has conducted tours for approximately 10,000 children. Burns believes the interns’ youth is an asset when building rapport with the children.

“They are very receptive to it,” Martinez said of her young listeners. She and Sanchez ask the children questions during or at the end of the presentation—usually held on a rail station platform—to check that they are listening. “They always have their hands up ready to answer everything. They get really excited.”

Teachers tell Martinez that after a tour their students “go back home and they get their parents on the train, too, show them where they went . . . show them what they learned. That’s what we want to happen.”

“We emphasize that [the train is] fun as long as they stay safe,” said Martinez, who loves running the tours, in part because of the questions the children ask.

“You would be surprised what [first graders] get out of it,” Martinez said. “They’re very smart when it comes to safety.”