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Among those attending the transit conference in Russia were, from left, FTA Region 9 Administrator Leslie Rogers, FTA Chief of Staff Matthew Welbes, Metro's Leonid Bukhin and the group's Russian translator. Photo courtesy of Leonid Bukhin.

Metro's Leonid Bukhin Participated in U.S. Delegation to Russia

- He saw a changed Russia during transit conference in St. Petersburg and Moscow

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(June 27, 2007) A recent trip to Russia as a member of a delegation of U.S. transit officials was something of a homecoming for Metro's Leonid Bukhin.

But, it was a trip that also was affected by recent tensions between Russian President Putin and President Bush over U.S. plans to place defensive missiles in Eastern Europe.

The delegation was to have been led by Sherry Little, Federal Transit Administration deputy administrator, but she was not able to obtain a Russian visa on time. Instead, Leslie Rogers, administrator of FTA's Region 9 in San Francisco, headed the 19-member delegation.

Bukhin, a project engineering manager in Systems Engineering, grew up in Ukraine and in Moscow and speaks fluent Russian. He was asked to participate by FTA because of his background and experience.

The group met with their Russian counterparts, May 24 – 30, in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Despite best efforts by members of both groups, international tensions made reaching an understanding with Russia on future discussions of joint transportation projects impossible.

At Metro, Bukhin is assigned to the Construction Department where he is involved with communication and electrical systems design and installations on the Eastside Extension and the Metro Orange Line.



CCTV Observer Jeff Roberts and Leonid Bukhin, project leader for design and installation of the Metro Orange Line communications system, discuss the surveillance camera network that allows CCTV observers to view activity at each station on the cross-Valley transitway. Photo by Bill Heard.

Toured transit systems

During the six days of meetings, delegates from both countries gave presentations on such topics as transit project planning, public/private partnerships, transit security, and transport services for the elderly and passengers with disabilities. The U.S. delegates also toured bus, trolley and subway systems in the two cities.

Much of what he observed during the tours of the St. Petersburg and Moscow transit systems didn't compare with Metro's more up-to-date technology, but Bukhin was particularly pleased with the live video surveillance transmissions from moving subway cars.

"They have eight cameras in each train car – 250 cars," he says. "A controller can look at two images simultaneously, and can select interior or exterior views in real time. One camera looks over the train operator's shoulder into the tunnel. That really impressed me."

Aside from the time spent with the colleagues touring transit facilities and discussing common issues, Bukhin was able to see the changes in Russian society and culture since his youth.

Native of Crimea

Bukhin, 42, is a native of Simferopol, Crimea, now an autonomous republic in Ukraine, but still a part of the USSR when he was born in 1964. His family moved to Moscow when he was in the 8th grade and he remained in Russia until he graduated from university in 1988 at age 24.

Bukhin enjoyed the interaction with the Russian transit officials who treated him and his U.S. colleagues very well. But having lived for many years now

in the United States, he found it somewhat difficult to accommodate himself to the new Russian manner.

"Moscow is now the most expensive city to travel to in the world," he said. "When I was younger, the pace was slower and people seemed a bit friendlier."

Economic growth and the development of a global energy market has made Moscow a center of commerce and wealth, which Bukhin feels has removed some of Moscow's uniqueness and replaced it with international conglomerates like McDonalds.

"Nevertheless," he said, "being asked to serve on the U.S. delegation was a great honor and I had a great time seeing places I have not seen in years."