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Robotic carts share the Central Warehouse floor with human co-workers. The carts weigh 3,000 pounds, including their 1,000-pound battery.



Photos by Ned Racine

## Central Warehouse Workers Get a Charge During Their Workdays

- [Q&A:](#) Our reporter interviews a 3,000-pound worker fond of yellow

By NED RACINE

(June 28, 2007) Brawny and patient, yellow and buzzing, 11 robotic carts crisscross each other's paths to deliver parts and supplies within the Metro Support Services Center.

This second generation of Automated Guideway Vehicles (AGVs)—the first were installed in 1986—is part of a \$4 million update to the Central Warehouse's Automated Storage and Retrieval System.



No. 8 transports two shrink-wrapped boxes.

“In the transit environment, we are unique,” said Dieter Hemsing, director of inventory management. Transit agencies from around the world have come to observe the Central Warehouse’s automated facilities, he said.

Jon Lyle, material supervisor of client vendor services, gives the AGVs enthusiastic reviews, both for their durability and accuracy. He should know. During his 24 years with Metro, Lyle has been project manager for the Central Warehouse upgrades.

Lyle has never seen the new AGVs spill a load. “They are very, very graceful,” he added.

To learn more about these graceful machines, I interviewed AGV No.1 in its Central Warehouse home.

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**Q&A: No. 1 tells all.**



No. 1 takes a break in the Automated Guideway Vehicle battery charging area. No. 1 would like

to work as a New York City taxi when it retires from Metro.

**Racine:** I notice you wear the number 1. Does that number have any particular meaning for you?

**No. 1:** I came from a very supportive family. During my testing in Bountiful, Utah, they were always yelling, 'You're Number One. You're number One.' I took it to heart.

**Racine:** You weigh 2,000 pounds, 3,000 pounds including your batteries?

**No. 1:** My weight is a private matter. I would rather concentrate on the fact that I can transport approximately 4,000 pounds. I have very low body fat, by the way.

**Racine:** And you're 60 inches long?

**No. 1:** Not including my two bumpers. They're 8 inches each. I'm a trim 44 inches wide. Sorry if I was a little testy before. Summer is here and I'm trying to lose a couple of pounds.

**Racine:** I understand. How do you reenergize yourself?

**No. 1:** The master computer informs us when we can take a break to recharge. The charging station senses when I have backed in and begins charging me. This system has reduced injuries among my human co-workers, who used to have to exchange batteries for the first generation of AGVs.

**Racine:** How often do you charge?

**No. 1:** In normal operation, 15 minutes every three hours. It's my time to catch up on *Popular Mechanics* magazine.

**Racine:** How do you receive commands from the master computer?

**No. 1:** I prefer to think of them as *suggestions*, Ned. A three-foot-long antenna in the warehouse broadcasts suggestions from the master computer to us.

**Racine:** So you're radio-controlled?

**No. 1:** Radio-*suggested*, a big advantage over our ancestors, who were guided by wires embedded in the concrete floor. Apparently, the wires were easily broken, which compromised the system.

**Racine:** Is the yellow you're wearing for safety?

**No. 1:** OSHA yellow, yes; although my girlfriend thinks I look better in brown.

**Racine:** Does she work in the warehouse?

**No. 1:** One of the new computerized cranes. She's very acrobatic.

**Racine:** How does it make you feel when you consider you cost \$80,000?

**No. 1:** I prefer to dwell on my role in routing 60,000 equipment parts orders and supply transactions each month.

**Racine:** Do you care what you transport?

**No. 1:** An engine, a crate, a transmission, a box of starter motors, it's all the same to me. As long as the load fits within a 48-inch cube, bring it on!

**Racine:** How long would you like to keep working?

**No. 1:** My manufacturer estimates up to 30 years. Then I'd like to try something different. Maybe being a taxi in New York City.

**Racine:** Jon Lyle told me you're much easier to troubleshoot than your ancestors.

**No. 1:** Gee, a guy has a bad day and suddenly he needs troubleshooting?