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Speakers Bureau Will Carry Metro's Message to the Public

- Knowledgeable employees needed as speakers; deadline is Aug. 24

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Aug. 9, 2007) The nation's growing concern with global warming and its possible causes makes this the perfect time for Metro to tell its story to the public, says Communications Manager Helen Ortiz-Gilstrap.

Next month, she'll formally launch "Metro Speaks," a speakers bureau. And, to help carry the agency's message she's looking for employees – from every part of Metro – who are knowledgeable in their area of responsibility and who are comfortable speaking before audiences.

"One of the basic functions of a speakers bureau is that it engages the community and informs them," says Ortiz-Gilstrap, noting that she currently receives as many as five speaking requests a month. "When people learn about what we do and the service we perform, they'll be able to get a better understanding" of how public transportation benefits the region and the environment.

"Many Metro employees are active in community organizations, so this is a great way to reach a lot of people that we can't through our normal advertising and publicity efforts," said Marc Littman, deputy executive officer for Public Relations. "It's also interactive. Audiences give our speakers valuable feedback that we can act on to improve service or address other mobility issues. And public speaking builds confidence that employees can put to work in many aspects of their lives."

Metro is promoting the speakers bureau with a brochure titled "Metro Speaks." Typical requests come from Chambers of Commerce, city officials, community and seniors groups, city commissions, special interest groups and clubs. Ortiz-Gilstrap has responded to at least 25 speaking requests since last November.

"From the requests I'm receiving, people want to know more about how to use public transit," she says. "People are seeking ways to do their part with the impact of climate change."

The speakers bureau will provide volunteers with equipment and materials they can use in conjunction with the knowledge gained from their own experiences working in the transportation industry.

Backgrounder and PowerPoint

Materials include an information backgrounder and a PowerPoint with slides on LA County's population and expected growth, air pollution and traffic congestion, and ways Metro is addressing those problems by planning and building transportation facilities, carpool and bicycle lanes,

and supporting transit-oriented development. The presentation also highlights Metro Rail and the Metro Rapid system.

Ortiz-Gilstrap has set a deadline of Aug. 24 for the first group of employees to volunteer for the speakers bureau. In mid-September, she'll schedule a two-hour familiarization session for volunteers.

Once the speakers bureau is underway, she'll make assignments based on requests and will match the speaker to the audience and its interest. Most presentations will be during working hours, although some will be at breakfast meetings or in the evenings.

For additional information about the speakers bureau or to volunteer, employees can contact Helen Ortiz-Gilstrap at 922-2843 or by e-mail at Ortiz-gilstrap@metro.net.

"As communication ambassadors, the employees who go out to make a talk are speaking for Metro," she says. "They're telling our story."