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Carson Division 18 is having solar panels installed on new steel shade canopies being placed in its parking lot. This trench will soon be the conduit for power generated by the new panels. The \$4.18 million installation of 1,600 solar panels should pay for itself by 2018. Photo by Jimmy Stroup

Shady South Bay Division Canopies to Offer Home to Solar Panels

By JIMMY STROUP

(Aug. 21, 2007) Carson Division 18's main parking lot is off limits at the moment, as Metro installs solar panels atop new shade structures shielding cars, operators and maintainers from the sun.

The \$4.18 million project is Metro's second investment in solar panels; West Valley Division 8 and East Valley Division 15 had panels installed in 2005. This new project at Division 18 is actually the direct result of the success – environmentally and financially – of the previous project.

"When we did the first solar projects at Divisions 8 and 15, it cost us \$3.5 million, but we got a lot of that money back in rebates. \$1.8 million, actually," said Tim Lindholm, Metro project manager, Facilities Operations. "So when we got it back, we took it to the Board and asked if we could reinvest it into another solar project."

Division 18's solar project is roughly the same size as the installations at Divisions 8 and 15 combined. The 417 kilowatt system made up of 1,600 individual panels should also provide a rebate similar to the first project, which Lindholm said they want to use to perpetuate Metro's solar revolution.

"That's the goal again – to keep it going," he said. "When we get this money back, we'll take it to the Board and ask to do this again somewhere else. Hopefully, we'll reinvest that money into more energy-efficient projects."

'Make us money'

With \$25,000 in monthly savings projected for the Carson development, the solar panel operation should pay for itself in 11 years or so, after which the panels will begin to "make us money," Lindholm said.

The Division 18 project had Metro thinking out of the box. Transportation Manager Cynthia Karpman said the division's transportation building has air conditioning units on top, prohibiting the solar panels where they're normally placed: on the roof.

In the end, Metro designed the steel canopies to act both as a mounting area for the panels and as shade for parked cars.

"They work as shade structures for cars, but then they generate power, too, so that's pretty neat," Lindholm said.

Solar panels are also being installed on the maintenance building at Division 18. Construction of the project started on Aug. 1, and Carson should have its parking lot back by the end of October at the latest, complete with power-producing shade canopies.