

[Metro.net](#) (web)

## Resources

► [Safety](#)

► [Pressroom](#) (web)

► [Ask the CEO](#)

► [CEO Forum](#)

► [Employee Recognition](#)

► [Employee Activities](#)

► [Metro Projects](#)

► [Facts at a Glance](#) (web)

► [Archives](#)

► [Events Calendar](#)

► [Research Center/Library](#)

► [Metro Classifieds](#)

► [Bazaar](#)

## Metro Info

► [30/10 Initiative](#)

► [Policies](#)

► [Training](#)

► [Help Desk](#)

► [Intranet Policy](#)

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Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa spoke on the present and future benefits of finding city residents jobs that pay a "living wage." Metro has pledged to work with City workforce agencies to fill 350 bus operator positions by June 2010.



Photos: Jimmy Stroup

## Metro Teams with City to Match People with Career Opportunities

By JIMMY STROUP

(Feb. 21, 2008) As part of the city's Economic Action Plan, Metro has teamed with the City of Los Angeles to reduce regional joblessness and fill some of its bus operator vacancies.

And the agency's dedication to paying competitive wages fits with Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's requirements that the jobs pay enough so workers can live without needing a second job or government assistance.

The agency lived up to its end of the agreement, placing 198 bus operators into jobs in 2007 through the workforce development program. Metro Executive Officer of Administration Don Ott said the program is working out well for the agency as it strives to fill vacancies.

"Filling ... 300 vacant bus operator positions costs us \$4.5 million in overtime each year – so getting people into those jobs benefits us as much as it does the new operators," Ott said.

"We end up hiring almost everyone who goes through the workforce program because [the workforce development agencies] have already done the preliminary background check and told people who won't meet our qualifications that they aren't suited for Metro," he said. "It saves us a lot of time and gets us candidates we can hire without reservation."



Alphonso Chavez (left), a bus operator at Central City Division 1, came to the agency through the City's workforce development strategy. Don Ott (right), Metro's executive officer of administration, said the job creation program helps Metro fill vacancies and helps people into jobs that pay well and have good benefits.

### **'My future, my career'**

Alphonso Chavez, a bus operator at Central City Division 1, typifies the success of the workforce program.

Hired more than a year ago, Chavez said he was bouncing from job to job until an advertisement for Metro at the workforce center at Wilshire Boulevard and Normandie Avenue made him reconsider his future.

"I was doing all kinds of jobs: handyman, private driver, landscaping," Chavez said. "But when I took the Metro training, I knew this wasn't going to be just another job. This was going to be my future, my career, so I took it as seriously as I could."

Metro has committed to filling another 150 bus operator positions by Villaraigosa's 2010 deadline of filling 100,000 jobs, which would be a total of 350 hired.

"It's all part of an economic action plan to help aid families in a tough economy," Villaraigosa said. "There's a connection between lowering the crime in the city and getting people a good job. Their self-esteem goes up, their kids do better in school because things are stable at home thanks to a good paying job, and their lives are improved in every way. This is all connected."