

[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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ADA Compliance Officer Chip Hazen is at the forefront of the entire agency's work to help Metro's customers with disabilities use the system as easily and effectively as possible. Here he holds the Metro Flash booklet displaying "901" as a customer with a vision impairment who wanted to ride the Orange Line would. *Photo by Jimmy Stroup*



Booklets Allow Riders to Flash Info to Operators

- Booklets aid customers with vision impairments to navigate Metro system

By JIMMY STROUP

(March 11, 2008) Ten thousand hard plastic booklets arrived at Metro last week – a restocking for the last 10,000 the agency recently ran out of.

But the booklets aren't for reading in any conventional sense. Unless you can read Braille. Or unless you're a bus operator.

The purpose of the Metro Flash booklets is to help people with vision impairments get on the right buses by communicating line numbers to Metro's operators. The spiral-bound booklets also have a few pages of basic information for reference.

The booklets are one of the primary resources the agency provides for individuals with vision impairments to help them use Metro.

"It's simple to use, really," Chip Hazen, Metro's Americans with Disabilities Act compliance officer, said. "The person with a disability flips to the set of numbers that designate the line he or she wants to ride. Operators stop and help them on, or say, 'Not me, but your bus is the next bus.'"

The booklets have been used at Metro since 1995 in one form or another. The original books were made of a stiff paper but in the same design as the current booklets. Subsequent books have been a hard plastic and had

Braille lettering imbedded in the plastic.

Less than \$3 each

This printing of 10,000 cost the agency less than \$3 a piece, said Jeff Ringsrud, senior marketing and communications officer, who worked with the online vendor Braille Superstore for the procurement.

This price tag was substantially less than the last batch from the late 1990s, which cost \$6.50 each, Hazen said. The cost isn't all that much, he said, when you consider how useful the patrons find Metro Flash.

"We have quite a few people who say they couldn't get around without it," Hazen said.

Operators in the field are very familiar with Metro Flash; Metro's Bus Operator Rule Book section 7.112 specifically lists the booklets and procedures to follow when the operator sees a patron using one.

Hazen said it was an operator who actually came up with the idea that became Metro Flash. The original idea was to have a set of numbers the blind could arrange onto a sign on a stick to hold up for high visibility.

Who Thought of It?

"We can't really remember who came up with the idea, to be honest," Hazen said. "I'm hoping that the operator who thought it up will see this article and give me a call. It's been so successful – I'd like to see that person get some recognition."

Other transit agencies are constantly asking Hazen for a few of the booklets so they can provide them to their customers, too. Hazen said that so far, Metro is the only transit agency in California providing something like Metro Flash to its riders.

With estimates ranging up to as many as 10,000 blind riders on Metro's system, the Metro Flash booklets are likely to get picked up by new riders or existing customers whose booklets are worn out from 10 years of use.

Metro Flash booklets are readily available to those who need them through Metro's Customer Information.