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Equipment Maintenance Supervisor Juan Castro (left), Mechanic "A" Carlos Martinez, and Warranty and Equipment Mechanic Kevin Cameron pose near a transmission being tested on the dynamometer, which simulates road conditions and measures performance.



Equipment Maintenance Supervisor Saves Metro Big Money

By JIMMY STROUP

(April 10, 2008) Since December 2007, Juan Castro has saved the agency more than a quarter of a million dollars. And all he did was employ a little of what he called "common sense."

As an equipment maintenance supervisor, Castro oversees the repair and rejuvenation of hundreds of transmissions in Metro's coaches. Normally, a transmission comes into Central Maintenance and is disassembled to determine why it was sent for repair.

But over the years, Castro and his technicians noticed that occasionally a transmission would be taken apart for no reason —there wasn't a thing wrong with it. Often the technician would have a feeling that the transmission was all right even before that happened.

Castro figured that a good deal of energy and money could be saved by identifying these instances before a mechanic goes to the trouble and expense of opening up a perfectly good machine.

The average transmission coming in to Central Maintenance will have more than 150,000 miles on



Equipment Maintenance Supervisor Juan Castro is responsible for saving more than \$250,000 in parts and labor by catching good transmissions before they get torn apart for an unnecessary rebuild. This transmission, the 22nd of 34 he's caught, will soon be shifting gears on a Local Metro bus near you.

it since its last rebuild. But these odd cases Castro started to look for would have low mileage and appear almost new.

Since he started to look for these oddballs, Castro has found 34 cases where the transmission came in labeled as bad but turned out to be perfectly serviceable. This process, called "re-qualification," is what's saving the agency some big money.

Money saved from doing nothing

It takes the average technician 36 hours of labor and \$4,000 worth of parts to rebuild a transmission for a grand total of \$5,200. It takes Castro about \$500 of labor

and testing to figure out the transmission doesn't need a rebuild.

"You can just look at them and tell a lot about it. Well, I guess a transmission technician could. You couldn't," he laughed. "But you could learn. We all didn't know anything about transmissions once."

The first clue for Castro and mechanics like Carlos Martinez – who both have more than 25 years of experience poking around in bus engines and transmissions – is the mileage.

"If it's got low mileage and it's come in for a rebuild, something under 50,000 miles, there's a strong possibility that it's good and that there's nothing wrong with it internally," Martinez said.

Now, instead of simply opening a transmission, Castro takes a look at each new device and marks candidates for his "re-qualification" program with a yellow maintenance tag: "Save for Juan Castro."

After the cursory examination, Castro will put the transmission on a dynamometer, which runs the transmission under stressful conditions and measures the performance, aided by a technician to run the test equipment – a "dyno tech."

If it tests well, Castro has basically written Metro a \$5,000 check. He puts the transmission on a pallet, marks it good and moves on to the next case in what he calls his "detective" work.

But only the strong survive. Castro won't send out a transmission if he thinks it won't run for at least 100,000 miles before coming back to Central Maintenance for an overhaul. Questionable cases are all fully rebuilt

by the mechanics he works with.

"We don't want to give the guys at the divisions a bad part," Castro said. "It's a lot of work for them to take a transmission off and replace it. We don't want them to go to the trouble unless we think the replacement, the rebuilt transmission, will last on that coach for at least two years."

Following the paper trail

Castro also saved the agency more than \$100,000 by identifying six bad transmissions that were part of a recent buy from the Allison Transmission Company. Since they were still under full warranty, Metro sent them to Allison and got six new, working transmissions.

All told, Castro's preemptive detective work has saved the agency roughly \$277,000 in parts and labor – not to mention that technicians' time isn't wasted rebuilding transmissions that don't need it. The entire affair has added a new level of efficiency to the transmission rebuilding process.

"It's common sense," he laughed. "But the people working here have the experience to turn that common sense into something that saves time and money."