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Vandalism Prematurely Ages Vertical Transportation Machines

- Maintenance team innovates to protect agency assets, rider access

By NED RACINE, Editor

(June 19, 2008) The elevator and escalator maintenance staff expects their machines to age. What troubles them is the vandalism prematurely aging their millions of dollars of equipment.

Particularly susceptible are Metro's 129 elevators. They are damaged by dropped pens and kicking feet and ballpeen hammers and human urine. "What's destroying our budget is the vandalism," explains Bobby Hupp, project manager for Vertical Transportation Facilities—Operation.

Recently an elevator in the Green Line's Avalon station was trashed by someone using a ballpeen hammer to break each elevator window—a determined effort since that vandal had to break two layers of safety glass separated by a vinyl film.



All the hand rails have been stolen from this Harbor Transitway elevator.

Because of safety regulations, an elevator cannot run with broken glass. So even though the elevator was mechanically fine, it could not move per California regulations. Each broken sheet cost \$1,200 to replace.

Elevators in the Green Line's Manchester station recently had their lights broken, indicator light and handrails stolen and floor damaged. Repairs will total \$22,000, without the cost of labor.

Vertical Transportation Facilities—Operation estimates at least 25 to 30 percent of its maintenance budget is spent on repairing vandalism. "We don't have a vandalism budget," notes Vance Gillless, maintenance supervisor for Vertical Transportation Facilities—Operation.

The type of vandalism changes with the season. "In the warmer months we get more scratching, graffiti, more cut hand rails [on escalators]," Hupp says. "In the winter months our elevators become encampments for the homeless. I've seen things in these elevators I never dreamed I would see."

Still Hupp says the elevators are in service 99 percent of the time.

Every morning Hupp's mechanics perform a sweep of their assigned elevators to ensure they are up and running. In addition, the mechanics

have daily, weekly and monthly maintenance assignments. So if an elevator is down, it may only be down for a 20-minute maintenance inspection.

"We schedule our maintenance after rush hours; we try to do it . . . mid-morning or early afternoon, so we don't impact patrons who use our equipment," Hupp insists.

Inoperable elevators not only inconvenience Metro riders, they present an obstacle for passengers with disabilities. Hupp sites vandalism to the Harbor Transitway's 37th Street USC/Exposition Park station, one of the transitway's 12 elevators, as creating such an obstacle.

Although the station has twin elevators, they are on opposite sides of the 110 Freeway, so if one of them is damaged, it's a significant barrier for a disabled person. When Metro offers alternate services in these situations, it incurs additional costs.

And, of course, repairing vandalism steals resources from other projects. At the Green Line's Aviation station alone, \$90,000 has been spent over the last six months to repair vandalism.



At the Green Line's Avalon station, urine has rotted a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch by $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch steel bar that provides external support for elevator windows.

- Photos by Ned Racine

Part of the damage stems from people using station platforms as urinals. At the Avalon station, for example, urine has rotted a $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch by $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch steel bar that provides external support for elevator windows.

"We are probably going to spend \$500,000 this year just for urine-related damage," Hupp says. Elevator floors suffer the most, both from the corrosive quality of the urine and the chemicals used to neutralize it.

Hupp says it is not unusual to receive an elevator cleanup call every hour at the 7th Street and Metro station, for example. Hupp says the onsite custodian there "actually caught a gentlemen in a three-piece suit, with a briefcase, urinating in one of our elevators."

Besides creating an odorous situation, the urine flows behind the flooring and eats away components of the elevator floor. So Gillless and Hupp are trying new ways to protect the elevator mechanisms.



Bobby Hupp shows the damage urine has done to the floor of an elevator along the Harbor Transitway.

Technicians will soon begin replacing Harbor Transitway elevator floors with a single sheet of stainless steel. Other technicians will soon install a stainless steel floor in the shape of a square pan, borrowing a successful idea from the

Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority.

Unfortunately, these floors run \$12,000 to \$15,000 each, more than twice the cost of the usual floor, but Hupp hopes it will extend the life of the floor by three or four times.

"Currently, we are replacing floors as fast as we can," Hupp says. "We get about a year's life out of a floor." The new stainless steel floors are expected to last three to five years.

Hupp shakes his head as he recalls a young mother pushing a baby stroller, with a rag over her face, to reduce the smell from the elevator she was about to enter.

Even with all the tools and dedicated technicians at his disposal, Hupp believes the turning point in his battle to lengthen the life of his equipment would be human beings showing more respect for their fellow human beings.

[Continued from Part I:](#) Transportation Machines Lead an Up and Down Life