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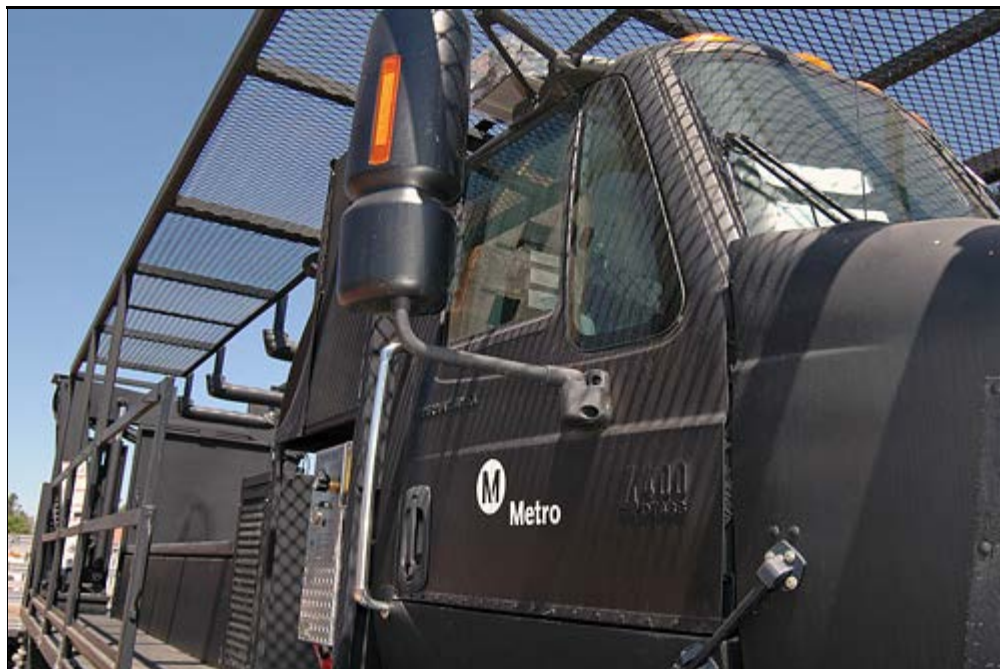
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Built on a 31-foot-long truck bed, Metro's new HiRail Emergency Response Vehicle was designed to be used when lives are at risk. *Photos by Ned Racine*

Q: Where does Metro's new emergency vehicle get to park?

A: Anywhere it wants to.

By NED RACINE, Editor

(Aug. 12, 2008) Think of sleek and bright; a vehicle that seems to whisper, "Drive me on twisting roads."

Metro's new HiRail Emergency Response Vehicle (ERV) is nothing like that. It's all hard surfaces and right angles painted in frumpy black. But it might save your life in a dire situation.

"The reason we need this is because there is no other way of trucking or transporting men and masses of equipment to an incident in a tunnel or on a track where it is inaccessible by [normal] vehicle," said Arthur Grant, Metro Security sergeant.

According to Grant, the new vehicle is the best option for bringing fire department search-and-rescue personnel or law enforcement officers into a critical situation.

Compatible with all standard-gauge railroad tracks nationwide, including Metro Rail, Amtrack, Metrolink and major freight lines, the vehicle was built in Chicago to specifications developed by Dan Cowden, director of security, and the Non-



Metro Security Sgt. Arthur Grant

Revenue Operations unit led by Harold Torres, assistant manager, equipment maintenance.

"The ERV is the first vehicle of its kind in the nation," Cowden said. "We've already received inquiries from other major transit operators regarding the ERV."

Cowden conceived of the ERV after participating in an emergency drill on the Metro Green Line, when he witnessed a Sheriff's Department SWAT team approach a train, with no protection from arms fire.



Metal shields at the front and rear of the vehicle have bulletproof windows, designed to protect the driver and SWAT team personnel.

Now, with the ERV's shields, law enforcement SWAT teams will be able to approach a train with cover, particularly important in a hostage rescue or similar emergency. To increase the value of the new vehicle, Metro added capabilities needed by fire departments in a fire-fighting or rescue scenario.

Built on a 31-foot-long truck bed, the vehicle would be used when lives are at risk from terrorist attacks or armed assailants, explained Grant, whose job requires that he consider such scenarios and the means to end them.

"It's all about readiness," he said. "We can't just sit idly by and do nothing. Although we're transit security and we do our share when we can, we need to have [equipment] on standby to help [fire and police personnel] out because they are helping us out."

Like the rest of the high-rail fleet, this vehicle's rail wheels drop down hydraulically and lift the truck off its front tires and onto its rail wheels. The back tires maintain contact with the road, so they can push the vehicle forward on the track.

To reach a Red Line or Purple Line station, for example, the ERV might be put on the rails at Metro Red Line Division 20 and driven into the subway, where it has already been tested.

Metal shields at the front and rear of the vehicle have bulletproof windows, designed to protect the driver and SWAT team personnel. If there is potential the ERV may come under fire, it can be driven by a joystick from a shielded position behind the truck cab, using a video camera placed at the front of the vehicle, and can operate in a lights-out environment. The vehicle can also tow or push trailers with additional equipment.

"I think it's important for people to realize that we are becoming more and more ready for any kind of event that might take place, whether it be natural or man-made," said Grant, noting that the vehicle and its trailers were purchased through a grant from the Department of Homeland

Security.

As many as twenty rescue or law enforcement personnel sit on two rows of padded seats covering storage compartments. Onboard is a 500-gallon tank of fire-fighting foam and a generator; electrical outlets line the outside of the truck bed. A remote-controlled crane (with an 8,000-pound capacity) sits at the left rear of the vehicle.

The ERV's diesel engine even includes an exhaust scrubber to meet safe emissions standards for tunnels.

Last week Grant drove the vehicle to Los Angeles Fire Department Station 88 in the west San Fernando Valley, one of the department's urban search-and-rescue headquarters, to introduce the vehicle and listen to firefighters' comments.

Grant values that input because, although Metro will maintain the vehicle, its primary users will be fire and police departments in emergency response situations.

Metro Security will use the ERV on a regular basis for tunnel security sweeps, and Rail Operations will use the vehicle periodically.

"It's the sort of thing you hope you never use for the reasons it was intended," Grant said. "You have to be prepared for anything, and, unfortunately, preparation is expensive."