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Rail General Manager Mike Cannell and Bus and Rail Director Roman Alarcon monitor crowds from the Los Angeles Sheriff's Dept. Emergency Operations Center post (EOC) at the agency's Gateway Plaza Headquarters. *Photo: Gayle Anderson*

Smaller Crowds to MJ Memorial Keep Metro Running Smoothly

By Laura Kloth
Staff Writer

(July 7, 2009) Smaller than anticipated crowds for Michael Jackson's memorial Tuesday at the Staples Center may have disappointed vendors, but it was wonderful news for Metro officials who made special efforts to keep transit running smoothly all day.

With the memorial service well under way by mid morning, Los Angeles Sheriff's Lt. Jenny L. Bethune said the morning commute had been "very good and very smooth" all along Metro's light rail and bus network.

Bethune was joined by Metro CEO Art Leahy, Rail General Manager Mike Cannell, and Bus and Rail Director Roman Alarcon as she monitored the crowds from the Los Angeles Sheriff's Dept. Emergency Operations Center post (EOC) at the agency's Gateway Plaza Headquarters.

Watching the crowds on television, some smiled a sigh of relief noting that operations were running well despite road closures on Olympic and Flower and restrictions on movement through other areas around Staples and the Nokia Theater that forced Metro to reroute several Metro bus lines.

To prepare for the event, Bethune said her department met with Metro officials and Los Angeles Police personnel Thursday.

At one point, the LAPD wanted to completely shut down service on the Metro Blue Line at Pico Station, but Bethune said the concerted efforts by her department, Metro and Transit Service Bureau officials assured the

LAPD they had the situation under control.

LASD Capt. Pat Jordan said past events like last year's immigration rallies and the recent turmoil following the Lakers' NBA championship win were indicators that the sheriff's staff needed shoring-up to cover more ground. Answering the call, sheriff's personnel who typically work graffiti patrols were reassigned, while others were being asked to work overtime.

"So we've learned when you have a big event, you know that you actually have to have your people spread out," he said. "It isn't just going to be impacting the area where you have the problem. If it's really big, you're going to be impacted all along the line."

Jordan said he spent years working out the West Hollywood area and noted that the LASD has extensive experience in handling large crowds. "I think we're getting to be old hats at it. Most people are trying to play catch up, but we just open up and we're ready to go," he said.

Cannell said his department would be monitoring the events of the day, and make changes if necessary.

"We had put additional bus and train service out. There does not seem to be a surge that we anticipated. Everything is going very smoothly and we hope the exodus will be as calm as the entrance," he said.

By Tuesday afternoon, Alarcon announced the bus line detours were being cancelled as of 3:45 p.m. while Bethune noted earlier the Emergency Operations Center had shut down by 3 p.m.

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