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Duane Martin's image appeared on billboards and posters during Metro's 'Imagine' campaign in 2008. He quipped: "I've gotten quite the ribbing. People are talking about taking up graffiti as a hobby...."

Director of Transportation Duane Martin Retires Oct. 2 after 33 Years

- He stays in transportation but takes an executive management position in the private sector, where he'll oversee light rail operations.

By GAYLE ANDERSON

(Sept. 24, 2009) After 33 years on the job – which he began as a bus operator in 1976 – Duane Martin will retire from Metro, Oct. 2, as Director of Transportation.

But leaving his Metro post does not mean retirement for Martin. In a little more than a month, he'll be taking up a new position in executive management in the private-sector side of the rail industry.

Martin's years on the job spans three decades of defining moments in Los Angeles history that challenged public transportation to the limits: the 1984 Olympics, the 1992 civil unrest and the 1994 Northridge earthquake.

During the civil unrest, the entire city was shut down south of Washington Boulevard and west of Vernon, Martin said. Every single bus had been pulled out of South Central Los Angeles. Only the Blue Line was running. Martin recalls the moment of decision: "Lots of people went to work today and they have no way get back home to Compton and Long Beach if we don't keep running." Martin opted to put a Sheriff's deputy on board and an operator on both ends of the train. "We ran every single train that night. The operators were willing and it was a proud moment for us."

Martin joined the SCRTD in 1976 as a bus operator at the age of 21. It was the first real job for the New York native who arrived on the West Coast in 1973.

< Martin revisits his
career in transit.



^ Duane Martin was 21 when he took up the wheel.

Starting at Crossroads Division 2, he worked as an operator for nine years, finishing the first level of his transit career on a high note by ranking sixth in the MTA Bus Rodeo. "It's a total accomplishment just to qualify," he said. "It means keeping your record clean and landing in the top percent of operators."

At the SCRTD, he rose through the ranks to Vehicle Operations road supervisor in 1985, a job that includes observing and monitoring compliance to the rules and procedures along with setting up detours and conducting accident investigations. It was in that capacity where Martin developed his passion for "controlling the chaos" – his term for "putting things back and making things work when something goes wrong."

When the Blue Line was beginning to take shape in 1990, Martin joined the rail control center (ROC) and during the next seven years found himself on the starting line of both the Red Line and Green Line.

In 1997, he took charge of the Blue Line and Green Line in his capacity of senior supervisor and then as Division 11 manager.

In a fast-paced fiscal year between 2002 and 2003, Martin went from managing field operations at ROC to ROC Manager. As part of a cross-training management team covering all the bases, he became manager of the Gold Line, then manager of the Red Line. "As a result, everybody was working as a team; we were all familiar with everything," he said.

Rail GM Mike Cannell appointed Martin Director of Transportation shortly after Cannell came on board in the last months of 2007. In that position, Martin became responsible for all the rail operations as well as Central Instruction.

Roman Alarcon, Director of Bus and Rail Operations Control, in charge of the control centers, is Martin's counterpart on the mainline.

"We've worked so close together that we were known as the Roman and Martin show," said Alarcon, who has worked with Martin for at least 10 years. "I'm sad to see him go and wish him the best. He has not only been a co-worker and a friend but also a great mentor."

"Duane has been a part of Metro through many transitions and his depth of experience is going to be missed," said Mike Cannell, General Manager of Rail Operations.



Working on the railroad: Duane Martin on his working relationship with Director of Fleet Maintenance George Kennedy: "He gives me the trains. I put the trains out on the street. I can't do my job without him so he has to give me what I need. I'm the end customer."

"Under his leadership, on-time performance is at 99 percent, morale is up and he and his partner, George Kennedy, Director of Fleet Maintenance, maintain 100 percent pull outs routinely," he said.

"Duane Martin is one of the best, most dedicated, and conscientious transportation professional that I have ever been associated with in my 39 years in this business," said Kennedy.

Kennedy tells the tale of his first day on the job as maintenance manager at Division 11 on June 4, 2001. Martin walked in Kennedy's new and unfamiliar office and ticked off a list of seemingly insurmountable challenges and said "I hope you can fix these issues." Then, as he was leaving, turned around and said "Good Luck." It was the start of a beautiful friendship, said Kennedy.

Cannell has appointed Gold Line Transportation Manager Tom Jasmin as acting Director of Transportation. "Tom is an ideal candidate and one who has managed bus divisions, the BOC, ROC and a number of Rail Divisions."

It was Jasmin, who, as manager of the Green Line start-up team, hired Martin as one of the seven supervisors for the start-up. "That was where I learned the nuts and bolts of running a train," said Martin. "I watched the Green Line grow from inception all the way through the start of operations in the summer of '95."

Metro Blue Line Rail Division Transportation Manager Robert Castanon praises Martin's unique management style. "In working with Duane Martin, I have realized his forte for building rapport with co-workers and people in general. His understanding and ability to inspire represents true leadership skills."

When ask to describe his management style, Martin says he tries to be fair and honest. He points to a worn and yellowing piece of paper taped to his desk that he calls his "daily prayer."

In simple terms, here are the words that start Martin's day at 5 a.m.: "Lead by example, listen aggressively, communicate purpose and meaning, create a climate of trust, look for results not salutes, take calculated risks, go beyond standard procedure, build up your people, generate unity, and improve your people's quality of life."

"One of the good things about operations is that there's a lot of good people that know what to do. Filling in a void is not as hard as you think if everybody works as a team. And that's what we do at Metro."

I've put in some long days, but
the years went by really fast.

—Duane Martin



Looking back over the years, represented by memorabilia collected in a bookshelf populated by SCTR, MTA and Metro pins, event hats, photographs of good times at work, family and movie stars on the set, and more than a few plaques and acrylic trophies, he sighs and shakes his head. "I've put in some long days, but the years went by really fast."

Martin and wife Colleen, who make their home in Covina, have two grown sons and one daughter plus the happy addition of four grandchildren.