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## Miles Walked, Promises Kept:

### Metro's own Mitigation team tends to community needs while Metro builds a railroad

(Nov. 13, 2009) As construction of the Metro Gold Line's new extension got under way, Metro's own Mitigation team – handily managed by Community Relations Manager Yvette Rapose – worked hand-in-hand with area businesses and residential neighbors to keep the project progressing smoothly.

Say you're a business owner situated along the Extension's six-mile alignment.

You've got a broken fence, your utilities have stopped working, maybe your sidewalk has suddenly sprouted orange safety cones and barricades and you're afraid your competition will start to pull your customers away?

**Solution:** The Community Relations Mitigation Team.

"The Mitigation team sets the standard and maintains quality control for how our contractors interact with the public," says Rapose. "We also work hand-in-hand with project management to insure the mitigations that we promised during the planning process are executed or completed as per the environmental documents."

Unofficially, the team is on call 24-hours to provide assistance.

"We mitigate for noise, dust and any other related construction impacts," she says. "If a contractor has to work around the clock, then we make sure the work that must continue has the least level of noise possible."

## Problems solved



Mitigation team is on the job at Mariachi Plaza in this photo taken Feb. 5, 2009. Clockwise from front and center: Yvette Rapose, Cristina Cornado, Perla Berry, Olga Arroyo, Lorena Hernandez and Olga Lopez.

One example involved a restaurant owner who lost parking on First Street, and then began losing customers.

"We helped set up the business a little differently. If customers couldn't come in the door as before, why not try serving take-out style?" said Rapose. The mitigation team helped the restaurant owner market the new service and kept his customers coming back.

"The job is finding creative solutions for perceived impact related to construction," she said. "It's getting business owners to perceive their situation in a new light."

Similarly, when parking was removed at First and Boyle, businesses there didn't have rear parking. The solution was only one street away.

"We discovered Pennsylvania Avenue, a wide street in the middle of the neighborhood."

The Mitigation team collaborated with the appropriate city departments and ended up getting the parking on Pennsylvania converted to angled parking. The new arrangement yielded 22 parking spaces, more than had been lost.

Typically, the main street shops and businesses in the area are 'mom-and-pop' enterprises. Rapose recalls a uniform shop run by an older woman, who had been providing uniforms for medical technicians, law enforcement officers, security personnel and others for years.

Now construction was partially blocking the sidewalk and she was afraid her customers couldn't stop by on their lunch hour.

"Again, we were put on order to come up with a new way to conduct business," said Rapose. "The solution was to set up a website where her customers could order uniforms. Now, we knew she wasn't computer savvy, so rather than setting up an online shopping cart that involved banking relationships and security, we made an order form online that could be faxed directly to the shop."

**Responsibilities and challenges**

The Mitigation team hit the ground running at the start of construction in July 2004.

"Public outreach comes first. That means weekly meetings at the construction field office to review any planned activities that might have an impact on a public right-of-way. If so, we saturate the impacted area with notices," said Rapose. "We maintain communication channels with stakeholder groups in the community, including elected officials and the media."

The biggest responsibility and challenge, she adds, is construction impact mitigation.

"We become technical experts. We come to know the activity inside and out because we're the ones that have to explain what's going on.

"Picture this: You have a house. We're in the street relocating gas and water lines. We need to make sure your gas and water lines are working. How? We actually check in homes, door to door. We coordinate access to the home with the resident and go right in there and check the plumbing and the stove and the water to make sure we relocated your line as we

should have," she said.

New mitigation efforts are under way, and the team is tending to other communities in construction areas: the Orange Line Chatsworth Station, and the I-405 widening.

But on the eve of the official opening of the Metro Gold Line to East Los Angeles, Rapose drives down First Street and sees welcome signs everywhere.

It's a new day on the Eastside.

There's not an orange cone in sight; the barricades are gone, a light rail train glides between beautiful stations and, most importantly, the smiles on local faces are wider than ever, thanks to Rapose and her hardworking Metro Mitigation Team.

*--from Gayle Anderson*