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CEO Art Leahy talks shop at all-staff meeting Dec. 9.

CEO Art Leahy Names Lonnie Mitchell Interim Chief of Operations at All Hands Meeting

- Employees Bid Farewell to Carolyn Flowers

By Laura Kloth
Staff Writer

(Dec. 15, 2009) Amid hugs and tears, Metro employees said good-bye to outgoing Chief Operations Officer Carolyn Flowers at an afternoon farewell party Dec. 11 in the Gateway Building cafeteria.

Flowers is leaving Metro to assume the post of Executive Director of the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) in North Carolina.

After thanking Flowers for her years with the agency, Metro CEO Art Leahy said, "I am sorry she's leaving. It's been a pleasure working with her. She's a dedicated employee. She works very hard. She's very diligent."

In response, Flowers said she was sad to be leaving, but excited about her new job. "I'm going there to try to expand the system, and take the legacy of Los Angeles with me."



Employees fill Metro Café dining room for farewell to departing Chief Operations Officer Carolyn Flowers. Procurement chief Lonnie Mitchell, at left with Flowers, steps in as interim Chief Operations Officer.

Chief Administrative Services Officer Lonnie Mitchell has been named interim Chief Operations Officer effective Dec. 14, replacing Flowers.

During the All Hands Meeting two days earlier, the CEO pointed out Mitchell's extensive naval career, saying he had great deal of experience managing large operations.

Leahy also thanked outgoing Planning Chief Carol Inge saying Inge played a critical role in getting Metro Board to approve the Long Range Transportation Plan. Inge's farewell party is planned for Dec. 17 in the cafeteria.

"I'm leaving with a really good feeling that the rest of the planning department will be here, they're so qualified and so professional. I have full confidence they'll be able to carry forward the work that we've been doing," Inge said.

Leahy said some "gradual" changes would be occurring at Metro over the

next few months which include more updates on service schedules to provide better service to customers.

"The real problem is that we are running more service than we can really afford to run," Leahy said referring to bus operations. He noted that bus ridership was about 2 million a day in 1980, but now has slipped to 1.3 million. The reduction in numbers can be directly attributed to additional rail lines available, along with individual municipal bus services.

"The good news is that the base service is very high which is about eight percent higher than in 1990, but the ridership is about a third less," he said.



CEO Leahy fields questions from a packed board room at all-staff meeting.

Comparing Los Angeles to cities like Chicago and Philadelphia, Leahy said Metro currently has the "lowest fares, lowest load ratios, the lowest boardings per hour."

Referring to the ongoing consolidation of Metro's five service sectors Leahy said, "We're going to return to the more conventional organization structure which involves creating a transportation and maintenance department."

He defined transportation to include radio dispatch, street supervision, division dispatch, while maintenance would take in bus cleaning, fueling and servicing. He said the consolidation would create two new positions and he encouraged employees who qualified to apply.