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ADA Compliance Administrator Chip Hazen helped arrange the training session for students with hopes of integrating the class into Metro's ongoing instructional efforts to assist visually impaired patrons.

Los Angeles Area Blind Students Get Tips on Taking a Bus

• Pilot Program Expected to Benefit Students, Bus Operators

By Laura Kloth
Staff Writer

(March 16, 2010) Several Los Angeles area students who are legally blind were given the opportunity to learn how to safely board Metro's buses and utilize the TAP program during a recent visit to Metro's Operations Central Instruction training site.

One by one primary grade students from the Frances Blend School for the Visually Disabled joined students from Irving and Widney public schools as they boarded Metro's buses, and listened to helpful tips from Metro instructors like Transit Operations Supervisor Francisca Montes-Jurado.

The nearly 100-year-old school is the only public school for blind children



west of the Mississippi, according to Terry Fields, Orientation and Mobility Instructor at LA Unified.

TOS Instructor Shonda Breland chats with a student from the Frances Blend School for the Visually Handicapped during a March 10 training session for the students.

"Right there where you're holding to your right that's the best place for you to sit because the bus operator can watch you from here to make sure that you get off where you're suppose to," Montes-Jurado explained to a couple of middle school students.

Systems Project Manager Vanessa Smith explained Metro's TAP program to the students and their mobility instructors, who are typically responsible for helping students with the application process. She said the disabled fare is \$14 a month and can easily be loaded onto a TAP card.

"The card is a smart card that contains a computer chip and an antenna. Instead of a paper pass, the technology allows the card to be electronically loaded. And it knows exactly what's available when you swipe it," she said.



LA Unified Mobility instructor Vince Fazzi helps students Rudolfo Zamudio (on ramp) and Daniel Enriquez board a Metro bus.

Students took time to examine the TAP fare box located next to the operator, and many walked along the bus checking out the rails, steps and seating while Mobility Instructors Tim Toomey and Vince Fazzi explained the arrangement.

"That's a strap for you to hold on if there's no place to sit and the bus is crowded, people hold on really tight to that and then as the bus moves, it kind of shakes a little bit and you're all safe and sound when you hold on to that real tight," Toomey explained to one student.

A joint Metro – L.A. Unified operation

ADA Compliance Administrator Chip Hazen said the lessons were scheduled at the request of Terry Fields, Orientation and Mobility Instructor at LA Unified, who called Metro for assistance late last year.

Many of the children enjoyed riding around the training lot in the articulated bus. They also enjoyed listening to the warning alarm that signaled the ramp was being deployed.

Special Education Instructor Joanna Isorena, who brought her kindergarten class, said the lesson provided the students with "a good daily living skill" while exposing them to public transportation which isn't always their parent's first choice of travel.



Balancing aboard a moving articulated bus was somewhat of a challenge for students and Mobility Instructor Tim Toomey as the teacher describes the internal workings of the vehicle.

She also noticed the younger children seemed to enjoy the sound of the bus engine.

"My kids have a lot of sensory needs, it's very surprising when they ride the bus, I guess the vibration, they like it or it calms them down," Isorena said.

By the end of the March 10 lesson, Fields was extremely pleased with the results.

Mutual benefit

"Our goal was for our kids to get oriented to several different kinds of buses. We've been having some problems on field trips getting the kids out into the community, getting them on and off the bus, and the bus operators have a timeline that they're trying to keep," said Fields.

"It was great for the kids," she added. "I think it was great for the bus operators and trainers to get to meet our kids and see what we deal with too. I think mutually it was great all around."





From left, Operators Victor Gonzalez and Div. 1, Mary Gillison Div. 5, join Instructors Shonda Breland, Kika Montes-Jurado, Audrey Turner, Vince Wilkes Frank Cecere, Assistant Operations Instruction Manager.

Hazen said older students would benefit from the lesson as they transition from high school to adulthood and need to get around on public transportation. Currently many of them rely on an expensive Access Paratransit program that costs \$32 a trip.

During their first meeting in November, Hazen suggested the piloted effort could become integrated into Metro’s overall effort to assist disabled individuals who use public transit.

At that meeting, Mike Turk, Assistant Manager at the OCI, suggested that “This may develop into something that’s an ongoing thing.”