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ADA Compliance Administrator Chip Hazen provides disabled students with important information about traveling on Metro. *Photo by Fred Camino*

Braille Institute Students Tour Red Line, Get Transit Updates

(April 4, 2010) Returning from a tour of the Red Line, students from the Braille Institute of Los Angeles settled into their seats in the Union Station Conference Room to have lunch and learn from Metro ADA Compliance Administrator Chip Hazen how the agency continues to improve transit for disabled patrons.

Along with Hazen, Community Relations Manager Barbara Burns and her staff were on hand March 23 to serve as tour guides for the students on a trek that took them from the Vermont/Santa Monica station to Union Station and the Gateway building.

Hazen told the students that as part of Metro's "Solutions in Sight" public education campaign, the agency has been busily producing three new 30 second spots to improve safety for disabled riders, including one that began production a couple of weeks ago.



Hazen explains Metro's fare vending machines to students and their guides. *Photo by Fred Camino*

The first video, narrated by Wayne Wassell, Transportation Planning Manager in Metro's Service Planning and Development Department, asks passengers to give up their seat for disabled riders and seniors and allow passengers in wheelchairs to board first.

Hazen said this video, which was produced by Metro Communications, will be shown on Transit TV starting in late April.

A planned second spot will focus on Safety Straps for Mobility Devices or tether strap program which provides straps to riders who use wheelchairs which are used by operators to secure their chairs onto buses. Metro began the program in May 2009 with Metro bus operators being trained on how to safely attach the straps and provide assistance to passengers with disabilities.

The third spot will remind operators about the appropriate manner of assisting disabled riders, as well as provide a background on Federal ADA requirements. Both spots are geared directly to operators and will be shown at Metro bus divisions.

Problems solved

When some of the students complained to Hazen about the difficulties in getting a seat aboard Metro buses, Hazen said a newly formed ADA Quality Assurance Committee is working on this issue.



Braille Institute student Latasha Bense tells Hazen sometimes she struggles to get a seat on the bus or train and wheelchairs tend to get greater priority.

Photo: myMetro.net

One solution, he said, may be color-coding sections of the bus and train to insure passengers know those seats are "only" for seniors and riders with disabilities.

One student asked if bus operators were required to announce stops to

prevent blind passengers from missing their stop when the Automated Voice Annunciator (AVA) system wasn't working.

"Yes, they are required," Hazen said.



Students from the Braille Institute toured the Red Line and learned about Metro's ongoing ADA improvements for disabled riders. *Photo by Fred Camino*

In fact, Metro's efforts are far ahead of other agencies with stops called out 85 to 90 percent of the time in LA County, while they called out about 13 percent of the time across the nation, he added. "So we're better than the rest of the nation, but we're looking for 100 percent."

The students said they were very pleased with their visit and when Hazen jokingly asked if he'd given them "too much information," one student cheerily yelled out, "the more the merrier."

Each of the students received a Metro map and Braille flash cards, also developed by Metro Communications, to help them communicate stops to bus operators.

-- from Laura Kloth