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Operator Janice Dickson, center, is honored for 'act of valor' at Operations Committee meeting June 17. Pictured, from left, Division 3 Transportation Manager Maria Reynolds, Operations Committee Chair Rita Robinson, CEO Art Leahy, Dickson, Exec. Director of Transportation Roman Alarcon, Chief Operations Officer Lonnie Mitchell, and UTU Local 1607 Chairwoman Lisa Arredondo.

Div. 3 Operator Assists Fellow Employee During Bus Attack

By Laura Kloth

Staff Writer

(May 27, 2010) Metro, Div. 3 Bus Operator Janice Dickson says she loves her job and considers it her "life's mission."

"Every time I get behind the wheel, I get a chance to touch someone's life with a smile or kind word," she says.

On April 28, Dickson's mission took a radical twist when she came to the assistance of a fellow Metro employee, Senior Scheduling System Analyst Rollin Baker, who was violently attacked while on duty validating passenger boarding data.

Dickson was driving on the Line 251 route from Long Beach when she heard a commotion behind her.

"I heard noises and when I turned my head, I saw one of the analysts bleeding profusely," she said.

Baker was one of two Metro data analysts on the bus working on a Passenger Miles Verification Project and was allegedly punched by a male passenger, who appeared to be "agitated" and behaving "aggressively."

Baker said the suspect became agitated when he allegedly caught the man ransacking his personal belongings. The swiftness of the attack shocked Baker, who alerted Dickson, who quickly called the police.

Dickson said she recognized the suspect as a regular customer who she'd spoken with many times before. Dickson was able to secure the bus and

hit the panic button, while firmly ordering the alleged attacker to get off the bus.

"I was initially a little stunned by the sudden trauma but turned to face him. He then tried to kick me," Baker said in his official report of the incident, adding the suspect shattered a clipboard that he used to try to defend himself.

"The Operator (Dickson) then put herself between me and my assailant (I was still sitting down), and using force of personality, assumption of authority and possibly rapport built up," Baker said.

Dickson was able to convince the suspect to leave the bus and within minutes was providing the Vernon Police with a full description of the assailant. The man was picked up and arrested later that day. Baker returned to work later after being treated for a cut lip at the scene by paramedics.

Today, Baker said he was grateful to Dickson, who said she relied on her OCI training to handle the situation.

"They [Metro Operations Central Instruction] train us for a multitude of situations... everything from handling someone who is sick to an altercation," she said. "They make us fully aware of what we're up against."

Metro operators are required to attend training classes annually that cover everything from performing CPR to learning how to assist disabled passengers.

A single mother of two grown sons, Dickson said she also relies on her personal faith when she gets behind the wheel every morning.

"I love my job," she said. "I love what I do. I love making a contribution to society."