



NEWS

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L.A. COUNTY GRAND JURY SAYS MTA CONSTRUCTION QUALITY ASSURANCE PROGRAM IS "ON THE RIGHT TRACK"

The Los Angeles County Grand Jury in a report released Tuesday, March 26 evaluated the MTA's rail construction quality assurance program as "on the right track".

The Grand Jury began its investigation last August as part of its good government oversight role. The panel studied the quality assurance methods used by the MTA in assuring safe, cost-effective construction and operation of the Metro Rail system.

The panel found that the MTA has developed policies that have become a standard for the rail construction industry, and that MTA procedures are competent, conservative and follow generally accepted quality guidelines. They also noted that much of the MTA's Quality Program manual was adopted by the Federal Transit Administration as a standard for the industry.

"We're pleased and proud of this vote of confidence from the Grand Jury," said Larry Zarian, MTA chairman. "We've made some important changes in our construction operation, and this report confirms we are, indeed, "on the right track."

A primary change endorsed by the panel was the MTA decision to establish quality assurance as an internal function. In the Grand Jury's view, this shifted implementation of quality assurance to the MTA, where the final responsibility already resided.

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The MTA also established safety as an internal function. Although the panel did not investigate safety, they did encounter safety issues as part of quality assurance. They noted that "on every occasion, we found safety issues considered and in the field adequate safety procedures in use."

"Our own records indicate that safety is improving all the time," said Joe Drew, MTA's interim CEO. "These observations by the Grand Jury are a solid confirmation of our efforts."

In reviewing MTA's quality assurance procedures, the Grand Jury examined the actions taken on a Nonconformance Report (NCR), one that was issued in January 1995 after a daily inspection report noted thin concrete in a tunnel wall. The panel noted that quality assurance oversight was maintained throughout the administrative review of the report, and that the process was not closed until repairs had been made, and all inspections accomplished.

"I'm gratified that our oversight has been given this seal of approval by the Grand Jury," said Stan Phernambucq. "We were criticized when this particular incident came to light, but the record shows, we dealt with it properly."

The panel made recommendations to further improve the quality assurance program by upgrading management tracking of unresolved issues, establishing a review of NCR's, and adding more resources for inspector certification. "Those recommendations are already being implemented," said Phernambucq.

The Grand Jury concluded that the MTA has developed a strong quality assurance program, staffed with competent individuals willing to face hard issues. "As evidenced by the engineering/management people involved in the project," said the report, "in our opinion MTA is on the right track."

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