



NEWS

October 27, 1999

CONTACT: ED SCANNELL/MARC LITTMAN
MTA MEDIA RELATIONS
(213) 922-2703/922-2700
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The High Price of "Risky Business" on the Rails

**STAGED TRAIN VERSUS PASSENGER VAN COLLISION PUBLICIZES RISK OF DEATH,
STIFFER PENALTIES SPEARHEADED BY MTA FOR RAIL CROSSING VIOLATORS**

A staged collision between a freight train locomotive and a passenger van carrying crash test dummies made for graphic testimony today about the risks motorists take when they ignore warnings at railroad crossings. It also served as a warning to motorists who cross railroad tracks illegally and live that the cost of such a risky move will soon increase.

California Assembly Bill 923, authored by Assembly member Robert Hertzberg (D-Van Nuys), sponsored by the MTA, co-sponsored by the Southern California Regional Rail Authority and recently signed into law by Governor Gray Davis, will increase the penalty for motorist violations at railroad crossings from \$104 to \$271 beginning January 1, 2000. A third violation could cost offenders as much as \$500. These are the same fines paid by motorists who violate laws regarding freeway carpool lanes or who run red lights on streets.

"The MTA and other rail transit agencies in California have gone to great lengths to try and prevent accidents and injuries, yet some people persist in ignoring the warnings at railroad crossings," said MTA CEO Julian Burke. "We are hopeful that the prospect of higher fines will cause potential violators to think twice about risking their own lives and the lives of others."

Fines collected under AB 923 will help support a variety of safety measures including driver education, the placement of barricades and gates, and the installation of additional surveillance cameras which identify violators and provide evidence needed to cite them. MTA currently employs 10 surveillance cameras on a rotating basis at 17 grade crossings on the Metro Blue Line which operates between Los Angeles and Long Beach.

More...

Page 2 of 2 Staged Collision Publicizes Fine Increase

The Metro Blue Line has 100 grade crossings and operates in one of the most densely populated light rail corridors in the United States. A team of eight LA County Sheriff's Department motorcycle deputies was formed in recent months to enforce the vehicle code at all of the crossings, as well as to enforce the laws prohibiting jaywalking and trespassing by pedestrians.

In addition to the use of gates, flashing lights and other safety equipment, the MTA conducts an ongoing public educational outreach to residents, businesses, community groups, senior centers, schools and safety fairs.

"We feel obliged to educate people and to discourage them from taking risks," said Paul J. Lennon, MTA managing director of safety and security. "Grade crossing safety on the Metro Blue Line is just as important to us as safely transporting passengers."

The Metro Blue Line has been in service since 1990. In September, the line carried an average of more than 56,000 passengers every weekday.

Today's collision was staged by a Hollywood stunt team along North Main Street just north of downtown Los Angeles.

#