



NEWS

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COMBINATION OF POLICE PRESENCE, SEISMIC AND FIRE SAFEGUARDS PRODUCES SAFE HAVEN FOR METRO RED LINE PASSENGERS

The latest installment of the Metro Red Line subway, a 6.3 mile extension that debuts June 24 and links the San Fernando Valley with Hollywood and downtown Los Angeles, like previous segments that have opened, is safe for many reasons.

Since it opened in 1993, the subway has never sustained damage from an earthquake or fire or been a refuge for criminals because of factors that include method of construction, state-of-the-art communications and control systems and a strong police presence.

"The complete safety and security of passengers has been built into the design and construction of the Metro Red Line subway," says Paul Lennon, MTA managing director of Safety and Security. "As a result, the odds of being injured in any calamity or becoming a victim of crime is practically non-existent. It's one of the safest subway systems in the world and it all starts with open, well-lit stations, including glass elevators, that afford no hiding space for criminals.

"We back up that 'crime-prevention through environmental design philosophy' with our partnership with the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), which greatly adds to the sense of well being in our stations. Special trained officers dedicated to the MTA and its Metro Red Line can regularly be seen patrolling the stations and the trains for any criminal activity and fare evasion."

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The reputation of the Metro Red Line as a safe haven is based on a track record that includes an exceptionally low crime rate.

The subway is constructed to withstand an earthquake greater than a magnitude 8 on the Richter Scale — and, in fact, was left unscathed by the Northridge Earthquake in 1994.

“One of the primary strengths of the subway, from a safety standpoint, is that all the technology that is utilized for this purpose has backup systems,” explained Lennon.

“For instance, if one of four large exhaust fans in any station fails the other three would more than adequately disperse smoke,” continued Lennon.

Deterring crime on the Metro Red Line are the officers assigned to the Transit Rail Division of the Los Angeles Police Department who began patrolling the system in November 1997 and for months have been gearing up for the opening of the subway in the San Fernando Valley.

While crime on the Metro Red Line is low and typically involves vandalism, officers are trained to react to far more serious situations.

“We are prepared for everything you can think of,” says LAPD Commander Garrett Zimmon. “We also have a resources multiplier, in that the entire resources of the LAPD are at our disposal.”

Complementing the efforts of the LAPD is the specially trained staff of Rail Operations Control (ROC), which is manned 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The 40 employees of ROC closely monitor 70 closed circuit television screens that display a live feed from up to 10 surveillance cameras located at each subway station. The ROC staff also watches for any problems that might occur on the light rail Metro Blue and Green lines.

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If an emergency should arise, ROC staff can immediately alert law enforcement and fire department officials and dispatch key MTA personnel to the scene of any incident.

ROC staff also simultaneously scrutinize power supply, signals, hazardous materials and earth movement systems as well as keep track of passenger loads. Other functions include sending out announcements that are displayed on variable message signs located above station platforms and alerting passengers over an intercom. The ROC can also start or stop trains and activate station and tunnel ventilation fans.

"You can almost hear a pin drop at the ROC because everyone is so focused on maintaining the safest system possible," said ROC Manager Frank Alejandro. "Visitors to the ROC often remark that it reminds them of the USS Enterprise and Star Trek, it is that sophisticated."

Metro Red Line tunnels are considered to be one of the safer places to be during an earthquake and are designed to move with the earth. A tunnel flexes with the ground while surface buildings may crack instead of sway. Portions of the new extensions located near faults have received extra reinforcement.

In the event of earth movement equivalent to a 4.5 Richter Scale reading or more, the ROC will stop all rail cars at the next station. The system will then be thoroughly checked before service resumes.

During major earthquakes in Mexico in 1985 and San Francisco in 1989, subway systems resumed service within minutes after each quake.

Following the massive 7.2 magnitude Kobe, Japan earthquake in 1995, engineers from that country began studying the possibility of revising their subway seismic criteria to resemble that used on the Metro Red Line.

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"The Japanese, whom we've long admired for their ingenuity, are developing design guidelines similar to those followed by the MTA," said Dr. Jim Monsees, an engineer with the consultants that designed the subway.

"It just confirms what we've been saying from the very beginning. Our subway is the safest place to be during an earthquake," continued Monsees of the Engineering Management Consultant Group.

If an earthquake, fire or any type of emergency should require the shutdown of the system, well lit emergency exits that lead to spring loaded doors and access the street or the mezzanine level of the station are located at both sides of the station platforms and at several cross passages in the tunnel. All emergency agencies, including the LAPD and Los Angeles county and city fire departments, can access the exits from the outside with keys that open up sidewalk doors.

Along the tunnels there are also safety walks located at the level of the doorway of the rail cars. This safety walk runs the full length of the tunnel and leads to the cross passages or eventually to the stations on either end of the tunnel. In most emergencies, passengers would have to walk no more than 750 feet to and across a cross passage and wait for a rescue train.

The emergency exits, which have emergency lighting during a power outage, enable passengers to evacuate the platform level and make it to the surface in only six minutes.

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Any outbreak of fire in stations or tunnels would be dealt with in a lightning quick manner.

"It should be reassuring to the public that the MTA Board has adopted the most current codes as far as fire, life and safety are concerned," said recently retired Los Angeles City Fire Department Battalion Chief Robert Aaron. "The adherence to these codes provides a safe environment for both passengers and employees."

The stations feature smoke alarms, an extensive sprinkler system (including small pipes under the track that emit 1,000 gallons of water per minute), fire extinguishers, smoke dispersal fans and outlets for hose lines. In addition, the stations feature emergency phones which connect passengers with the ROC elevators large enough to accommodate two 7-foot gurneys, flashing emergency strobe lights and a high decibel alarm.

Made from steel with fire-resistant windows, the train cars are not conducive to the spread or the eruption of fire. Aaron says that if a fire broke out, it would take nearly one hour for it to burn through the floor, enough time for the operator to safely evacuate passengers and call for fire department assistance. Fire hose outlets also are located in the tunnel every 250 feet.

Passenger safety is the number one priority of the MTA and the entire Metro Red Line is designed to be safe and secure. Other safety measures include:

- Emergency intercoms in the trains.
- Train operators and uniformed police officers are in constant contact with Rail Operations Control.

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- All construction and finishing materials are manufactured to be graffiti and vandal-resistant and have low flame, low smoke properties.
- Platform tactile floors help vision impaired passengers safely board and exit.

When the Metro Red Line opens in the San Fernando Valley, the Metro Red Line will span 17.4 miles, beginning at Union Station in downtown and concluding at Lankershim and Chandler boulevards in North Hollywood.

The subway extension opening June 24 features stations in Hollywood at Hollywood and Highland boulevards, in North Hollywood across the street from Universal Studios and at Lankershim and Chandler boulevards.

Metro Rail, which includes the Metro Red Line subway and the Metro light rail Blue and Green lines, will span some 59.4 miles with links to Long Beach, downtown Los Angeles, El Segundo, Norwalk, Hollywood, Universal City and the San Fernando Valley.

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