



NEWS

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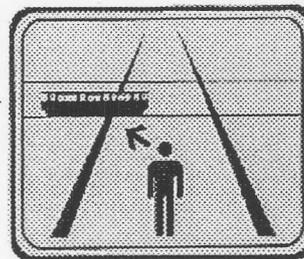
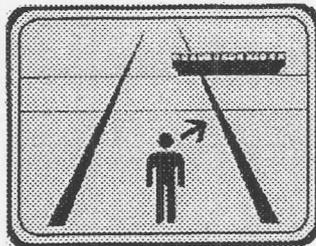
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FIBRE OPTIC SIGN DESIGNED TO WARN PEDESTRIANS MTA EVALUATING "SECOND TRAIN COMING" SIGN

The MTA is evaluating the effectiveness of a fibre optic sign designed to warn pedestrians at Metro Blue Line grade crossings that more than one train is approaching. Installed last June at the Vernon Avenue crossing, the "second train coming" warning sign is intended to serve as an additional deterrent to illegal crossings that sometimes result in serious injury or death.

The sign measures three feet by four feet and is activated only when two or more trains are approaching the crossing, either two Metro Blue Line trains, a Metro Blue Line train and a freight train, or, on some occasions, two Metro Blue Line trains and a freight train.

The sign's graphics include images of a train, a pedestrian, a grade crossing and an arrow placed in the line of sight between the pedestrian and the train. The train and the arrow symbols alternate in tandem from left-to-right and so on, thereby warning the pedestrian to be aware of the imminent presence of a second train approaching from either direction.



The MTA surveyed community members to determine whether they believed a sign with graphics or text would be more effective. After reviewing four potential options, most showed a preference for the design currently in use.

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The current evaluation includes a second survey to determine the public's awareness of the sign and whether the public understands the message the sign is intended to convey.

In addition, a video camera is recording the number of pedestrians who enter the crossing illegally when the sign is activated. At the current volume of rail traffic on the alignment, two or more trains approach the Vernon Avenue crossing 20 to 25 times per day.

The MTA anticipates completing the evaluation and filing a report with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in Spring, 2001. If the "second train coming" sign is found to be an effective deterrent, the MTA will seek approval from the California Public Utilities Commission to retrofit additional crossings. The Metro Blue Line includes 101 crossings along its 22-mile alignment.

The design, construction, installation, testing and evaluation of the sign was made possible by a \$200,000 grant from the FTA. It is the first warning sign of its kind in operation in the United States.

"Thousands of people cross the Metro Blue Line tracks safely day after day," said Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, Los Angeles County Supervisor and MTA Board Chair. "Our goal is to heighten awareness of the need for caution, especially among the few people who continue to jeopardize their safety and the safety of our passengers."

In addition to the new sign, the Metro Blue Line employs an extensive range of other safety equipment designed to prevent or discourage illegal crossings.

In early 2000, the MTA completed testing of a four quadrant gate project at 124th Street. The MTA since has developed a preliminary list of 10 additional intersections as candidates for design and installation of the four quadrant gates. Gates at all four quadrants can serve as a greater deterrent to motorists who might otherwise be tempted to drive around the two gates found in the standard two quadrant arrangement.

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Other safety equipment additions have included the installation at various crossings of swing gates, pedestrian gates, train-activated "No Left Turn" signs, median islands and additional warning lights. The MTA also has tested the ARC (Alternating Rail Crossing) light system to determine whether the alternating flash of a train's headlights increases the visibility of the train.

Nearly 50 percent of all train vs. vehicle accidents are the result of illegal left turns on the "street running" segments of the Metro Blue Line alignment in central Los Angeles and Long Beach where Metro Blue Line trains operate on city streets as opposed to the exclusive right-of-way found in the mid ("cab signal") segment of the alignment.

In an effort to eliminate any potential confusion on the part of motorists intending to make left turns at crossings in the Los Angeles "street running" segment on Flower Street and Washington Boulevard, the MTA has relocated and redesigned the "T" signals which provide instructions to train operators.

The MTA also is nearing operation of 39 active fiber optic "Train" warning signs in this segment. Future plans call for the installation of such signs in the Long Beach "street running" segment.

The MTA has found the use of photo enforcement cameras at selected crossings has resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of vehicular grade crossing violations. Currently, 10 cameras are rotated among 17 locations. As a result of their success, the MTA soon will install an additional six cameras at six locations in the Los Angeles street running segment.

The MTA has been engaged in an ongoing community outreach program aimed at reducing the number of accidents. The program includes visits by MTA Public Affairs staff to safety fairs, schools, housing association and community group meetings, as well as door-to-door contact with residents along the alignment.

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In addition, bilingual safety banners and billboards have been positioned along the alignment, signs have been posted on trains, and brochures have been distributed.

Law enforcement plays a significant role in the MTA's efforts to promote safety on the Metro Blue Line alignment. Formed two years ago, the eight-member Sheriff's Motorcycle Team assigned to MTA's Transit Services Bureau patrols the alignment, acts as a visual deterrent and cites grade crossing violators.

MTA sponsored legislation, effective January 1, 2000, which raised the fine for illegal crossings by vehicles to \$271. In addition, the MTA spearheaded efforts to have a section on grade crossing safety included in the DMV California Drivers Handbook and questions regarding grade crossing safety to be included in the statewide written license test for new and renewing drivers.

Since the MTA began service on the Metro Blue Line in July, 1990, 54 people have died in train vs. vehicle and train vs. pedestrian accidents. In calendar year 2000, such accidents have resulted in one fatality.

"Our efforts are aimed at encouraging people to do the right thing when they approach the Metro Blue Line tracks," said Allan Lipsky, MTA chief operating officer. "The MTA continues to seek innovative ways, both through technology and person to person contact, to achieve that end."

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