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MTA Emphases Rail Safety, Security as Opening of Metro Gold Line Approaches

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MTA has undertaken a number of initiatives to ensure that the Metro Gold Line, scheduled to open this summer, operates with the utmost safety and security.

MTA has created a state-of-the-art rail safety education program, established a close security partnership with the L.A. County Sheriff's Department, and is leveraging its considerable experience as operator of the Metro Red, Blue and Green Lines in bringing proven, effective safety and security measures to L.A. County's newest rail line.

The 13.7-mile Metro Gold Line will serve Pasadena, South Pasadena, Highland Park, Lincoln Heights, Chinatown and downtown Los Angeles.

Trains have not operated in these communities for years, and a new generation of residents must understand and adhere to safety precautions along the route. Electric P2000 trains are scheduled to run approximately every 10 minutes among 13 stations during peak hour commute times, and approximately every 12 to 20 minutes during non-commute hours.

Rail Safety Education

Education is the most important element in MTA's rail safety program. The public must be educated about safe interactions with trains or MTA's extensive safety measures will be rendered ineffective. Since September 2002, MTA has conducted proactive education presentations that detail rail safety issues to the community and, specifically, to surrounding schools. MTA's Community Relations Rail Safety team attended scores of community events and 71 area schools, reaching nearly 48,700 students with the rail safety message.

Here students are trained to be cognizant of approaching trains and their required stopping distances, to stay away from tracks and idle trains, and not to breach train crossing gates. MTA has taken actual photographs of the rail alignments and has created interactive DVD presentations to help the community recognize rail warning devices and how they function in their neighborhoods. Real-life examples are used to demonstrate what to do and what not to do near trains.

"We expect the interactive DVD presentations to provide a much more effective and relevant safety message," said Lynda Bybee, MTA's Deputy Executive Officer of Community Relations. "There's a lot of visual noise in an urban setting. We want to urge everyone to be sensitive to the warning devices that are there for their own safety."

PHOTO: GAYLE ANDERSON



P2000 Metro Gold Line train arrives at Chinatown Station during testing run.

The newest tool in MTA's education arsenal is a mobile theater that employs advanced video and 3-D effects to simulate the true operation of a P2000 train along the actual Metro Gold Line route. The ride is similar to Disneyland's "Captain EO" ride, with vibrating seats and surround sound. It provides an opportunity to make a visually compelling, lasting impression on children and adults. The mobile theater will be used throughout Los Angeles County.

Safety is a personal responsibility, and MTA will rely on its relationships with the community to extend and amplify this safety message.

"MTA considers safety a partnership with the community," said Joanne Longsdon, Senior Community Relations Officer who works with MTA's rail safety presenters. "It takes a willingness to share in these efforts to ensure that the community interacts safely with these trains."

Other components of MTA's Safety Education Program include a poster campaign in schools to remind students daily about rail safety, and public service announcements that will run on local television stations and movie theaters in the coming months.

Rail Safety Operations

MTA has employed a suite of safety measures on the Metro Gold Line that have proven effective for 13 years on the Metro Blue Line, which serves the communities between downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach. For example, MTA has made use of four quadrant gates on key intersections that completely seal them off when trains are crossing. Vehicle detection loops embedded in the pavement detect vehicles that may be caught within the intersection as the gates descend and automatically lift the nearest gate to allow the vehicle to escape. Additionally, 23 of the 30 at-grade crossings on the Metro Gold Line are equipped with pedestrian and swing gates, which bolster safety by completely closing the crossing to foot traffic.

Fiber optic signs installed on traffic signal cantilevers are utilized in street-running portions of the Metro Gold Line route to give drivers advance warning of approaching trains. Used previously on the Metro Blue Line, this safety measure has been instrumental in dramatically lowering the incidents of illegal left-hand turns. The Metro Blue Line has experienced a 50 percent drop in such incidents over the last two years.

MTA has also paid close attention to signage and striping at intersections to ensure compliance with Public Utilities Commission regulations. MTA will closely monitor other safety measures as well.

"Safety is involved through design, construction, pre-revenue and revenue operations," said Abdul Zohbi, manager of rail operations safety at MTA. "If somebody reports a hazard on the Metro Gold Line, we'll investigate the hazard and quickly come up with a solution. Our job never ends."

MTA's successful rail safety education and operation efforts are the result of a joint program between the agency's rail operations safety and community relations departments.

Security Partnership with L.A. County Sheriff's Department

MTA has recently contracted with the L.A. County Sheriff's Department to take full security details on MTA's entire Metro transit system. The Sheriff's Department will work collaboratively with MTA's transit operating supervisors, its transit security unit and Metro Gold Line management to coordinate security efforts.

For the first time, Sheriff's Department security assistants will be used to inspect fares at Metro Red and Gold Line transit stations, allowing the Sheriff's Department to extend its coverage and visibility. Fare inspectors will provide riders with information, directions and other assistance. They will also be able to write citations, call for backup, and proactively resolve issues before they become problems.

“MTA will have more station security coverage than it has ever had before with the introduction of these fare inspectors,” said Gerald Francis, general manager of rail operations at MTA. “They will supplement the eyes and ears of law enforcement, acting as a force multiplier to increase security on the Metro Red and Gold Lines, which frees up officers to focus on critical law enforcement duties. Furthermore, they will also serve as customer service ambassadors to our patrons.”

Station parking lots will be well lit, and closed circuit television cameras will be installed for monitoring purposes. Stations will be equipped with emergency intercoms that will be directly linked to close circuit television observers. Station structures will be well lit and will have no hiding spaces. To deter graffiti, flat surfaces are minimized and wrought iron fences are used instead of block walls.

Contracted Metro Transit Sheriff’s deputies and security personnel will patrol Metro Gold Line stations during all hours of operation. Metro Transit Sheriff’s personnel’s full-time policing and security measures will include vehicle and foot patrols onboard the trains and in passenger stations.

Sheriff’s transit motorcycle deputies will also patrol the Metro Gold Line right-of-way full-time to ensure the safe passage of rail patrons, motorists, and pedestrians. Motorcycle deputies have helped reduce collisions dramatically along the Metro Blue Line, and will be frequently seen at Metro Gold Line grade crossings to help ensure traffic enforcement and community safety.

The Sheriff’s Department has set up multiple bases of operation for policing the Metro Gold, Red, Blue and Green Lines to speed response times.

MTA and Sheriff’s Transit Services Bureau plan to employ a transit community policing function that involves everyone associated with the passenger station, including local police, fare inspectors, transit rail supervisors and janitorial staff. The focus will be on resolving problems quickly, establishing close contact with passengers and local community members, and creating high visibility for law enforcement.

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