

LA County Sheriff's Motorcycle Team One of Best Safety Investments on the Metro Blue Line



By Ed Scannell

(August 17) They've become a familiar sight along the 22-mile Metro Blue Line alignment, and in just a few months the eight deputies from the LA County Sheriff's Motorcycle Team assigned to patrol the nation's busiest light rail line already have made an impact on the line's safety.

The team's charge is to assist in reducing the number of serious accidents and fatalities along the Metro Blue Line through vigorous enforcement of traffic laws. It's a role that complements a series of engineering improvements by MTA designed to increase safety, and MTA's stepped-up Metro Blue Line Safety Awareness Campaign, which includes community outreach, distribution of safety materials and the placement of safety banners at intersections.

Becoming a member of the team was no easy feat. Just 50 deputies met the minimum requirements, and a rigorous seven week training weeded out all but the eight who now call the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau their home away from home.



BLUE LINE SHERIFFS--Background from left: Deputies Edwin Roberts, Elton Simmons, David Wolf and Robert Green; Foreground from left: Deputy Marion Tucker, Sergeant Brad Wright and Deputy Governor Davis. Not pictured: Deputy Dave Veylupek

The eight completed 120 hours of additional Sheriff's Academy training and a one-month street "break-in" in which the deputies demonstrated proficiency on their "bikes" by maneuvering through more than 20 coned patterns. In addition, the motor deputies' skills were put to the test during simulations of extraordinary street conditions, and they received special training in emergency braking, weapons deployment and lock turns to negotiate heavy traffic, as well as training on a high-speed closed circuit race track.

"Motorcycles add flexibility to our law enforcement efforts on the Metro Blue Line," said Sergeant Brad Wright, leader of the Metro Blue Line contingent. "We can move in and out of heavy traffic much easier than a car, and if a driver fails to stop for a signal at a grade crossing, or makes an illegal left turn in front of a train, no one can overtake that driver as easily as we can."

"Our presence clearly has become a deterrent," added Wright. "When people see us they know they're going to get a ticket if they break the law. As a result, I believe our presence is helping to reduce the number of serious and fatal accidents on the Metro Blue Line."

In recent weeks the team's scope of work has been expanded to include response to incidents on station platforms and in nearby park-n'-ride lots.

Enforcing the law on a motorcycle isn't the easiest job. The deputies put up with near freezing temperatures in the winter and many 100-degree days in the summer with no air conditioning and no heater.

But it's all worth it, says Deputy Marion Tucker, the Sheriff's Department's only female motorcycle deputy.

"I wanted to join this team because I thought I could do it and that it would be fun," said Tucker who has ridden motorcycles since the age of five. "As a member of this team, I've been able to combine my love of riding with my job. It's the best of both worlds."

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