

MTA

CEO Report

Linda Bohlinger, Chief Executive Officer
August 11, 1997

The second hardest thing I've had to do as Interim CEO is to call the mother of Eleazar Montes, the worker who died at a Metro Rail construction site on July 25, and express my sorrow on behalf of the MTA. The first hardest thing I've had to do was to speak with the widow of Jaime Pasillas, the first worker killed at our construction site. In both cases, I was able to use my ability to speak Spanish to better communicate the MTA's condolences.

This is the Metro Rail project's second fatality in 10 years of construction. Mr. Montes, 33, a carpenter for Tutor-Saliba-Perini, died on July 25 at our Metro Red Line Universal City station construction site. We launched an immediate investigation into the circumstances of the tragic accident. Mayor Riordan issued a statement of sympathy on behalf of the Board and I attended a memorial service for Mr. Montes and offered staff's condolences to his mother and family.

A team of MTA staff and consultants, including a forensic safety engineer, was dispatched to the Universal City station accident site to photograph and document evidence and

interview witnesses. The LAPD, LAFD and Cal OSHA also are investigating the accident, which occurred while Mr. Montes was working atop a scaffolding 50 feet above the station floor. The

preliminary investigation indicates that his safety belt was not clipped to the structure, as required by safety regulations.

The week before the accident, the MTA had hired Behavioral Science Technology, Inc. to assess the MTA's construction safety program and help us improve safety within Metro Construction. Contractor Ron Tutor's firm has agreed to hire a team of safety experts from the Dupont Corporation to begin an intensive safety awareness program for his compa-

ny's — as well as our other construction companies — workers and work sites. Both companies have years of experience in this field.

Last February, Jaime Pasillas, 52, also a Tutor-Saliba-Perini employee, was killed while working in a tunnel beneath Hollywood Boulevard. His was the first death in the history of the Metro Rail project. Following that accident, the MTA conducted a thorough safety inspection of the project. Since then, our Construction Safety Department has conducted both regular and surprise safety inspections.

Although MTA contractor lost-time accident statistics remain below the national average for heavy construction projects, these two deaths raise serious concerns about the safety awareness level of our construction contractors. In order to prevent future tragedies such as those of Eleazar Montes and Jaime Pasillas, we'll redouble our efforts to safeguard the lives of everyone involved in MTA construction projects.

Bus Roadeo Winners

Everyone had a great time with family, friends and colleagues at the MTA's annual Bus Roadeo at Santa Anita, July 26. Congratulations to Bus Operator Jose Arizmendi of Division 9 and to mechanics Doug Creveling, Alan Wong and Marco Pedemonte of Division 10! They're the winners in this year's MTA Bus Roadeo.

Jose placed first in a field of 30 operators who drove an exacting course laid out in a parking lot at Santa Anita Race Track — I had the opportunity after the event to drive a portion of it, myself.

Placing second was Samuel Morales of Division 1. Michael Hubler of Division 1 was third. Jose will represent the MTA at the APTA finals in Chicago, September 23. I'll be at APTA to cheer him on!

The three-member Division 10 mechanics team — Doug, Alan and Marco — beat 10 others in the bus maintenance event. They'll be in Nashville in August to compete in the APTA-sponsored national championships.

The Rail Roadeo winners also were announced. Robert Rodriguez, a Metro Red Line operator, represented the MTA at the APTA rail conference in Washington, D.C., in June. The winning rail maintenance team of Dennis Gibo, Tony Pham and Andre Tran, led by their instructor, Gary Dewater, also competed for us at that conference.

I would encourage all staff members to participate as a judge or as a spectator in next year's Bus Roadeo. You'll come away impressed with the skills of our operators and mechanics — and you'll have a lot of fun!

Board Ratifies TCU Contract

With the UTU contract agreement wrapped up, the Board

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now has ratified a three-year agreement with the TCU, which represents some 600 MTA clerical workers. That contract, which includes a 1.5 percent wage increase each year, was overwhelmingly approved July 25 by the TCU membership.

The TCU contract allows the MTA to reduce its annual contribution to the union's Health and Welfare Trust Fund, while maintaining the present level of benefits. The agency also may hire part-time custodial or customer information employees, a move that will help reduce overtime and provide more scheduling flexibility.

The successful completion of the UTU and TCU negotiations leaves only the ATU contract still to be agreed upon. Contract talks are continuing between the MTA and the ATU.

Law Eliminates Alternates

Governor Wilson has signed into law legislation that will eliminate alternate members from the MTA Board of Directors. The new law, AB-1143 (Murray), also sets a four-year term of office for the Chief Executive Officer and directs that the CEO approve all construction contracts by the lowest responsive bid. The law takes effect Jan. 1, 1998.

Meanwhile, a second bill intended to shape the Board, SB-567 (Polanco), is now pending before the Assembly Appropriations Committee where it is scheduled for a hearing on Aug. 20 or earlier, depending on the legislative schedule. The bill, which the MTA opposes, calls for a Board of nine voting members — down from the current 13.

A Judge's Ruling

A Superior Court judge has issued a tentative decision requiring the MTA to rescind its award of a contract for construction management of the Metro Red Line's Eastside extension. The ruling came July 30 in a suit against the agency by Metro East Consultants (MEC), which competed for the \$83 million contract against JMA and Bechtel.

The Board now is considering its options in the wake of the judge's ruling. The Board had been scheduled to vote at its July meeting on awarding the contract to JMA.

Turn in Your Forms

I want to remind all eligible non-represented employees that you have only a few days left to turn in the retirement plan and benefit option forms distributed to you recently along with the PTSC ballot. The ballot was due Aug. 5 and the option forms are due into Human Resources by Aug. 13. Failure to meet the Aug. 13 deadline could jeopardize your eligibility for PERS.

The Retirement Plan Election Form has three options from which you can choose. If you choose the PERS plan option, you also have an opportunity to get extra survivor benefits coverage at no cost to you.

These actions affect former SCRTD and new MTA employees, Teamsters members and members of the Transit Police Officers Association.

Employee Survey

The results of the employee survey, completed by some 3,400 of you this spring, will be available to employees in September. The survey covered such areas as job satisfac-

tion, morale, communications, Board and executive leadership and the merger.

The results include data gathered during employee focus groups and interviews with executive officers. We'll use the survey to help us improve morale, working conditions and customer service. Follow-up surveys will be conducted to help us stay on course with these improvements.

The survey was developed by a committee that included representatives from Transit Operations, RTP&D, Human Resources, Communications, Strategic Planning and Employee and Labor Relations.

Substance Abuse Training

The MTA has one of the transit industry's most effective substance abuse programs. Now, Human Resources is offering a series of 12, four-hour training classes in August for managers and supervisors who are responsible for implementing the agency's alcohol and drug abuse policy.

The training is mandatory for those who supervise safety-sensitive employees and for those who may be called upon to order a "reasonable-suspicion" drug or alcohol test. Managers of non-safety-sensitive

employees also can benefit from the training. Information sessions for all employees are scheduled Sept. 11.

Supervisors' classes are scheduled through Aug. 25. Space is limited, so call Luanne Urie at 922-7164 to reserve a seat. For further information, call Leila Procopio-Makuh at 922-7175.

Cashing in Your TOWP

A number of employees who called the CEO HotLine recently have asked when they could cash out TOWP or frozen sick leave. Well, a new policy allows non-represented employees to request one cash out at any time during a 12-month period.

You can cash out all TOWP or frozen vacation hours in excess of 160 hours at your current rate of pay, providing you have used at least 80 hours of scheduled TOWP for vacation. Non-represented employees also may convert frozen sick leave hours into TOWP once each 12-month period. To do this, you have to be at least 55, currently in active service and have five or more years of service.

Human Resources is distributing a memo giving further details on the cash-out procedure along with the forms you'll need for cash out or conversion. This new administrative policy is reflective of our efforts to be more employee-supportive, one of our four guiding principles.



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