

# Metro

A METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY MAGAZINE FOR EMPLOYEES AND STAKEHOLDERS



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# Family

## MTA honors employee suggestions

*Winning ideas expected to save time and money, improve service, morale*

By Bill Heard, Editor

Replacing the high-pressure fuel regulator on a compressed natural gas engine was a delicate, time-consuming task with a dangerous potential. Until, that is, Robert De La Torre put on his thinking cap.

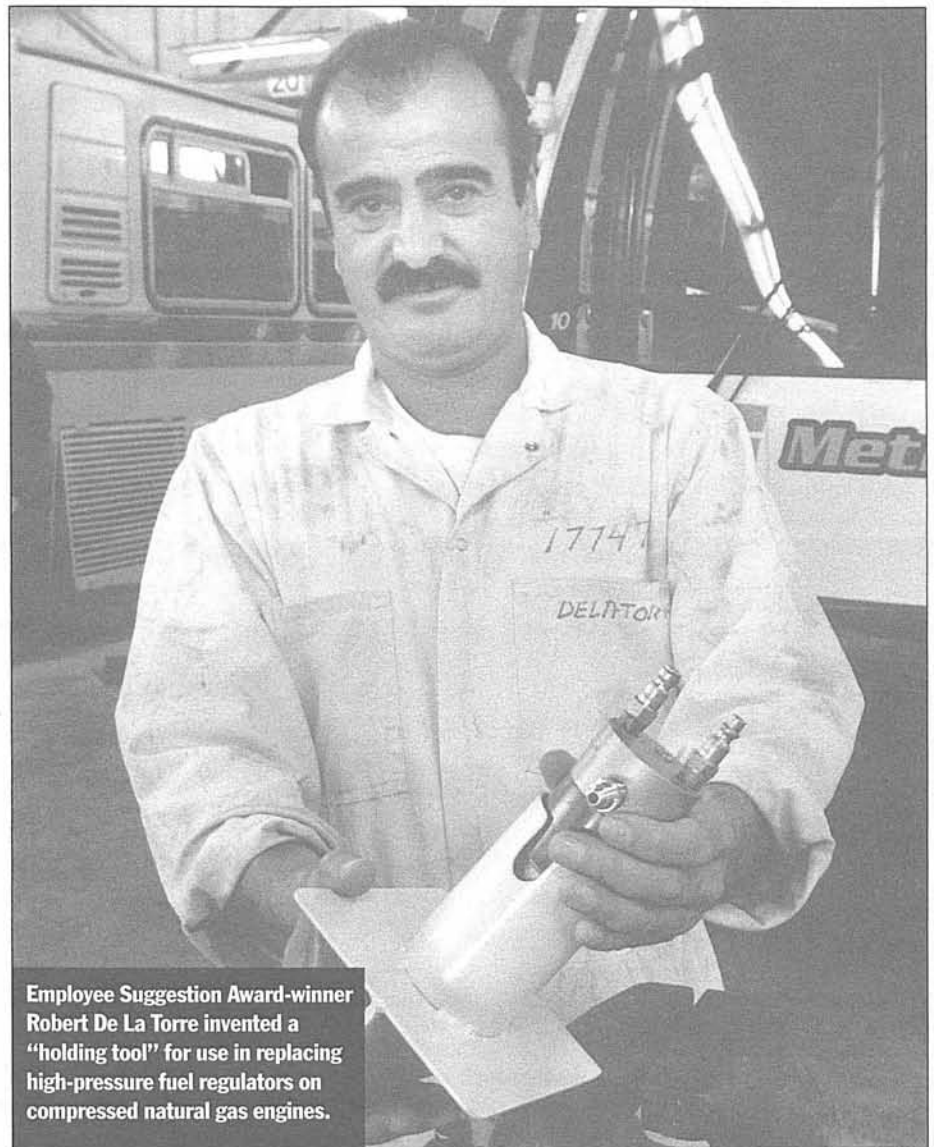
As a mechanic at the MTA's Division 8 in Chatsworth where he and co-workers serviced scores of CNG buses, De La Torre believed that using a vise to grip a regulator while removing its gas and coolant fittings could puncture the fragile unit. In operation, that could cause a leak that might hurt someone.

So, De La Torre invented a special "holding tool" that overcomes the drawbacks of using a vise. Today, the tool is in use at every CNG facility the MTA operates.

His innovative idea won De La Torre the appreciation of management, a framed certificate and a \$100 award in the MTA's Employee Suggestion Program (ESP).

Eight other thoughtful employees, who submitted suggestions ranging from ways to improve passenger service to increasing temporary worker productivity, also were honored during a Feb. 11 ceremony as members of the MTA's first group of ESP winners.

"These employees are committed to making Employee Awards, continued on Page 5



Employee Suggestion Award-winner Robert De La Torre invented a "holding tool" for use in replacing high-pressure fuel regulators on compressed natural gas engines.

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## MTA offers some commuters up to \$120 in gift certificates for ridesharing

The MTA has developed an innovative "gift certificate" program designed to encourage people to stop driving to work alone.

"Rideshare 2000" targets commuters who use portions of the I-605, I-10 and I-405 transportation corridors — all three of which have new or soon-to-be-opened car-pool lanes.

The program offers \$2 gift certificates redeemable at Target and Ralphs stores and at Unocal stations for every day a commuter uses "alternate modes" of transportation to get to work. Participants can receive up to \$120 worth of gift certificates.

The program was designed for companies with fewer than 250 employees.

"The MTA developed the program to reduce congestion, increase mobility and improve air quality along these corridors," says MTA Deputy CEO Sharon Landers. "Programs like Rideshare 2000 are highly effective, with 85 percent of participants continuing to use alternative modes up to a year after the incentives end."

### Employers must register

Participating employers are required to register with the MTA and designate a representative who certifies that employees at the worksite are actually ridesharing and qualify for the program.

Employees must either carpool, ride public transit or

commuter rail, bike, walk or telecommute to work at least five times a month during a three-month trial period.

The program is restricted to employees who have been driving alone to work during the past 90 days.

Rideshare 2000 is funded by an \$860,000 state grant authorized by Senate Bill 836. The measure provides funding to county transportation agencies and regional rideshare agencies in Southern California to implement voluntary rideshare programs.

### Program is needed

"Such programs are important because Los Angeles County's congestion problems can not be solved solely by building highways and running more transit service," Landers says.

The targeted corridors are:

- San Gabriel River (I-605) Freeway between the I-10 and I-405 freeways.
- Pomona SR-60 and the San Bernardino I-10 Freeway between the I-710 Freeway and the San Bernardino County line.
- I-405 Freeway between the South Bay and the Orange County line.

For additional information about Rideshare 2000, call the MTA at (213) 922-2811, or inquire via FAX at (213) 922-2849. ■

## MTA needs riders with disabilities to help improve Metro Bus service

The MTA is actively recruiting wheelchair users and other persons with disabilities for "Metro Wheels," a program aimed at improving Metro Bus service.

The goal of Metro wheels is to achieve a 50 percent reduction in wheelchair pass-ups and access failure and to improve overall performance.

Currently, some 40 volunteers participate. The MTA needs additional volunteers to provide more comprehensive information about the entire Metro Bus system on a daily basis.

Volunteers receive a monthly Metro pass and are given free Internet access.

### Instant feedback

"Metro Wheels provides instant feedback to the MTA's 11 bus operating divisions," says Ellen Levine, executive officer, Transit Operations. "Most importantly, it elevates the voice of the customer."

Volunteers report daily over the Internet their experiences with Metro Bus service, describing how the wheelchair lift on a bus worked, how they were treated by an operator, and providing other information.

The MTA is developing a separate program to address concerns of customers with visual impairments and will explore another for riders with hearing disabilities.

For additional information about Metro Wheels, call (213) 922-4340 or check the MTA's Internet website at [www.mta.net](http://www.mta.net). ■

**Metro Family**

A Metropolitan Transportation Authority publication for employees and stakeholders

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# Calling the MTA for transit information?

*New voice response system gives faster service to bus, rail patrons*

By Bill Heard, Editor

The MTA has upgraded its Customer Information organization with the addition of five automated phone features that are providing fast, customized service to transit patrons throughout Los Angeles County.

The new Voice Response System helps callers plan trips by bus or rail. It can locate a nearby pass or token sales outlet. And if you can't spare the time waiting on line for a Customer Information agent, the system will call you back when an agent is free.

The interactive system was developed by a team of MTA Customer Relations and Information Technology Systems employees. Working off a mainframe computer, elements include a voice synthesizer, text-to-speech function and information generation system.

The automated service is in operation 24 hours a day. The service augments the MTA's 95 Customer Information agents who staff 128 phone lines from 6 a.m. until 8:30 p.m. on weekdays and from 8 a.m. until 6 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays.

The MTA's Customer Information department receives almost 8,000 requests for assistance each weekday and more than 4,000 calls a day on weekends.

## Reducing waiting times

The new service is reducing caller waiting times, which in the past could reach 30 minutes. Daily average waiting times now have been cut to four to six minutes and Communications Manager Tom Longsdon expects automation will help the system keep pace as calls and transit ridership increase.

"We expect call waiting times will continue to improve," Longsdon says. "A portion of the calls our Customer Information agents would have answered are now being handled after hours by the automated Voice Response System."

Callers can access the Voice Response System from a touch-tone phone. The new services are:

■ **Automated Call Director.** This feature directs incoming calls to the next available operator, but now can route the call to a

Spanish-speaking Customer Information agent, if the caller requests.

■ **Automated Trip Planning.** Available for the past three years only to corporate transit coordinators, this feature now helps patrons select the best transit routes to reach their destinations. To use the service, callers dial in origin and destination codes, departure and desired arrival times and fare class. If the patron doesn't know the codes, the system will help obtain them from a Customer Information agent by voice or FAX. This service provides information on 40 different transit agencies in Los Angeles County.

■ **Wait-Time Announcer.** This feature gives a caller the approximate waiting time until an agent is available for assistance.

■ **10-Minute Call-Back.** If a caller prefers not to hold for a Customer Information agent, he or she can enter a phone number, hang up and the Voice Response System will call back within 10 minutes and direct the caller to an agent. If the caller has left the phone unattended, or if another person answers, the call-back system will attempt two additional calls at five-minute intervals.

■ **Pass or Token Sales Locator.** Dial in a ZIP code and this feature provides the location of up to five MTA transit pass or token sales outlets in the immediate area.

A computer-generated voice, dubbed *Sven* because of its slight Scandinavian accent, directs callers to the proper information menu



**Marion MacKenzie of Media Relations is Marion, the English and Spanish voice of the Voice Response System.**

where *Marion*, a pre-recorded, digitized female voice, assists the caller with choices.

Currently, *Marion* provides assistance only in English, but will offer help in Spanish beginning this summer. About seven percent of patron calls require Spanish language assistance. Spanish-speaking agents are assigned to every Customer Information work shift.

"We've taken proven technologies and pulled them together in a massive information platform to serve our patrons," says Doug Anderson, the senior systems analyst who led the team that designed and implemented the Voice Response System.

Working with Anderson were Senior Systems Analyst Paula Grigsby; Systems Analysts Romulo Reyes, Sandra Sanders and Debbie Williams; and Alonzo Williams, Janet Clark, Robert Lapin, Robert Makuh, Jia-Ming Yueh and J. Rosario Arellano, Information Technology Systems programmer analysts. ■



**Doug Anderson (center) led the team that developed the MTA's new Voice Response System. From left are Janet Clark, Bob Makuh, Paula Grigsby, Jia-Ming Yueh, Debbie Williams, Anderson, Bob Lapin, J. Rosario Arellano, Alonzo Williams and Romulo Reyes.**

# MTA debuts two exciting new features on Internet website

*Plan a trip...see LA history unfold on MTA's interactive web pages*

By Bill Heard, Editor

If you regularly cruise the Information Superhighway, check out two exciting new features the MTA is offering on its Internet website at [www.mta.net](http://www.mta.net).

Want to use mass transit to get from Point A to Point B in Southern California? Click on the MTA's new "Trip Itinerary Planner" page.

Interested in history and paleontology? Click on "L.A. Underground" for an in-depth look at fossils, prehistoric animal bones and other artifacts unearthed during construction of the Metro Red Line.

L.A. Underground includes more than 100 electronic pages of historical text and photos, animated characters and color video. Designed primarily for youngsters in grades 4 to 6, it will inform and entertain almost any net browser.

## History's rich legacy

"Through this website, we hope to bring the rich legacy of Los Angeles history, dating back millions of years, to the public and especially to school children," says Marc Littman, MTA Public Relations director. "We'll also show them the future legacy we're building with Metro Rail."

The Trip Itinerary Planner (TIP) page helps transit riders choose the quickest, most direct bus or rail lines to reach their destinations. TIP provides print-outs of schedule and fare information, as well as transit maps based on *The Thomas Guide* geographical data.

"Anyone with access to the Internet can use our Trip Itinerary Planner," says Bill Mumbleau, head of an MTA information systems team that developed TIP. "Getting the information takes less than a minute."

TIP covers Metro Bus and Metro Rail lines, all local carriers in Los Angeles County and Metrolink. An updated version of TIP, due online in August, will give the user walking directions to the nearest bus stop or rail station.

## LA's fascinating underground

United States history buffs will be fascinated by L.A. Underground's compilation of facts, diagrams, photos and documents relating to Campo de Cahuenga, near today's Universal City. It was

at this site in 1847 that the United States and Mexico signed a treaty ending the Mexican-American War.

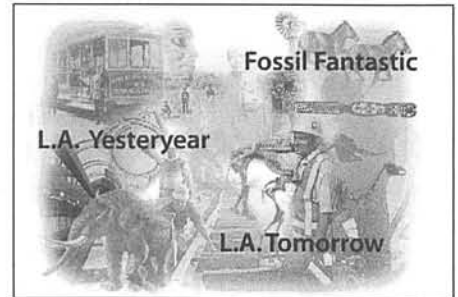
L.A. Underground includes rare pictures of LA's Chinatown taken in the late 1800s, along with color photos and descriptions of household items and other relics found during Metro Rail excavation.

Among the artifacts featured on the web page are bones of mastodons, saber-tooth tigers, ancient camels, horses and bison recovered by workers during tunneling. Although the finds are housed at the Los Angeles Museum of Natural History, Littman notes that most people will never have an opportunity to see them.

## Worldwide access

"But, any Internet user anywhere in the world can access L.A. Underground and get the full story of the treasure trove accumulated from 10 years of Metro Rail construction," he says.

Additionally, L.A. Underground browsers have immediate Internet access to LA's Museum of Natural History, to other U.S. museums and to museums in Britain, Canada and elsewhere in the world.



Internet browsers can choose from three exciting options in accessing the MTA's L.A. Underground web pages. The website address is [www.mta.net](http://www.mta.net).

The L.A. Underground web page was designed by Fly on the Wall Productions, which specializes in designing creative web sites. The agency worked closely with Littman, MTA Environmental Compliance Manager Jim Sowell, Thomas Amiya of MTA Marketing and Yoon Ham of MTA Public Affairs.

The Travel Itinerary Planner web pages were developed by an MTA Information Technology Services team led by Bill Mumbleau, Enterprise Geographic Information Systems manager. Ricardo Mireles-Cordova, Devang Parikh and Mauro Artega were principal team members. ■

## First Choice

<b>Leg 1</b>	METRO BUS 42 west - DOWNTOWN LA UNION STA		
Leaving	LAX TRANSIT CENTER DOCK 13	08:00A	AT
Arriving	CESAR CHAVEZ AV/ALAMEDA ST	09:07A	SE Corner
Pay	\$1.35	Pass \$42	
<b>Total Cost</b>	\$1.35	<b>Estimated Time</b>	67 MINS



The MTA's Trip Itinerary Planner provides bus and rail schedules and fares. The Internet web page includes maps of Metro Bus lines. This map shows Line 42.

## Suggestions survive rigorous selection process

*Employee Awards, from Page 1*

the MTA a better place to work," said Deputy CEO Sharon Landers in keynote remarks. "Their suggestions support the vision, mission and goals of the agency."

Landers noted that suggestions submitted through the ESP program must survive a rigorous process which includes review by a technical panel and final approval by agency management. Winning ideas must either save money, generate revenue, increase productivity, improve work processes, improve safety, improve service or improve the MTA's image.

"The Employee Suggestion Program is an excellent way to get in touch with frontline employees who have good ideas that benefit the MTA," said Frank Cardenas, executive officer, Administration.

Taking home honors for their winning suggestions were:

- **Jeffrey Burton**, a mechanic who recommended a method to remove torn paper currency more efficiently from jammed bus fareboxes by modifying the existing compressed air system.
- **Lawrence Busch**, a Revenue Department property maintainer who recommended installing a reset button to quickly clear jammed bus fareboxes. The device could save money by eliminating almost 50 percent of farebox service requests.
- **Dorothy Cook-Coleman**, an accounting assistant who proposed a means of saving money by collecting any outstanding travel cash advances from departing employees on their last day of work.



**Shawn Lowe (R), a budget systems analyst, won awards for two suggestions on increasing productivity and keeping costs down. Presenting her award is Frank Cardenas, executive officer, Administration.**



**The first group of MTA employees to qualify for Employee Suggestion Awards were honored in February. From left, top row, are Jeffrey Burton, Cindy Kondo-Lowe, Lawrence Busch, Robert De La Torre and Gerald Maizland. Bottom row, from left, are Patti Gagan, Shawn Lowe and Leonard Hooper. Not shown is Dorothy Cook-Coleman.**

- **Patti Gagan**, a transportation project manager whose idea to ensure departmental voice mail telephone coverage will improve customer service.
- **Leonard Hooper**, a transit operations supervisor who suggested that an "operations information sheet" could address employees' concerns about the use of new products and would improve employee morale.
- **Cindy Kondo-Lowe**, a Human Resources manager whose suggestion to improve timesheets by including computer coding information would improve the efficiency of the payroll process.
- **Shawn Lowe**, a budget systems analyst, who had two winning ideas. She suggested a way for departments to increase productivity by

sharing the services of temporary workers. She also developed a list of 10 other ways the MTA could keep costs down, including reducing the use of electricity.

- **Gerald Maizland**, a bus operator who suggested that printing the word "in" in large letters at the front door of buses and "out" at the rear door will facilitate passenger loading and improve service.

"We've been asking employees to think outside the box," said Ellen Levine, executive officer, Transit Operations. "These suggestions help us achieve our goals."

The Employee Suggestion Committee, with representatives from all major divisions, reviews all suggestions. ■

### MTA has ESP

The MTA's Employee Suggestion Program is designed to stimulate employees to submit innovative and creative ideas that:

- Save money,
- Generate revenue,
- Improve safety,
- Increase productivity,
- Raise employee morale,
- Improve service,
- Improve working conditions and
- Improve the MTA's image.

Each suggestion approved by the ESP

committee is worth \$100. Suggestions that result in cost savings or increased revenue earn the employee 10 percent of the actual savings or revenue increase up to a maximum of \$1,000.

The CEO also may grant special awards exceeding \$1,000 if the suggestion will result in exceptional cost savings or increased revenues.

ESP forms are available in the mail distribution areas on each floor of MTA Headquarters and in the kitchens at all operating divisions and field locations. ■

# David Sutter assumes leadership of North Hollywood tunnel project

*"We are surrounded by insurmountable opportunities."*

— Pogo

By Wendy Taylor

That this is one of his favorite quotes says a lot about David Sutter.

Recently hired by the MTA as the project manager to oversee completion of the Metro Red Line North Hollywood subway, Sutter not only brought his last rail construction project in on time, he managed to do so \$25 million under budget.

"I worked with a great team of professionals," said Sutter, referring to San Francisco's \$250 million Muni Metro Turnback and Extension projects. "It took a lot of people pulling together to make it happen, and with everything I see here, I predict the same."

That project involved construction of an underground train switching and storage facility that links the Muni Market Street Subway with the Embarcadero.

"The North Hollywood extension of the Red Line is a critical project for Los Angeles," says Sutter. "That's exactly the kind of challenge I enjoy most."

With 13 years under his belt managing major public works projects, Sutter is experienced in planning, design, construction and operation.

He has supervised implementation of an owner-controlled insurance program, as well as consultant/contractor selection and schedule and cost engineering control.

In addition, he's proficient at obtaining project approvals at the local, state and federal levels, including FTA, EPA, CalOSHA and other regulatory agencies.

But, one of Sutter's most significant career experiences — perhaps the one that drew him to the LA underground — was his visit to the Channel Tunnel during its construction.

"The 21 miles of tunnel between Britain and

France, the large size of the Channel's facilities, and the hundreds of challenges to overcome makes it a truly awesome accomplishment," he says.

A native of New York City and a graduate of the State University of New York, Sutter also studied at the University of California at Berkeley.

"I'm pleased to welcome David Sutter to our staff," said Charles Stark, MTA executive officer, Construction. "I'm confident he will carry on the fine work of John Adams, who was interim project manager during the past year and a half." ■



David Sutter, Project Manager Metro Rail North Hollywood

## New CNG buses, conversions to diesel will put more Metro Buses on the road

By Marion MacKenzie

The MTA is living up to its promise of improving bus service.

In February, the MTA Board voted to purchase 50 additional compressed natural gas-fueled buses and gave the green light to convert 127 inoperative ethanol vehicles to clean diesel.

The Board's action was only the most recent of several votes authorizing the purchase of hundreds more CNG buses.

"These decisions to increase our bus fleet will go a long way toward reducing overcrowding and delays and provide more frequent, efficient service throughout the county," says Ellen Levine, executive officer, MTA Transit Operations. "This is good news for us and our passengers."

By the year 2005, the MTA's CNG fleets will be one of the largest in the nation with more than 980 coaches. The average age of the entire bus fleet also will have been reduced from nine to six years.

### Conversion adds more buses

The decision to convert the inoperative ethanol buses to clean diesel allows the MTA to put 127 serviceable coaches back on the road quickly.

The ethanol buses had proved difficult to maintain, requiring engine overhauls as frequently as every 25,000 miles, compared to every 45,000 for methanol vehicles or every 200,000 for diesel engines.

"We applaud the Board's decision to convert these ethanol buses to diesel," says Levine. "The engine conversion costs only about \$15,000 per vehicle, and it will increase our operating bus fleet within a matter of months."

The conversion also will allow the agency to withdraw older vehicles from service and replace them with newer, converted buses with clean-running engines.

The MTA's long range capital plan calls for the purchase of hundreds of new buses over the next 10 years at a cost of about \$1 billion. ■

## Employee "workout teams" aim for big savings in massive review of MTA

Deputy CEO Allan Lipsky: "MTA must dramatically change."

By Bill Heard, Editor

**T**he MTA is implementing sweeping cost savings generated by teams of employees who have spent the past several months thoroughly reviewing every agency function and expenditure.

Beginning in early February, a group of more than 120 employees, selected for their wide knowledge of the MTA, was organized into 10 "workout teams."

The teams' goals were to identify cost reductions and ways to increase revenues. Members, who spent up to 40 percent of their time on workout team tasks, were expected to be innovative and to "think outside the box."

Team reports were due in early April so that recommendations could be implemented in the FY 1999 budget.

Deputy Chief Executive Officer Allan Lipsky, who — with CEO Julian Burke —

initiated the massive agency review, says the MTA must change if it is to survive.

### Dramatic change needed

"With several years in a row of significant cuts and a serious projected deficit for FY 1999, there are no easy solutions," Lipsky says. "It is imperative that the MTA focus its efforts and dramatically change what it does and how it operates."

That means eliminating, streamlining and improving the work processes and activities throughout the agency, he says.

Working with consultant advisors, the employee teams targeted human resources, information technology, fleet maintenance and new business development. They also reviewed overhead costs, capital planning, investment and budget processes, fares, labor management, transit service delivery and

workers compensation costs.

The teams sought to reduce labor costs, improve maintenance and fleet management, find new revenue sources and maintain better control of federal and state funds.

Deputy Assistant CEO Michael Gonzalez is workout project manager. Shirley Maimoni and Callier Beard are project coordinators.

Lipsky notes that using workout teams to achieve cost-efficiencies within the MTA is a different approach from those taken in the past. The concept has strong executive support and recommendations are being implemented to produce needed changes.

"The workout teams took ownership of their problem areas and were committed to resolving them," says Lipsky. "We're not looking to consultants to solve our problems. We have to solve these problems ourselves." ■

## Metro Bus Operator Davis saves life of South Central baby

*'It's just part of the job and goes along with the territory.'*

By Gary Wosk

**S**tanding a brawny 6-foot 3-inches, Metro Bus Operator Michael Davis is usually head and shoulders above the crowd, but it's what he did recently that really makes him stand tall.

Davis saved the life of a one-month-old baby girl, Feb. 12, when the infant suddenly stopped breathing aboard his bus in South Central Los Angeles.

As the girl's hysterical mother looked on, Davis, an MTA bus operator since 1989, instinctively stepped in and calmly took control of the situation, applying the skills several family members in the nursing field had taught him.

First he checked the baby's airway for a blockage. There was none. He then gently lowered the tiny girl onto his outstretched leg, lightly cupping her head in his huge palm.

### She sprang to life

It probably seemed like an eternity, but after about five minutes and repeated taps on the back, the girl sprang back to life with a cough and a huge grin.



**Metro Bus Operator Michael Davis saved the life of a baby girl who stopped breathing aboard his bus.**

As the crying-with-joy mother hugged her child, the other passengers offered heart-felt congratulations to Davis. Everyone wanted to shake his hand.

The modest Davis didn't tell anyone about the incident, not even his wife, Stephanie. It was his passenger who brought the near-tragedy to the attention of the MTA.

In late February, Davis was named KNX News Radio "Citizen of the Week" and was selected by MTA Transit Operations to be Employee of the Month. He was honored by the

MTA Board in March.

"It's just part of the job and goes along with the territory," insists the soft-spoken Davis, whose only previous life-saving experience was resuscitating a puppy. "But, it tops anything I've ever done."

Davis is the father of two children, Trenell, 13, and Shantell, 8. He was reared in South Central LA and now lives in Moreno Valley. Following the rescue, he was chosen Division 10's employee of the month. ■

# MTA Transit Institute teaches bus operators how to provide a pleasant ride for passengers

*Special training cited in 25% reduction of customer complaints*

By Bill Heard, Editor

*You're a Metro Bus operator on Line 20, Wilshire Boulevard. You stop at Rossmore and a passenger boards with his radio blaring. Over the noise, you politely ask him to turn it off.*

*Instead, the passenger smirks and takes a seat. The radio disturbs other passengers, but you shrug and drive on. You've done your duty. Or have you?*

**T**hanks to a refresher training program launched by the MTA last July, Metro Bus operators now have a range of strategies for ensuring their passengers a pleasant ride.

And it's paying off. The MTA has experienced a 25 percent reduction in customer complaints, a fact officials attribute to the new training and to the agency's Customer First initiative.

The customer communication techniques are taught during the Transit Institute, a 16-hour seminar every bus operator is required to attend annually. Operators also learn about their importance in forming and maintaining a favorable image of the MTA.

At this point, almost half of the agency's 3,300 operators have attended.

## A change of culture

"The major goal of the Transit Institute is to change the culture of our organization," says Michelle Caldwell, director of Finance Administration, Transit Operations. "Customer service is the focus. If a bus operator can make a decision in favor of the customer, that's the right decision to make."

The customer service elements of the Transit Institute are conducted by operator-trainers who are selected for their experience and standing among their peers. What they're teaching about dealing with difficult people is a departure from the past.

Previously, Metro Bus operators were expected only to issue a single, professional request to uncooperative passengers. After that, they might call a supervisor or ask for police assistance, depending upon the magnitude of the situation.

That's all changed now, according to Bill Frazier, manager, Operations Instruction.

"We're teaching operators to engage passengers in conversation — in a strategy — to get them to comply with the rules of proper conduct," says Frazier.

## Review of knowledge

The Transit Institute begins with a review of 148 questions that tests operators' technical knowledge and sets up the training to follow.

Next, instructors cover such topics as new motor vehicle regulations, defensive driving, accident prevention and emergency procedures.

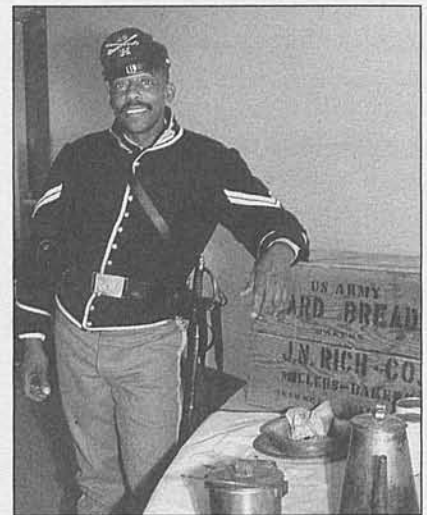
The second day of training features discussions on how to improve customer service. Instruction includes a training module on the Americans with Disabilities Act and sensitivity training that covers the special needs of disabled passengers.

In the next fiscal year, Caldwell says Transit Operations is planning to institute a one-day training program for maintenance personnel.

The Transit Institute program has drawn interest from Access, an organization for the disabled, and from other transit agencies in Long Beach, Santa Monica and Orange County. ■



The MTA's African-American Employees Association (AAEA) marked Black History Month in February with presentations by two organizations. The Tuskegee Airmen are veteran African-American pilots who integrated the U.S. Army Air Corps during World War II.



Cpl. A.J. Simien of the New Buffalo Soldiers portrays one of the former slaves who formed a crack U.S. Army unit that fought in battles during the Indian Wars of the American West.



# Pre-positioned buses help keep MTA service rolling

*Experiment places 12 buses near area's heaviest-traveled lines*

**M**TA Transit Operations has initiated a bold experiment managers hope will permit nearly instant response to fluctuations in traffic and service conditions on some of the region's heaviest bus lines.

Each weekday, a dozen coaches and operators are positioned at key locations near heavily-traveled lines, ready to respond should service slow, buses break down or become overcrowded.

"We're trying to be very responsive to changing travel patterns and to the demands of our customers," says John Hillmer, Northern Region general manager. Hillmer and Gary Spivaek, service operations director at MTA Division 3, devised the Service Restoration Plan.

If a bus on a crowded line experiences a

breakdown or difficult traffic conditions — or should any of a thousand things cause delays — the MTA's Bus Operations Control Center can call a pre-positioned bus into service.

Traffic snarls and other disruptions can make a bus line with sufficient passenger capacity appear to be overcrowded. The agency is considering posting employees called "service regulators" at strategic locations to monitor bus service and ensure that it flows smoothly.

## Limit on passenger loads

Under a federal court Consent Decree, the MTA may not operate with average passenger loads exceeding 135 percent of seating capacity in a 20-minute period. That works out to no more than 15 standees per 43-seat coach.

"With the Consent Decree, we have to manage our operations very closely," says Hillmer. "The Service Restoration Plan is part of our commitment to improving the level and type of service we offer."

To ensure that Metro Buses provide good passenger service and remain within the court's guidelines, MTA schedulers check the heaviest-traveled lines twice monthly for compliance. Less traveled lines are checked quarterly.

A line that exceeds the passenger load guidelines in three consecutive checking periods would violate the Consent Decree.

Should passenger loads on a bus line exceed the limits, Transit Operations can make adjustments in the number of buses assigned or in frequency of service. ■

## MTA's anti-counterfeit measures foil bus fare cheating

*Agency's pass exchange program monitors counterfeit fare activity*

By Frank Harper

**A**t a busy bus stop at Spring Street and Broadway in downtown Los Angeles, it's the afternoon rush hour.

Vanessa Smith of the MTA's Revenue Department, clad in a red reflective vest, and two uniformed police officers, are greeting boarding bus riders.

Smith and her police team are engaged in a novel program designed to monitor the extent of counterfeit pass activity on the Metro Bus system.

Carrying stacks of brand-new bus passes in assorted denominations — weeklies, monthlies, semi-monthlies — Smith and the officers will board various Metro Bus lines for the next few hours and request passengers to simply exchange their bus passes for new ones.

Smith and other Revenue teams will gather back at Headquarters and inspect the collected passes to determine if any are counterfeits and to assess their quality.

The pass exchange program eliminates one of the main difficulties in conducting this kind of fare compliance survey — interference with normal passenger boarding and maintaining bus schedules.

"We had often gone out with police officers and looked at passes as they came aboard," says Jim Cudlip, assistant director of Revenue, "but it meant we had to make a very quick decision as we viewed each pass. You have to keep the bus going and people moving. If someone is doing a good job of counterfeiting you won't see it."

## Analyzing the passes

The pass exchange method affords the police and the Revenue Department sufficient time to closely inspect and analyze the passes collected.

"This allows us to look at every pass — good or not — to get as wide a selection as possible," says Cudlip, "and to get a better idea of what our counterfeit rate really is."

What have been the results of the pass exchange outings so far?

"We're very happy," Cudlip says. "The total number of counterfeits we've found is a fraction of one percent."

Cudlip attributes the low incidence of counterfeit activity to more sophisticated, yet costlier printing methods.

Among the methods used to thwart phony passes are embossing, foils, and holography.

## Worth the price

"It appears to be well worth the incremental difference in price," says Cudlip.

"I've talked with several other agencies—San Francisco, Seattle, Minneapolis, St. Louis—some of which have a much higher incidence of counterfeiting because they use cheaper printing methods that are easier to duplicate. Some agencies will admit to rates as high as three to five percent of certain types of passes," he says.

Vanessa Smith and the other Revenue inspection teams say that passengers generally have a very positive attitude toward the program.

"They've paid full retail prices for their passes," says Cudlip, "They're happy to see us checking pass validity and preventing some people from getting away with counterfeits."

Based on results so far, the pass exchange program is a success. The Revenue Department plans to continue the program as one means to monitor counterfeiting activity and to assist police in tracking counterfeit passes back to their source. ■

# MTA News in Brief

## MTA honors civil rights pioneer Rosa Parks in March ceremony at Wilmington station

The MTA honored one of America's modern day civil rights pioneers, March 20, with the unveiling of an artist's rendering of a plaque commemorating the struggle of Rosa Parks.

Parks, the woman whose refusal to surrender her seat on a Montgomery, Ala., bus in 1955, was ill and unable to participate in the event at the Imperial/Wilmington Metro Blue Line/Green Line station.

A bronze plaque will be installed later at the station in permanent recognition of the woman who served as a lightning rod for the civil rights movement.

The effort to honor Parks was spearheaded by the MTA's African-American Employees Association (AAEA), with help from the office of

the Los Angeles County supervisor who represents the area.

Following her act of defiance in 1955, Parks was arrested by Montgomery police. The arrest sparked a 381-day boycott of Montgomery's city bus system and a wave of other civil rights demonstrations throughout the South and the rest of the country.

"The plaque will be a source of community and cultural pride," said AAEA President Jerry Kiper. "The surrounding Watts-Willowbrook community has a large transit-dependent population and it is a most appropriate location to honor Ms. Parks for her lasting contribution to the cause of civil rights." □

## MTA receives award from Black Business Association

The Los Angeles Black Business Association recently presented its Government Agency Award to the MTA in recognition of the agency's equal opportunity programs to foster African-American economic development.

In 1997, the MTA competitively awarded contracts valued at more than \$32.5 million to minority- and women-owned firms, with approximately \$8 million — or 25 percent — awarded to African-American businesses.

Of the more than 1,300 minority- and women-owned businesses certified to do business with the MTA, some 300 are owned by African-Americans. □

## Red Line celebrates 5th birthday; used by 38 million riders

As the Metro Red Line celebrated its fifth year of operation, the MTA announced that more than 38 million boarding passengers have used the system since it opened Jan. 30, 1993.

Metro Red Line ridership during Fiscal Year 1997 topped 11.6 million boardings, up 52 percent compared to FY 96 when 7.6 million boarding passengers rode the subway.

The increase in ridership is linked to the opening of the 2.1-mile Wilshire "spur" in mid-1996 from Wilshire/Alvarado to Wilshire/Western.

The MTA said more than 34 million boarding passengers during FY 97 used the entire Metro Rail system. The 48-mile system is composed of the Metro Red, Blue and Green lines.

The MTA is completing construction on Segment 2 of the Metro Red Line from Wilshire/Vermont to Hollywood/Vine. Segment 2 is expected to open in early 1999. Segment 3, from Hollywood and Vine to North Hollywood, is expected to be completed in mid-2000. □

## MTA teams up with Hollywood to return stars to Walk of Fame

Actress Connie Stevens helped the MTA and the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce welcome hundreds of stars — including her own — back to the Walk of Fame in March.

Some 320 stars had been in storage since 1994 while Metro Red Line tunnels and stations were under construction.

"The people of Hollywood entrusted us with preserving the dignity of the Hollywood Walk of Fame," said MTA CEO Julian Burke. "This is an excellent example of how the MTA works with a community and makes good on its promises, and is a clear sign that the opening of the subway is not that far away."

It's estimated that an additional 700,000 visitors will be drawn to Hollywood each year, once the next segment of the Metro Red Line opens in the spring of 1999.

"We're extremely encouraged by the ever-increasing number of developers we see making commitments and inquiring about the revitalized Hollywood," said Johnny Grant, Walk of Fame chairman. "Obviously, the subway has a lot to do with that. Studies have shown that



Actress Connie Stevens represented the film industry during a rededication of the Hollywood Walk of Fame in March. Her star originally was placed on Hollywood Boulevard in October, 1977.

wherever these systems are built, economic resurgence follows."

The next segment of the Metro Red Line will include stations on Vermont Avenue at Beverly, Santa Monica and Sunset boulevards, and on Hollywood Boulevard at Western Avenue and Vine Street. □

## Lower subway assessments will support downtown Business Improvement District

The MTA Board has approved an innovative proposal that will reduce Metro Red Line assessment fees for downtown Los Angeles businesses by five cents per accessible square foot over the next five years.

The savings will be used by downtown business owners to support a newly created Business Improvement District (BID), that will provide increased public safety, street lighting and maintenance.

Many business owners consider the BID a key element in the revitalization of downtown LA.

The original Downtown Benefit Assessment District was formed in 1985 by the then RTD to help fund construction of one or more rail

transit stations.

The MTA Board's plan will provide a five-cent reduction from the annual levy currently calculated at approximately 17 cents per accessible square foot, but scheduled to go up to about 26 cents in 1998.

The MTA's original agreement with the property owners was that no taxes would be levied until the Metro Red Line became operational. In Fiscal Year 1992-93 the MTA bonded for \$154 million against the anticipated revenues from the assessment district.

As additional security, a reserve account was set up for 10 percent of the total amount, \$15.4 million, in the event of delinquencies, foreclosures or unforeseen events to ensure

repayment of the bonds.

"The Board's Jan. 29 action substituted a surety bond for the reserve account, which frees up the \$15.4 million," said Terry Matsumoto, MTA executive officer, Finance. "These funds will be applied to the annual debt service payment and will give the members of the assessment district a nickel reduction in their square footage assessment for five years."

"The Metro Red Line is providing a benefit to downtown businesses and we want to work with those merchants as best we can, while at the same time meeting our responsibilities in the financing of the project," he said. □

### MTA Bikestation to participate in Bike-to-Work Day

Thousands of Californians will strap on helmets instead of seatbelts, May 21, to participate in Southern California Bike-to-Work Day.

The fourth annual event will give many bikers in the Long Beach area an opportunity to visit the MTA-sponsored Bikestation, located near the terminus of the Metro Blue Line.

The bike-transit center offers free, secure bike parking daily for commuters, as well as bike rentals and repairs. Newly added to the Bikestation are Cycle-Safe lockers for after-hours bike storage.

Bike-to-Work Day events will include a complimentary continental breakfast, morning newspaper and a drawing for such prizes as a folding bicycle, movie passes, T-shirts and bike accessories.

The Bikestation also will host Bike Day on Saturday, May 16, from 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. This family event will feature an unclaimed bicycle auction, a bike safety and training rodeo for adults and children ages 10 and older, and commuter training presentations by Long Beach Cyclists.

Located at the intersection of First Street and the Promenade in downtown Long Beach, the Bikestation is open from 6 a.m. until 7 p.m.

on weekdays and from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. on weekends.

For further information on coming events, call 562-436-BIKE (2453) or access the Internet web page at [www.ci.long-beach.ca.us/bikestation](http://www.ci.long-beach.ca.us/bikestation).

The Bikestation is sponsored by the MTA, City of Long Beach and the Mobile Source Air Pollution Reduction Review Committee. □

### LA leads the world in freeway carpool lanes

Los Angeles County now boasts the largest freeway carpool system in the world.

With more than 130 miles of carpool lanes currently in use, and several hundred more planned by the year 2015, commuters can save at least one minute a mile during rush hours.

High Occupancy Vehicle lanes are marked with a "diamond" symbol and are dedicated for use by carpools, vanpools and buses. Vehicles in carpool lanes travel faster and relieve congestion in regular freeway lanes. Ridesharing can reduce the cost of commuting by as much as \$300 a month.

Over the next two years the MTA and Caltrans plan to complete 10 more carpool lane projects in Los Angeles County.

First on the list is a 7.6 mile stretch along the I-405 Freeway from the Orange County Line to the intersection of the I-710/Long Beach Freeway.

In July, another 6.1 mile stretch on the I-405 will be opened, this one between the intersection of the I-710/Long Beach Freeway and the intersection of the I-110/Harbor Freeway.

"By the year 2015, Los Angeles County's HOV lane system is projected to serve more than 1 million person trips each day," says Jim de la Loza, MTA executive officer, Regional Transportation Planning and Development. □

### Austrian delegation looks at MTA's ADA implementation

A 15-member delegation representing the Disability Commission of the Vienna, Austria, regional parliament visited the MTA, March 20.

Headed by Parliament President Erika Stubenvoll, the group was interested in the agency's implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). They were welcomed by MTA CEO Julian Burke and Deputy CEO Sharon Landers.

Commission members met with MTA staff to discuss ADA-required signage, shuttle services, wheelchair lifts, subsidies, special passes and other services for disabled passengers. They also visited other transit agencies during a week's stay in California. ■

## MTA will place 127 clean diesel buses in service by mid-summer

**B**y mid-summer, all 127 of the MTA's alcohol-fueled buses that had been sidelined by engine failure will be back in service with engines modified to burn clean diesel fuel.

Modification of the burned-out engines began in April and has proceeded at a pace of 15 buses per month, according to Richard Hunt, deputy executive officer, Transit Operations.

The MTA purchased 333 buses with Detroit

Diesel methanol engines in 1989. The engines began experiencing failures after 45,000 miles of operation.

To improve service life, the MTA converted the engines to ethanol. Performance continued to drop, averaging only 25,000 miles between overhauls. Diesel engines average 200,000 miles between overhauls.

In February, the MTA Board approved converting 127 of the failed engines, which were

past warranty, to clean diesel at a cost of about \$15,000 each.

Detroit Diesel will make the conversions and, along with MTA officials, will closely monitor performance. The company also will issue new warranties for each converted engine.

"Many of these buses are less than six years old," says Hunt. "They should be back on the street where we can get another six years of service from them." ■

### Metro Family Change of Address Form

**Important, please check:**     MTA employee     MTA retiree     MTA stakeholder     Add     Delete     Address change

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Company \_\_\_\_\_

Current Address \_\_\_\_\_ Apt # \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

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