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An estimated 83,000 rode the Orange Line on opening weekend.



Photo by Gary Leonard

Sammy Said it Best: Metro Orange Line Opening Was 'Cool'

- Public's favorable comments buoyed Metro volunteers

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Nov. 1, 2005) Little Sammy Hobbs, a Valley resident, may have summed it up best. "It was cool," he said, as he stood in line at the Warner Center station with his father, Larry, waiting for their second ride aboard a Metro Liner.

Sammy's assessment of the Metro Orange Line's opening weekend seemed to be shared by the majority of the 83,000 who rode the sleek articulated buses, commented on the comfortable ride and admired the landscaped transitway.

Elaine Irvine of Van Nuys and her friends, Kathleen Brown and Sheri Hooper were making a day of it. Brown was determined to ride "the whole strip," while it was a "historic thing" for Hooper.

Irvine, who lives only a block from the

Photos by Bill Heard



Sammy Hobbs and his dad, Larry, were beaming when they boarded a Metro Liner at Warner Center for the trip to North Hollywood. Sammy had collected a cap and a bag of souvenirs to show his friends.

Reseda station, liked the bus and the scenery along the route. She expects to ride the Orange Line to work and for shopping.

The women's interest in the new service wouldn't have surprised Operator **Rudolfo Mejia Morataya**. As he drove an eastbound run, the Division 8 extra-board operator said, "Most people love it because they can get to their destinations faster. They're very excited about it."

'A great success'

Arnold Kay of Valley Village brought his friend, Westwood resident Jerry Richbrook, along for the ride. Kay had watched the 14-mile line being built. "I think it's terrific and will be a great success." He plans to ride the Orange Line to take his wife shopping in the West Valley.

At Warner Center, visitors crowded dozens of souvenir and information booths, including that of City Councilman Dennis Zine, where District Director Michael Besem was getting reactions from residents.

"A lot of people say they'll use the Orange Line for entertainment purposes, more so than just to commute," he said. "They talked about going to the Pantages, going downtown for a show or to the Hollywood Bowl. That surprised me."

Over at the Metro booth, Senior Community Relations Officer **Devon Cichoski** was pleased with the public turnout. She has worked on the Metro Orange Line project for three years and was seeing it come to fruition.

"Along the way, a lot of people doubted whether anyone would ride the Orange Line," she said, "but the turnout, today, shows that the community is excited and that people are going to use it."

Just at that moment, a resident of Warner Center came up to tell Cichoski that she has important meetings downtown every day this week. She asked where she could buy a weekly pass. "That's exactly what we want people to do," said a beaming Cichoski.



After three long years of work, Senior Community Relations Officer Devon Cichoski was delighted with the turnout during the public opening.



Mike Perococo of Van Nuys folds a paper bus model for his daughter, Leila, who's proud to be almost 4 years old.



Elaine Irvine of Van Nuys, left, and her friends, Sheri Hooper and Kathleen Brown came out for a day of fun on the Metro Orange Line.

Warner Center rideshare

Adding emphasis to that point was Marcia Charnas, who coordinates the rideshare program for some 300 employees of Zenith Insurance Co. Her company also belongs to a larger group of Warner Center employers that, according to Metro Rideshare Supervisor **Sara Zadok**, has perhaps 10,000 employees in rideshare programs.

"They're very excited about the Orange Line," said Charnas. "They can get to work more cheaply in the comfort of these beautiful new buses than by driving."



Marcia Charnas, left, employee transportation coordinator for Zenith Insurance, and Metro Rideshare Accounts Supervisor Sara Zadok met at the Warner Center celebration. With Charnas are her retired racing greyhounds Beauty and Katie.

Mike Perococo, who now lives a block from the Woodman station in Van Nuys, figures he can commute to his new job via Orange Line. A former New Yorker, he's used to "fast commuting. I think it's good for the Valley, good for the community and it's obviously good for the environment."

His daughter, Leila, almost 4 years old, was excited about coming out for a ride on the big buses. Father and daughter expect to make the Orange Line a frequent weekend adventure.



Taking a moment for a quick bite of lunch are, from left, Metro's Anna Mercaldi, Ron Jue, Alicia Morales Rodriguez, Devon Cichoski and Dave Hershenson.

More than 500 Metro employees were deployed at the 13 stations helping customers and the curious make big adventure of the opening days.

'Doing crowd control'

Division 1 Transportation Manager **Cindy Karpman** was the station manager at the Balboa station. Her crew included personnel from divisions 5 and 7 and the Regional Rebuild Center. "We're doing crowd control; trying to keep everything organized to help people get on and off the bus safely."

Gateway Building Services Manager **Brian Soto** was getting "very positive comments" from riders, who also were interested in the pedestrian walkways and

the unique stations.

Human Resources Supervisor **Scott Lloyd**, Warner Center station manager, found that riders loved the buses, especially "Kids love it, they're having a blast."

At the Metro booth selling commemorative Metro Orange Line T-shirts, lapel pins and posters, **April McKay**, director of Customer Programs and Services, said the \$10 T-shirts were the most popular item.

Operator **Miguel Monjaraz** interviewed on an eastbound run, said, "It's very nice to see so many people. It's a great new experience and I'm happy to be here and enjoy it."

Stock Clerk **Santos Carrillo**, who started his volunteer shift at 5:30 a.m. found some people already standing in line. One fellow told him he's giving up his personal car to use Metro.

Surprise his girlfriend

Bill Douglas, a senior risk analyst who's been with Metro for two months, had to laugh when a rider who lives near the Balboa station told him he was headed over to his girlfriend's house to surprise her.

Assistant Transportation Manager **George Trudeau**, who was responsible for coordinating the bus operation for the weekend event, was pleased with the way things were going. "This has turned out to be way better than we thought it'd be. The operator training has paid off. Nothing but great comments!"

Robert Torres, corporate health and safety manager, was checking the safe flow of passengers at the stations and making sure signals and signage were being observed. "So far," he said, "Everything looks good, no major incidents."

Assistant Transportation Manager **Derick Mahome**, helping direct operations at the North Hollywood station, looked at a line of riders that stretched from the boarding area all the way around the plaza and out of sight behind a building.

Buses were being loaded about every 3 minutes, but he estimated a wait of 45 minutes or so. "It's a lot more people than we expected, but it's been really successful today," he said. "Everybody's been doing what they can to make it work well."

Sheriff's Lt. Pat Jordan dropped by the North Hollywood station to check on the 40- to 50-member contingent of deputies and 10 Explorers assigned to opening weekend duties.

'A good test'

"It's mostly visibility and crowd control today," Jordan said. "This is a good test for how it's going to run on a day-to-day basis for traffic and for the numbers of people who will be on the buses."

A normal day will see six Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau patrol cars in circulation, along with two motorcycle deputies and deputies deployed to the stations. They'll be augmented by fare inspectors.

Jordan was particularly pleased with the Sheriff's Volunteer Posse. "They have a definite mission patrolling the Orange Line and they're a big hit with the kids."

Library Archivist **Jim Walker**, a Los Angeles transit historian and author, was on

volunteer duty at the Laurel Canyon station. Looking at interest in the Orange Line, he believes it will foster development in the Valley.

Deputy CEO John Catoe talks with a passenger at the North Hollywood station.



"It's evidence that, if you build transportation, they will come," he said. "People want to live where transportation is."

Deputy CEO **John Catoe**, who had been aboard at least 10 Metro Liners by noon, Saturday, said the public turnout "is exceeding our expectations. I've talked to many people who said they haven't been on a bus in a decade, but they're going to try the system going to work Monday morning. I think it's an overwhelming success for transit, for the Valley and for Los Angeles."

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