



NEWS

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MTA STEPS UP PUBLIC OUTREACH TO REDUCE GRADE CROSSING ACCIDENTS ON THE METRO BLUE LINE

As the Metro Blue Line goes about the business of moving 50,000 boarding passengers a day, the MTA has set its sights on making the nation's most successful light rail line also the nation's *safest* light rail line.

In an effort to reduce the number of grade crossing accidents between Metro Blue Line trains and pedestrians and vehicles, the MTA has revamped its public safety awareness program.

Approved by the MTA Board of Directors in November 1998, the new Metro Blue Line Grade Crossing Safety Awareness Program got underway today and includes several key elements:

- Door-to-door distribution by Los Angeles County Sheriff's deputies and MTA Public Affairs staff of bi-lingual flyers, rail safety brochures, safety magnets and other information to parents, students, schools, businesses and facilities along the Metro Blue Line corridor
- Mounting of 270 street pole banners with safety messages at intersections, and posters and banners featuring safety messages on Metro trains and buses
- Working directly with parents, residents, businesses, educators and commuters to develop messages for specific communities
- Outreach to specialized groups including homeowner associations, chambers of commerce and traffic reporters
- Distribution of safety materials to DMV offices and public libraries
- Use of newspaper ads to publicize the safety messages.

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Since service began on the Metro Blue Line in July 1990, collisions between Metro Blue Line trains and vehicles and pedestrians along the 22-mile route from Los Angeles to Long Beach have resulted in 43 fatalities.

"While none of the 43 fatalities has been determined to be MTA's fault, we feel obliged to educate people and to discourage them from taking risks," said Paul J. Lennon, MTA managing director of safety and security. "Grade crossing safety on the Metro Blue Line is as important to us as transporting passengers."

"Outreach has always been key to relaying the safety message," added Lennon. "What makes this new program particularly significant is the door-to-door distribution of safety materials, the posting of safety messages on all our trains and the presence of banners all along the Metro Blue Line corridor. As a result of these additions, we'll reach even more people with the safety message."

One of the thematic features of the banners, ads and other safety materials is a cartoon character created by artist Steve Gray that MTA has named "Safety Guy." Sporting a bicycle helmet, orange safety vest and knee pads, "Safety Guy" offers "Tips for Safe Rail Trips" and warns people that "Tracks Mean Trains!"

"I created 'Safety Guy' with kids in mind," said Gray. "He's sort of a Barney Fife kind of character. He's goofy, but he's also someone whom kids will find believable."

"It's important for kids to *get* the safety message before they get bored," added Gray. "A character like 'Safety Guy' can accomplish that by holding their interest."

The stepped-up public outreach supplements a series of ongoing engineering improvements that also have been designed to increase safety on the Metro Blue Line. They include:

- Continued testing of a four quadrant gate project at 124th Street

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- Installation of swing gates at the Artesia Station, pedestrian gates at Gage Avenue and the Vernon and Florence stations.
- Installation of train-activated "No Left Turn" signs at 55th Street
- Construction of median islands at 92nd Street and Manville Street
- Construction of median island at 103rd Street to replace delineators (cylindrical plastic barriers)
- Relocation of "T" signals and installation of active fiber optic "Train" warning signs in Los Angeles
- Installation of "Second Train Coming" warning sign and widening the sidewalk at Vernon Avenue
- Installation of additional flashing warning lights at Vernon Avenue, 55th Street, 92nd Street, Century Boulevard, 103rd Street, 119th Street and Compton Avenue
- Installation of photo enforcement equipment at six additional intersections in Los Angeles.
- Testing of ARC (Alternating Rail Crossing) light system on five Metro Blue Line cars. When the horn or bell on each car is sounded, the car's headlights will flash on an alternating basis and will remain flashing for 10 seconds after the sounding of the horn or bell. If the test phase (six-month maximum) is successful, the remainder of the 54-car Metro Blue Line fleet will be retrofitted with the ARC system.

"When people approach grade crossings we want them to think about safety, to pay attention to the warnings of oncoming trains, and to realize that the physical deterrents at those crossings have been placed there to save their lives," added Lennon.

In addition, a series of other engineering recommendations included in a recent study by Booz-Allen & Hamilton, Inc. are in the planning stage. They include:

- Installation of active fiber optic "Train" warning signs and relocation of "T" signals in Long Beach

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- Installation of four quadrant gates at one additional intersection (to be determined)
- Installation of photo enforcement equipment at five intersections in Long Beach
- Installation of pedestrian barrier (pipe rail) near Pico Station
- Improvement of pedestrian crossings (swing gates, pedestrian gates)
- Installation of flexible delineators (cylindrical plastic barriers) where applicable.

Safety also will be enhanced by the addition of the recently-formed Sheriff's Motorcycle Team to the Transit Services Bureau. The Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department conducts law enforcement operations along the Metro Blue Line under contract with the MTA. The team's eight motorcycle deputies will enforce all laws, including the California Vehicle Code, along the Metro Blue Line, which has 101 grade crossings.

"Safety is a partnership between the MTA and the thousands of people who cross the path of the Metro Blue Line every day," added Lennon. "There is very little that can be done to stop someone who is bound and determined to cross the tracks even when it is unsafe to do so, but we can make it more difficult to do so and cause a person to think twice about taking a risk that might prove fatal."

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