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From L to R: South Bay Bus Operators Luis X Ortega, Miguel Tellez Castro and Javier Monroy, Road Supervisor Diana Hernandez, Bus Operator Isaac Altamirano, Safety Supervisor Gil Von Mueller, Bus Operators Paul Shaw, Monica Jimenez, Brenda Garret, Christopher Schiazza and Reyna Leyva/ From L to R: Bus Operator Christopher Schiazza, Transdev South Bay Director of Transportation Rene Alvarez, and Safety Supervisor Gil Von Mueller/ New 60-foot articulated buses/ Most Ridership

The South Bay's population is growing rapidly, and our service and ridership is matching that growth. The Transit Optimization Plan will add more service to the South Bay early next year and a new South Bay Rapid route is expected to start running sometime in 2018. To manage our day-to-day bus operations in the South Bay, we lean on the biggest member of the MTS extended family – Transdev.

Transdev's South Bay operation is responsible for 41 of our 95 bus routes. Based in Chula Vista, the South Bay bus division houses 231 buses, and employs 438 Transdev drivers to handle the workload. Many of our busiest bus routes cross through the South Bay including Routes 709, 933/934, 950 and 929. Ridership on routes such as the 709 and 950 has grown so much that the standard 40-foot buses are being supplemented with new 60-foot articulated buses.

We checked in with the South Bay operations team to learn more about their outlook on service and how they make it all work. According to Transdev's Director of Transportation Rene Alvarez, a big part of that is communication.

"We get all the bus operators into one room once every other month and talk about the challenges on the road, upcoming detours, and importance of safe driving," said Alvarez. "This inperson communication helps everyone."

Alvarez has held just about every position in bus operations since 1990. He started his career with Chula Vista Transit on his 21st birthday. He's worked for MTS in-house and also on the contract side. "Just like with the in-house bus team, safety is our number one priority," added Alvarez. "We've really taken a re-energized approach to our emphasis on safety recently, and the operators are responding."

"The way I look at it is we play a big part in each passenger's life," said Safety Supervisor Gil Von Mueller. Like many MTS bus operators, Von Mueller is working at Transdev as a second career. He previously worked nearby at the Wonder Hostess Bakery Outlet for 23 years.

“Keeping passengers safe is most important,” he added. “A key way we can do that is by not rushing the process. It’s important that we remember to work at a comfortable speed behind the wheel and all the other duties. Operate at our own speed.” In addition to focusing on safety, South Bay operators also appreciate the rapport developed with passengers. “We know a lot of them on a first name basis,” added Von Mueller.

“Sometimes passengers try to give me hugs, because I see them every day,” said Chris Schiazza, a 12-year bus operator in the South Bay. Schiazza is a former Marine who looks the part. He’s originally from Brooklyn and appreciates the cultural diversity seen on many MTS bus routes. “Some of the inner-city routes are considered challenging. But I like them. They are busy and I’ve never really had an issue. There are a lot of good people on these routes.”

“Keeping passengers safe is most important.” Gil Von Mueller

Safety Supervisor

Both Schiazza and Von Mueller have had incidents on South Bay routes where a passenger became unruly, only to have other passengers come to the bus operator’s defense. “It turns into community policing, which we can appreciate. Many of our passengers have our backs,” said Von Mueller. In addition to having loyal riders, the camaraderie and professionalism among the 438 Transdev operators continues to grow. “We are always looking to promote from within,” said Alvarez. “We want to reward good employees.”

“The employees are great to work with. I know their kids,” added Von Mueller. “I try to say hi to everyone, acknowledge everyone. We have a job to do, but we also laugh and appreciate everyone.” Schiazza, who began working South Bay routes a dozen years ago, has seen a significant culture shift since he started. “We are progressing. People have a better attitude than what I saw 12 years ago. It’s more professional and there’s more structure.”

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