



Regional  
Transit



The RT's light rail vehicle "in the shop".

## IBEW members keep Sacramento

# Primed to Perform

Story and photos by Eric Wolfe

Local 1245 members take their work seriously at Sacramento Regional Transit. More than 100,000 people are banking on it.

That's how many people board an RT bus or light rail vehicle each day, expecting to get from here to there—safely, smoothly and on schedule. That can only happen when the District's 254 buses and 76 rail cars are primed to perform. Like any complex mechanical device—or three-year-old child for that matter—it performs a lot better with regular attention.

When a light rail car comes in for its routine 10,000-mile checkup, the first

thing Gary Rice looks for is his wet suit. "They get so much dirt on them we have to hose them off," explains Rice, a "C" Mechanic. "I have to get the calipers, brakes, hydraulic pressure control unit"—the whole underbelly of the car. It takes about a half hour just to get the grit off so that a proper inspection is possible.

During a recent visit by the Utility Reporter, Rice is performing a 35,000-mile check. It's a more detailed inspection for leaks, bad brakes, electrical problems—anything that could degrade safety or service if it's not detected in time.

At 300,000 miles, a light rail car's cen-

ter truck gets "mid-lived," says "C" Mechanic Daniel Talamantes. That means new bushings and new bearings, among other things.

A light rail vehicle's use of electric current for power raises an additional set of maintenance issues.

Two "propulsion inverters" control the high-voltage power system, storing power from the line, explains "A" Mechanic Brian Medeiros. "We have to inspect to see if there's any kind of arcing. We don't want any stray voltage."

At the moment, he's inspecting the main contactor for the propulsion system. He will spend a little extra time on the auxiliary contactors, which he calls "a notorious high-fail item."

Redundancy is built into the system to assure greater reliability. The two propulsion inverters, for example, work independently of one another so that the train would keep operating even if one gives out.

Riders, of course, don't generally notice things like a back-up propulsion inverter. What they do notice is how the



Daniel Talamantes, "C" Mechanic, puts fenders in the part washers.

rail cars look. And that's the job of IBEW members, too.

Vehicles get banged up. Fact of life. When RT light rail cars get banged up they're going to find their way to Ivor James, "A" Body Fender Mechanic. James is the sole remaining Body Fender Mechanic on day shift after one retired and another went to rail maintenance.

"It's all in the prep," explains James. "If you don't do it right, it's not going to look right."



"C" Mechanic Gary Rice hoses down the underside of a light rail vehicle so that it can be inspected.



Kenneth Doran, an "A" Mechanic, inspects the undercarriage of a LRV.

RIGHT: Ivor James, "A" Body/Fender Mechanic, preps for painting.



"A" Mechanic Dwayne Dickerson dries off underside of an LRV to be inspected.



Brian Medeiros, an "A" Mechanic, inspects the main contactor for the LRV's propulsion system.



Turning rotors in the bus shop is Gasoline Propane Mechanic Raymond Lucero.

## to Regional Transit on the move

### Bus Maintenance

You'll find the same concern for looking right and running good at RT's bus maintenance facility.

Don Franks is working on a rear side panel and an access door, which got banged up somewhere along the 833 route miles the system covers. But not all the dings and scratches happen out on the road.

"The buses are wider than they used to be but the (parking) lot size hasn't increased, so scrapes are happening right on RT lots," Franks confides.

Memo to management: widen the parking spaces.

Phil Hancock, an "A" Mechanic Trainee, is working on a coolant leak. "I pulled the pipe out, cleaned it out, put some new pipe dope on it." Hancock has been

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Don Franks, "A" Body/Fender Mechanic, works on a bus's rear side panel.



ABOVE: "A" Mechanic Mark McKee in the bus shop.

BELOW: Eric Okungbowa, "A" Mechanic Trainee, changes broken pulley on an AC compressor.



"A" Mechanics Body/Fender in the bus shop are, from left: Rodney Beverly, Gary Parks and Don Franks.

Matt Mibach, left, and Robert Bonsack, both "A" Mechanics, adjust bolts holding the bus to the truck. They are replacing the truck with one that's been serviced.



### RT's union legacy

Sacramento Regional Transit District began operations on April 1, 1973, with the acquisition of the Sacramento Transit Authority. But IBEW Local 1245 has been on the system a lot longer than that.

Local 1245 was already representing transit workers in Sacramento when Pacific Gas & Electric sold its electric facilities to the Sacramento Municipal Utility District and the Sacramento City Line Transportation System.

Later, IBEW went through some changes of its own when Local 1245 was amalgamated with IBEW Local 1324, which had been organizing PG&E workers in the Bay Area, and IBEW Local 50, which had organized workers in the Bay Area Key System Transit Lines, now the Alameda-Contra Costa (AC) Transit District.

When RT came into being in 1973 it completed a new maintenance facility and purchased 103 buses. Over the next decade RT continued to expand bus service to the growing Sacramento region while a cooperative effort emerged among city, county and state government officials to develop a light rail system, which was inaugurated in 1987 and has expanded considerably over the years to a system that now covers 37 miles in RT's 418 square-mile service area.

Matt Mibach, Bob Thompson, Jim Watt and Robert Bonsack



### RT by the numbers

Light Rail Mechanics, Serviceworkers, Body Fender Mechanics: **55**

Bus Mechanics, Serviceworkers, Body Fender Mechanics, Painters: **80**

Linemen: **18**

Rail Workers: **10**

Facility I, II, III, and Tech: **60**

### IBEW Local 1245 Stewards:

Lauren Bartlett  
Rod Beverly  
Connie Bibbs  
William Gilliam  
Dwayne Dickerson  
Gary Parks  
Brian McCord  
Rick Curtis  
Donnell Williams

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on the job for five years, and is plenty glad to be represented by a union.

“I came from a world where there’s no benefits,” he says, a world where you “were lucky to get a paid vacation.”

IBEW members at RT know that collective bargaining is their chance to move forward. With negotiations for a new contract set to begin in late summer, they’ve already submitted dozens of bargaining proposals to the union.

A major concern for light rail “A” Mechanics is pay equity.

A lot of shops specialize, matching up their mechanics with specific tasks. But at RT, an “A” Mechanic has to be able to do it all. Jim Watt, an “A” Mechanic who will be sitting at the bargaining table this fall, explains:

“Electronic troubleshooting. Mechanical work. AC troubleshooting. We have to be able to do the electrical work. All of the mechanics have to be able to do all the work.”

But that extra versatility isn’t properly recognized in their compensation, Watt

believes, and that is shaping up to be a real problem for RT.

“They’re having a problem hiring qualified people because the wages they pay are lower than the wages you could get somewhere else,” he says.

## Lineworkers

A similar situation existed for RT Lineworkers. They suspected the jobs they were doing might be split up among three or four classifications at other agencies—work that includes overhead work, traction power, signaling, substation protective relay testing and troubleshooting.

But they weren’t content to just speculate. They established a survey by going on the Internet and finding wage rates at comparable agencies.

Brian McCord, Lineworker III, said the survey showed that RT “is really getting something for its money.” For one thing, they discovered their department is much smaller than those of comparable agencies.

“They couldn’t attract people with the wages,” says McCord. “We had three people leave—one went to SMUD, one transferred to operations, one retired. If we’d had the money, he’d still be here.”

The Lineworkers contacted the union, which ultimately negotiated a significant equity adjustment.

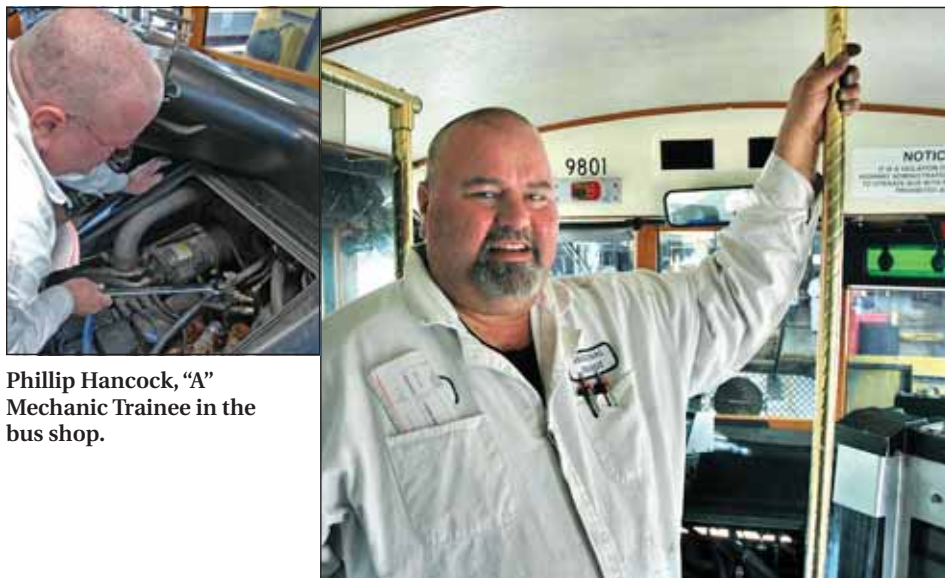
It was a classic case of supply and demand, and an economic fact of life for many employers as retirements begin to thin the workforce and certain jobs become harder to fill.

Dwayne Dickerson, a Light Rail “A” Mechanic, knows that general negotiations is where the action is. He’s a union steward, an 11-year IBEW member. But today, as he dries off the underside of a light rail car that’s just been steam cleaned, he just shrugs off a question about negotiations.

“Just waiting to see what’s offered,” he says.



Local 1245 Business Representative Darryl Norris, left, and bargaining committee member Rodney Beverly.



Phillip Hancock, “A” Mechanic Trainee in the bus shop.



LEFT: Lineworker IIIs Brian McCord, left, and Steve Johnson.



BELOW: Johnson and McCord perform preventative maintenance on a rail switch.

## Team RT Takes Second in “Rodeo”

IBEW Local 1245 members from Sacramento RT finished second out of 45 teams in the Maintenance Competition at the 32<sup>nd</sup> International Bus “Rodeo” in Nashville, Tenn. last month.

Representing RT in the competition were Mark McKee, Mark O’Brien and Jeff James. Competition consisted of a 50 ques-

tion written test, two engine modules, an air conditioning module, an ABS air brake board, bus inspection and multiple (electrical) defect bus. The RT team placed first in the ThermoKing air conditioning module. They also had a perfect score in the Cummins engine module, but lost the tie breaker to another team

based on time to start the engine.

The rodeo, sponsored by the American Public Transportation Association, tests mechanics’ abilities to troubleshoot mechanical problems and fix them quickly. First place in the Maintenance Competition went to the team from Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority.



Representing Sacramento Regional Transit District at the Rodeo were, from left, Mark McKee, Mark O’Brien and Jeff James.



Sacramento RT has been represented on the Advisory Council in recent years by William Gilliam (above). Prior to Gilliam, Constance Bibbs represented RT on the Council.

