

IBEW LOCAL 11 LIGHTS UP LIGHT RAIL

Going Underground on the Crenshaw/LAX Line



"I've been with Neal Electric for a while already; they treat me good," says journeyman Fernando Martinez, 45. "And the union gives me the opportunity and the benefits."

BY MARK EDWARD NERO

Los Angeles is a commuter county, one whose residents first and foremost depend on cars to get them from place to place. But other forms of transpor-

tation, including light rail lines, are shaping the future of LA transit.

Knowing this, LA County Metro has for years been engaged in a project that aims to extend a new line, Crenshaw/LAX, from the existing Exposition

Line at Crenshaw and Exposition Boulevards.

And crucial to that is the participation of the Building Trades local affiliated unions, and at their forefront, IBEW Local 11.

"The Crenshaw line has been a long journey in the making," said Shomari Davis, representative of Local 11, who joined "Building Trades News" on a site visit 100 feet underground for the future station at Martin Luther King Jr.



Anthony Crump of Metro.



Shomari Davis of IBEW Local 11.



Apprentice Marlon Anderson, right, with Andrew Ammsso of Local 441.



"When I was a kid, I got shocked by electricity, and I've been excited by it ever since," says Quiontessa Riddick, a second-year apprentice.

and Crenshaw Boulevards. Neal Electric is the signatory contractor. Davis said he's been working on projects in the MLK-Crenshaw area since he was an apprentice more than 15 years ago.

"I'm always happy to see this community progress, especially with all of the building that Metro's doing," he said.

About 25-plus members of his local are on the project on any given day, he said.

"And as we get more stations happening, it will definitely go up because there's a lot of electrical work at every

station and all of our disciplines work here," he said. "All three of our classifications are working on this project, which is great. It'll be something they can be proud of when it's finished."

Pride in Work

That pride is part of second-year apprentice Quiontessa Riddick's motivation for coming to work each day. She lives just 20 minutes from the MLK station. "I used to do office work," says Riddick, 49. "I looked outside and saw the construction workers and said, that's where I need to be. The pay is a lot different. In the office, my max was \$14 an hour. Here, I started at \$16.32 and I'm already on my third level of pay, and working on my fourth."

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Photos by
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The site of the future MLK station.



Christian Torres, 26
Journeyman

"I wanted a good job where I was able to get good benefits for my family. I love the work that I'm doing and I'm happy to come to work every day. I'm proud to say that I'm union and I'm happy to be able to take care of my family and people that rely on me." On the job at Crenshaw/LAX since November 2016, Torres has worked in all three of the line's underground stations.

"It's intimidating at first, but once you get used to it and you know everything's safe, you're good."



Jannette Bautista, 48
Journeyman

"I joined as an apprentice in 1995. I like to travel, I like the pay, and I like the excitement of the job."



Marlon Anderson, 31
First-year apprentice

"What I can honestly say about the union is it's a great opportunity and a career builder for young men and women. What's most important is the brotherhood about it – the 'one team, one dream' mentality. We all work together for a common cause, to build up this great city -- and any other city. What I also like about it is it's a camaraderie among us unions. Out here, we've got Iron Workers, we've got Plumbers, we've got Sheet Metal Workers, all of us are working together."

I like it because it gives me a Trade and helps take care of my family, and it also stimulates my mind. That's why I like the IBEW. It's a challenge, and keeps me always busy."



Misael Garcia, 36
Second-year apprentice

"I was working in a restaurant, as a bus boy. I said 'I need a better future,' so that's why I decided to go to the union. They offer opportunities and equality. The union doesn't discriminate. I see a big difference between the union and the non-union work. Over here, they respect everything. I never have any problems with my pay, it's steady, everything's good. Sometimes when I was working non-union, I had many problems with pay." He's been encouraging friends to sign up.

"Think about your future, think about your family, I tell them. This makes me proud of the IBEW, because I'm doing something important over here, building something strong for the future."

Crenshaw/LAX will include eight stations over eight and a half miles, and includes a variety of construction terrains and challenges. “It has underground segments, at-grade segments, as well as some aerial segments,” said Anthony Crump, a community construction relations manager with Metro.

Pre-construction on the \$2 billion project began in 2013, with heavy construction kicking off the following year. The line is projected to open by the end of 2019, Crump said.

“The number of people working on this varies, so it can be anywhere from 500 to 700 people, depending upon what’s going on at that particular point in time,” Crump said.

Construction Careers

“This work is being done under a Project Labor Agreement, one of the first ones that the Metro board authorized as part of our Measure R funding,” Crump explained. “Project Labor Agreements form a partnership with our labor partners to ensure that union workers get jobs. We provide some opportunities for people to enter the workforce through the apprenticeship program through different mechanisms. We have a construction careers policy that comes along with that. Basically, the idea is to give local residents jobs, to give back to the local community.

“We’re really excited about the opportunity to transform Los Angeles



Quiontessa Riddick pulling wires in the tunnel under the MLK station.

County with new transportation options, and of course we’re very proud of our relationship with our union labor partners in getting that done.”

Another Local 11 worker benefiting from the PLA and from IBEW Local 11’s renowned apprenticeship training is first-year apprentice Marlon Anderson, 31, of Long Beach. Anderson,

who’s performed various tasks on the job, including installing underground conduit, fabricating pieces, tunnel work and fitting PVC pipes together, said that the project has instilled him with a sense of pride.

“I’m looking forward to riding this thing one day,” he said. “Take my children on it and say ‘I remember when

this was a big hole in the ground.’

“The train is a big part of the city in general, because one train from Long Beach connects to LA, and that connects all the way up to the San Fernando Valley. It also lowers emissions on the highway and it’s a time saver. You can save a little money and take the train without all the traffic.”