



# Local 1277

# News

July, 2022

1744 North Main Street • Los Angeles, CA 90031 • (323) 222-1277

Website: [www.atu1277.com](http://www.atu1277.com)

## President's report

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### **Learning leads to higher earning** **Investment in Education is Paying Dividends**

*By Mauro Varela*  
*Treasurer, Local 1277*

Brothers and sisters, as one of the officers involved in reviewing and selecting candidates for the JAC program, I am proud to report that I definitely see that the positive results of your time and sacrifices are really showing! The pool of qualified candidates has grown dramatically by leaps and bounds. As such, I feel we take a little refresher on the best way to get qualified to further your career at MTA.

First things first: *Know the programs.* Not all the programs are the same. Currently we have four JAC programs and all have different requirements for selection.

The *first* and most sought out program is the **Maintenance Specialist JAC**. This program is for those members who want to work on the rail cars themselves. Without at all offending or oversimplifying, the Maintenance Specialist is a rail “mechanic.” A Specialist will repair and overhaul rail cars for both heavy and light rail lines at MTA. They mainly work out of Rail (yards) Shops but will also work out on the “main line.”

The *second* program that generates the most interest is the **Track Inspector JAC**. This program is one of the three Maintenance of Way (MOW) classifications with a JAC program. I have nothing but total respect for our Track Inspectors. Out of all the JAC programs, this is the most labor-intensive program. I need to make this clear to any future applicant: This program will *require heavy lifting, long walks in the heat or cold, swinging large and heavy hammers, and, most importantly, a lot of geometrical math.*

A quick note on the MOW. All MOW classifications will require some outdoor work. Keep in mind that this means working in the sun, at night, and even in rain—whenever we do get some. *The MOW classifications do not for the most part work in a shop environment.* The other thing to keep in mind, when deciding on what program to apply for, is that “old reliable,” L.A. traffic. If you do not like to sit in our ever-growing traffic snarls, then the MOW classifications may not be for you. The MOW classifications will drive from one end of L.A. to the other and back. Drive, drive, drive is the way of life at the MOW.

That brings me to the *third* classification in the JAC program, and one that I currently hold: **Signal Inspector JAC**. Signal Inspectors are responsible for keeping the public safe when it rides on trains. Signal Inspectors maintain the crossings (gates and lights) at grade level and the switches that move the trains from track to track,

as well as other various equipment associated with signaling of trains. Again, as above, this is outdoor work and involves a lot of driving.

Finally, the *fourth* classification is **Traction Power Inspector JAC**. This is the only JAC program that will require *two years* working with high voltage because of the safety concerns associated with the nature of the work. Traction Power Inspectors are responsible for repairing, inspecting, and maintaining the high-voltage power used by the trains for propulsion. *This work can be extremely dangerous and requires a strong grasp of high-voltage distribution systems such as transformers, power supplies, and other related systems.*

### **Know What to Study**

With all this information and choices, and for the sake of promoting our brothers and sisters, it is important that you make an informed decision on what program to apply for. *Here at ATU Local 1277, we will never stop anyone who is eligible for promotion from promoting.* However, I encourage our brothers and sisters to apply for the program you are seriously thinking about for career advancement and higher wages. Keep in mind that these programs will come around more than once, maybe not always on a timely schedule, but new classes *will* become available. With that said, I want to encourage you to apply for the program that will best help you reach your career goals, *but please note that you must have all your proper qualifications before you apply for any JAC program.*

The problem that can be created when someone applies, gets accepted, and starts a program is that they really may not see themselves on a career-making path and, therefore, jump to another program right in the middle of the one that they are currently enrolled in. This leaves a vacancy which could have been filled by someone who may have really wanted to make a career at that position. All your Union asks is that you are considerate to your other brothers and sisters, both when applying for a JAC opening and accepting promotions.

The JAC programs are an excellent way to promote to a new higher-paid classification, but you must be aware of the very strict requirements that have to be met:

- You must have 24 units of college electrical or electronics credit (from an accredited school)
- You must not be on Step 2 or above
- You must not have any discipline in the past 12 months prior to your application

For most applicants, the biggest hurdle is the 24 units. For various reasons, many members can't or won't enroll in school to get those

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24 units. While there may be some reasons for this, ***please do not let finances be a reason for not getting your units!*** LACMTA has a tuition-reimbursement program to help, so money should not be a reason for not completing your units which will help you get promoted and better paid.

For those of you who may not know, LACMTA will reimburse you up to *\$250.00 per unit* for Undergraduate/ Certificate classes, and up to *\$375.00 per unit* for Graduate classes. The Tuition Reimbursement Program works as follows:

- Please see the H.R. Department and show the list of classes you are interested in attending and have the classes approved for reimbursement. Then sign an agreement stating you will remain at LACMTA employee for six (6) months after the completion of each semester.
- You must register at the appropriate community college.
- Pay for your classes upfront.
- Pass your classes with a C grade or better.
- Turn in your grade and receipts for reimbursement.

Brothers and sisters, as you can see, ***it pays to get educated***—both in the short term (while in school) and in the long run (promotions). So, if you have not done so yet, I advise that you look at the schedules for the nearest local community college to you and enroll. ***Remember that the greatest investment you can ever make is the investment in yourself!***

## Tips for Choosing Classes

When choosing your classes, there are a few things to focus on. Not all “electrical or electronics” class will qualify for the required 24 units. That said, what should you focus on? Keep in mind that 24 units is the equivalent to basic electrical knowledge. Register for classes that will give the basic concept and grasp of electrical fundamentals. Classes like AC and DC theory, and fundamentals are a good starting point. Applied AC and DC calculations are also great to have on your transcripts.

The purpose of having the 24 units is *not* to hinder anyone from promoting into the JAC programs; the aim is to ensure that the apprentices have a sound, basic understanding and grasp of the fundamentals of electricity. This is one of the key differences between the JAC program and the Mechanic OJT program. Those entering the Mechanic OJT are not expected to have any knowledge of mechanical theories and principals. In the Mechanic OJT, candidates will start their foundation from the ground up.

On the other hand, in the JAC program, you are expected to have knowledge of basic electrical theory when you apply. The reason for this is that the time spent in a JAC class is to familiarize and focus on specific equipment and practices at the agency. That said, how do you choose your classes so that they count and your use your time wisely?

Well, when choosing an “electronic or electrical” class, make sure that the focus of that class is *electrical/electronic based and only electrical/electronic based*. Meaning that it is not a split class. For example, a class at Los Angeles Trade Tech (LATTC) with the code **DIESLTK 142 Diesel Engine Overhaul and Electronic Engine Control** is an excellent class. However, as you can see by the title of the class, it’s focus is split between the engine overhaul and the electronic engine control. As I said, this

is a great class and I encourage any of our bus mechanics or anyone wanting to promote to mechanic to take it because it is geared more towards equipment with a Diesel/CNG engine. However, the focus of the class is not solely electrical theory or practices. Therefore, MTA’s side of the committee has deemed this class as not eligible for the required 24 units.

Now, LATTC has developed a set of classes specifically designed with MTA’s JAC program in mind. I understand that because of the course code, it can be a little confusing, but the series of classes under **Rail Maintenance** course code **DIESLTK 401, 402, 403, and 404** are four (4) 10-unit classes that would satisfy the requirement for the JAC programs at MTA. I know that these classes require a lot of sacrifice and time and are not offered every semester. However, do not let that stop you from taking other classes at LATTC or even at other colleges. Just keep in mind that not all colleges offer the same classes or number of units per class. ***You should also be aware that there is no specific list of which classes to take.***

Another issue that members have been having a problem with is “accreditation.” Many of our members have gone to private colleges or trade schools, and I applauded your initiative. However, keep in mind that when applying to the JAC programs all 24 units must be from an accredited college, university, or trade school. Some members have applied with transcripts from private colleges or trade schools where they show 24 units or more. However, those schools are not accredited therefore their units do not count for the JAC programs. If you have any questions about your schools’ accreditation or if you have completed your classes outside the U.S., you can contact the National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (NACES), have them evaluate your units and submit their report with your application.

When in doubt about enrolling in a particular class, feel free to contact me via phone or email, or even to set up a quick one-on-one meet to review your units. I can be reached at [mvarela@atu1277.com](mailto:mvarela@atu1277.com) or 213/210-7353. You can call or text or leave a message. Just make sure to leave your contact info so I can return your call if need be.

For our brothers and sisters at Riverside Transit and SunLine Transit, please refer to your MOUs, since there is also similar language when it comes to promotional or career education. It is always our goal to get language like this into our CBA/MOUs in order that you can continue to promote and advance in your careers. We are currently working with RTA to start similar programs, and STA seems to be on-board to work with Local 1277. STA has even built a facility which may be used for such programs.

A final note: Local 1277 President Aguilar, who is also Chairs our ATU California Conference Board, which represents all ATU members and families in our state, is also involved with the State Labor Federation’s California Transit Workers Program. He is working with our transit agencies to get grant funding for mentor programs in both operations and maintenance, so that you can promote and advance your careers in the near future. Further, the ATU is working on securing training for Zero Emission Buses. We are trying to lead the way into future technology and, at the same time, working to secure the future of our members and families.

***Here is some late news: As of Friday, June 24, 2022, the posting for the following JAC classes have been sent to your Shop Stewards: Maintenance Specialist; Signal Inspector; Traction Power, and Track Inspector. The closing time to***

apply for these excellent classes is 4:00 p.m., Friday, July 25, 2022.

Never forget: Learning leads to higher earning!

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## Save the “Spooky” Day!

An early reminder:

Local 1277’s great “Old Timer’s Day”

is set for 11 a.m. – 3 p.m., Saturday, October 1,

at the Quiet Cannon,  
901 Via San Clemente, Montebello

The Party Theme is “Spookiness”

Attendees must have their Union dues  
paid up for 2022.

Local 1277 retirees and a guest attend for free.

Party invites will go out in mid-August.

## Drug-testing mandate: Part II

### An Important Follow-Up Concerning The Federal Drug Testing Mandate

By John DiRito  
Board Member-at-Large

Good morning, afternoon, and evening brothers and sisters. I hope this finds you and your family well. I want to follow up a bit concerning my article in last month’s newsletter, where I discussed and explained the importance of submitting to the Federal Drug Testing mandate for public transit employees. Part of that process is to make sure you, the transit professional, is aware and prepared for what is required. Hopefully, in sharing this knowledge, you will be better able to understand your role in this highly sensitive and vital process.

Generally speaking, your employer will receive a list from The Clearing House (Sorry, not Publisher’s; no money to be won here!) in which there is listed a *randomly chosen* number of names to be tested for a given month. Employers (transit agencies) have a set amount of time to ensure the testing happens, and if not, they *must* report back as to why it did not occur (for example, an employee may be on vacation or out on long-term illness or injury). Testing will usually occur at the start of one’s shift, but that is not an absolute given; there are variables that could affect when you may be called in.

Once the notice has been given to you, the ‘countdown’ starts, and you should leave immediately to go to the assigned clinic performing the test. *Under no circumstances, should you make any “pit-stops” along the way!* It is not wise to “quickly stop at your house” or pull up at a fast-food drive-through. Head directly to the assigned testing site.

*Please note: Not only do most agency vehicles contain GPS, but should some unforeseen event happen (accident, flat tire, etc.), and you are clearly not on your way to the clinic, YOUR JOB AND CAREER CAN BE IN JEOPARDY! Your employer will view your little detour as an attempt to circumvent the test or, even worse, report you as “failed to submit the required sample.” And be sure, brothers and sisters, if that happens, you will be terminated! This is no joking matter, and you better treat it with all the seriousness it deserves!*

Once you arrive at the clinic, be sure to check in ASAP. Your paperwork is going to be time-stamped to coincide with your arrival and ultimately when you have completed providing a sample. *Please note that you should read the intake form thoroughly.* Most times, the clinic will ask for your identifying information, including social security number and relevant employer information. But I stress: *Be wary of signing any documents asking for permission to release all your medical information from your healthcare provider!*

The testing company or clinic is *not* under any circumstances entitled to know all the details of your medical history simply because you are submitting a sample. They can request permission to contact your primary-care doctor over any health concerns that may arise, *but that is not a blanket release to your medical history.* Should you have any doubts about the privacy of your medical history/records when at a facility, confirm with the staff that you are *not* permitting your medical release, while at the same time, confirming that you are *fully complying* with submitting a sample. If this continues to be an issue, do not hesitate to call your Shop Steward or a Local 1277 Executive Officer to help rectify the situation.

Once you checked in and are waiting to provide a sample, *do not, and I repeat do not, pee or leave the building unless approved to do so by the clinic personnel.* Fill the cup to the top of the rim. You are better off with more than not enough. Do not flush the toilet or turn on the water in the facility unless instructed to do so. Once you give your sample to the person performing the test, make sure you *do not* leave your sample alone with anyone. Make sure that two—not one—*two* vials are filled and sealed. Sign them—stating clearly that you observed the sample being secured. Many times, the tester will give you back the surplus and say go ahead and pour the rest out in the toilet and flush it. Your response should be okay, *but not until you seal my pee.* This is important because if you need to request a split sample test, then at least you know you saw the concealment of your pee.

If you fail to provide a sample, then you will have a maximum of *three hours* and no more than 40 ounces of water in order for you to provide a sample. If you fail to provide a sample, it will be called “fail to provide”, and it is now considered a positive test. The Medical Review Officer or MRO will contact you and ask questions. If you are taking medication and didn’t provide the information, now is the time to say it.

*A final important note: If you test POSITIVE at the clinic, you have 72 hours in which to register for a split-sample test. Please request the split sample test in writing. Please do not forget this important reminder!*

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# Thinking about leadership

## I am a Leader

By Errol Frazier  
Vice President, Local 1277

The Leader position is open and has been posted. I have been here, done my job, and have earned my seniority, so I should be able to make it. And then, it finally happens. Now what? Let's start with the dictionary and then, pull out your contract book and let's take a look.

Merriam-Webster gives the definition of the word Leader as a person who leads, such as a guide or a conductor. A person who directs a military force or a unit [an officer]. A person who has commanding authority or influence [a politician, a union officer, a corporate executive]. A first or principal performer of a group [a leading actor, a quarterback or point guard].

You will normally hear the phrase to "assign and assist", to describe the duties of the Leader. In our MTA contract, Article 13 formally says, "A Leader directs an employee group assigned to his/her responsibility and need not to be concerned with the work of any employee not in that Leader's group."

And Article 13 continues: "It is the Leader's responsibility to direct the employees in the progress of their work under the supervision of his/her immediate Supervisor with whom he/she shall consult in all matters affecting such work."

## Union Leaders

To have a holistic view of what a true Leader is, we should also understand the meaning of the words: Labor Union. We all are proud members of one: ATU Local 1277. Merriam-Webster defines it as an organization of workers formed for the purpose of advancing its members' interest in respect to wages, benefits, and working conditions.

A combination of those words, Leader and Labor Union, will give us a comprehensible picture and the understanding of who or what a leader in our labor union should be. A Leader is the person who leads an organization of workers formed for the purpose of advancing its interest in respect to wages, benefits, and working conditions.

Duties of a Leader as noted in Article 13 of our contract: "A Leader directs an employee group assigned to his/her responsibility and need not be concerned with the work of any employee not in that Leader's group." I have heard management say, "You are a Working Leader." There is no such thing as a "Working Leader". Be sure of this!

A Leader does *not* falsify any job on a bus to show "Working Leader." This is completely fraudulent. *If anyone gives you that directive, ask them to give it to you in writing, then call the Union office and we will handle the rest.* Leader is an assignment and has a job on code. If you as a Leader are able to assist your group, then by all means, do so. *But please do not get caught playing on the computer like management does.*

Article 13 also speaks to who is qualified to be a Leader. "Seniority of equally qualified employees shall be the deciding factor in the promotion of an employee to a Leader or a regular Relief Leader position. This shall also apply to the selection of a Temporary Leaders".

So, up to this point we have discussed the Leader and labor unions with their definitions, and who is qualified to be promoted or (elected) to Leader, Shop Steward, or even Union officer.

Those are the generalities, all very important. But I want to delve into the specifics, into the nuts and bolts of being a good Leader. Of having "The Right Stuff," if you will. Simply put: How does someone need to act in order to be seen as a good Leader? Here's what I think:

### A good Leader:

- Listens
- **Protects**
- Knows their crew's strong points and weakness
- **Feels compassion and shows it at appropriate times**
- Assigns
- **Encourages/criticizes positively**
- Influences

### A good Leader does *not*:

- Demean
- **Belittle**
- Demoralize
- **Sacrifice**
- Abandon
- **Criticize *negatively***
- Bad mouth/spread rumors
- **Set someone up to fail**

A Leader in a labor union has a tremendous responsibility. He or she has a duty to do the best job they can for the company, *but a much bigger duty to those people that they are charged with leading.* A Leader does so much more than just "assign and assist." For better or worse, a Leader has the ability and the influence to set the tone for both workplace and the workday.

Pairing those who work well together and assigning them to the kind of work that they enjoy doing and excel at will ensure a crew that is happy, productive, and will be back on the job the next day.

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Here are the upcoming Local 1277 membership meetings for July and August. Please make every attempt to attend the meeting for your unit. It's **your** Union, and we need your participation at our meetings! All members will receive credit for the meetings.

<b>Tuesday, July 5:</b>	Los Angeles area members:
<b>Tuesday, Aug. 2:</b>	L.A. Building Trades Council, 1626 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles. Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Evening Session 5:00 p.m.
<b>Wednesday, July 6:</b>	Metrolink Unit members:
<b>Wednesday, Aug. 3:</b>	Local 1277 Office, 1744 North Main Street. Morning Session 8:30 a.m. Evening Session 5:00 p.m.
<b>Wednesday, July 6:</b>	Riverside area members:
<b>Wednesday, Aug. 3:</b>	IELC Building, 1074 E. La Cadena Dr., Riverside Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Afternoon Session 3:00 p.m.
<b>Thursday, July 7:</b>	SunLine area members:
<b>Thursday, Aug. 4:</b>	Hilton Palm Springs, 400 East Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs Morning Session 10:00 a.m. Afternoon Session 4:00 p.m.
<b>Thursday, July 7:</b>	Long Beach area members:
<b>Thursday, Aug. 4:</b>	LBFA Local 372, 2201 Cherry Avenue, Signal Hill CA 90755 Morning: 10:00 a.m. Afternoon: 3:00 p.m. Evening: 6:00 p.m.