

# Metro supplier bulks up on fiber view

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By **CHRIS H. SIEROTY**  
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With eight full-time employees, JM Fiber Optics Inc. is not the largest company in the Inland Empire; however, the Chino-based firm has established a niche for itself supplying fiber-optic services and products.

For more than a decade, one of JM's customers has been the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, or Metro, which serves 1,433 square miles and 1.4 million riders a day.

In March 2007, the company won a contract to replace the Metro's aging message system with the firm's TransitVUE TPIS, state-of-the-art passenger information and messaging system.

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Photos By Dan Elliott

Web developer Karla Duarte and Kenneth Rivera show the Los Angeles Metro Redline Subway System information boards.

"We are installing the system on the Metro's Red Line," said Ken Rivera, president of JM Fiber Optics. "It allows Metro to display real-time train arrival and departure information, play public service announcements and even third-party advertising using digital signage and kiosks."

The system, which the company developed and trademarked, uses LCD or LED monitors that would generate revenue if Metro uses them to sell advertising, Rivera said.

The \$2.2 million contract enabled JM to design and develop the TransitVUE system, which also offers intrusion detection and monitoring functions, Rivera said. A majority of the money came through a grant to Metro from the Department of Homeland Security.

JM Fiber Optics is looking for opportunities to sell the product to other transit agencies, Rivera said. Other transit agencies using Homeland Security funding will be allowed to use JM Fiber Optics products without going through a lengthy approval process.

JM Fiber Optics also has long-term government-wide contracts for several products used by Metro. These contracts give JM Fiber Optics access to non-competitive revenue streams of public money.

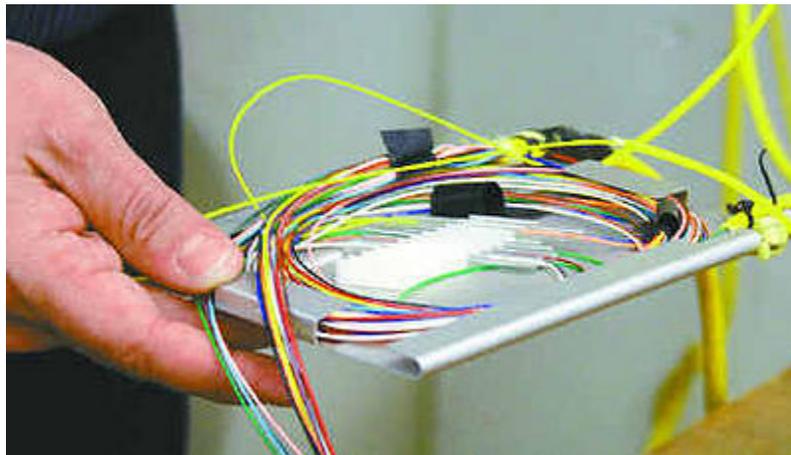
The company developed and trademarked the FibrMat, a rail intrusion detection sensor mat that utilizes fiber-optic technology. The product has the potential to assist in the prevention of unauthorized intrusions, such as terrorist attacks and suicide attempts, Rivera said.

The system alerts a central station if someone or something is near the rails. If there is a security breach, the system alerts security, which can monitor the situation by camera to determine how the incident should be handled, he said.

If needed, the system will set off an alarm and passengers will be evacuated from the terminal. It will alert the train or subway and prevent it from entering the station, Rivera said.

"We just invested in it last year," he said. "We are the only ones who have it. Many transit agencies are now required to have rail-level security because of terrorist threats."

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Fiber optic wires and connections that are used for training new technicians at JM Fiber Optics.

JM Fiber Optics was expected to apply for the contract with Metro to install the technology.

"We're going out to bid in about a month," said Metro spokesman Rick Jager.

The technology will be used to protect the Metro's Red Line subway, which runs from Union Station in downtown Los Angeles to North Hollywood.

JM's revenue growth over the past three years has been driven by government sales and mass transit. In 2006, JM Fiber Optics generated about \$2 million in sales, which increased to \$2.4 million last year.

Sales in 2008 are projected to be about \$6.4 million.

"Ken's been very aggressive in order to bring all this together and make us grow to the point where the company is today and where it will be going in the future," said JM Fiber Optic's co-owner Jetta Rose.

Rivera and Rose formed JM Fiber Optics in 1992 after the owner of their employer, Eureka Technical Sales, retired.

The benefit of owning the company is the freedom to change the company as technology dictates instead of just giving ideas to a management team that may or may not follow the advice, Rose said.

Besides developing fiber optic cable and infrastructure components or CCTV equipment, JM Fiber Optics trains fiber-optic installers and technicians.

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Owner Kenneth Rivera and Marketing Director Maria Rivera of JM Fiber Optics.

Photo By Dan Elliott

The firm offers training and testing certified by the Electronic Technician Association. The training costs \$1,195 to \$1,295, and is open to everyone, including people looking for a career change.

There is a \$150 examination fee and a \$65 fee for an FCC license.

There are two levels of training: apprentice and technical. The apprentice level is for those with little or no experience, while the technical level is for people who have industry experience and want to design systems.

An apprentice earns \$15 to \$20 an hour, while a technician usually earns \$25 to \$35 an hour. "It's a semester worth of training in a week," Rivera said.

JM Fiber Optics does not offer direct employment assistance, but the training does provide the company with a large talent pool when a big job comes along. Metro and other transit agencies need technicians with FCC licenses.

JM Fiber Optics' development of new fiber optic technology has paid off with more than just a growing business; the privately held firm was named Technology Firm of the Year by the Los Angeles Minority Business Opportunity Center.

A Small Business Administration 8(a) business development program participant, JM gained the recognition for its mass-transit digital signage system TransitVUE.

"The Small Business Administration's 8(a) program provided opportunities that normally would be available to only large companies," Rivera said. JM Fiber Optics has benefited through the years from the use of SBA loans and successfully winning an 8(a) contract.

The SBA's 8(a) program provides assistance to foster growth and development of minority-owned businesses, according to the SBA's Web site. The award brings the company more credibility, Rivera said.

As the company continues to grow, Rivera said the firm will remain in Chino.

"We started the firm in Chino," he said. "We live in Chino and are a locally based business."

Being based in the centrally located Inland Empire allows JM Fiber Optics to access markets from Los Angeles to Phoenix.