

MTA Staff Preparing Analysis for Board Following Judge's Consent Decree Ruling

By Bill Heard, Editor

(September 24) In the wake of a U.S. District Court decision, Thursday, ordering the MTA to immediately obtain 248 buses to reduce bus overcrowding, the MTA staff will begin work on an operational and financial analysis of the decision for discussion at a special Board meeting, Sept. 29.

In a five-page order, Judge Hatter ruled that the MTA must buy 248 additional buses within 30 days instead of the 481 additional buses in the Special Master's order. He also wrote that, in light of the MTA's apparent increased fleet reliability, the Special Master should reconsider whether the MTA needs to purchase 49 additional buses as spares.

Combined with the Special Master's order, Hatter's ruling requires the MTA to purchase a total of 297 new buses. The analysis being prepared by the staff will determine the amount of additional service required by the ruling and the schedule for implementing the ruling.

The judge's ruling affirms all other findings and determinations of the Special Master's orders. He said the court must accept the Special Master's findings unless they were "clearly erroneous."

At next Wednesday's special meeting, Board members are expected to consider a response to the court's decision. The special session follows the Board's September meeting during which members heard reports about the MTA's progress in rebuilding the bus fleet and improving service.

In his remarks to the Board, CEO Julian Burke said the MTA has made "significant improvement in our bus operations, which continued right through the summer. In May and June, we began to see many fewer cancelled trips, better on-time performance and cleaner vehicles."

Burke said the "Consent Decree load factor compliance reached 99 percent and will continue to rise as our remediation plan progresses." He also said he is "cautiously optimistic" about a better working relationship between the MTA and the Bus Riders Union in the Joint Working Group.

In his ruling, Judge Hatter directed the Special Master - working with the MTA and BRU - to consider other measures to reduce overcrowding. As examples, Hatter mentioned moving buses from less crowded lines and reducing or eliminating MTA service that overlaps municipal bus service.

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