

MTA Submits Petition to CPUC Seeking Power Outage Exemption



(May 9, 2001) Metro Rail lines should be exempt from rotating power outages, the MTA has told the California Public Utilities Commission in a formal petition signed by CEO Julian Burke.

The MTA "will be significantly impacted in our ability to operate vital public transit service during rotating power outages," the petition stated. "In order to maintain, preserve and protect the safety of our passengers, employees and Los Angeles citizens...(the) MTA must be exempt...."

Southern California Edison, which provides electrical power to portions of the Metro Blue Line and Metro Green Line, notified the agency, April 11, that the MTA will be reclassified as a "non-essential customer."

The Metro Green Line experienced its first rolling blackout Tuesday afternoon. The outage affected the tracks between the western-most stations – Douglas/Rosecrans and Marine/Redondo – for about an hour.

The MTA Board voted April 26 to seek the power outage exemption. The California Transit Association (CTA) also is asking the CPUC to approve a blanket exemption for rail operators. The CPUC recently granted such exemptions to BART and the underground portions of the MUNI light-rail system in San Francisco.

Rail system at capacity

The petition notes that the MTA's "at-grade rail systems are packed to capacity...during rush hour, a prime time for rotating outages. With the increasing price of gasoline, MTA expects even further demand on its rail systems."

The CPUC staff currently is reviewing the MTA and CTA petitions. The Metro Red Line draws its power supply from DWP, and is not affected by Edison power outages.

In its petition, the MTA outlined eight safety hazards that could endanger Metro Rail passengers in a power outage. The MTA also raised the possibility that federal law "may prohibit imposition of rotating outages on these rail operations."

The petition cited federal regulations that override state or local rules or regulations that would affect the normal functioning of a (grade crossing warning) system...without first taking measures to provide for safety of highway traffic...."

The MTA's petition said evacuating passengers from stranded trains would be a key safety hazard in a power outage. Most evacuations would require the assistance of fire and police personnel who could be used elsewhere in a blackout.

The petition noted that crossing gates on the Metro Blue Line automatically come down and block traffic in a power outage. A Union Pacific train could hit an impatient motorist who drove around the lowered gates.

Power outages also could shut down some electronic communications equipment.

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