

## State Auditor Faults MTA in Monitoring Bus Operator Driving Records

- MTA Cites 'Excellent Safety Record'; Agency Outlines Series of Improvements

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Aug. 15, 2001) The California State Auditor, in a report released late Tuesday, criticized the MTA's record-keeping system for preventing Metro Bus operators from violating state and federal restrictions on hours behind the wheel.

The audit says the MTA "does not accurately track or consistently monitor its bus drivers' on-duty hours and cannot ensure that its drivers are obeying the on-duty time restrictions."

In a statement, the MTA emphasized that the agency's "excellent safety record" and asked the auditors to reassure passengers that the "MTA has one of the best safety records in the country."

Summary Report:

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Metro Buses log some 300,000 miles per day and have experienced 3.87 accidents of all types per 100,000 road miles over the past 18 months.

"While it's important to note that the Metro Bus system is very safe, the MTA has allocated \$8.2 million toward improvements in record-keeping to ensure that the agency fully complies with all federal and state regulations," said Chief Financial Officer Richard Brumbaugh.

"The auditor's report has been very helpful in pointing us in the right direction," he added. "In fact, we're in substantial agreement with many parts of the auditor's report."

### Regulations set driving limits

Federal and state regulations prohibit bus operators from driving for more than 10 hours a day. They may not drive after being on duty for 15 hours or after being on duty for 80 hours in a consecutive eight-day period. Operators also must have at least eight hours off-duty before a driving shift.

Bus operators are required to formally request the MTA's permission before taking an outside job and to submit a "disclosure letter" concerning the job's driving requirements. State regulations require operators who have more than one employer within a 24-hour period to maintain a driving log.

The auditors said MTA records and logs do not accurately account for the time operators might spend on the road for another employer while off-duty from the MTA. The report said "not all bus drivers who have other employers submit the disclosure letters...."

The CHP, in 30 inspections since 1999, has consistently given MTA divisions satisfactory ratings for record-keeping.

"MTA will continue to improve its systems of tracking bus and rail operators' time behind the wheel to ensure the safest possible service for our patrons," the agency's statement concluded.

State Sen. Richard Alarcon (D-LA) requested the audit following last

year's labor negotiations between the MTA and the UTU. Alarcon questioned the safety record of the MTA's part-time operators compared to that of full-time operators.

### **No conclusion on driving records**

Although the audit report notes that some 3,200 full-time and 760 part-time operators currently drive for the MTA, it does not conclude that part-timers have worse driving records.

In its response, printed as part of the audit document, the MTA took issue with many points of the auditor's work, noting that "there is no evident difference in the relative number of accidents for full-time and part-time drivers."

The MTA is taking a number of actions to improve the records it maintains on bus operators. These include upgrading the TOTS computer records of operator service and standardizing procedures, effective in September, that require operators to provide letters disclosing outside employment.

The MTA also will train operators to do a better job of reporting accidents and will retain a consultant to develop an agency-wide safety training program to begin in early 2002. The MTA also has formed a committee, along with leaders of the UTU, ATU, TCU and AFSCME, to address safety issues.

To improve monitoring of DMV citations, MTA Quality Assurance will provide monthly summary reports to division managers beginning in September.

<b>Transit Agency Accident Ratings</b>			
*from 1999 National Transit Database Reports			
Transit Agencies	Vehicle Service Miles	Bus Collisions	Collisions per 100K Revenue Vehicle Service Miles
Los Angeles MTA	74,331,300	872	1.17
Chicago CTA	61,271,400	1,554	2.54
New York MTA	94,346,600	5,587	5.92
Philadelphia SEPTA	34,882,700	908	2.60
Peer Average	63,500,233	2,683	3.69

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