
EDITOR'S NOTE: (Nov. 8, 2001) The MTA Board of Directors met in closed session to discuss the Consent Decree Thursday but took no action on the option of pursuing an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court.

MTA Board Chair John Fasana, Mayor James Hahn and MTA CEO Roger Snoble told reporters afterwards that the MTA hopes to avoid further litigation. The goal is for MTA staff and the Bus Riders Union to reach a common understanding of how to measure compliance and move forward on bus improvements.

Fasana said the Board would review progress made on this effort next month while still retaining the appeal option if agreement can't be reached.

MTA Board Updated on Bus Service Improvements Made Since 1996 Signing of Consent Decree

By MARC LITTMAN

(Nov. 8, 2001) - The MTA Board of Directors today received an update on the significant improvements in bus service MTA has made since the signing of the Consent Decree in 1996. The update came at the halfway point of the 10-year agreement.

The update noted MTA's operation of a record amount of bus service, the dramatic reduction in customer complaints, reduced overcrowding, the ongoing infusion of hundreds of new buses into MTA's fleet, the inauguration of additional lines and new types of service, the lowering of discount pass rates and maintenance of existing cash fares. The following is a summary of the improvements:

- **Record Level of Bus Service**

MTA and its contracted services have set a new record this year for the most bus service operated, more than was operated by its predecessor, the Southern California Rapid Transit District in the mid-80s, despite the fact that many bus lines once operated by SCRTD are run today by Foothill Transit and some of the county's municipal bus operators, and the fact that Metro Bus service today also is augmented by Metro Rail.

- **Reduced Overcrowding**

MTA has succeeded in reducing the number of standees on Metro buses as prescribed by the Consent Decree. Weekday compliance is now 97.5 percent.

- **New Bus Purchases**

MTA accelerated new bus purchases with a multi-year plan to purchase more than 2,100 new compressed natural gas (CNG) buses through FY 04. To date, more than 1,400 of these have been placed into service. MTA will begin taking delivery of its next bus order in December 2001.

- **Reduction In Average Age of Fleet**

The infusion of new buses into the fleet has resulted in a significant reduction in the average age of the fleet. In November 1996 the average age of the Metro Bus fleet was 9.05 years. In September 2001, that number dipped to 5 years, making MTA's fleet one of the youngest fleets among major bus operations in the U.S. By March/April 2002 the average age of the fleet is expected to reach 4.8 years.

- **New Bus Service**

MTA has initiated important new bus service aimed at improving the access of patrons who depend on public transit to get to jobs,

medical facilities and places of recreation. The agency implemented a pilot project, which included 15 new lines and 84 buses added since December 1997. Three remaining lines are being evaluated for implementation. In addition, MTA inaugurated the Metro Rapid Bus Program on the Wilshire/Whittier and Ventura Blvd. corridors, with plans for a future 22-line expansion on the counties most congested corridors.

- **Additional Metro Rail Service Benefits Bus Passengers**

MTA extended Metro Rail service to Hollywood and North Hollywood, which resulted in an increase of 120,000 average daily boardings. The extensions provided direct benefit to bus patrons, many of whom rely on both bus and rail service in their daily commutes.

- **Reduce Monthly Pass Rate/Add New Weekly Pass**

MTA lowered the monthly Metro pass rate from \$49 to \$42, introduced a weekly pass, implemented an off-peak 75 cents fare system-wide from 9 p.m to 5 a.m.

- **Additional Funding for Municipal Operators**

The Municipal Bus Service Improvement Program has been funded with \$15 million annually to address overcrowding and provide new countywide service.

- **Customer Complaints Reach All-Time Low**

The preceding improvements have contributed to the lowest rate of customer complaints received by MTA in one month. Customer complaints declined from a ratio of 6.37 complaints per 100,000 daily boardings in July 1997 to a ratio of 3.15 complaints per 100,000 daily boardings in July 2001.

"MTA has put its shoulder to the wheel in the last five years, something our passengers recognize," said MTA Board Chair John Fasana. "The improvements we've made in bus service give testimony to MTA's commitment to delivering the best bus service possible."

"It continues to get 'better on the bus' and our record of achievement in the coming years will be even better," he added. Fasana's comments were underscored by MTA CEO Roger Snoble.

"I've now had an opportunity to carefully analyze MTA's response to the Consent Decree and I'm convinced we are in full compliance by any reasonable measure," said Snoble. "The MTA Board has asked me to make a renewed effort to work collaboratively with the Bus Riders Union and other Metro passenger representatives to avoid further litigation. I'm fully committed to that goal."

The Consent Decree was signed in October 1996 by MTA and plaintiffs to settle litigation brought by a coalition of civil rights groups in response to proposed fare increases, elimination of monthly passes and alleged reduced funding of the Metro Bus System.

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