

MTA Moves to Improve Comfort, Performance of Bus Operators' Seats

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(March 13, 2002) One of the most common on-the-job complaints among bus operators is about the place where they work – in the drivers seat. For some, a shift spent behind the wheel can be a real pain in the back, in the neck, in the...well, you know.



^ Comfort counts behind the wheel.

When operators voiced their concerns late last year to Deputy CEO John Catoe, he ordered a full-scale ergonomic study of the drivers seats and driving compartments on Metro Buses.

The study's purpose: to select a seat design that will be comfortable for the greatest number of operators, help reduce operator injuries and improve driving performance. The seat also must stand up to the rigors of constant use in a variety of road conditions.

"The drivers compartment is a bus operator's office," says Catoe. "If that office isn't comfortable, or worse, if the seat is causing injuries, we must take prompt action to correct the problem and improve our operators' working environment."

In 1999, the MTA received 169 bus seat-related injury claims from operators. In 2000, the last year for which complete data is available, the number of claims dropped to 97.

Transit Operations expects to launch an actual over-the-road test in late spring of the top four seat models. According to project manager John Roberts, the MTA will obtain at least 10 seats of each model. A panel of bus operators will develop the field test and judging criteria.

A variety of road conditions

The seats will be installed on every type of bus the agency currently operates. The buses then will be circulated among the divisions. A cross-section of operators of different heights and weights will operate the buses over a variety of routes and road conditions that will thoroughly test the comfort and durability of the seats.

The test will include the Bostrum Trans Air Model 914 that's currently used on most MTA coaches, as well as the Recaro Ergo Metro and two seats built by U.S.S.C. Group, Inc. Together, these three companies account for 99 percent of the transit operator seat market in the United States.

Operators also will be selected to visit other transit properties to learn about their experience with different seat models.

The ergonomic study, conducted during January and February, included interviews with Metro Bus operators and other staff members, a survey of industry trends and an evaluation of drivers seats. Researchers also established 11 ergonomic criteria against which drivers seats could be judged.

The criteria include how easily the seats can be adjusted horizontally, tilted, raised or lowered by the operator. Lumbar support, suspension,

cushioning and other factors also were taken into account.

The researchers noted the size of the drivers compartment – which varies from 39 inches long on the Flex Metro to 60 inches long on the low-floor New Flyer – and how easy they were to get into and out of. They also looked at operator training, flexibility and ability to adjust the seat for the “best ride.”

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