

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the first of two articles about how innovative planning and the use of computer technology is changing MTA's service planning and scheduling process, improving Metro Bus service and saving budget dollars. Next> [Pieces of a Puzzle: Scheduling MTA's 16,000 Daily Bus Trips.](#)

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## **Creative Planning: How MTA Met Consent Decree's Mandate with Fewer Buses, Less Cost**

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(July 15, 2003) Metro Bus schedule planners were faced with a perplexing challenge earlier this year: add 400,000 hours of service to meet the federal Consent Decree's dictate to reduce passenger overcrowding without busting the agency's operations budget.

The Special Master had mandated a 5.5 percent increase in service – about 1,000 more trips each day. The Bus Riders Union demanded that MTA add at least 185 buses to the fleet.

A preliminary estimate by MTA service planners indicated the job could be done with only 125 buses, but even that number would be more than the agency could afford to buy and to operate.

"We were facing a significant increase in fleet size and resource commitment in order to comply with the Consent Decree," recalls Ed Muncy, director, Service Performance and Analysis.

### **Creative approaches**

Service sector schedule makers jumped into the problem with both feet – and the most creative approaches to system design and implementation in recent memory at MTA.

Routes were changed to provide more trips and better service at those times and in those places where it would help meet Consent Decree requirements. Some bus service was eliminated, particularly where rail service could meet the transportation needs of riders.

Planners scheduled Metro Rapid and limited bus service on several routes. Other routes were modified to provide more frequent service in the busier segments and less service on little-used portions of the lines.

"Making better use of the resources available was a big win for the service sector development managers and their staffs," says Muncy.

He credited Jon Hilmer in the San Gabriel Valley sector, Madeline Van Leuvan in South Bay, Mike Brewer in San Fernando Valley, Scott Page in Westside/Central and Dan Nguyen in the Gateway Cities sector with developing the new scheduling plans.

### **Jamming the buses**

One example of creative scheduling is changes on the Wilshire/Whittier Metro Rapid Line, where patrons were jamming buses through the middle of the route. At the eastern end toward Whittier and the western end toward Santa Monica, buses were traveling light.

To reduce mid-route loads, schedulers developed a flexible "shortline" service that concentrates buses in the more heavily traveled portions rather than running all buses from end to end of

the 26-mile line.

In the end, meeting the federal mandate required only 23 additional buses – not 185 or even 125 – and just a 70,000-hour increase in service.

“The savings are obviously enormous when compared to the cost of buying and operating 125 or more buses a year,” says Muncy.

And there’s more to come. “For this go-around,” he says, “all we did was get the low-hanging fruit. Next time, we want to get higher in the tree and squeeze out a few more efficiencies.”

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