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Special Master Orders Metro to Add 134 Metro Rapid Buses

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(April 15, 2005) The Special Master over the federal Consent Decree issued an order, Thursday, requiring Metro to add at least 134 buses to the Metro Rapid fleet and to have all 28 proposed Metro Rapid lines in service by Dec. 31, 2008.

Under the order, the Board of Directors was directed by the Special Master Donald Bliss to "re-evaluate the sources of bus-eligible funding (including those currently in use for rail projects) and, unless economically infeasible..." use the funding to expand and operate Metro Rapid service.

A total of 11 Metro Rapid lines are currently in service and three more will be introduced, June 27, on Fairfax Avenue, Beverly Boulevard and Lincoln Boulevard. The Lincoln Boulevard service – to be called Rapid 3 – will be operated by Santa Monica Big Blue Bus.

Bliss's order also said that no more than 33 percent of Metro Rapid service can be taken from existing local or limited bus service, nor can Metro cut service elsewhere in the system and re-allocate it to the Metro Rapid network.

Service improvements required

In fact, the order says the implementation plan must include improvements to local and intersecting service, saying that a Metro Rapid network "will do little to improve countywide access...if bus service in other parts of the system suffer from degraded service."

The implementation plan is due to the Special Master by July 31, 2005 and is effective on that date. Proposals for amending or modifying the order or the new service plan are due Aug. 31, 2005 and Metro has until Sept. 20, 2005 to reply to any comments. Bliss encouraged the agency to implement any "appropriate and feasible" parts of the plan during the June 2005 shakeup.

In a statement issued late Thursday, Metro said it is reviewing the Special Master's order and noted that the agency is in compliance with the Consent Decree.

"Since the Consent Decree was signed in 1996," the statement continues, "we have added more than 1.6 million annual bus service hours, which have not resulted in a corresponding increase in demand. To date, the additional capital and operating costs associated with this service expansion have totaled more than \$1 billion of taxpayer money."

Assistant County Counsel Steve Carnevale wrote in a memo to the Board of Directors that operating 134 new buses during peak hours only would mean an extra 200,000 service hours and would have "a

significant budget impact beginning in the next fiscal year.”

The Board is expected to review the Special Master’s order and possibly consider a response at its April 28 meeting.

Pilot Project lines

The Special Master’s order also requires Metro to continue operating and improving 11 Pilot Project local, limited or community circulator bus lines, unless it can get agreement that the lines are not economically feasible or used by riders. In that case, new bus lines can be substituted, but the funding for the program, the number of vehicles and vehicle seats can’t be cut.

Metro was ordered to consider whether to adopt a Bus Riders Union (BRU) proposal to improve freeway service. The proposal included shorter headways, evening and weekend express service and elimination of higher freeway fares.

Finally, Metro was ordered to consider the BRU’s proposal for a 50-shuttle network in five canyon neighborhoods. The agency has been operating shuttle Line 218 (Laurel Canyon Boulevard) in the Hollywood Hills connecting the San Fernando Valley to West Los Angeles, although few riders use the service.

The Special Master’s order said Metro should consider the BRU’s proposal for shuttle service to Topanga Canyon, Benedict Canyon, Mulholland Drive, Kanan Road, Malibu Canyon and Agoura Hills.

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