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## Judge Will Let Consent Decree Expire, Oct. 29; Denies Contempt Motion

- He will retain jurisdiction over Metro Rapid program until 2010
- Says 'quality of life has improved for Los Angeles' public transit dependent'

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Oct. 25, 2006) After almost 10 years of federal court oversight of LA County's public transit system, the Consent Decree will be allowed to expire as scheduled on Sunday, Oct. 29.

U.S. District Court Judge Terry Hatter issued an order dated Monday, Oct. 23, denying a motion by the Bus Riders Union to extend the Consent Decree for another four years and a companion motion to hold Metro in contempt for alleged failure to comply with Special Master Donald Bliss's orders.

Hatter, however, will retain jurisdiction until Nov. 30, 2010 to ensure that Metro's New Service Plan is implemented.

That program, which began in 1999, was developed by Metro and calls for the operation of up to 28 Metro Rapid lines by June 2008. The plan was approved by Bliss in November, 2005. It includes requirements for maintaining quality service. Currently, Metro operates 15 Metro Rapid lines and plans to start a 16th line in December to serve Reseda Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley.

"It's good news," CEO Roger Snoble said this morning during phone calls to alert Board members that Judge Hatter had issued an opinion. "He said the Consent Decree had served its purpose and would not be extended. He said we are in substantial compliance."

## Will implement service plan

As for the judge's decision to retain jurisdiction over implementation of the New Service Plan for four more years, Snoble said, "He wants to make sure we do what we said we'd do...and that's our intention."

In an interview with my.Metro.net, the CEO said, "Certainly, the main premise of the Consent Decree was to improve the quality of service for all our riders. We've done a great deal of that, but there's a lot more to do yet and we need to work toward improving the system every way possible."

"We're going to go forward," he added. "We have a lot more freedom now to be able to do the things that are necessary for us to attract new riders and serve new markets. Our customers are the big winners and I'm really happy for that fact."

In a statement released Wednesday, Board Chair Gloria Molina said, "Metro has worked very hard to expand the scope and quality of transportation services throughout this region, and Judge Hatter clearly recognizes this fact."

"But, I want to reassure Metro's customers – and the public at large," she continued, "that Metro is committed to sustaining the improvements made to the bus system."

**'Taken all reasonable steps'**

In his decision, Hatter wrote, "... (I)t is clear that MTA has substantially complied, and taken all reasonable steps within its power to insure compliance with the (Special Master's) Final Order. Thus, MTA will not be held in contempt."

The judge acknowledged that there had been disagreements between Metro and the BRU during the 10-year span of the agreement over how to implement the Consent Decree.

"In hindsight," he continued, "the Consent Decree was a less than perfect document. As a result, it is impossible to achieve absolute compliance. Indeed, the Special Master informed the parties that the Consent Decree did not require perfection."

"Despite an increasing ridership, increasing traffic congestion and fiscal constraints," he wrote, "MTA has substantially complied with the Consent Decree while maintaining fares at reasonable levels."

"As a result of the Consent Decree and the efforts of all parties," Hatter concluded, "the quality of life has improved for Los Angeles' public transit dependent poor population...."