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[CONSENT DECREE UPDATE: Another Court Hearing Set]

(Nov. 8, 2006) A hearing has been scheduled in U.S. District Court, Nov. 27, on a motion filed by the Bus Riders Union to amend Judge Terry Hatter's order of Oct. 24.

That order denied a motion by the BRU to extend the Consent Decree for another four years and a companion motion to hold Metro in contempt. But, the judge retained jurisdiction until Nov. 30, 2010 to ensure that Metro's New Service Plan is implemented.

The BRU is claiming that to facilitate the portion of the judge's order retaining jurisdiction over implementation of the New Service Plan, it is necessary to extend related sections of the Consent Decree. Those sections pertain to new bus service, the Joint Working Group, the Special Master, and attorney's fees.

Metro plans to oppose the BRU's motion.

Metro Compiled Record of Achievement During Consent Decree

- Expansion, upgrade of bus fleet marked 10-year period
- Metro leaders pledge to carry on in the spirit of the decree

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Nov. 8, 2006) Despite continued attempts by the Bus Riders Union to prolong the life of the Consent Decree, Metro can now mark the expiration of the federal order with a look back at a record of achievement that not only earned the agency the transit industry's highest honor in 2006, but also won praise from the special master overseeing the 10-year agreement.

The decade saw an unprecedented expansion and upgrading of the Metro Bus fleet with the purchase of more than 2,100 new high-tech coaches and articulated buses. Transit Operations also made measurable improvements in bus service quality, cleanliness, safety and security.



Metro added more than a million service hours to the bus system, established a series of new local bus lines, and introduced such innovations as Metro Rapid service, freeway express service and the Metro Orange Line with its 14-mile dedicated transitway.

"Since the inception of the Consent Decree, the MTA has made the improvement of bus service a high priority," wrote Special Master Donald Bliss in a letter announcing his resignation last February. "The progress has been substantial."

And, in his Oct. 23 ruling denying a request to extend the Consent Decree, U.S. District Judge Terry Hatter declared that Metro had "substantially complied" with the agreement and said, "...the quality of life has improved for Los Angeles's public transit dependent poor

population.”

Spirit of the Consent Decree

CEO Roger Snoble, Board Chair Gloria Molina and members of the Board of Directors all have pledged to continue improving the Metro Bus system in the spirit of the Consent Decree.

“We welcome this ruling,” Molina said during the October Board meeting. “It will give us an opportunity (to be) in the driver’s seat but, more importantly, to work in partnership with the transit dependent to continue the improvements we’ve made, to expand on those improvements and find ways to expand our ridership. This system is vitally important to the well-being of the entire region.”



“We want to have good bus service because that’s the only way we’re viable,” added Supervisor Yvonne Burke, who thanked the Bus Riders Union for its cooperation over the years and noted that Metro had entered the Consent Decree voluntarily.

“But, we’re now starting anew and the Consent Decree is behind us,” she said. “We are committed to maintaining the service that we agreed to provide.”

In previous discussions with employees, Snoble has said that Metro would not “let the bus system go to seed,” but would work to “make the system more relevant to today’s travel patterns, make the service available to more people. We have a whole different story to tell today than we had ten years ago.”

New rail lines

Throughout the Consent Decree years, Metro continued to expand Metro Rail service, completing a subway line through Hollywood and into North Hollywood, opening the Gold Line to Pasadena and starting construction on both the Gold Line’s Eastside Extension and the Exposition Line to Culver City.

Metro Rail also introduced a new fleet of rail cars – the P-2000s – for service on the Green Line, and began testing the AnsaldoBreda 2550 light rail car for service on the Gold Line.

In addition, Metro carried out a massive Transit Operations reorganization by creating five geographical bus service sectors and appointing governance councils of local citizens to advise each one.



The agency also initiated the Universal Fare System TAP program and the Metro Connections program, both of which are expected to go into full swing beginning in 2007.

Among other measures taken to comply with the Consent Decree, Metro:

- Achieved between 98.5 percent and 99 percent of its bus passenger load factor goals,
- Converted 333 ethanol buses to diesel,
- Repaired 594 CNG buses,
- Installed Automated Passenger Counters on all Metro Buses,
- Activated Automatic Voice Annunciators on Metro Buses,
- Installed Transit TV monitors on Metro Buses,
- Developed a new Transit Service Policy,
- Conducted a \$500,000 bus shelter improvement program,
- Completed the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative Program,
- Implemented signal priority on 14 bus routes,
- Implemented high-tech surveillance and security systems on the Metro Rail system, and
- Implemented heightened safety features and photo enforcement cameras at critical Metro Blue Line intersections.

Quickening the pace

Although the term of the Consent Decree has expired, Metro will honor the spirit of the agreement by achieving cost and service efficiencies and by quickening the pace of its plans for innovative bus and rail services.



As an example, Metro Rapid service will grow from the current 15 lines to a total of 28 lines – many of them featuring articulated buses – by June 2008. That will give Los Angeles County more than 400 miles of high-capacity bus service to 34 cities and 11 unincorporated communities.

The implementation of Metro Connections will reorient bus service from the grid system to a “hub and spoke” system in which major lines will be established between transit centers at heavily used destinations. Smaller bus lines, municipal transit services and shuttle buses will feed into those transit centers.

Both the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension and the Exposition Line are due to open within the next three years. There's talk about light rail service on Crenshaw, a light rail connection to LAX, in addition to the hoped-for “subway to the sea.”

These and other changes are intended to keep Metro in the forefront of transit innovation and to ensure that the agency lives up to its hard-won reputation as “America’s Best.”