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**Calls Interpretation Of Consent Decree Standee Target "Unachievable"
Transit Panel Says MTA Demonstrates "Exceptional Diligence" In Efforts To Improve Metro Bus Service**

(Los Angeles) - A peer review panel led by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) says MTA has demonstrated "exceptional diligence" in its efforts to improve bus service to people dependent on public transit in Los Angeles County. In its March 3 report, the panel also concluded that 100 percent compliance with a consent decree's standard for an acceptable maximum number of standees on buses is "unachievable."

Signed in October 1996, the 10-year Consent Decree resolved legal action against MTA that sought to reduce the average number of standees on Metro Buses. In examining MTA's efforts to meet the Consent Decree standard as interpreted by Special Master Donald Bliss, the panel also looked at the impacts of those efforts to the agency's operations and the potential for improvements through other transit industry practices.

The panel acknowledged that since 1996 MTA has added 1,800 new buses to its fleet, reduced crowding, initiated new services such as Metro Rapid ("a national model for Bus Rapid Transit") and decentralized its organization to better respond to community needs. "Overall," the report states, "service enhancement has outpaced most, if not all, of the nation's transit systems."

The panel said that the number of standees on buses is "only one measure of service quality" and the Consent Decree goal for standees of eight per bus is "an extremely high standard." Nevertheless, it concluded that MTA has achieved this standard by current common industry standards of measurement.

The report recognized the limit on MTA's resources and noted that "the narrow focus" on compliance with the standee limit "can significantly hamper efforts to develop service for new markets" and targeting scarce resources to worst case scenarios "can lead to neglect in other aspects of the system which can result in the negative spiral of declining ridership."

In calling into question any interpretation of the Consent Decree's standee goal as an absolute limit, the report says "a broader appreciation of transit service performance...can result in greater service delivery benefits to all communities and ridership groups."

The panel's recommendations include focusing on a broader range of service quality issues, continuing to develop the Metro Rapid bus system, and focusing on "opportunities to modify service in line with growing and shrinking markets."

The APTA panel was convened at the request of MTA CEO Roger Snoble and Deputy CEO John Catoe to assist MTA in reviewing its efforts to meet the requirements of the Consent Decree and to give industry guidance on how the agency can improve its performance. In addition to APTA staff advisor Greg Hull, panel members included Anne Herzenberg, CEO, Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority; Wilson Johnson, deputy general manager of operations, San Francisco MUNI; and Michael Shiffer, vice president for planning and development, Chicago Transit Authority.

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