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## Subway Backers Attack '60 Minutes' Broadcast : MTA: Transit and business leaders call report on troubled project inflammatory and one-sided. Producers defend show.

December 19, 1995 | ERIC LICHTBLAU | TIMES STAFF WRITER



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In a day of carefully choreographed damage control, transit and business leaders blasted "60 Minutes" Monday for an "inflammatory" and "one-sided" report on the Los Angeles subway, saying the project is not the disaster that viewers nationwide were led to believe.

But the legendary television news magazine stood by its Sunday night broadcast, and some of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's most frequent critics used the program as further evidence that the federal government needs to intervene in a project run amok.

MTA officials had worried for months about how "60 Minutes" would portray the agency to its more than 25 million viewers and had worked frantically to put on their best face for the show. They found out Sunday night that they had good reason for concern.

The broadcast raised no new issues for local viewers who have become accustomed to bad news from the MTA. But it weaved the history of cost overruns, ground sinkages and other problems at the agency into a damning portrait of bureaucratic ineptitude, suggesting that the subway has joined riots and earthquakes among the ranks of Southland disasters.

The counterpunches came quickly Monday, as the MTA and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce held separate news conferences, saying they believed that the broadcast had unfairly represented a project that is crucial to Southern California's future.

Conspicuously absent from the MTA news conference was Chief Executive Officer Franklin E. White, who faces possible firing this week in a campaign by Mayor Richard Riordan and other detractors. The MTA board meets Wednesday to decide White's future.

White, normally the MTA's point man on such major public relations issues, decided not to attend the briefing because he felt that the firestorm over his job would "distract" from the task of countering the "60 Minutes" piece, several agency officials said.

"Under the circumstances," said board Chairman Larry Zarian, "he felt uncomfortable with the idea that [the news conference] might be turned into a question-and-answer session about his own situation. . . . He didn't want this to become convoluted."

White declined comment later on the broadcast and his decision to not attend the briefing.

Instead it was Zarian who led the attack, telling reporters that he was "disheartened" by the segment. "It is unfortunate that the program left a lot of unanswered questions, and I believe it was done deliberately," Zarian said, asserting that the show's many "omissions" and "false impressions" made clear the slant of its producers.

MTA officials took issue with a small number of factual points, challenging some of the show's financial figures and its suggestion that the subway would be dangerous in an earthquake. And they said the broadcast failed to adequately cite the \$5.8-billion project's many attractions.

"60 Minutes" segment producer Richard Bonin defended the piece, saying: "We attempted to be as fair and accurate as possible. I regret that they feel that way . . . but we stand by the story factually and otherwise, and we feel like we gave Mr. White and the MTA a fair shot at facing the criticisms that have been raised about the subway project."

State Sen. Tom Hayden (D-Santa Monica), meanwhile, used the piece to bolster his months-long attack on the MTA, saying that he planned to meet with White House officials to express his concern about the federal government's failed oversight of the "mess" at the agency.

Times staff writer Bill Boyarsky contributed to this report.



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