



NEWS

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MTA VIRTUALLY WIPES OUT EXTERIOR BUS GRAFFITI; 42 PERCENT IMPROVEMENT IN APPEARANCE OF FLEET

The MTA's five year fight against graffiti and vandalism has virtually wiped out external graffiti on MTA buses and has resulted in an overall 42 percent improvement in the appearance and cleanliness of the 2,050-bus fleet.

By the end of April, over 30 percent of all bus windows will be free of etchings, a form of vandalism that is the major remaining graffiti problem. Monthly surveys of fleet appearance by the MTA's Operations also have found a 54 percent improvement in the condition of bus seats, and a 30 percent improvement in eliminating graffiti on bus interiors.

"MTA buses are visibly cleaner now than they have been at any time since the late 1970s," said MTA Board Chairman Larry Zarian. "MTA's clean buses will now attract more riders, due to the efforts of hundreds of volunteers and dedicated staff, along with the strong commitment of the Board for the Zero Tolerance Program."

The agency's success against graffiti can be attributed to a comprehensive eight-point Zero Tolerance program now in effect at all MTA operating divisions. The program combines intensive efforts to clean and replace vandalized equipment, to establish an outreach program to the community, and to cooperate with law enforcement agencies and the courts with the assignment of juvenile offenders to graffiti cleanup crews.

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"Improving the appearance of the 2,050 buses in the MTA fleet is difficult because of the heavy usage they experience every day," said MTA Chief Executive Officer Joseph Drew. "But, the success of the Zero Tolerance program has helped us reduce the costs of our cleanup effort from \$21 million in 1993 to a projected \$16 million this fiscal year."

MTA maintenance crews have installed 573 complete sets of new bus windows since July 1, 1995. An additional 1,200 sets are on order. The sets include "sacrificial" plastic window inserts that protect the glass windows from etching by vandals.

A mid-1995 inspection of the MTA's bus fleet identified 68,000 seats among a total of 144,000 that required cleaning or replacement. To date, some 12,000 seats have been renovated and 4,000 new seats remain to be installed. By next summer, all 68,000 seats will have been refurbished.

"We also believe that our employee volunteers who educate young people about the harmful effect of graffiti are making a lasting impact on our communities," said Arthur Leahy, Executive Officer, MTA Operations. "They have become role models for many of these youngsters."

Some 175 MTA operations personnel have volunteered for Division Advisory Committees (DAC) that concentrate on anti-graffiti work. These men and women average six presentations each week at area schools and are involved in community cleanup events somewhere in Los Angeles almost every weekend.

DAC volunteers work with young members of such organizations as the YMCA, Boys and Girls Clubs, church groups, and the Brotherhood Crusade, making hundreds of anti-graffiti contacts a year. The youngsters concentrate on cleaning transportation equipment, bus stops, terminals, and surrounding areas.

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"Our public transportation system is a reflection of this community," said Los Angeles County Supervisor and MTA Board Director Michael Antonovich. "We need to work together to stop a few graffiti vandals from defacing property that belongs to all of us."

An area of growing importance in the Zero Tolerance program is that of involving the taggers themselves in the cleanup effort. Two programs address that issue: the Juvenile Alternate Work Services (JAWS), under the Los Angeles County's youthful offender probation program, and the MTA's own Mediation and Restitution Services (MARS) program. The courts sentence young offenders, and some adults, through the JAWS program to work on crews assigned to clean MTA buses and other facilities scarred with graffiti.

The crews work eight hours a day, seven days a week, cleaning the exteriors and interiors of buses coming into the Central Business District.

MTA Transit Police, and the juvenile court judges, refer youngsters charged with graffiti and vandalism directly to the MARS program. Transit Police arrested 143 juveniles for graffiti related incidents, between July 1 and December 1, 1995, and referred more than 65 of those cases to the MARS program.

Some taggers were apprehended as a result of the almost 150 calls made each week to the MTA's 1-800-STOP-TAG phone line by people reporting vandalism.

Presented with the cost of the damage they've caused, many offenders choose to work off their debts, which are computed at a rate of 24 hours of community service for every \$100 of damage. Since March, 1995, MARS crews have cleaned some 14,000 buses and have worked more than 10,000 community service hours.

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