



NEWS

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MTA FILES LEGAL BRIEF SEEKING CLARIFICATION, POSSIBLE MODIFICATION OF COURT ORDER TO EXPAND AGENCY'S \$1 BILLION PROGRAM TO IMPROVE METRO BUS SERVICE

The MTA today filed a legal brief seeking clarification and possible modification of an order recently issued by a federal court Special Master who decided that MTA should commit substantial additional resources to buy and deploy hundreds of more buses on top of the more than \$1 billion MTA already is spending to improve Metro Bus service.

On March 6, 1999 Donald Bliss, the Special Master who oversees implementation of the federal court Consent Decree to improve Metro Bus service, recommended MTA go forward with all its remediation efforts -- including the purchase of 2,095 new buses through June 30, 2004 -- but take additional steps. These include buying and pressing into service 532 new additional compressed natural gas buses by June 30, 2002 and leasing or buying 277 buses this calendar year for additional service until the new buses arrive.

It will cost more than \$400 million to implement this latest ruling on top of the more than \$1 billion MTA will spend through June 30, 2004 to revamp Metro Bus service.

"It is my opinion, as manager of large enterprises for over 25 years and as the current manager of the MTA during this critical period of its existence, that the recommendations of the Special Master would require an expenditure of resources which is way out of proportion to the problem he is attempting to address," **said MTA CEO Julian Burke.**

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“The resources available to this agency to deal with the severe transportation problems in this county are much too dear to justify the reprogramming of hundreds of millions of additional dollars to provide the load factor reductions contemplated by the Consent Decree when the MTA is already implementing a remediation plan to accomplish this very objective,” Burke said.

The MTA CEO said the impact of this decision will affect all residents of Los Angeles County whether or not they ever use Metro Buses or Metro Rail.

“Everyone, including the MTA, agrees the Metro Bus system must be improved and that’s being done, but the Special Master, in turn, must recognize MTA is a multimodal transportation agency and the Consent Decree, itself, recognizes this fact,” Burke added.

Implementing Bliss’ decision could drain funds from street and highway improvements that serve 6.1 million motorists in Los Angeles County, as well as from the Metro Rail program which by next year will serve 200,000 average weekday boarding passengers in the county, and even could delay or scuttle other planned Metro Bus service improvements.

Moreover, Burke said it may not even be possible to implement the Special Master’s decision.

“There’s no way to get hundreds of more buses here in the timeframe he recommended,” Burke said, and even if we get those buses to expand our fleet, we’d be hard-pressed to find funds to operate that expansion, especially when you consider MTA already faces an unresolved operating deficit.”

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Mobility is the linchpin of the region's economy which underscores the importance of MTA's multimodal transportation programs. The agency also plays a major role in battling smog in the basin by getting solo motorists out of their cars and trucks and, consequently, preventing tons of daily pollutants from being emitted into the air. The MTA funds about half of the freeway HOV lane construction in the county as well as freeway sound walls, traffic signalization and other local street improvements, rideshare incentives, the Freeway Service Patrol and other projects. It also subsidizes 16 sub-regional bus operators in the county.

"All of these programs benefit everyone in the county including minorities, the transit dependent and the disabled," Burke said.

Among many pertinent legal and other issues, the MTA chief executive officer said the agency is questioning the methodology Bliss used to calculate the need for 532 more buses. For starters, he said the MTA could assign the same number of added bus trips to specific lines as ordered by Bliss without buying as many buses.

Bliss has given the Bus Riders Union until April 27 to respond to MTA's legal brief, and then he will respond to MTA's request later this spring.

In the meantime, MTA will continue to improve and expand Metro Bus service. This year 160 additional peak hour buses will be deployed. Since the Consent Decree was signed in October 1996, the MTA has made significant progress. It has planned a 60 percent increase in bus purchases through 2004 and increased the number of buses in service during peak hours by 12 percent and substantially increased the total hours of bus service.