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METRO BUS SYSTEM CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS DIP TO ALL-TIME LOW; BUSES ALSO BECOMING CLEANER AND MORE DEPENDABLE

The deployment of over 400 new buses and introduction of Metro Rapid bus service in fiscal year 2001, and other factors, all contributed to the lowest rate of customer complaints received by MTA in one month.

Customer complaints declined from the ratio of 6.37 complaints per 100,000 daily boardings in July 1997 to a ratio of 3.15 complaints per 100,000 daily boardings in July 2001, a new record and perhaps the strongest indicator yet, amongst others noted in a fiscal year 2001 performance review, that the Metro System continues to improve.

In pure numbers, passengers boarded Metro Buses over 29 million times in July 1997 and lodged 1,815 complaints. In July 2001, there were a total of 1,051 complaints and approximately 33.3 million boardings.

"From a technical standpoint, it seems that the service we're putting out is getting more dependable," said Richard Hunt, MTA Executive Officer of Operations. "We're more reliable, more comfortable and more passengers are recognizing this because our complaints are down significantly. We're also safer as well as more punctual.

"We're began consistently tracking customer complaints six years ago when they were much higher. In the last three years specifically, the amount of complaints have trended downward and that trend continues."

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The inner and exterior appearance of Metro Buses, a priority since a cleanliness program was initiated in September 1999, has also shown marked improvement. In September 1999, on a scale of 1 to 10 for cleanliness, the average MTA bus division averaged between a 4 and 5. In April, May and June 2001, that rating improved to a 7.4. Criteria included the condition of dashboards, windows, graffiti control, bumpers, the driver's area and the step well.

Significant progress was also reported in such categories as fewer cancelled bus runs and a higher percentage of buses pulling out from bus yards on time, both which impact the number of customer complaints.

In the first quarter of FY99, over 1,700 bus runs were cancelled compared to zero in the last quarter of FY01.

The percentage of buses leaving MTA bus divisions on time has increased from 94.19% in August 1997 to 99.53% in June 2001.

"It may seem like an infinitesimal improvement but if we carry an average of 45 passengers per bus, per hour, if we're one hour late, that's a lot of people who are affected," says Hunt. "To show you how much we've improved in that category, over 1,800 buses were late the first quarter of FY99. That's a significant improvement.

"I'll put it another way. For every 1,000 times we're scheduled to pull out buses, 99.5% of them we make on time, and that's a high standard because any number of issues can affect a bus not leaving on time."

Hunt also cited other reasons for the continuation of Metro System improvements, besides the newer fleet and new service.

"You can do anything if you focus on it and put enough resources behind it," says Hunt. "All the improvements show the level of support that other MTA departments are contributing to making this a success story.

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"The leadership team of MTA CEO Julian Burke and Deputy CEO Allan Lipsky has continued to sharpen our focus on important issues of providing a clean, safe and reliable transit operation in bus and rail and that works its way down the organization. They're giving us not only the motivation but also the resources required to make it happen and the result is what you're seeing on the street."

Key FY02 objectives for MTA Transit Operations include launching two to four additional Metro Rapid bus lines and supporting pre-revenue operation of the Pasadena Blue Line, which will start revenue service in July 2003.

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