
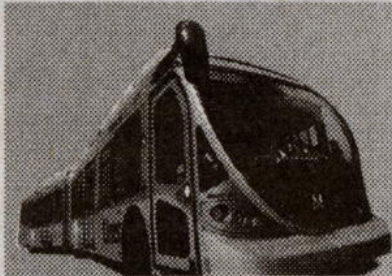


MORE BUSES

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority and Bus Riders Union remain at odds over a federal consent decree, which has spurred \$1 billion in improvements to the bus system.

Orange (or white) Metro Local bus	BRU Proposed	Court Ordered	Status
	1,000	495	495*
Red Metro Rapid bus and freeway and shuttles			
	Rapid: 309	134	Under review
	Freeways & shuttles: 317		

Metroliner bus and other replacements



The parties agreed to replace MTA's old fleet with 2,095 new buses, now in service, including 200 of these high-capacity buses scheduled to start running on select routes this year and next.

*The BRU disputes whether this order was fully met.

** These buses are scheduled to begin service this year and next on select routes.

Los Angeles Daily News

Railing against MTA

Bus Riders track advocates over future of L.A. transit

By Lisa Mascaro
Staff Writer

Sunday, April 24, 2005 - Nearly 10 years and \$1 billion after a landmark civil rights suit put more buses on L.A.'s streets, the bus versus rail fight between the MTA and the Bus Riders Union rages on as if the case was just filed yesterday.

The plaintiffs continue to claim discrimination by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority and its mostly Democratic board of directors despite a vastly improved transit system for 450,000 mostly poor and minority riders.

The MTA, accused of spending more on suburban trains than inner-city buses, continues to build billion-dollar rail lines - while crying poverty every time the court forces it to buy more buses.

With the consent decree set to expire next year, the two sides are gearing up for a fight over whether it will be extended even as many who have followed the issue question whether the public interest has been served.

Former MTA board member Nick Patsouras, who has been involved in local transit issues for more than 20 years, believes the consent decree has gotten in the way of developing coherent policies.

"They (the Bus Riders Union) are on a crusade and they don't look at the ramifications of what more buses means and I don't hear an articulate voice from the MTA side (saying), what are the implications five years from now?"

The suit was filed in 1994 when the MTA's 1,680-bus fleet routinely broke down, creating overcrowding. After battling two years in court, two sides reached a settlement - the 10-year consent decree.

But few expected at the time that it would give the ragtag Bus Riders Union - and ultimately, the court - so much authority in monitoring public transit and mandating costly new procurements.

In the last nine years, the MTA has spent \$1 billion on buses and now devotes nearly half of its \$3

billion-a-year budget to bus operations, up from 39 percent in 1996.

Under court order, it has bought nearly 500 traditional buses to reduce overcrowding so that no more than eight passengers are standing at a time. It's also replaced 2,000 diesel-fueled buses with what is now the nation's biggest clean-air fleet.

And last week, it was ordered to improve service by adding 134 Metro Rapid buses, which travel express routes. And, for the first time, the court told the MTA to consider diverting money from its rail operations if need be.

The MTA declined to discuss that ruling, pending a decision on whether to appeal.

But even as the MTA eyes the end of the 10-year order, the Bus Riders Union is considering whether to ask the court to extend the arrangement so more can be done to ensure transit access for all.

"They haven't changed their priorities," said attorney E. Richard Larson, western regional counsel for the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, which filed the 1994 case.

"They find every excuse they can not to fund the bus system. You don't hear them doing the same thing with rail. They do everything they can to fund rail."

But MTA officials say the consent decree limits their ability to adequately address the region's transportation needs because so much of their resources are going to buses used by fewer than 10 percent of Los Angeles County residents.

"Clearly we had to improve the bus system, and that's a given," said MTA spokesman Marc Littman. "It's straitjacketed us to other solutions we could have done to deal with mounting traffic problems."

In addition, he said, the case has turned the transportation issue into a bus versus rail debate that oversimplifies the problems in Los Angeles, where commuters waste 93 hours a year in freeway congestion.

"The BRU has done a pretty good job of casting us as the ogre and standing up for the downtrodden. There's a bigger issue here," Littman said.

"We are responsible for the mobility needs of more than 10 million people ... We've got to look at streets and highways, more technology, better ways to deal with freight, more ride-sharing."

Not surprisingly, the BRU thinks the answer to the region's transit crisis is buses. It wants the MTA to halt construction of all new rail lines, including the Gold Line extension to East Los Angeles and planning on the \$600 million Exposition Line to the Westside.

"If you take a couple of billion dollars, you could flood every freeway, every corridor, every canyon with buses that would come often, nights and weekends," said BRU organizer Deborah Orosz.

But Mark Pisano, executive director of the Southern California Association of Governments, which oversees transportation planning for the six-county region that includes Los Angeles, decried that solution.

Rail is an integral part of a strategy to reduce congestion and smog in Southern California, he said, and the region could be penalized and lose federal funding if clean-air goals are not met.

"The courts need to realize there's a lot of different federal mandates," said Pisano, whose strategy also hinges on building a multibillion-dollar magnetic-levitation train along freeways. "We've been doing a good job, SCAG and the MTA, to get that right balance."

Still, University of Southern California professor James E. Moore, who served as an expert in the BRU case, says the bus system has improved significantly under the consent decree, and it should be the core of MTA's business.

True, he said, the court has probably cost MTA a few miles of additional rail lines, but he questions how beneficial more rail would have been when MTA's trains today have 240,000 boardings - fewer actual passengers - after a more than \$7 billion investment.

"We've spent billions on rails and we've systematically reduced transit use," he said. "That is not a win. That is not a good use of public resources."

He's reluctantly come to support bus-only lanes or busways, like the Orange Line opening this year in the San Fernando Valley, as a better option.

But MTA insists that with buses running at 12 mph on streets - and rail costing less to operate once it gets built - the agency needs all tools to get L.A. moving.

"You get to the point where we're creating some of the traffic," he said. "There's only so much money available. The more you put into one mode, you have to take from others."

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