

Bus Riders Union to File an Injunction, MTA Board Raises Rail and Bus Fares Over Objection of ...



Written by MARIANNE LOVE

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Bus Riders Union to File an Injunction, MTA Board Raises Rail and Bus Fares Over Objection of Thousands



Changes to San Fernando Valley Bus Service to Take Effect June 24

The Bus Riders Union is expected to file an injunction in response to the bus and rail fare hike recently approved by the board of the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

Manuel Criollo, lead organizer for the Bus Riders Union said while disappointed in the increase fares, his organization never imagined the hearings would draw thousands of bus and rail riders.

"The MTA hasn't done an adequate environmental impact report on the impact of the proposed fare hike or the one they just improved. We will be seeking an injunction until the MTA provides an EIR," Criollo said.

Criollo said based on industry standards, it's a very well known fact that when fares are raised, ridership decreases.

"When you increase fares by 10 percent you lose 4 to 5 percent of the riders. People will get in their cars," Criollo said. "For a region with the worst air pollution in the country, this is a serious implication to the region."

An environmental impact report looks at how more cars on the roads due to the fare hike will effect air quality and traffic congestion.

The board approved the monthly pass to rise from \$52 to \$75 and the day pass to \$6 from \$3 by July 1, 2009.

Student fares, grades kindergarten through 12, will increase to \$29 from \$20 and college students will pay \$43 instead of \$30 by July 1, 2009.

This is the first time Metro has adjusted fares in 3.5 years and the second change in the past 12 years.

In a 9-4 vote, board members approved a fare increase in more than a decade despite emotional testimony by thousands of bus riders who protested at public hearings last week saying they can't afford the raise in rates over the next two years.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, Councilman Bernard Parks, board appointees Richard Katz and David Fleming, were the dissenting votes.

"We owe it to the community to ensure the financial stability of the transit agency and position Metro so that it can meet the mobility needs of Los Angeles County today and into the future," said Gloria Molina Los Angeles County supervisor and Metroboard chair, who proposed a compromise measure.

Without a fare change, Metro was facing a projected \$1.8 billion operating deficit over the next 10 years that would have severely impacted service for thousands of riders and stymied the transit agency's efforts to provide new transit service in an era of rising gas prices and growing traffic congestion.

To lessen the impact on the most transit dependent customers, Metro also will double the amount of money it gives major social service agencies to provide tokens and taxi vouchers for their clients. The total annual allocation will be \$10 million.

Board members were facing a deficit in its fare recovery ratio and fare structure for the 2007-08 budget, which lead to the adoption of a fare increase.

The fare increase balances the objective to increase ridership, maintain the lowest possible fares while recognizing special groups such as seniors, students, the disabled and transit-dependent individuals.

The Bus Riders Union, a civil rights and environmental justice membership organization, call the rate hike racists because about 86 percent of all MTA riders are low-income people of color, the profoundly poor.

In 1992 the organization contended bus service was awful and the MTA distributed money collected from fares in discriminatory ways.

They sued and in 1996 won a 10-year consent decree, which expired in the fall.

Criollo said they are working with attorneys to revisit the consent decree in which the MTA made a series of promises. A hearing in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals is set for next month.

"Between November (2006) and June (2007), the MTA has cut about \$8 million in service and a lot of service in the San Fernando Valley," Criollo said.

The Valley is overseen by a governing council, which includes San Fernando Councilwoman Nury Martinez.

Martinez did not return phones calls seeking comment about the changes.

Michael Brewer, service development manager for the MTA, said his department looks at the efficiency of the bus routes each year during June and December.

Effective June 24, several changes to San Fernando Valley routes will change or be cancelled.

"Plan Metro Connections enables us to produce more reliable service by shortening routes 25 miles or longer. It's hard

for long routes to stay on time. Lines 90 and 92 will be broken to create shorter routes," Brewer said.

Brewer said the fare will remain the same for two lines as it did for one line.

There's no change to line 90 between downtown Los Angeles and Sunland, however, the portion of the route from Sunland to Olive View Medical Center will be operated by new line 290.

No change to line 92 from Sylmar Metrolink Station to downtown Los Angeles, however the portion of the route from Burbank to Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink Station will be operated by new line 292.

For budgetary reasons some service will be eliminated on the weekends for line 154 between Tarzana and Burbank, line 155 between Universal City and Burbank Metrolink stations and line 239 along White Oak Avenue to Sylmar Metrolink Station. A segment of Line 183 between Burbank and Glendale will not operate on Saturday and Sunday.

Line 656, a late night service between Panorama City and downtown Los Angeles, will only operate between Panorama City and Santa Monica Boulevard and Highland Avenue in Hollywood. The segment formally operated between Santa Monica Boulevard and Highland and downtown Los Angeles will be cancelled.

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