



April 19, 1996

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TO: MTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: ARTHUR T. LEAHY *Al Leahy*

SUBJECT: COMPLAINT ANALYSIS AND BUS OPERATOR SENSITIVITY
TRAINING PROGRAM RELATED TO CUSTOMER
RELATIONS

This is in response to a request for information at the Marketing and Public Relations Ad Hoc Committee by Director Bonzo.

ISSUE

Board members raised questions about the number and types of complaints and concerns raised by our customers on a regional basis. In addition, they requested information concerning bus operator sensitivity training as it relates to customer relations and interactions.

BACKGROUND

Customer Complaint Findings

In general, the level of total complaints peaked during August 1995. Schedule-related and operator performance categories showed the most dramatic increases. Complaints declined through the end of the calendar year, and increased in January 1996. Except for the August complaint level, the ensuing months' complaint levels through the remainder of the calendar year are approximately the same as were recorded nine years ago. Attached are graphs which display a summary of complaints by major category for the system, and by region, for the period June 1995 through January 1996.

In June 1995, the MTA undertook major service changes and restructuring in the Northern and Southern regions. In the Northern region, service reductions resulting from the first phase implementation of the Board adopted restructuring plan for the San Fernando Valley were combined with changes to reduce overall agency costs. This led to a dramatic increase in schedule-related customer

complaints and an initial net loss in San Fernando Valley ridership. The extent of actual ridership loss was mitigated by staff's quick response to customer concerns resulting in changes of service levels, modifying routes and aggressively addressing service quality. Since the August peak in complaints, that number has declined in the Northern region.

It should be noted that not all of the adopted San Fernando Valley changes were implemented in June 1995. Status reports have been presented to the Board transmitting updates on progress to date with regard to implementation of the adopted plan.

In the Southern region, restructuring of services to meet the opening of the Metro Green Line temporarily upset a number of customers. The level of complaints in the Southern region has remained at a fairly constant level for schedule-related complaints, rather than diminished, due in part to ongoing reliability problems with methanol/ethanol engine components (the Southern region has methanol buses at its Division 2). In addition, the Southern region's Division 5 has had transmission problems associated with the Flex-Metro buses.

The other two regions did not experience major system changes. The Western region has not experienced a variance in schedule-related complaint totals since September. However, the Eastern region, which has two bus divisions (Division 1 and Division 12) with methanol vehicles, showed an increase in schedule-related complaints. As with the Southern region, the ongoing problems with methanol engine components have made it difficult to sustain scheduled daily pull-out assignments, and to maintain service on the street.

An analysis of complaints by operator indicates that several operators have had multiple customer complaints filed about them. Division management has energetically implemented programs to track and monitor the performance of their operators to ensure that these numbers are reduced. The divisions have begun more extensive programs to train/retrain all operators on improving their customer relations' attitudes and techniques, in addition to more aggressively working with the operators and union representatives in cases requiring discipline.

Customer Relations Sensitivity Training of Operators

The MTA currently provides, from the very onset of an operator's career, extensive customer training:

- During formal classroom training given new operators, four classes are devoted to customer relations issues. The classes cover the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) customer sensitivity and operator/customer relations training. These classes familiarize future operators with the needs of the various types of customers they will meet while driving a bus and to inform them of ways to effectively deal with them.
- Operators are given additional training at their assigned divisions by supervisors and managers. Included in this training is an effort to teach/reinforce added interpersonal skills to the operator.

- Special customer relations training/retraining programs have, or are being set up, for many of the divisions which are to be given to all operators. These training courses point out the impact of negative operations (pass-ups, unpleasant attitude toward passengers) on the perceived quality of bus service and address better methods of minimizing negative operator/customer interactions. In several regions, operators with several customer complaints are given focused retraining and one-on-one counseling, and their performance is monitored closely.
- Central Instruction in El Monte has instituted a program in which they travel to bus divisions to provide ongoing retraining of operators on subjects including bus line connections, landmarks, and also answers to other commonly asked customer questions; the purpose of this program is to better prepare operators for their role as an information provider to customers.
- Operators who receive a complaint against them are interviewed by division management as quickly as possible, and are counseled and disciplined as verifiable or warranted. A problem in investigating and disciplining operators based upon customer complaints is the difficulty in verifying the allegations, even for those receiving multiple complaints. Operations management has assessed this issue of operators receiving multiple complaints, and in some cases has begun exercising its management right to counsel and institute progressive discipline of repeat operators. Where warranted, operators are required to attend one-on-one retraining by central instruction in El Monte; the retraining emphasizes areas needing correction.
- A program has been established by the Southern region in which operators with multiple customer complaints are sent to the MTA's Customer Relations department to answer complaint calls from the public and receive further customer relations training.

In addition, the regions have implemented the following customer relations-related programs in an effort to provide better service quality to customers:

- Extensive community outreach efforts, at the division level which has enabled staff to gather, communicate and exchange information regarding bus service. Community forums or other special events, e.g., open houses, or periodic meetings, involve the participation of elected officials, community leaders and interested residents.
- Quick Complaint Response. In coordination with Customer Relations, processes have been created to respond quickly to a complainant, rapidly investigating the allegations including an interview with the operator, and immediate follow-up with the complainant to close the information loop. In some cases, the complaint process entails a home visit with the complainant.
- Commitment at each division to analyze and develop mitigating actions for problems arising out of customer dissatisfaction, whether they be mechanical or operational. Staff at divisions are assessing trends in complaints for their divisions, including identifying repeat problem operators, and are developing programs, including progressive discipline, to correct the situation. Several regions have instituted pilot programs in which customer comments and complaints from

passengers of pilot lines are being actively solicited. Complaints received on these lines are immediately addressed and a commitment is made to follow up with the individual complainant by the close of the next business day.

- Gain sharing. Divisions recognize outstanding individual and team performance results. The person(s) being recognized are awarded a benefit. Included within this gain sharing concept is the development of a team spirit. Six divisions (3, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 15) have organized operators into teams each headed by a Transit Operations Supervisor. The purpose of this reorganization of staff is to develop a sense of teamwork and cooperative work performance. The teams strive to achieve specified work objectives.
- Bus to Bus Run Assignment. The same bus is assigned to the same bus run each day. This strategy promotes operator buy-in to the actual service provided by having them take a more active interest in the quality of service based upon the condition of their vehicles.

Conclusion

Efforts are underway to provide the training needed to improve customer relations. The result should be a continued lowering of complaints and noted rule violations concerning poor customer relations and passenger discourtesy.

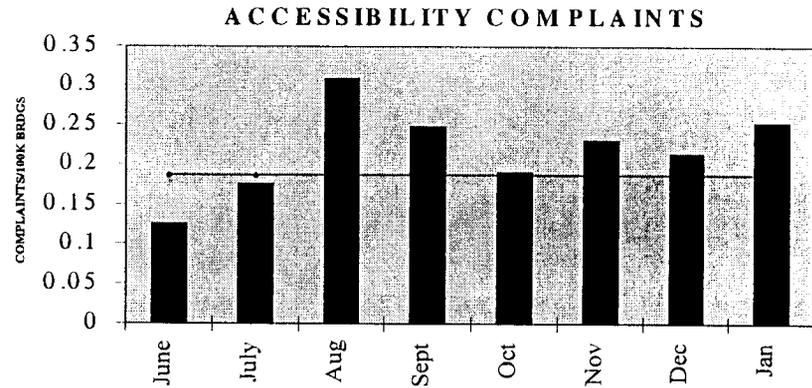
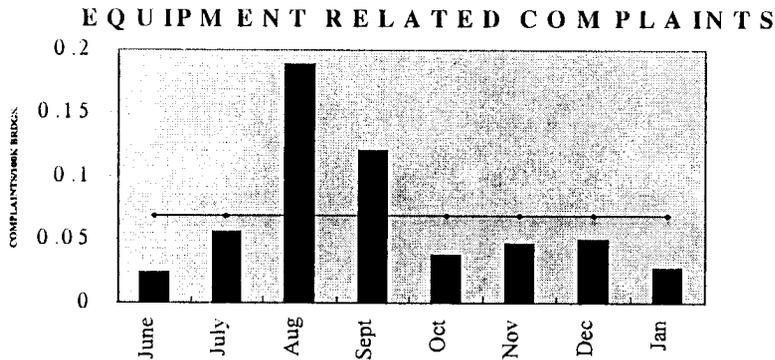
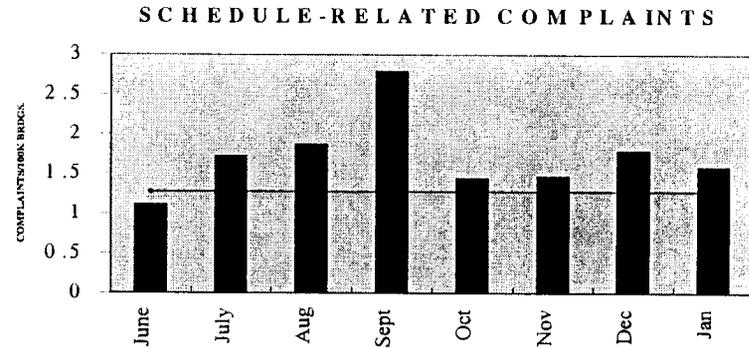
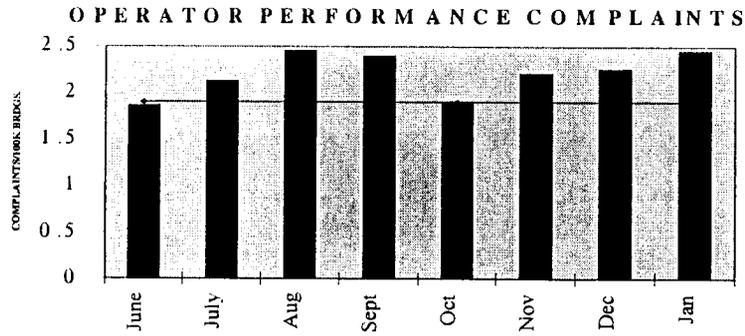
As noted, the MTA has in place programs designed to train and retrain operators on effective customer relations techniques. Staff is committed to providing higher quality service to our patrons.

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Attachments

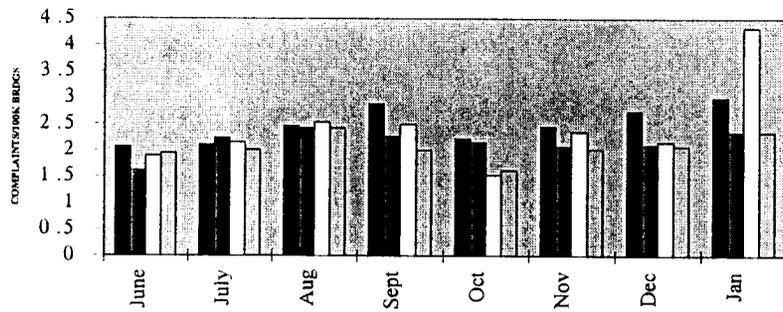
SYSTEM TOTAL COMPLAINT TREND, BY CATEGORY



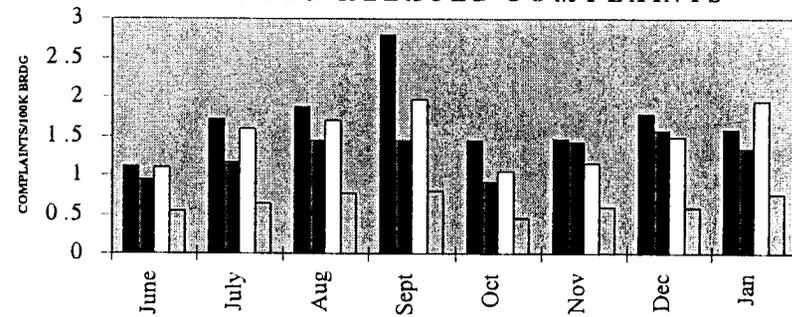
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COMPARISON OF COMPLAINTS BY REGION

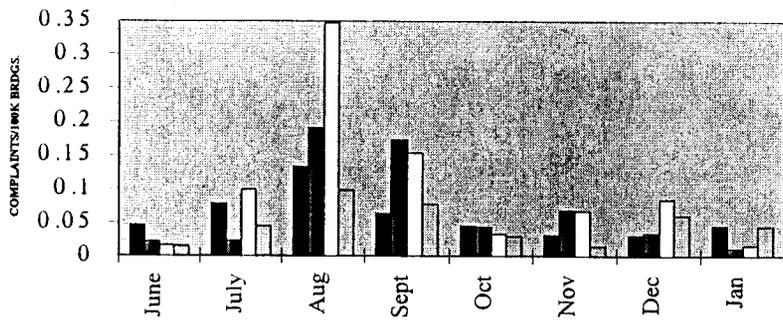
OPERATOR PERFORMANCE COMPLAINTS



SCHEDULE-RELATED COMPLAINTS



EQUIPMENT-RELATED COMPLAINTS



ACCESSIBILITY COMPLAINTS

