

LOS ANGELES COUNTY METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

It Can Increase Its Efforts to Ensure the Safe Operation of Its Buses

REPORT NUMBER 2001-101, AUGUST 2001

The Joint Legislative Audit Committee requested that we examine the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (MTA) management and monitoring of its bus and rail operators. Specifically, we were asked to determine if the MTA complies with applicable federal and state laws designed to protect driver and public safety. We were also asked to review the MTA's procedures for monitoring the secondary employment of its part-time drivers. We found that:

Audit Highlights . . .

Our review of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's management and monitoring of its bus operations revealed that it:

- Lacks an effective system to prevent all violations of driving time restrictions.***
 - Does not adequately track the time its bus drivers work for other employers.***
 - Has an error-prone accident database that makes analysis difficult if not impossible.***
 - Does not take full advantage of information on traffic citations to consistently discipline its bus drivers.***
-

Finding #1: The MTA lacks an adequate system to prevent violations of driving and on-duty time restrictions.

Although state law requires it to ensure that its bus drivers do not exceed established maximum driving and on-duty time limits, the MTA does not generate sufficient information either to be aware of or to prevent all such violations. Federal and state laws dictate bus drivers must not drive more than 10 hours, or for any period after having been on duty 15 hours, and both of these restrictions require a prior off-duty period of at least 8 hours. The MTA's scheduling database generates reports on drivers who work more than 12 hours to ensure that they complete driver logs, but it does not report on the actual driving time. Moreover, because no reports are generated on drivers who work less than 12 hours but drive more than 10, the MTA has no information on those possible violations. Also, the MTA's report on drivers who work more than 15 hours contains numerous errors and thus may not identify time violations. Finally, the MTA cannot use any of the reports, which are generated after the fact, to prevent violations.

The MTA should take the following actions:

- Continue upgrading its Transit Operating Trends System (TOTS) database. In addition, it should further enhance TOTS so it can produce reports that identify all bus drivers who have driven more than 10 hours or for any period after having been on duty for 15 hours.

MTA Action: Pending.

The MTA plans to complete the TOTS upgrade by February 2002. However, the MTA states that it is not technologically feasible at this time to enhance TOTS so it can produce reports that identify all bus drivers who have driven more than 10 hours or for any period after having been on duty for 15 hours. Nevertheless, it will monitor advances in technology and the development of its other systems to seek opportunities for applying this feature.

- Ensure that its division managers review, correct, and re-run the 15-hour report daily so that the report contains accurate information.

MTA Action: Partial corrective action taken.

The MTA states that division staff update the 15-hour report daily. In addition, it believes that once complete, the planned modifications to TOTS will assist management in its review and control of operator hours of service regulations through automation.

Finding #2: The MTA does not effectively track secondary employment.

An important step in preventing bus drivers from exceeding the maximum legal on-duty hours is identifying whether they have employment outside of the MTA (secondary employment), and if so, the types of duties and the number of hours spent with those employers. However, the MTA lacks a database for tracking the secondary employment of its bus drivers, and thus is unaware of drivers who exceed the maximum legal on-duty hours and may cause accidents.

The MTA should take the following actions:

- Enforce its newly established procedures by requiring all divisions to provide, and all bus drivers to complete, secondary employment disclosure letters. These letters should be updated periodically throughout the year.
- Consistently ask for hours worked per week, phone numbers, addresses, and job duty information on the secondary employment disclosure letters. Also, division staff should periodically select a sample of bus drivers and call their other employers to verify the bus drivers' time commitment.

- Develop a database to track those bus drivers who have secondary employment and must submit a daily driver log.



MTA Action: Partial corrective action taken.

The MTA plans to begin using a revised secondary employment form for its drivers to complete in early December 2001 and intends to track them for changes every six months. However, although the form requests certain information about the drivers' other employment such as phone number and name of the company, it does not ask the driver for information such as his or her job duty and number of hours worked per week. Additionally, the MTA did not indicate its actions relating to the development of a database to track those bus drivers who have secondary employment.

Finding #3: The MTA's system for tracking bus driver accidents has flawed data.

In addition to not always knowing when drivers violate on-duty restrictions, the MTA cannot be sure how long drivers have been working at the time they have accidents. Although the MTA tracks the number of bus driver accidents using a database, the Vehicle Accident Monitoring System (VAMS), we found numerous errors in VAMS. Some bus drivers improperly documented the amount of time that elapsed between when they started work and when accidents occurred. In addition, some data entry staff in MTA's bus division did not properly input details from the accident report into the VAMS. As a result, VAMS is not useful to the MTA for analysis that might determine potential causes of bus accidents. In particular, the unreliable data make it impossible to determine whether driver fatigue has contributed to accidents.

To ensure that it captures more accurate accident data, we recommended that the MTA provide refresher training to its bus drivers and data entry staff on how to fill out accident reports and how to enter information into VAMS. Further, it should complete its plans to include controls that ensure drivers' data is coded correctly in VAMS.

MTA Action: Pending.

The MTA hired a safety management consultant to develop a safety improvement workplan. The MTA states that it will implement the plan throughout its organization. The MTA plans to complete the TOTS upgrade by February 2002; but did not indicate whether the upgrades will include controls that ensure drivers' data is coded correctly in VAMS.

Finding #4: The MTA does not take full advantage of information on drivers' traffic citations to consistently apply its discipline process.

State law requires the MTA to participate in a Department of Motor Vehicles (Motor Vehicles) process that gives motor carriers full disclosure, including citations, of any action against a bus drivers' driving record. However, the MTA does not take full advantage of this Motor Vehicles information. Moreover, our sample of driver citations reveals that bus drivers frequently fail to disclose their citations to division managers, despite the MTA's policy requiring them to do so. For example, we were unable to find any evidence that bus division managers were aware of citations for 39 of the 56 bus drivers in our sample. Being unaware of all citations, managers cannot equitably use the discipline process to identify and, if necessary, discharge bus drivers.

The MTA should periodically distribute Motor Vehicles' summary citation data to its division managers so they can readily access all citations relating to all their bus drivers.

MTA Action: Pending.

The MTA has created and distributed two monthly summary citation reports to division managers for review and comment. MTA staff are reviewing the applicability and usefulness of the report with division managers.