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Local Section

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MTA votes to appeal bus purchase

Board seeks cheaper way to increase service

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A divided MTA board voted on Monday to appeal a court order to buy 145 buses to reduce overcrowding, saying it can add the required new service without purchasing \$100 million in new buses, officials said.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority's appeal to U.S. District Judge Terry Hatter comes as the agency must reduce the number of passengers standing on a bus to no more than eight as part of a consent decree that grew from a civil rights lawsuit.

"The issue is, do we have to go out there and buy additional buses at taxpayer expense?" said MTA spokesman Marc Littman. "We might have to put out some new buses, ... but that'll save taxpayers a lot of money."

The Bus Riders Union, which filed the lawsuit resulting in the 10-year consent decree and had urged the MTA to comply rather than appeal, said the agency is trying tactics

already rejected by the court.

"We believe this appeal is from a position of weakness," said BRU organizer Manuel Criollo. "The very core arguments MTA has tried and have been rejected."

The MTA board has struggled with its response to the January ruling by the court-appointed special master as the appeal deadline neared.

The agency has said it will cost \$30 million annually to provide the 290,000 hours of new bus service as the special master ordered, or \$300 million over the next 10 years.

It further estimated the cost of new buses at about \$100 million over 10 years, Littman said.

But the agency believes it will be able to provide the required hours with fewer than the 145 buses mandated.

"The MTA believes that through more efficient scheduling of its buses it can provide all units of service with fewer than the 145 buses identified by the special master," according to a statement.

The agency already has hundreds of new buses on order.

The board voted 7-2-1, with Councilmen Martin Ludlow and Tom La Bonge opposed, and Supervisor Gloria Molina abstaining. Absent were Mayor James Hahn, Councilman Antonio Villaraigosa and Supervisor Yvonne Braithwaite Burke.

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