



Students Sign Petition Opposing MTA Rate Increase

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MTA Board Members to Hold a Public Hearing on Restructuring Bus Fares



High school student Richard Edmond confers on Tuesday with Patrisse Cullors, a

youth mentor at Grover Cleveland High School in Reseda.

Richard Edmond is 15 years old and relies on the bus system to take him to and from school, work and attend Bus Rider union meetings in downtown Los Angeles.

The sophomore at Grover Cleveland High School in Reseda is concerned over the potential bus fare increase set to go before the MTA board of directors this morning.

The board is beginning public hearings on the issue.

In discussions leading to the adoption of the 2007–2008 budget, various board members commented on the need to address MTA's fare policy in the context of resolving a "structural deficit." The American Public Transportation Association peer review noted its fare recovery ratio and fare structures are 24 percent, which is low when compared with industry peers.

They recommended a comprehensive fare policy that recognizes users should pay a reasonable portion of the services provided that would index fare changes to match service level and cost increases.

It is consistent with MTA's short- and long-term goals for maintaining and improving the regional transportation, according to public documents.

The proposed fare policy balances the competing objectives of increasing ridership, maintaining the lowest possible fares and recognizing the needs of special groups such as students, elderly, disabled and transit dependent, while requiring transit users to pay a fair and reasonable portion of the costs.



Students from Grover Cleveland High School in Reseda get aboard a MTA bus after school on Tuesday. About onequarter of the student population has signed a petition opposing a proposed rate hike going before the board of directors today.

The proposed fare restructuring effective July 1 is estimated at about \$80 million of incremental fare revenues over the 2007 budgeted amount of \$280 million and a total of \$360 million in 2008. The board is facing a proposed fare hike July 1 from \$20 to \$45 per month for students, \$52 to \$75 per month for adults and \$12 to \$37.50 for seniors and the disabled. Effective Jan. 1, 2009, those monthly fees would increase to \$72, \$120 and \$60 respectively.

Edmond plans to attend this morning's meeting and he's bringing a petition, signed by nearly 800 students, opposing the fare increase. About 32,000 students attend Cleveland High School.

Edmond said if the new rate goes into effect, he won't be able to afford it and can only imagine future incarcerations because he'll be forced to hop on the bus without paying.

His parents have nontraditional work schedules making it impossible to bring him to and from school, plus he doesn't think it's their responsibility because they also have to deal with his two younger siblings.

"The mayor (Antonio Villaraigosa) went to Washington, D.C., to get money for the Red Line, why can't he get grants for the MTA," Edmond said. Even at a young tender age, Edmond has ideas he sees as alternative to raising the fares so high.

Among his suggestions is a busonly lane that would encourage drivers, sitting in traffic, to get out of their cars.

"If the board can only wait, with the gas prices so high more riders are expected to ride the bus," said Edmond, who added that it takes him two hours one way to walk to school from his Canoga Park home.

Members of the Bus Riders Union, a progressive civil rights and environmental justice membership organization, are calling the rate increase racist and predict devastation to all bus riders, but especially the poor and lowincome community members.

They say about 86 percent of all MTA riders are low-income people of color, the profoundly poor as MTA's own analysis has observed and primarily inner city Latino, African Americans, Asian and female bus riders.

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

They sued the MTA in 1996 under the Civil Rights Act and won a 10-year consent decree, which expired in October.

The consent decree added 2,000 additional buses to the fleet, forced MTA to put money back into the bus system and prohibit raising fares, said Patrisse Cullors, a Bus Riders Union member and a Cleveland High School youth mentor.

Students have been telling Cullors they won't be able to afford the proposed fares, that their parents take the bus, the family structure is threatened and that they may have to use their limited funds for bus fare instead of food.

"This increase will affect everyday life. There's a concern about the drop-out rate increasing, about the added stress it will put onto the working-class, lowincome, bus-riding families," Cullors said. "We see this as a serious civil rights violation." Cullors said the poor would stop riding the bus if the rates are increased not because they don't want to pay, but because they can't afford to pay any more money.

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