

Anger erupts over Muni cutting runs short

Chronicle

Muni's top operations chief said little to mollify two San Francisco supervisors who voiced anger and frustration at a City Hall hearing today on "switch-backs," the transit parlance for turning around trains before they reach their scheduled final destination.



"For many of our residents, as you can imagine, it becomes a very big problem," said Supervisor Carmen Chu, who called for the hearing after fielding numerous complaints from her constituents in the Sunset District who are fed up with being booted off the N-Judah and the L-Taraval trains early and told they have to wait for the next one to come along.

Supervisor John Avalos, who represents the Excelsior, said he, too, hears plenty of complaints from his constituents who rely on the M-Oceanview.

John Haley, head of operations for the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency, said he's aware of the gripes. He described the switch-backs as an unfortunate but necessary "service management technique" used by Muni to address delays in the system that cause bottlenecks closer to downtown, where ridership is heaviest.

"Trains are turned to support the greater good," he testified.

He said Muni's policy is to only turn around a train if another one will be along within five minutes, but Chu and Avalos were skeptical that the policy was actually followed.

The key to reducing switch-backs, Haley said, is to reduce delays. That's often easier said than done. The causes of delays are varied -- equipment that malfunctions, too few vehicles or operators to meet all the scheduled runs, accidents, tracks blocked by double-parkers, etc.

In September, for example, when there was a spate of equipment problems, there were 175 switch-backs. In October, as some of the problems were resolved, the number dropped to 105; and in November and December there were 97 in each month -- representing less than 1 percent of the scheduled runs, Haley said.

The supervisors, however, said that number is still unacceptable, given that people who rely on Muni in the outlying neighborhoods have few alternatives but to wait for the next train; there aren't a lot of nearby bus lines, and catching a cab is near-impossible.

By meeting's end, the problem was not resolved, but the supervisors vowed to pursue the issue and, Avalos, said, find ways to assure that "neighborhoods that are further away from the downtown core have better options so they don't have to deal with this all the time."

Posted By: [Rachel Gordon](#) | January 10 2011 at 04:19 PM

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