

South Bay Cities Council of Governments

December 30, 2020

To: SBCCOG Transit Operators Working Group (January 7, 2021 meeting)
SBCCOG Transportation Committee (January 11, 2021 meeting)
SBCCOG Board of Directors (January 28, 2021 meeting)

From: Jacki Bacharach, Executive Director
Steve Lantz, Transportation Director

Subject: L. A. Metro COVID 19 Recovery Program

Adherence to Strategic Plan:

Goal A: Environment, Transportation, and Economic Development. Facilitate, implement, and/or educate members and others about environmental, transportation, and economic development programs that benefit the South Bay. Strategy 5 – Actively pursue opportunities for infrastructure funding for member agencies.

BACKGROUND

The L.A. Metro Board of Directors directed its Office of Extraordinary Innovation (OEI) to prepare COVID 19 Recovery Plan recommendations to address continuing reduced ridership and revenue. Attachment D, Exhibit 1 contains a matrix of the Metro staff's draft final recommended actions with annotations by SBCCOG staff. A draft SBCCOG comment letter is in Attachment E. Since Metro has extended the comment deadline to February 8, 2021, a letter needs to be approved by the SBCCOG Board of Directors at its January 28, 2021 meeting.

The Recovery Plan outlines the set of transit ridership recovery challenges that are facing Los Angeles County, including COVID 19 not being under control, and recurrent stay at home orders, continuance of racial and economic inequities, record unemployment, loss of sales tax revenue and resultant negative impacts on regional and local budgets, increased traffic and increased vehicle ownership. The recommendations incorporate Metro actions described in its recently completed NextGen Transit Study in addition to short- and long-term strategies to generate new revenue and attract previous and new riders to the L. A. County transit system.

Beyond the short-term impacts of COVID 19, the report asserts a positive correlation between an increase in auto ownership and reduction in transit usage. However, transit usage was on the decline before the emergence of the pandemic, therefore SBCCOG staff believes that more analysis is needed before a causal relationship between a decline in transit usage and an increase in auto ownership should be assumed.

In addition, there may be other factors beyond auto ownership to be considered, such as:

1. Concerns are not reduced significantly about health and security risks with transit use;
2. Reductions in convenient and reliable transit availability in the suburbs as Metro and other operators focus on their service to improve transit equity and access to opportunity;

3. The potential impact of a long-term continuation of remote-work business models and technology innovations that may create a “new normal” reduction in work-related vehicle trips and vehicle miles travelled; and
4. The continued growth of e-commerce and e-services as customers continue to shop and obtain services on-line after the COVID 19 threat lessens.
5. The emergence of public and private shared-ride mobility-as-a-service (MAAS) options and smart multi-modal payment systems (e. g.: Metro’s new Microtransit pilot program in the LAX / Inglewood area; Metro’s new TAPForce multi-modal smart wallet payment system)

RECOMMENDATION

After hearing Metro’s presentation, review the policies and make a recommendation to the SBCCOG Board on the attached matrix and comment letter.

Exhibits:

1. SBCCOG Matrix of Metro Recovery Task Force Recommendations

**Exhibit 1 - Summary of Metro Recovery Task
Force Final Recommendations**

Draft - as of 12.31.20

#	Metro Recovery Task Force Final Recommendations	Costs	Timeframe (SBCCOG est.)	SBCCOG Staff Notes
1	Survey riders on current travel patterns, modes, future plans and customer experience	negligible	completed	Survey sent to 11,000 previous on-board survey respondents. 23% response rate. Effort was entirely in house
2	Fund Safe Streets	no new cost	completed	Metro in May allowed Cities that received 2020 Open Streets grants to repurpose \$ on safe / slow streets programs
3	Expand and Innovate cleaning - on high touch areas of infrastructure	\$8.8 mil / yr.	immediate, ongoing	Staff is exploring a range of technology and chemical treatment options.
4	Distribute masks to riders	\$1.3 mil / yr.	immediate, ongoing?	Reduces conflicts with bus drivers. Funded through December 2020 (@\$50,000); Needs additional funding to continue
5	Allow mask and personal sanitizer vending	potentially no new cost	immediate	Use Metro staff and licensed vendors at some stations where free masks are not being distributed by staff.
6	Implement smart phone contactless visual payment TAP application	revenue positive	completed for Apple phones, immediate for Android phones	Enables new fare revenue with rear door boarding by using contactless fare payment
7	Improve on-line public meeting protocols	negligible	immediate	Minor cost for Zoom licenses and WiFi hot spot for each meeting
8	Increase ventilation on buses, enhance HVAC filtration systems	unknown	1-3 years	Metro staff is testing 3-stage HVAC filtration system for future installation. Costs tbd.
9	Support employee parents that cannot work from home	neutral?	immediate	Metro is Implementing creative HR policies, childcare matching, TOWP donation, Metro villages at key stations for distance learning / telecommuting. SBCCOG is concerned that aggregate annual costs do not significantly impact operating and maintenance budgets.
10	Restore service to stay ahead of demand, retain rear-door boarding	unknown	immediate, ongoing	Revenue is near zero (down \$240 mil / year), Includes Next Gen Phase 1 service has lower revenue service hours (5.5 million / yr.) than pre-COVID (7 million / yr.); Metro monitors ridership/demand weekly. Cost impact depends on when Metro resumes fare enforcement.
11	Study New Bike Share Models	unknown	1-3 years	Re-bid contract or bring ops/maintenance in house to be performed by Metro staff. TBD in early 2021. Limited savings in current budget.

12	Promote Metro Active Transportation (MAT) - walking and biking with more bike infrastructure and more Metro bikes	\$120,000	immediate	Metro to fully fund MAT Cycle 1, pilot to distribute bikes, Adopt-A-Bike program using abandoned bikes.
13	Allow and promote telework - new telework policy in January 2021	unknown	1-3 years	14% of Metro staff is currently telecommuting. Cost: \$2,000 / participating employee for laptops, software, training offset by \$13 mil. reduction in non-hq rent and reduced turnover (\$10K - \$30K per employee)
14	Install more Bus Lanes at congestion hot spots - on streets	negligible	1-5 years	Planning and installation of bus lanes are in current budget and included in NextGen capital program/ Needs concurrence of local jurisdictions.
15	"We're Here for You." marketing and communications campaign	\$500,000 through 12/20.	immediate	Themes: Travel Safe, Cleaning efforts, service adjustments, rear-door boarding, social distancing, bus crowding, APTA's safety and Health Commitment program
16	Increase Customer Ambassadors - non security staff	Annual cost: \$55,000 to \$7.4 mil.	1-3 years	Options range from 50 repurposed FTEs to 50 new FTEs. Staff seeking a Community Organization partner for a pilot. Project being "aligned" with Fareless System Initiative. New staff not included in Metro budgets.
17	Explore new mobility solutions - MicroTransit, Mobility on Demand	negligible	1-3 years	Mobility Services RFI responses being reviewed. No significant costs in FY 21. May reduce fixed -route transit demand.
18	Use budget to advance recovery - for Metro short-term operating and capital priorities	\$1.5 million to \$130 mil.	1-5 years depending on funding	Implement Next Gen speed/reliability improvements (\$7 M), station and bus plaza expansion (\$16.3 M), enhanced service on BRT and other routes (\$107 M). Needs budget amendment for balance of FY 20-21 and beyond.
19	Reimagine capital projects - within Ordinance constraints	negligible	1-3 years	Recovery TF developed project assessment matrix tool to analyze projects based on enhanced mobility and ridership, equity and Title VI compliance, and health and economic development. Tool was not used for pandemic prioritization. No FY 20-21 budget impact, but potentially significant capital project impacts thereafter.
20	Better Address Homelessness -connect unhoused on Metro system with services and housing.	\$5 mil. /yr.	1-5 years	Use Metro property for transitional housing through partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs). Needs further analysis of future Metro budget impacts.
21	Run Express Buses on Improved HOV and Express Lanes - on freeways	tbd	1=3 years	Advocates raising min. vehicle occupancy requirement and expanding ExpressLanes network to improve bus speed and efficiency.
22	Accelerate Networks of complete streets	tbd	3-5 years	Recommends creation of an internal Metro Complete Streets Plan of priority corridors. Needs concurrence of local jurisdictions. Not included in Metro budget.

23	Fully integrate Transit in LA Region	tbd	5+ years	T. F. would have Metro drive regional, state and national mobility agendas and policies. Recommends one Integrated countywide fare (or fareless) structure, single/unified customer information location, enhanced data management through RIITS, enhance 511, updated signage at shared stops, seamless trip planning, more mid-day Metrolink service, synchronized shakeout dates between Metro and Munis. Needs new funding and concurrence of Muni Operators.
24	Offer incentives to reduce car ownership - and use transit	\$15 mil. / 10,000 conversions	1-5 years, depending on funding	Goal: get 10,000 new riders on transit and out of their car with a program of free transit, free/discounted bikes, mobility wallets, better bus options or other incentives for households to become car-free or car-light. Not included in Metro budget.
25	Improve station amenities	tbd	1-5+ years	E.g.: food, retail, restrooms. Need to evaluated capital and operating costs, potential funding sources. Not included in Metro Budget.
26	Improve Public Engagement and Strengthen Rider Voices	tbd	immediate, ongoing	Examples: Include demographic metrics in outreach effectiveness to ensure Metro reaches the most impacted stakeholders and transit reliant communities; Create toolkit of Metro resources for riders; Elevate role of CAC; Overhaul website. Not included in Metro budget.
27	Gather more data on equity and travel patterns	tbd	immediate, 1-3 years	Centralize storage and availability of location-based services data in Metro ITS Department to better understand travel patterns, access to key destinations and mode share demographics. New staff and technology licenses not included in Metro budget.

28	Share data and information internally more openly and effectively	tbd, potential cost savings	immediate	Develop internal data management policy on data access, security, deploy a digital asset management system, open data policy and portal
29	Accelerate Joint Development and Transit-Oriented Communities	revenue generator	immediate, ongoing	Update JD policy to prioritize communities with the deepest need to support economic development, counteract displacement; Reinvest revenue in an affordable housing trust fund, a strategic acquisition fund, and JD pilot projects. Needs concurrence of local jurisdictions. Not included in Metro budget.
30	Expand Region's broadband infrastructure	tbd, potential cost savings and new revenue	3-5 years	Co-locate infrastructure; include fiber and above-ground facilities for internal network operations and WiFi access to riders. Needs concurrence of local jurisdictions. Not included in Metro budget.
31	Create green jobs and green infrastructure	tbd	3-5 years depending on funding	Partner with utilities and local agencies on sustainable energy and water infrastructure; Use P3s, Cap-and-Trade financing.
32	Reimagine "Destination Discounts"	TBD	1-3 years	Additional Marketing and Arts/Design FTEs and program costs need to be determined. New positions not included in Metro budget.
33	Study how Metro can reduce capital construction costs	TBD, analysis costs are negligible	immediate	Staff will develop and implement measures in 11 areas of Capital Program Management.
34	Build staff capacity	25% potential savings	immediate, ongoing	Metro Program Management identified a potential to save 25% by using Metro staff for core agency functions rather than contractors. Enforce DBE/SBE/DVBE commitments in contracts. Metro needs to evaluate short-term savings vs long-term pension costs.
35	Use Measure M and R Ordinances	tbd	unknown	Without taking funds from any project, subfund or subregions, potential amendments could enable: Highway Reform recommendations, more rapid response to pandemic and transit system expansion. Needs local participation in development, written concurrence.
36	Expand revenue - optimize commercial revenue opportunities	tbd	1-5+ years	Partner on 13 areas of revenue generating projects, including: advertising, digital billboards, sponsorships, leases, etc. Revenues may require initial capital or staff investments. Initial staff costs not included in Metro budget.
37	Identify funding for incentives to reduce car ownership and increased transit funding	tbd	1-5+ years	Explore progressive revenue sources such as a vehicle license fee, tax on commercial parking, federal and state funding, etc. Not in Metro budget.