



**Metro**

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**OCTOBER 1, 2015**

**TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**THROUGH: PHILLIP A. WASHINGTON** *PAW*  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**

**FROM: NALINI AHUJA, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FINANCE AND**  
**BUDGET** *Nalini Ahuja*

**SUBJECT: METRO/ACCESS SERVICES COLLABORATION**  
**EFFORTS**

### **ISSUE**

Due to growth in the senior population and cutbacks in funding for social and human services transportation the demand for Access Services (Access) continues to grow. The report outlines current issues that Access paratransit is facing and the manner in which Metro and Access are working together to - ensure that paratransit services are delivered in a safe, reliable, and prudent manner throughout Los Angeles County.

### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Funding**

Access provides mandated Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) paratransit services on behalf of Metro and 43 other fixed route operators in Los Angeles County. Since its inception, Access has been funded by Metro on an annual basis through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). Each year, funding levels are derived from paratransit ridership projections from a third-party consulting firm. This year, for the first time, Metro and Access have agreed on a mid-year reconciliation process to discuss budgetary trends and other financial issues in order to get a head start on next year's funding request.

Moving forward, a multi-year MOU is being considered that outlines the roles and responsibilities of both Access and Metro similar to the agreements Metro has with other agencies it funds. This should make the process of entering into an annual MOU much more efficient. In addition, Access would be part of Metro's consolidated audit process, which provides financial oversight of the various

public agencies funded by Metro. The annual funding request would continue to go to the Metro Board of Directors for approval and Access' Board would subsequently approve Access' budget.

### Federal Transit Administration Issues

Access has closed two of the three regional paratransit findings made by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) in 2014.

1. **No Show Policies:** Access' revised No Show policies went into effect on April 1, 2015 and the finding was closed by the FTA on April 9, 2015.
2. **Origin to Destination:** This service, which will provide additional assistance for qualified customers beyond the curb, was implemented on July 1, 2015 and the finding was closed by FTA on July 21, 2015. Access has also implemented policies and procedures in response to the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Reasonable Modification rulemaking, which took effect on July 13, 2015. The rulemaking mandated that, in certain cases, both fixed-route and paratransit agencies must modify their policies and procedures to ensure customers can access these services.
3. **Regional Paratransit Fares:** The FTA granted Access an extension until January 1, 2016 to implement a revised regional paratransit fare system. For the last twenty years, Access has used a coordinated, distance-based, two-tiered fare system that is easy for customers to understand and for Access' providers to implement. In some cases, however, the paratransit fare charged under this system may be more than twice the fare of a comparable local fixed-route trip. (The DOT regulations state that the maximum paratransit fare that can be charged is no more than twice the local transit agency's base fixed-route fare.) So, for example, a paratransit trip within the Metro service area can cost no more than \$3.50 each way given Metro's \$1.75 base fare.

Access has held two series of community meetings around Los Angeles County to discuss specific fare proposals. On August 24, 2015, Access' Board of Directors approved a fare structure that would comply with current federal regulations by the FTA's deadline of January 1, 2016. The fare system would check each paratransit trip request against its fixed-route equivalent, double the fixed-route fare, and then round down to a fare of Free, 50 cents, \$1, \$2, \$3 or \$4. (For example, a paratransit trip that mirrors Metro's system would be \$3 because Metro's base fare of \$1.75 would be doubled to \$3.50 and then rounded down.) Access' Board also approved a motion that stated the new fare structure would not be implemented if either a legislative or a regulatory change is enacted by January 1, 2016 that would allow for the continuance of the current Access fare system.

The vast majority of public comments opposed changing the current fare structure. Customers felt the proposed fare structure would be more complex and lead to uncertainty about what fare would be charged for a particular trip. Many public comments also opposed increasing the maximum paratransit fare that can be charged from \$3.50 (under the current system) to \$4.

The regional members of Access (which includes Metro) will consider the proposal in October 2015.

Concurrently with this process, Access will be working on reprogramming its reservation systems so they can interface with the Metro trip planner on [www.metro.net](http://www.metro.net). This will enable Access to compare each paratransit trip request against its fixed-route equivalent to ensure that a customer is not charged more than twice the cost of a comparable fixed-route bus or rail trip.

In January, Access' Board also asked that Access staff examine the possibility of obtaining regulatory relief to allow Access to keep its current fare system. In March, Access submitted a Petition for Rulemaking to the DOT. This Petition, which has received significant support from the Los Angeles County disability community, asks that a small change be made to the DOT regulations to clarify that a coordinated fare, such as the one currently used by Access, is permitted in the context of a coordinated paratransit system.

On August 20, 2015, the DOT issued a Federal Register Notice seeking public comments on Access' Petition. Public comments were accepted on [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) until September 21, 2015. The docket number for this rulemaking is DOT-OST-2015-0075. The vast majority of comments, including Metro's comments, that have been posted to the docket as of this writing, are supportive of Access' Petition.

### Access Eligibility

Using an independent consultant, Access recently conducted a comprehensive assessment of its eligibility functions, which are currently performed by a contractor in a facility on Mateo Street near downtown Los Angeles. Access is in the process of using the recommendations contained in the report to enhance the eligibility screening criteria to ensure that the process continues to be comprehensive, thorough and fair. One of the first steps in Access' "rebooting" of its eligibility process will be to find a new facility, which should be completed by the end of the year. Access will provide regular reports to its Board while the process unfolds.

### Other Collaborative Efforts

#### Providing Mobility Options

Many people with disabilities are able to use the accessible fixed-route for some of their trips. Access has been a leader in implementing programs (such as Travel Training and the regional Free Fare program) that divert some paratransit

demand onto the bus or rail system. These programs are a “win-win” for both Metro and Access customers and the region because they enhance a customer’s independence by offering additional mobility options while saving the region money.

In order to continue to enhance these programs and ensure they are meeting their objectives, Access will be working on the following:

- Access will work with Metro to see if it is feasible to distribute LACTOA-Senior/Disabled cards at the Eligibility Center to customers who do not qualify for Access, but demonstrate eligibility for reduced fixed-route fares.
- Access has enhanced its travel training program to include group travel trainings to reach more individuals. Travel training is designed to teach customers how to use the bus or rail system.
- Access and Metro will establish a working group comprised of Metrolink and the other transit operators that participate in the Free Fare program. The committee will review all aspects of the program to make sure it is achieving its goals of encouraging people with disabilities to use fixed-route services, while reducing paratransit costs.
- In addition to Access’ regular next day service at Rancho Los Amigos National Rehabilitation Center, Access provides a shuttle service to Metro’s Blue Line Willowbrook Station. The Rancho to Rail shuttle has transported an average of 850 Rancho clients monthly and has also helped Metro decrease pass-ups on its Lines 117 and 120.
- Access provides emergency back-up transportation when Metro bus accessible equipment is inoperative. Additional services include the provision of temporary shuttles, as requested by Metro’s Bus or Rail Operations Control, in instances where accessible pathway and elevator repairs are underway at rail and bus stations and the handling of requests for assistance during special events, such as the recent Special Olympics.

### **Recent Customer Feedback on Service Animal Policy**

Access receives and acts upon valuable feedback through a number of channels, including public comments received at Metro Board Committee meetings.

Last year, based upon customer comments on overcrowding in Access sedans, particularly for those customers who have service animals, Access implemented a policy that no more than two passengers can be carried in the rear section of its sedans. In addition, Access formed a subcommittee of its Community Advisory Committee (CAC), the Service Animal Subcommittee, to develop and review policies related to customers who travel with service animals; initiated a

partnership with Guide Dogs of America to improve its driver training processes; and held a series of community meetings to discuss service animal issues.

At a recent Metro System Safety, Security and Operations Committee Meeting on September 17, 2015, public comment was received related to the safety of customers and service animals riding in the front seat of an Access sedan. Access had received similar comments at its CAC and had already agendaized the issue for further discussion.

Access, with its CAC and Service Animal Subcommittee, is open to revising its current policy in order to allow a minivan to be dispatched if two or more customers are traveling with their service animals. The current policy permits such trips to be performed in either a minivan or a sedan.

Access will continue to work collaboratively with its committees and customers who travel with service animals and will update the Metro Board on the revised policies regarding this issue. It is expected that these policies, which will be presented to the Access Board of Directors, will be implemented by the end of the year.

## **NEXT STEPS**

### **Moving Forward**

Metro and Access must also look for additional funding sources. Recently, Metro, with the support of Access, took over the administration of Federal Section 5310 funds from the State of California. By doing this, Access' capital funding was boosted from \$600,000 to over \$4 million per year. Access has also been participating in our Regional Sales Tax Working Group. In addition, Access and Metro have been investigating whether Access can be reimbursed for some of its trips by Medi-Cal. And while some of these local efforts will help, it is still imperative that the federal government step up to the plate and provide a robust, multi-year transportation bill that significantly increases funding across the board for all transit programs.

The growth in ridership and growing costs for ADA paratransit are challenging issues. Going forward, Access and Metro will continue to work collaboratively to provide the most efficient, highest quality paratransit service for people with disabilities in Los Angeles County.