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**APRIL 3, 2020**

**TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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

**SUBJECT: WEEKLY UPDATE ON RESPONSE TO COVID-19**

### **ISSUE**

This memo is the weekly update to the Board, for the Week of April 3, on Metro's actions responding to COVID-19.

### **BACKGROUND**

Due to the ever-changing crisis regarding COVID-19, staff will issue weekly updates to the Metro Board of Directors on the latest actions to respond to federal, state, and local directives during this national emergency.

### **DISCUSSION**

Metro's Incident Management Team (IMT), in coordination with the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) and several departments, continues to respond to the evolving crisis and take actions accordingly. Metro has ramped up its efforts to enforce Essential Travel only on the system. In addition, we are working with the City, County, and PATH to connect individuals with housing.

### **Operations**

Metro continues to utilize rear-door boarding and mandatory bus operator barrier usage to ensure the safety of customers and personnel during this critical time. These aggressive hygienic precautions have been positively received system wide. We are also exploring methods to limit the amount of people allowed on board buses.

### *Service*

As of this week, ridership continues to decrease (approximately 70-84%) due to the Safer at Home public order which was expanded to allow for only the most essential

activities. We are still carrying approximately 300,000 people per day. Current service levels include adjustments to on-street reality and workforce impacts, as many essential Operations employees continue to be affected by childcare issues and medical professional directives for being at risk to COVID-19.

Rail service (A, Expo, Gold, Green, Red/Purple) remains at 12-minute frequencies during peak hours and 20-minute frequencies during off-peak hours. Last terminal departures continue to take place at midnight and weekday consists are maintained to the extent possible to allow capacity for social distancing system wide. Staff will continue to monitor on-street reality, ridership levels and may further optimize service levels for bus and rail to conserve valuable resources while providing transit service to those essential workers who rely on Metro.

#### *Strengthened Cleaning Regimes & Customer Hand Sanitizer Stations*

Metro continues to practice strengthened cleaning regimes in addition to regular cleaning activities in response to COVID-19 on all vehicles, stations and terminals, and at our Divisions and locations, with a focus on high touch point areas.

As of today, hand sanitizer stations have been installed at over eighty Metro locations and Divisions, including various high traffic stations and major transfer points such as Union Station, 7<sup>th</sup>/Metro Center, Wilshire/Vermont, North Hollywood, Pico, Culver City, Chinatown, Soto, Sierra Madre, Rosa Parks/Willowbrook and Norwalk. We have also provided hand sanitizer units to our three contract bus carriers. Metro will continue to procure the necessary personal protective equipment and supplies for our employees, including masks, as safety remains our top priority.

#### *ExpressLanes Torrance Service Center*

On Friday, March 27, Metro ExpressLanes management was informed that a contractor at the Metro ExpressLanes Torrance Service Center had tested positive for COVID-19. All the individuals at the service center were notified and provided information regarding steps they would need to take in light of the situation. The service center was closed and remains closed for the foreseeable future. The ExpressLanes website, telephone system, social media and Go 511 were updated reflecting the closure. On Sunday, March 29, a deep cleaning of the facility was undertaken. ExpressLanes representatives continue to provide customer support remotely. In addition, features available on the Metro ExpressLanes website and the automated telephone self-service provide customers with the opportunity to manage their accounts, resolve violations, and get information about the program.

#### *Pause of Violations Escalation Fees for Toll, Parking, and Transit Court*

Metro ExpressLanes has paused all violations escalations, effective March 17th. Penalties will not apply to any violations notices and no registrations will be placed on DMV hold, in light of current circumstances. Parking citation is following the same policy, and Transit Court has the discretion on this process.

## **Communications & Government Relations**

### *Federal and State Policy*

Since Congress adopted and the President signed into law H.R.748 - the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act last week – the House and Senate have continued discussing the need for additional federal legislation to address the COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier this week, Speaker Nancy Pelosi began to discuss the idea of advancing a major infrastructure package as a part of the next COVID-19 stimulus bill. Specifically, Speaker Pelosi and House Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter DeFazio laid out a plan to advance their Moving Forward Framework for the People initiative - which includes a comprehensive strategy for investing in infrastructure. This proposal includes a mobility element, along with funding for broadband, community health centers and water infrastructure. Metro's advocacy team is fully engaged with members of the Los Angeles County Congressional Delegation in the event an infrastructure plan advances in either the House or Senate. Our agency is well positioned in this regard in that the Board has already approved a set of policy proposals outlined in the Rebuilding America program. As of April 3, 2020, Speaker Pelosi appeared to be backing off the idea of immediately bringing an infrastructure package forward – instead indicating that she may first move on a bill to enhance the CARES Act and after that - move on an infrastructure-focused stimulus package.

### *State Issues*

The State Legislature continues to be on recess and this recess is expected to be extended. As mentioned in previous updates the Legislature is expected to adopt a budget based largely on last year's budget. We further understand that leadership in both houses have advised members that the committees will tightly scrutinize bills being submitted for policy committee consideration. The Board has authorized Metro to sponsor a number of bills in this year's legislative session. We will be working with the authors of those bills to determine an appropriate path forward for each measure. Lastly, the California Transit Association continues to provide updates to the Administration on the condition of transit agencies statewide. As a part of this effort the Association is developing a set of regulatory relief proposals that will help transit agencies in this period.

### *Essential Travel Only*

Metro continues to be in service for those who serve us. Metro's videographers from the Communications Department spent time last week on the streets capturing extraordinary footage of events of the past month and the impact that the COVID-19 crisis is having on our region. We also wanted to show L.A. County -- and the world -- the heroic effort by Metro's Operations Department to keep our buses and trains rolling to provide essential trips for people who depend us the most. The [video](#) marks the beginning of Metro's strong stance that its service is for essential travel only.

### *Marketing Campaigns*

Metro Communications will be releasing an anti-harassment and bullying campaign next week. Titled Coronavirus Doesn't Discriminate, Neither Should We, the posters were created to remind our workforce and the public that Metro has a zero tolerance for

discrimination based on race or ethnicity on its system and in the workforce. The posters are attached for your viewing. In addition to this campaign, Metro is pushing out messaging regarding essential travel only and social distancing. Messages have been recorded for station announcements and radio ads; print and digital ads are also part of these ongoing campaigns.

#### *Metro in the News*

Metro Media Relations has fielded a large number of major local and national print, TV, online and radio media inquiries regarding the agency's COVID-19 response. News agencies have inquired about Metro's daily cleaning regimes, ridership losses, confirmed cases among Metro employees, reduced service schedules, potential impacts on construction projects, financial impacts and essential travel directives, among others. Media Relations has also responded to City of Carson Mayor's call for Metro to suspend transit operations, reporting that the agency intends to continue providing lifeline service to L.A. County to enable critically needed workers and others to travel for essential activities throughout the county. Mr. Washington also provided an interview with the New York Times to discuss long-term agency impacts resulting from the loss of both sales tax and farebox revenues as well as potentially long-lasting challenges that will likely confront the transit industry in the wake of COVID-19.

#### *City of Carson*

The Mayor of Carson announced that the city was shutting down service, effective Saturday, March 28. At that time, he encouraged Metro to do the same, both publicly and through a letter to me, dated March 26. I responded later in the day that Metro would continue to provide service for those who depend on us.

At the same time, David Goldstein, an investigative reporter with CBS2, inquired about a bus operator in Carson who has tested positive for COVID-19. Metro Media Relations confirmed that the bus operator who tested positive for COVID-19 worked for Metro's contractor MV Transportation, which operates several bus line services in the Carson area. The contractor utilizes its own operators and bus divisions to provide bus services. This story aired on Tuesday and Wednesday this week.

On Thursday, April 1, the Mayor of Carson held a press conference publicly asking Metro to cease operations. Metro released this statement to eight members of the media who asked for a response:

“The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) intends to continue providing service to LA County. Because Metro is a critical entity for Southern California's health, business and civic infrastructure – we are committed to continuing our operations to ensure that public transportation remains available for first-responders, healthcare workers and other key members of the workforce who need to move across Los Angeles County. Metro is still carrying approximately 300,000 people per day – that's how many essential workers rely on the service.

Our agency has strengthened cleaning of our buses, trains, and at Union Station and our other major transit hubs. This includes an elevated focus on cleaning high touch point areas such as handrails, elevator call buttons, and ticket vending machines. On a daily basis we continue to review our agency's cleaning protocols to ensure that they are up-to-date as the current situation evolves. We are doing everything possible to maintain a healthy and safe system for our customers who rely heavily on Metro buses and trains as their lifeline to get where they need to go through LA County.

Metro will continue to provide service as long as we possibly can.”

### *Maintaining Service Matters*

Subsequent to the Carson Mayor's press conference, I received an impassioned email from a woman imploring Metro to continue transit service, especially for the many people who still depend on us for essential trips. Here is the actual exchange.

From Victoria Williams to Phil Washington:

I do sincerely understand the seriousness of eliminating all Metro buses for Los Angeles County due to stopping the spread of the Covid-19 — which Mayor Robles of Carson is recommending to MTA.

I would like for you, when it comes to making a decision, to please think of those people like my sister who is single and above age 55 and who depends on the bus to get to her employment as a security aide.

She will not be able to join the 6.6 million people who can file for unemployment. Not getting to work by bus would for her be a personal problem, not the employer problem. She has been traveling on the bus with a mask, long before anyone had to tell the public.

Currently she is doing everything to keep her apartment and had volunteered at a food bank in the past, just to bring vegetables on her table. She told me that most renters will not be able to play catch up once their rent becomes in the arrears and she does not want to be one of them.

When you think about grocery stores and other essential businesses which the public depends on, not everyone owns or drives automobiles in this large county. My point is just a suggestion only — that maybe not eliminating all buses, but to downsize the buses, with posted signs requiring wearing masks along with social distancing on the buses.

I think removal of all buses should be done, once we reach at a point when the word comes down for a total mandatory lock down level.

Thank you for working so hard in the field of Public Transportation for the people of Los Angeles County.

Victoria Williams  
Resident and voter of city of Los Angeles

From Phil Washington to Victoria Williams:

Hi Ms. Williams:

We understand that we are lifeline for many people and we have no plans to stop LA Metro service.

Be safe and be blessed.

Phillip A. Washington

I will take this opportunity to emphasize that providing lifeline service is even more important during a crisis. For this reason, I will stand firm that we will maintain service as long as we possibly can.

#### *Workforce Communications*

Internal communications continues to push out a daily brief to employees highlighting key information. There is a dedicated area on myMetro where employees can go for continuously updated materials which now includes a posting a list of confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Metro employees, contractors and vendors. COVID-19 Information Centers are being established at all divisions so employees will have a centralized location for all materials related to the topic.

#### *COVID-19 Confirmed Cases*

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to unfold, and in the interest of public safety transparency, Metro began posting a list of confirmed cases of COVID-19 among Metro employees, contractors and vendors. The list will be [via this link](#) on the Metro website and will be updated by 6 p.m. daily.

#### **Workforce and Leave Policy**

In alignment with the new federal law, Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), effective April, 5, 2020, Metro will implement a new process for leaves of absence related to COVID-19. In addition to complying with the new federal law, the goal of our new process is to support employees to balance the needs of their family with the needs of Metro, and to provide flexibility to employees as we work through this fluid and difficult situation.

The FFCRA mandates certain benefits to employees in need of leave due to various reasons related to COVID-19, including leave to care for themselves and their families. Specifically, pursuant to the new law, Metro will provide paid sick leave benefits to employees needing leave to care for themselves or others, as well as to employees in need of leave for childcare purposes. Additionally, the new law has provided expanded, job-protected Family Medical Leave for employees needing leave for childcare. This benefit is also paid by Metro.

To support employees as we implement the new process, we are holding live webinar trainings for supervisors and above and are in the process of developing an eLearning for employees. We have also set up a dedicated email address and telephone line as a resource for employees with COVID-related questions, in addition to a comprehensive FAQ provided on our Intranet.

Members of Metro's Senior Leadership Team continue to meet with our Labor Leaders, twice a week. This format provides us an opportunity for rapid response to their concerns.

### **Construction**

Construction continues to proceed for all of Metro's projects. Contractors have developed work plans that enable social distancing and other measures to comply with guidance issued by federal, state and local officials. The City of Los Angeles (Department of Building Services) has issued construction guidelines and follow-up inspections to assure compliance with the guidelines. Metro construction projects are complying with the guidelines.

### *Safety Stand Down*

Metro's construction contractors and workers participated in a statewide Safety Stand Down on April 1, to emphasize the importance of following the health guidance in the field. There have been no additional cases of COVID-19 reported in the past week on Metro construction projects.

### **Economic Outlook**

Based on a one week look back (03/26/20 – 04/01/20) in comparison to the same time frame last year (03/28/19 – 04/03/19), we are at a 93% fare revenue loss collected from bus and rail. We are still tracking data on sales tax revenue losses, and we anticipated having updated projections in the weeks to come.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Metro continues to monitor and adapt to the evolving situation. As the crisis continues, we will stay in close contact with the Board to keep everyone informed.

For more information or if you have questions, please contact me directly at 213-922-7555 or our Chief of Staff, Nadine Lee, at 213-922-7950.

