

FY 2019-2021 TDA Triennial Performance Review of Metro as the Regional Transportation Planning Agency

Executive Summary

Background, Scope and Methodology

The California Public Utilities Code requires all Regional Transportation Planning Entities (RTPE) to conduct an independent Triennial Performance Review in order to be eligible for Transportation Development Act (TDA) funding. In July 2021, Metro selected BCA Watson Rice, LLP to conduct a Triennial Performance Review of itself as the RTPE and operator, as well as the twenty-one municipal operators to which Metro allocates funding. This Triennial Performance Review covers a three-year period ending June 30, 2021.

This Triennial Performance Review was conducted in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS) and in accordance with the processes established by the California Department of Transportation, as outlined in the *Performance Audit Guidebook for Transit Operators and Regional Transportation Planning Entities*.

The review methodology for this Triennial Performance Review of Metro as the RTPE included four tasks:

1. Project Initiation
2. Initial Review
3. Detailed Review
4. Documentation of Performance Audit Results

This Triennial Performance Review included the following elements:

1. Compliance Requirements
2. Follow-up of Prior Recommendations
3. Review of Metro Functions
4. Findings and Recommendations

Key Challenges and Accomplishments

In March of 2020, Los Angeles County went into quarantine in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As stated in Metro's Long Range Transportation Plan released later in

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2020, the pandemic reshaped all aspects of how we work and travel with the long-term impacts still unknown. With that backdrop, some of the key challenges faced by the agency during the triennium include:

- Significant drops in ridership during the initial stage of the pandemic which, while having improved over time, have not returned to pre-pandemic levels.
- Sharp reductions in fare revenue due to reduced ridership and fare-less policies designed to encourage first responders and essential workers to continue to use bus and rail service as needed.
- Operational challenges that included:
 - Scheduling and route adjustments to adapt to reduced ridership.
 - Logistical changes in operations including shifting from front to rear boarding.
 - Supplying operators and maintenance staff with Personal Protective Equipment including face shields and masks.
- An initial reduction in sales tax revenues.
- Labor shortages in operations, professional staff, and construction laborers.
- Leadership and staff changes related to management staff opting for early retirement through the Voluntary Separation Incentive Program in August of 2020.
- Homelessness in and around Metro facilities and operations.
- Increases in non-property crimes within the system including a 43% increase in aggravated assault on passengers and a 185% increase in assaults on operators (from 2019 to 2021).

While it is unknown what the long-term impacts will be on work and travel patterns in the region, Metro has used this as an opportunity to rethink its approach to planning and operations and ensure long-term financial sustainability.

It is also important to consider the accomplishments achieved by Metro during the same three-year period. These accomplishments include:

- Continued Metro's core operational services and capital construction during the pandemic.

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- Formed the Recovery Task Force in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and produced “A Path Forward”, a report that identifies and recommends actions to respond and recover from the pandemic.
- Developed and began implementation on the NextGen Bus Plan designed to innovate the current bus system to meet the needs of current and future riders and restore transit service to pre-pandemic levels. Phase 1 of the plan focused on service changes to a significant number of routes within the system. Phase 2 will include expansion of Metro’s micro-transit service (Metro Micro) and additional bus trips to improve the frequency of service.
- Developed and completed Metro’s Long-Range Transportation Plan in 2020 providing a roadmap for how Metro will plan, build, operate and maintain mobility over the next 30 years.
- Developed the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Vision and Principles study to provide a definition of BRT performance that established new standards and eligibility for Measure M Countywide funding.
- Established a Customer Experience Office with the goal of improving the overall rider experience.
- Adopted a Low-Income Fare is Easy (LIFE) program to reduce ridership costs for low-income riders.
- Developed the Better Bus Program, a \$2.1 billion five-year plan that aims to improve the bus system to address racial inequities and provide a quicker, more comfortable trip experience for riders.
- Developed PATH teams consisting of mental health clinicians, formerly homeless individuals, and other key staff to help the unhoused find temporary or permanent housing services and link them to other programs.
- Adopted a revised **Joint Development Policy** with the goal of building affordable housing on Metro-owned properties near transit facilities.
- Approved the Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) Implementation Plan to implement Metro’s commitment to partner with 88 cities and unincorporated areas to support TOC activities.
- Adopted First/Last Mile Guidelines to further integrate first/last mile planning into Metro’s overall transit project delivery.

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- Developed an Adopt-a-Bike program to give in need residents the opportunity to obtain free bikes that have been unclaimed with over 1,000 bikes being distributed.
- Worked with Metro's labor partners to establish protocols for vaccinations and PPE guidelines, and extended labor agreements with four unions.
- Implemented telework practices and policies after the initial County-wide quarantines that ensured that professional and administrative functions continued.
- Continued progress on major capital projects including:
 - Crenshaw/LAX Transit Project (Project commenced in 2014 and the forecasted opening in 2022)
 - Regional Connector Project (Currently under construction since 2014 with a forecasted opening in 2022)
 - Purple D Line Extension (Project construction began in 2019, with a phased opening from 2024 through 2027)
 - Olive Street Bus Priority Lanes Project including Traffic Analysis (Fall 2020), Final Design Plan (Summer 2021) and Implementation (Fall 2021)

Compliance Requirements

To determine Metro's compliance with requirements the review team identified key compliance requirements, discussed compliance requirements with Metro representatives, and gathered and reviewed evidence of compliance. Metro was found to be in compliance with all applicable requirements evaluated as part of this Triennial Performance Review.

Follow-Up of Prior Recommendations

The prior Triennial Performance Review completed in 2019 included no recommendations.

Review of Metro Functions

The following sections discuss the results of the review of Metro functions.

Planning and Programming of Transportation Funds

The planning and programming of transportation funds in Los Angeles County has challenges unlikely to be found elsewhere including programming authority for 50 distinct

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local, state, and federal sources of funds; responsibility for allocating over \$6 billion annually in funds; a need to assess, refine, and program funding requests in a way that is fair, transparent, and consistent with multiple needs; political and public expectations to move quickly and boldly to increase capacity on a badly strained transportation system.

Within this context, successfully planning and programming transportation funds requires several key elements including accurately forecasting available funds, developing criteria for evaluating funding choices, evaluating capital funding requests, and balancing revenue and expenditures. Metro accomplishes these tasks through a combination of advisory committees and Service Councils system which assist in both planning and implementation, developing a core set of planning documents designed to consider and address both short- and long-term transit and transportation needs, and employing staff for the budgeting and implementation of its plans. The review team concluded Metro has planned and programmed transportation funds and addressed the challenges faced methodically, effectively, and efficiently over the triennial period.

Transportation Funds Administration

Metro administers several funds. Successful administration of these funds requires several elements including clear identification of guidelines or requirements, appropriate tracking and certifying of the use of funds, reasonable flexibility, and coordination and assistance to municipal operators receiving funds.

The review team concluded that Metro has developed approaches to each of these elements, and effectively and efficiently administered transportation funds for the region during the triennium.

Rail Construction Program

Metro is responsible for planning and building a rail transit system. This undertaking includes alternative analysis, design, construction, and pre-start-up operations of the project. The rail transit system serves the San Fernando Valley, West Los Angeles; South-Central Los Angeles/Long Beach; South Bay/Harbor; Century Freeway Corridor; and the San Gabriel Valley. Metro is currently constructing the Purple Line extension, the Regional Connector and the Crenshaw/LAX (K Line) Projects. The Regional Connector Project will provide a seamless journey from Azusa to Long Beach and from East Los Angeles to Santa Monica, through the downtown LA core. The K Line will extend from the E Line (Expo) and merge with the C Line (Green) at the Aviation/LAX Station, connecting the Crenshaw Corridor, Inglewood, and El Segundo. The forecasted opening for the Regional Connector and Crenshaw Projects are in 2022.

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Metro has implemented several practices to accelerate rail construction including life cycle costing, project labor agreements, programs to work with communities affected by rail construction, involving operations in the early stages of project design, consolidating construction contracts, revised authority for certain change orders, implementation of strict ethics requirements for employees and contractors, and development of a detailed Project Management Plan. The review team concluded Metro continues to be effective in planning, designing, and constructing a rail transit system for Los Angeles County.

Legislative Proponent and Analysis (Government Relations)

Metro's ability to plan, program and deliver transportation services is greatly impacted by federal, state and local legislation. Having an effective legislative proponent and analysis program is essential to Metro's ongoing ability and success in delivering transportation services to Los Angeles County.

Metro has an effective government relations function that includes a clear scope and direction, active monitoring of legislative initiatives and activities and active pursuit and advocacy of legislative priorities and positions in coordination with others. The review team concluded Metro's Government Relations function provides a well-focused, well structured, comprehensive and effective legislative proponent and analysis for Metro.

Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP)

The Air Quality Management Plan is a regional blueprint for achieving the federal air quality standards and healthful air. The South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) is responsible for clean air in the South Coast Air Basin, an area that includes Orange County and the non-desert portions of Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The SCAQMD develops the AQMP every five years, with the most recent plan developed in 2016. SCAQMD is in the process of developing an updated AQMP for 2022. The 2022 AQMP will represent a comprehensive analysis of emissions, meteorology, regional air quality modeling, regional growth projections, and the impact of existing and proposed control measures.

Metro's role in the AQMP is to develop and implement transportation strategies that reduce vehicle miles traveled and related emissions. These strategies are submitted to SCAG and included in the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) developed by SCAG. The review team concluded Metro meets or exceeds its obligations to support and improve air quality in the Southern California region and the regional Air Quality Management Plan (AQMP).

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Consolidated Transportation Services Agency (CTSA)

Consolidated Transportation Services Agencies were originally created by the Social Services Transportation Improvement Act in 1979 to coordinate and improve social service transportation services.

Metro has taken or directed several key actions to fulfill its CTSA responsibilities including designating Access as the CTSA for Los Angeles County in 1994, developing the *Public Transit-Human Services Transportation Action Plan for Los Angeles County* in 2008, and released the updated Coordinated Public Transit – Human Services Transportation Plan in March 2021.

During FY 2020, Access implemented many new initiatives and services aimed at promoting the health and safety of riders, staff, and contractors in addition to supporting the emergency response to communities impacted by COVID-19. Access implemented new same-day service and curbside pickup pilot programs to help rider's access essential services during the pandemic. Access implemented six emergency delivery programs to ensure seniors and people with disabilities continued to receive meals, groceries, and paper goods during the pandemic.

Access also developed and released an updated strategic plan during 2021 as the "Access Short-Range Strategic Plan 2022-26." The Strategic Plan identified challenges and developed responses to ensure continued customer satisfaction with Access' services. The review team concluded Metro has met legislatively mandated responsibilities related to planning for coordination and improvement of social service transportation services.

Management Performance

The review of Metro's management performance included a review of Metro's goal setting and monitoring including related policy decisions, Metro's governance structure and the role of the Board in providing leadership, and allocation of administrative funds.

Metro's goal setting and monitoring processes through the Metro Vision 2028 Strategic Plan and the Equity Platform Framework provide well-founded, well-structured and strong direction for the Metro Board and agency. These efforts and policy statements will serve Metro and those served by Metro over the next decade.

Metro's Board of Directors guides the agency's priorities, projects and activities, and includes 13 members who represent areas throughout Los Angeles County. The Metro

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Board's governance approach and structure, including the use of committees and advisory bodies, provides Metro with an effective leadership and decision-making system. The review team concluded Metro's administrative funds were adequately and effectively allocated to achieve Metro's stated goals through the budget process.

Internal Administration

This review of Metro's internal administration included determining if the budget is being used as an effective management tool, if internal controls are adequate and provide appropriate information to management, if accounting procedures are adequate to make fund balances available, and if the organization and reporting structure could be improved.

A good budget process is a broadly defined process that has political, managerial, planning, communication, and financial dimensions. A good budget process incorporates a long-term perspective, establishes linkages to broad organizational goals, focuses budget decisions on results and outcomes, and involves and promotes effective communication with stakeholders. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these tasks became increasingly difficult. However, using virtual communications, responding quickly to changing operational needs and utilizing State and federal funding, Metro has been able to continue to maintain strong budgetary practices. The review team concluded Metro's budget development process had incorporated the processes and practices to provide an effective budget for the organization.

Internal controls are designed to safeguard organization's assets from error, loss, theft, misuse, misappropriation, and fraud. Effective programs of internal controls provide reasonable assurance that these objectives are met consistently. These internal controls include the Office of Inspector General, the Civil Rights Office and its Audit and Administration functions. The review team concluded Metro has multiple internal controls approaches and systems in place to safeguard its assets from error, loss, theft, misuse, misappropriation, and fraud.

Formal documentation of accounting policies and procedures is an essential component in providing effective controls over accounting and financial reporting, as well as providing a comprehensive framework of internal controls. The review team concluded Metro has adequate accounting procedures and properly accounts for and makes available monthly its fund balances.

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An organization's structure should provide a framework of functional areas within which individuals can achieve the organization's goals. An effective organization structure clearly reflects the priorities of the organization, facilitates effective service delivery and problem solving, ensures consistency of direction and management control, minimizes obstacles and barriers to performance, and stimulates a culture of shared accomplishment and teamwork. The review team concluded Metro has established an organization structure that provides an effective framework of functional areas within which individuals can achieve the organization's goals.

Findings and Recommendation

We find the Los Angeles Metro, functioning as the RTPE, to be in compliance with the requirements of the Transportation Development Act. In addition, Metro generally functioned in an efficient, effective, and economical manner during the triennial period.

With the enactment of SB 508 the definition of local subsidy changed to include all countywide funds allocated to operators. This change has resulted in ambiguity and inconsistency in how this category is reported and requires further clarification.

We recommend Metro should work with members of the Bus Operations Subcommittee and other regional service coordination bodies to clarify the definition of "local subsidy" as it relates to TPM reporting and subsequent calculations of farebox recovery ratios. These discussions should include discussions on required Maintenance of Effort funding to ensure that system-generated local contribution requirements are met.