

## **Homeless Services**

The homelessness crisis continues to challenge communities nationwide, including their respective transit agencies. In Los Angeles, the crisis is among the most severe in the country, with more than 69,000 people experiencing homelessness (PEH) throughout the County. Over the last three years, there has been a noticeable increase in people experiencing homelessness seeking shelter on the transit system. Metro conducted its point-in-time count in March 2022 and estimated that approximately 800 individuals experiencing homelessness were sheltering at the rail and bus rapid transit stations on any night.

In January 2023, Metro commenced an evaluation at Metro end of line stations and an assessment of impacts on nearby local communities. This evaluation included point-in-time counts of PEH at the end of line rail stations and a demographic survey to better identify the need for social services to support unhoused riders. The count revealed that, on average, 555 unhoused individuals disembark nightly at Metro's 12 end of line rail stations. While transit vehicles and stations are not designed to be used as a shelter, they can be viewed as an encampment as they provide refuge from the cold winter weather and the summer heat.

Metro's primary role is that of a transit operator, not a homeless service provider, yet the magnitude of the crisis requires all hands on deck. Metro customers are concerned about homelessness on the system. We have heard from our customers through various channels, surveys, social media, customer care, and community meetings that homelessness is a top priority area for improvement. Metro riders told us that homelessness significantly impacts their customer experience.

The lack of adequate local, state, and federal resources to prevent and respond to homelessness represents an existential threat to the thousands of individuals experiencing homelessness daily in LA County. It also threatens to undermine the willingness of residents to take public transit, even as the system rapidly expands via the most extensive transit construction program in the country.

The impact of the homeless crisis on our system is well documented. In a 2018 brand survey, 64% of respondents felt that there were too many homeless people on the system, and some responded that they avoid Metro entirely due to widespread homelessness on the system. Metro also recognizes the urgency of curtailing behaviors and conditions that adversely affect the health and safety of other customers and employees. Metro's 2020 and 2022 Customer Experience Survey found that how Metro addresses homelessness on buses was one of the top 5 improvements that our bus and rail customers want to see. Based on the How Women Travel survey, the top reason

that women find it difficult to ride transit is that they do not feel it is safe. Safety perceptions for waiting at a station were even lower.

The presence of homeless individuals on public transit can create a range of problems that can negatively affect the customer experience. Some of the challenges include:

Safety concerns, sanitation and hygiene issues, increased maintenance costs, and decreased ridership. Homelessness often coincides with mental illness, substance abuse, and criminal activity. This can lead to situations where customers on public transit feel threatened or unsafe. Many homeless individuals lack access to proper sanitation and hygiene facilities, which can result in unpleasant smells and unsanitary conditions. This can make it difficult for other customers to use public transit comfortably. Homeless individuals on the Metro system deter other riders from using transit, either through their behavior or through their presence on transit vehicles or facilities.

Metro has increased its security presence, outreach, support programs for homeless individuals, and sanitation efforts to address these challenges. Metro has had to expand custodian crews on trains, stations, and ancillary areas to address cleanliness issues caused by PEH. In FY 24 Metro estimates the agency will spend \$200.9 million on cleaning efforts, an increase of 13% over FY 23. Recently, Metro's Director of Safety Certifications determined that custodians must wear Tyvek suits and Powered Air Purifying Respirators (PAPR) when cleaning in ancillary areas due to potential health risks. The agency has seen a drastic increase in homeless individuals living in ancillary areas in the rail stations where tremendous amounts of human waste and drug paraphernalia are left behind. PAPRs provide a higher level of respiratory protection by filtering out harmful airborne particles and reducing the risk of inhaling contaminants such as fecal matter. This helps protect custodians from exposure to pathogens, bacteria, and unpleasant odors associated with human waste, ensuring their safety and well-being while performing their cleaning duties.

Over the past five years, Metro allocated more than \$28 million in advancing solutions to support unhoused individuals who take shelter on the Metro system. Since 2017, Metro has funded dedicated multidisciplinary outreach teams (MDTs), contracted through the County of Los Angeles Department of Health Services' (DHS) Housing for Health Program, to provide service on the Metro system. Metro is on track to double that amount, with FY 24 spending projected to exceed \$15 million annually.

Non-profit community-based organizations staff the MDTs and specialize in supporting PEH dealing with mental health concerns and addiction. The program recently expanded from eight teams to sixteen teams. Ninety-four outreach staff are working for six CBOs (Path, CCM, LA Mission, USHS, HOPICS, and LAFH) providing homeless services on the Metro system. MDTs are deployed 7 days a week, between 3:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and 7:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. on weekends. The teams assess the needs of unhoused riders and connect them with services such as medical care, social

services, and food in addition to emergency, short-term, interim, and long-term/permanent supportive housing (including family reunification) when available. Despite the significant efforts, the scale of homelessness on the system far exceeds Metro's ability.

The County of Los Angeles Department of Health Services' Housing for Health Program sets the key performance indicators (KPIs) for Metro's MDTs. The KPIs include metrics such as outreach contacts, Homeless Management Information System enrollments, referrals, and placements interim and permanent housing. Metro's street-based outreach teams consistently surpass county metrics for engagement and housing. Since 2018, Metro's outreach teams have connected 4,609 people to interim and permanent housing. For FY 23, Metro is at 106% of the KPI related to connections to interim and permanent housing with 524 individuals connected to housing. DHS sets the outreach contacts KPI based on service area size. In FY 23, Metro's MDTs are at 43% of the KPI target for outreach contacts. Given the expansive size of Metro's system, the MDTs struggle to meet this KPI, indicating the need for additional MDTs on the system.

Homelessness on public transit is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach. While providing security personnel and sanitation efforts can help address some of the immediate challenges of homelessness on public transit, these measures alone are not enough to fully address the problem. More comprehensive solutions are needed to address the underlying causes of homelessness and provide the support and resources that homeless individuals need to maintain stable housing and improve their overall well-being.

As a public transit agency, Metro has limited resources to address the issue of homelessness. The crisis is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach. While providing security personnel and sanitation efforts can help address some of the immediate challenges of homelessness on public transit, these measures alone are not enough to fully address the problem. More comprehensive solutions are needed to address the underlying causes of homelessness and provide the support and resources that homeless individuals need to access and maintain stable housing and improve their overall well-being.