



Board Report

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**REVISED
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 15, 2018**

SUBJECT: METRO EQUITY PLATFORM FRAMEWORK

ACTION: ~~RECEIVE AND FILE~~ APPROVE METRO EQUITY PLATFORM FRAMEWORK

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE Metro’s Equity Platform Framework.

ISSUE

Access to opportunity should be a core objective of public decision making, public investment, and public service - and transportation is an essential lever to enabling that access. Unfortunately, there exists vast disparity among neighborhoods and individuals in Los Angeles County in their ability to see and seize opportunity - be it jobs, housing, education, health, safety or other essential facets of thriving in vibrant, diverse communities. A multi-point equity platform provides a basis for Metro to actively lead and partner in addressing and overcoming those disparities.

Metro staff does not approach the subject of equity lightly or uninformed. The adoption of Measure M included performance metrics that were tied to disadvantaged communities. The major revision to the Long Range Transportation Plan has committed to incorporating equity as a crosscutting issue since its introduction to the Board in February 2017. The Policy Advisory Council has flagged this as a major topic of interest. Most importantly, recent and engaged experience with community members with several projects (i.e., First/Last Mile planning, the Transformative Climate Communities grant for Rail to Rail, and a body of innovative workforce development initiatives) all underscore both the timeliness and urgency that equity considerations bring to Metro’s portfolio. In addition, staff informally reached out to representatives from academia, foundations, advocacy organizations and local government in developing this platform. Their demonstrated experience in research and collective action, and their candid feedback on challenges and opportunities in the equity space were invaluable.

DISCUSSION

Metro’s multi-point equity platform is wrapped around four pillars.

First, we need to define a common basis for talking about and building an agenda around equity, and how to improve it.

- Equity holds different perspectives and priorities for everyone and anyone who will be part of

this conversation.

- At its core, *inequity* exists when there are fundamental differences in access to opportunity, not just with respect to where you begin, but in your capacity to improve from that starting position.
- Historically and currently, race and class have largely defined where these disparities are most concentrated: in poor, minority communities throughout LA County. Age, gender, disability, and residency also can expand or constrain opportunities.
- It would be presumptuous to begin a truly inclusive conversation with a pre-determined definition of “equity” and all its facets, but Metro can enter into that conversation committing to the following:
 - Establish meaningful goals around a shared definition of equity and actions to achieve those goals.
 - Define metrics to evaluate outcomes and consider redirected actions if needed. It will be particularly critical to infuse equity-based performance metrics in Metro’s investment decisions. These cannot be the only investment considerations. Transportation is rife with tradeoffs. But equity metrics need to be definable, impactful, measurable, accountable, and at the front end of the analysis, not the back end.
 - Seek and invite the diverse range of voices that must participate with Metro in accomplishing the above. Importantly, we need to proactively reach out to those who have remained on the margins of decision-making in the past. These will include historically underserved communities and organizations that represent them. But we must also reach out and hear voices that may not be aligned with established groups.

Second, Metro needs to establish comprehensive, multiple forums to engage the community meaningfully and actively in pursuit of the first step discussed above. An important opening conversation with LA’s community members would address: a) where they believe achieving equity has been problematic - broadly, and specific to transportation’s role; and b) where improved relationships, partnerships and actions aligned with Metro’s portfolio of responsibility can be defined to advance more equitable transportation outcomes going forward.

- This will be a challenging conversation, insofar as it requires the Metro as Board and staff to invite the community to articulate where it has experienced, in fact deeply felt, inequity in Metro’s past. This isn’t a platform for Metro to defend or be defensive; people feel what they feel, and it is going to be impossible to define a new path and build a different position of trust if past experience is not given voice and legitimacy.
- That said, the main point of this conversation forum should be to learn and move forward based on that acknowledgement. This may require reconciling divergent opinions to arrive at some shared goals and actions. Actions going forward may redress past ills - that is to be determined - but they certainly should not repeat them, if at all possible. It is also an opportunity to discuss with community members those initiatives where Metro has actively tackled disparity gaps, such as its growing portfolio of workforce development initiatives.
- Advice and best practices on how to effectively have these community-driven conversations

will be key.

- Metro can start with lessons learned from other cities across the country. San Francisco, Seattle, Oakland and others all have models to tap.
 - These forums would benefit from professional facilitation. Foundations have established several venues that Metro might pivot from (e.g. the on-going national Strong, Prosperous and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC) Initiative includes Los Angeles as a participating city - LA Thrives coalition is the local lead; the California Endowment and others have underwritten numerous initiatives across the County); or seek new support.
- As noted at the outset, Metro consulted with equity thought leaders whose advice informed the core of this platform. Retaining this cross-sectional consultation will be critical to successfully implementing a platform that requires dedication and time. In particular, the community forums envisioned will benefit from a circle of demonstrated leaders. We certainly don't hold all the keys on issues, and making use of the rich resources around us is essential.
- A key step will be to establish a formal or informal advisory group supporting the equity platform, and to incorporate, as appropriate, the equity agenda into existing advisory groups.
- In addition, the following initiatives are also suggested:
- Actively develop and invest in a Community Based Organization (CBO) oriented public engagement program. This approach may not be applicable to every Metro investment, program or activity located in, or otherwise impacting, LA County's historically underinvested (HU) communities. As stated above, we must be mindful that any single group does not represent all voices in every community. However, this approach should be added to and implemented as part of our public process, if we are going to establish and maintain legitimacy within impacted communities when addressing equity issues that they themselves are experiencing directly.
 - Invest in the transportation technical capacity of local governments that serve HU communities. Metro cannot and should not be the sole partner in all transportation or transportation-impacted decisions, legally or practically. And traditional funding and regulatory programs in particular assume effective participation by local jurisdictions. In short, strengthening cities that are home to equity communities is probably a core requirement for a more equitable County. This assistance can range from delivering transportation improvements swiftly and effectively to competing for discretionary funding more successfully; to better supporting more community-inclusive decision-making around transport investments.

Third, the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) must have a concentrated focus on equity. There are two major arenas for that focus to take root.

Where Metro **Leads**

- First and foremost, we must tackle impacts of the LA County's transportation system under our

direct responsibility via Metro's role as transportation planner, operator, builder and funder. As such, equity is a "cross cutting" principle that will be applied throughout the LRTP's development, as reported to the Board in prior presentation's on the Plan's design and rollout.

- Critically, what we choose - or do not choose - to invest in that system is paramount. Over the 40-year span of the LRTP, a considerable amount of funding controlled by Metro is legally or legislatively dictated, such as Measure M. It should be noted that equity related factors were considered as part of the 5 performance measures developed to assess and prioritize Measure M's expenditure plan projects. Specifically, the "Economy" and "Sustainability/Quality of Life" themes included metrics attached to investments in disadvantaged communities. But while there are important additional equity considerations Metro can assess as projects are implemented, there are practical limitations to rethinking or redirecting certain funds that are statutorily prescribed.

However, a significant amount of funding in the long range plan is not yet locked down for 40 years, allowing us to reassess current patterns of investment and either reaffirm them or change them.

- These investment decisions should be based on performance outcomes and, as presented here, front and center considerations should be given to those that actively:
 - advance outcomes that promote and sustain opportunities in underserved communities; or
 - avoid outcomes that lead to or aggravate disparities in opportunity in those communities.
- Notably, investments must be made to operate, maintain and rebuild the existing transportation system, in addition to expanding it. The community's ability to access that transportation system - where, when, how, and at what cost - impacts their opportunities to jobs, housing, education and health. Thus, measuring equity against that access, and for whom, is central to our planning process.
 - In this realm, there will be several, discrete transportation activities that will be developed alongside the LRTP where equity will be front and center: any discussion of "right sizing" fares, redesign of the Metro bus system, our continuing work in Work Force Development and small business support, to name a few.
 - The Long Range Transportation Plan will not duplicate analysis and recommendations in these areas. It will incorporate goals, decisions, and any actions attached to all of them, and will likely help facilitate equity-driven discussions in each of them.
 - These issues address critical transportation access concerns, and will be important venues for coordinating community involvement.

Where Metro **Partners**

- Beyond its core transportation responsibilities, there will be an expectation to take on a new, countywide, visible equity challenge: the Metro transport system's interface with gentrification/displacement/affordable housing.

- Neighborhoods throughout the county are facing escalating housing costs, real estate developments that are reshaping community culture, and in both cases, frequently forcing existing residents into painful relocation or transportation decisions. Gentrification/displacement/affordable housing is a common thread of concern among elected officials and advocates. And it hits every corner of the County.
- Metro cannot address this subject by ourselves - it will require active partnerships with others, such as the County, cities, Council of Governments, private sector and business as well as community representatives. Foundations are extremely interested in this arena and could bring valuable resources to the table.
- Among other considerations, these issues underscore the complexity of equity concerns and the necessarily complex response to them. By taking up a big problem - but not Metro's problem alone - it gives us the space to explore, experiment and advance change while building necessary partnerships at the outset.

Fourth, we need to pursue equity training within Metro. Successfully setting and delivering on a new equity agenda requires "top to bottom" ownership throughout the agency.

- In recent years, there has been a growing body of equity training designed for governmental agencies. LA County departments have deployed these programs, among others. We intend to explore options and commit to internal education that would be required at certain levels and positions.
- Training would be in two important areas:
 - Methods to evaluate equity including data collection, measurement and analysis; and
 - Approaches to effectively communicate and work with communities in a manner that recognizes and respects equity issues.

This platform is a starting point, and should be considered a working outline that can be adjusted with experience and feedback. The commitment expressed herein, however, should be a guiding constant - for Metro, our transportation partnerships, and the people we serve.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will proceed to use the Equity Platform as a framework for specific analyses and actions attached to Metro initiatives, as outlined in this report. Progress will be reported periodically to the Board, particularly as it relates to key plans and programs underway, such as the Long Range Transportation Plan.

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