

**Board Report**

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**OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE  
OCTOBER 15, 2020****SUBJECT: NEXTGEN BUS PLAN****ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION****RECOMMENDATION**

APPROVE

- A. the NextGen Bus Plan, as adjusted through the public outreach and public hearing process, for implementation starting December 2020, and
  
- B. Approve the results of the Title VI Service Equity Analysis for the NextGen Bus Plan

**ISSUE**

On January 23, 2020, the Board approved the release of the NextGen Bus Plan for public review. Over the past eight months staff have been actively outreaching to and engaging with the public and various stakeholders, elected officials, community leadership groups, and Metro employees, to solicit feedback on the NextGen Bus Plan. In addition, an on-line virtual workshop and information/data center was developed to provide customers with detailed information on all route and stop proposals as well as comparisons between the current and proposed bus system.

Based on the comments received, the NextGen Bus Plan proposals were revised to retain service coverage in several areas where eliminations were originally proposed. In addition, Metro's MicroTransit pilot zones were adjusted to improve coverage where MicroTransit type service is a better option compared to fixed route bus. Finally, most of the eliminations of "one seat" rides for commute trips to downtown LA were restored.

Five Public Hearings were conducted focused on changes proposed for each of the five Service Council areas. An additional "all region" hearing was held in which all proposed changes were reviewed. There were 589 total attendees and 292 comments received. In response to these comments, additional minor adjustments were made to the plan prior to presenting the final recommended service changes to the Service Councils for approval in September 2020.

The Service Councils deliberated for a total of 15 hours during their September 2020 meetings. All proposed changes to bus services were adopted with a small number of proposals being improved

through Council input as part of their discussions.

## **DISCUSSION**

On January 23, 2020, the Board approved the release of the NextGen Bus Plan for public review. This plan is based on the Transit First scenario which includes:

**Reconnect Scenario** - Service adjustments recommended through the Reconnect scenario redesign the routes and schedules to attract trips where and when there is the greatest market potential. The lessons learned in Phase 1 present a path forward for reinventing the bus network, including:

- Maintain coverage as much as possible through minimizing discontinued segments, coordinating with municipal operators, and introducing MicroTransit, while better linking people to where they want to go.
- Create a competitive transit network that reduces overall travel time by optimizing all components of the trip, including accessing the bus stop, waiting, and riding.
- Build a competitive and attractive network by investing in fast, frequent and reliable service, especially during the midday, evenings and weekends when the greatest opportunity to grow ridership exists.
- Integrate Metro's Equity Framework throughout the project, not only through the significant amount of public outreach and stakeholder engagement during the planning process, but also as reflected in the service change proposals.

**Transit First Scenario** - Transit First builds onto Reconnect by adding capital infrastructure to support the new service plan, including:

- Implementing speed and reliability improvements such as bus lanes where appropriate, signal priority, optimizing bus stop spacing, and all door boarding. By speeding up the bus system, more service can be provided within the same number of service hours while also making bus service more competitive.
- Investing in improving the comfort and safety of the wait environment, especially at major transfer points. This addresses a major barrier to using the bus network, particularly for women who account for over half of transit customers and often travel with young children. In addition, Metro's Transfer Design Guidelines present various recommendations that Transit First would begin to implement to attract more customers to transit.

If fully implemented, the Transit First scenario is expected to achieve a 15-20% increase in ridership.

## **Public Outreach and Engagement**

Over the past eight months staff have been actively outreaching to and engaging with the public, stakeholders, elected officials, the NextGen External Working Group, transit advocates, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, community/neighborhood groups, and Metro employees including bus operators and customer care agents. Over 1,500 comments were received through the public outreach process (Attachment A). Overall, there was widespread support for the core principles of the NextGen Bus Plan, including improved frequencies, especially off peak, merging of Rapid and Local services on key corridors, and investments in speed and reliability improvements. More information was requested regarding the bus stop consolidations. As such, detailed bus stop consolidation maps for each line were posted on the NextGen website and shared with the public for review prior to the public hearings. Finally, there were some concerns with lost service coverage and “convenience”, or the need to transfer under the plan when a one seat ride currently exists.

Based on the comments received, the draft NextGen Bus Plan was adjusted to restore service coverage in several areas prior to the Public Hearings. In some areas, Metro coordinated service plans with municipal operators resulting in proposals that are more in line with the travel patterns of those customers. Metro’s MicroTransit pilot project zones and implementation schedules were also revised to coordinate with the NextGen Bus Plan to provide a better mobility option in several areas where fixed route is underutilized. Finally, express services to downtown LA that were duplicative of underlying bus and rail service were restored during the commute hours to maintain a one seat ride during periods of high ridership. While service on other lines were slightly reduced to reallocate to these adjustments, the overall core service plan was kept intact.

### Public Hearings

Six public hearings were conducted between August 19 and 27, 2020 (Attachment B). Five of the hearings were conducted during the evenings on weekdays and focused on specific proposals for each of the five Service Council areas. A sixth “all region” hearing was conducted on Saturday August 22 at 10:00 am where proposals for all 5 service areas were presented. Customers were invited to comment on any service proposal at any of the six public hearings.

The public hearings were formally advertised through various means, including:

- Publication of the official Public Hearing notice in the following print newspapers:
  - Armenian Media Network
  - Asian Journal (L.A.)
  - Korea Times
  - La Opinión
  - Los Angeles Times
  - Los Angeles Sentinel
  - Panorama (Russian)
  - Pasadena Star News
  - Rafu Shimpo (Japanese)

- South Bay Daily Breeze
- Watts Times
- World Journal (Chinese Daily News)
  
- Information regarding the proceedings was also shared via car and bus cards, Facebook ads and events, on Nextdoor, on Metro's Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts, on Metro's blog, The Source, and mentioned in various Metro program newsletters in the weeks leading up to the hearings, and over 20,000 take one brochures were distributed aboard Metro buses and over 5,000 take one brochures were distributed to customers at major transit hubs.
  
- Over 300 Metro stakeholders and almost 5,000 people who had registered at NextGen workshops were notified of the hearings via e-blasts specifically about the hearings.
  
- Information regarding the hearings was shared by various publications and organizations including la.streetsblog.org, on the Cal State LA, City of Malibu, City of Lynwood, and City of Vernon websites, in online community papers such as Larchmont Buzz, Laurel Canyon Times, and Malibu Times, and by local Neighborhood Councils including North Hills West and Los Feliz Neighborhood Councils.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, all public hearings were conducted virtually. However, staff took great strides to develop a system which allowed customers to participate and comment through various methods, including:

- Live comments during the hearing by phone in English, Spanish, Mandarin, or Russian
- Via links to comment through the agenda posted online
- US Postal Mail
- Email to [Nextgen@metro.net](mailto:Nextgen@metro.net) <<mailto:Nextgen@metro.net>> or [servicechanges@metro.net](mailto:servicechanges@metro.net) <<mailto:servicechanges@metro.net>>
- Email to the Board Secretary's Office
- By phone (the Service Councils phone number was listed on the car and bus cards)

A total of 589 people viewed or listened to the public hearings through Livestream, audio link, and the archive. A total of 292 comments were received as follows; the content of those comments is provided in Attachment C.

- 27 comments were received by phone during the virtual public hearings
- 118 eComments were received and read during the public hearings; an additional comment was received a few minutes after the hearing adjourned and have been incorporated into the record
- 128 unduplicated comments were received via email
- 14 comments were received through the virtual workshop website
- 5 mailed comments were received

Based on the public hearing comments, additional modifications were made to the plan before finalizing for Service Council approvals in September 2020. Attachment D and E present the final

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NextGen Bus Plan service and stop changes recommended and approved by the Service Councils (noting changes made as part of the approval process).

### Title VI Service Equity Analysis

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 is a Federal statute and provides that no person shall, on the grounds of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. A Title VI Service Equity Analysis is required for a major service changes, as defined in Metro's Title VI program. The Title VI program also defines Disparate Impact and Disproportionate Burden. A Disparate Impact refers to a facially neutral policy or practice that disproportionately affects members of a group identified by race, color or national origin, while a Disproportionate Burden refers to a neutral policy or practice that disproportionately affects low-income populations more than non-low-income populations. For major service changes, a Disparate Impact occurs if the absolute difference between the percentage of minority adversely affected and the overall percentage of minorities is at least five percent (5%). Likewise, a Disproportionate Burden occurs if the absolute difference between the percentage of low-income adversely affected by the service change and the overall percentage of low-income persons is at least five percent (5%). Attachment F presents the findings of the Title VI evaluation of the NextGen Bus Plan.

The Title VI evaluation of the NextGen Bus Plan was conducted at three separate resolutions: (1) a line and line group analysis to identify adverse impacts caused by changes to individual bus lines or groups of related lines serving a specific corridor; (2) a review by Day Type and Service Type to determine if adverse impacts result from changes to each type of service; and (3) a review by Service Council area to determine if there are geographical adverse impacts. There is a substantial legitimate justification for these changes. Metro can show that there are no alternatives to these proposals that would have a less disparate impact on minority riders but would still accomplish Metro's legitimate program goals. The following are the conclusions from the Title VI evaluation.

### **Disparate Impact**

- Line and Line Group - Of 112 lines or line groups evaluated there were 17 lines or line groups that would experience a Disparate Impact on minorities on one or more day types. Each of these proposals is consistent with the objectives of the service restructuring program, and alternative services have been identified in each instance that would provide service to most of the impacted riders.
- Service Type - No Disparate Impacts
- Service Council Area - No Disparate Impacts

### **Disproportionate Burdens**

- Line and Line Group - Of 112 lines or line groups evaluated, 31 lines or line groups result in a Disproportionate Burden on low income populations on one or more day types. However, each of these proposals is consistent with the objectives of the service restructuring program, and

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alternative services exist for most of the impacted riders. There are no alternatives to these proposals that would be consistent with the service restructuring program objectives and have a lesser Disproportionate Burden.

- Service Type - With the merging of Rapid services into Local Lines, the Rapid service type would technically experience a major reduction in services resulting in a Disproportionate Burden on low income populations. However, with the blending of Local and Rapid service, all impacts would be mitigated by increases in Local service within each Rapid corridor.
- Service Council Area - No Disproportionate Burdens

### Service Council Action

At their September 2020 meetings, Metro's five Service Councils received the final Next Gen Bus Plan proposals as well as the Title VI Analysis for the plan. These meetings were viewed or listened to by 258 people with a total of 26 additional comments received by phone or online. Councils deliberated for a combined 15 hours on the 106 service change proposals within the NextGen Bus Plan. During the meetings, five further adjustments were made to the plan based on public comments and concerns expressed by the Service Councils. By the end of this process, all service change proposals were approved except for the minor routing changes proposed for Line 161 (Warner Center - Thousand Oaks via I-101). Attachment G presents the final Service Council votes on each of the line/line group proposals.

### Recommendation

Staff recommends approving the NextGen Bus Plan, along with the Title VI Service Equity Analysis, as proposed in this report and detailed in Attachments D, E and F. This plan is a culmination of over two and a half years of market research and travel demand analysis, evaluation of the existing bus service, significant public outreach and stakeholder engagement, and refinements made as a result of the February and March 2020 workshops and community meetings as well as six public hearings held in August 2020.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Adoption of the NextGen Bus Plan would allow staff the ability to begin implementing the service change starting in December 2020. The routing and bus stop changes would be completed within the Revenue Service Hours (RSH) allocated to Metro bus within the FY21 adopted budget. Additional frequency increases based on the service plan would be phased in based on prudent financial management, considering ridership trends, revenues, resources including workforce availability, and service performance.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

Recommendation supports strategic plan goal #1: Provide high quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling. The study also encompasses two sub-goals: 1) Target infrastructure and service investments towards those with the greatest mobility needs; and 2) Invest in a world class bus system that is reliable, convenient, safe, and attractive to more users for more

trips.

### **NEXT STEPS**

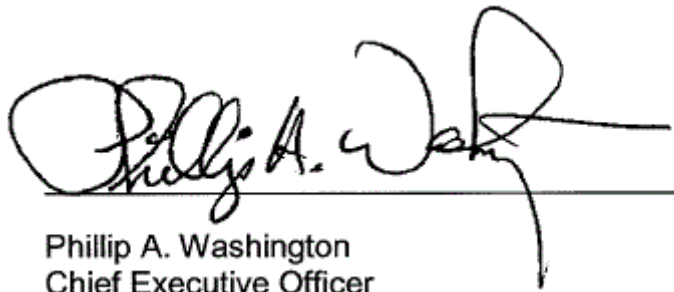
If approved by the Board, implementation of the NextGen Bus Plan will begin December 2020 and continue through subsequent service changes in June and December 2021.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

- Attachment A - Public Outreach Comment Summary
- Attachment B - Public Hearing Notice
- Attachment C - Public Hearing Comment Summary
- Attachment D - Line Level Proposals
- Attachment E - Stop Optimization Proposals
- Attachment F - Title VI Analysis
- Attachment G - Regional Service Council Vote Summary

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