



Board Report

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OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE NOVEMBER 19, 2020

SUBJECT: MOTION 39 RESPONSE - POLICIES AND PROTOCOLS FOR FUTURE SERVICE SHUTDOWNS

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE the motion 39 response regarding policies and protocols for future service shutdowns.

ISSUE

During the June 18, 2020 Operations, Safety and Customer Experience Committee, Directors Bonin and Solis requested a report on policies and procedures for future service shutdowns.

BACKGROUND

On Saturday, May 30, 2020 at approximately 6 p.m., Metro made a decision to suspend service from 8 p.m. through the balance of the evening. Service resumed as scheduled on Sunday at 5:30 a.m. The decision to suspend Metro bus and rail service was made in the context of quickly escalating civil unrest; soon thereafter, curfews were in effect in the cities of Los Angeles, Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Culver City and West Hollywood as a result of demonstrations and protests. Later that night, Governor Gavin Newsom declared a State-of-Emergency in the City and County of Los Angeles. This rapidly evolving situation put Metro Operators and the riding public in great danger. As a result, Metro made the difficult decision to suspend transit services across the County to ensure the safety of Metro employees and riders during the on-going George Floyd protests. The decision was made by Metro's Incident Management Team in alignment with the National Incident Management System's (NIMS) guidance for Major Incidents and Disasters.

DISCUSSION

Metro's ability to deliver service in emergency situations may be impacted by the unique, dynamic, and specific challenges of each event. The primary criteria affecting a decision to continue service

during an emergency are:

- Maintaining safety for people (Metro's employees and customers)
- Preservation and protection of public property (Metro equipment and resources)
- Active FEMA Type I or Type II event (described below)

After the events of May 30th, Metro held after-action reviews and identified opportunities to improve the processes for making and communicating our service continuity decisions during emergency situations. The Chief Civil Rights & Inclusion Officer and the Executive Officer of Equity and Race have both been consulted and engaged in the discussions to improve these tactics.

Service Suspension Criteria

The Incident Management Team (IMT) with guidance from Metro's Emergency Management Department's policies and in alignment with the National Incident Management System (NIMS) may activate Metro's Emergency Operation Center (EOC) if there is consideration for a declaration of a FEMA Type I or Type II event. These events include, but are not limited to, severe earthquakes, bombs, chemical agents, active shooters, or other emergencies affecting multiple rail lines or buses simultaneously. Type I or Type II events may also include service suspensions to protect life and property.

Decisions regarding service suspensions due to such emergencies will continue to be guided by Metro's Emergency Management process with considerations from our law enforcement and oversight agencies' directives. Prior to reducing, redirecting or suspending service, Operations will assess the level of risk to our employees, customers, and equipment. As part of the IMT (comprised of Metro's CEO, Chief Operations Officer, Chief of System Security & Law Enforcement, Chief Communications Officer, Chief of Risk, Safety, and Asset Management, and others as needed), Operations will communicate a recommended set of strategies to safely and strategically provide service that is responsive to the emergency affecting service continuity. Any decisions affecting service will be communicated to the Metro Board Chair and subsequently with the Metro Board of Directors.

Decisions regarding the continuity of service will follow these principles:

1. Metro will endeavor to continue operating regular services to the extent possible, as an essential service provider.
2. If circumstances do not allow Metro to operate regular services safely through isolated areas, Operations will attempt to re-route buses to maintain a buffer of approximately five blocks around the affected areas. Detours can be adjusted as needed and would continue as long as feasible or until the crisis has ended in the area. For rail, service disruptions would occur at stations in the affected areas. Metro will attempt to maintain service at stations outside of the affected areas, as long as operationally feasible.
3. If circumstances become untenable, as they pertain to on-street disruptions in service, the Metro CEO will consult directly with the Metro Board Chair.

Public Notification

In the aftermath of the events of May 30th, staff continue to explore new and better strategies for

informing customers of dynamic, unplanned service emergencies. Staff recognize real-time communications as one of the most challenging aspects of our relationship with customers. In reviewing Metro's tactics for emergency public notifications, it became clear that Metro has the most difficulty reaching two specific segments of the rider population: those without mobile data plans (~35%) and those whose primary language may not be English (~32%). Working with Metro's Chief of Civil Rights & Inclusion and Executive Officer of Equity & Race, staff have taken a closer look at how to reach these two populations during a crisis.

According to Metro's 2019 Fall On-Board survey, 95% of our riders state that they now have access to a mobile phone. From the same survey, 60% of riders say they own a smartphone and 35% say they own a cell phone. These results appear consistent with similar findings from the Pew Research Center. According to the Pew Research Center, 27% of low-income people are mobile dependent, meaning riders who do not have internet access at home and likely don't have access to a desktop computer. In comparison, 48% of Metro riders can be characterized as mobile dependent, per the 2019 Fall On-Board survey. Because their cell phones are the only way they can connect to the internet, it is a critical tool for accessing transit information in addition to other essential services.

While Metro has well-established standard practices for notifying the public of service impacts through traditional and social media, staff recognizes opportunities to improve notifications to cell phone users who may not necessarily have a data plan. Even without data plans, the vast majority of cell phones have some kind of digital communication capability and the most basic cell phones can send and receive SMS texts.

Staff are currently exploring a text alert system through our CRM ActiveCampaign. Such a system would allow people to opt-in for text alerts, which would prove useful during emergency situations. This system would also have the added benefit of allowing Metro to deliver real-time, non-emergency mobile alerts directly to our riders, notifying them of routine delays, detours, and disruptions.

In addition to understanding Metro riders' cell phone capabilities, it is also important to understand the languages in which Metro riders best consume information. Metro ensures that our passengers with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) have meaningful access to information on services and programs. As part of our commitment to Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Metro translates vital passenger information in seven languages: Armenian, Chinese (traditional), Japanese, Korean, Russian, Spanish and Vietnamese based on the FTA-mandated translation needs analysis conducted in 2019. Additionally, Metro has installed Language Assistance phones at Customer Service Centers and Lost and Found to assist LEP customers. The Language Assistance phones have the capability of translating over 250 languages.

While Metro does a great job providing fixed information in multiple languages, providing translations during dynamic emergency situations presents significant challenges. However, staff have identified several strategies to vastly improve access to information in multiple languages.

An improvement that emerged from the after-action review was the need for better live multi-language telephone assistance. The public is well aware of 323-GO-METRO and know to call with any queries or for assistance with trip planning, payments, etc. However, currently, calls are only answered during the hours of 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Monday through Friday and 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. As an improvement for handling calls during emergencies that occur after

hours, Customer Care will re-open the Call Center (323-GO-METRO) remotely and handle any calls that may come in. This will provide an almost seamless experience to callers who may otherwise not have a way to get information digitally, and best of all, the Lionbridge translation services will ensure that callers get the information needed in their preferred languages.

Also, in evaluating our technology resources, it was quickly learned that the “translate” button on metro.net was not intuitive or easy to find. A quick win for non-English speakers is to ensure their ability to easily find and have all of the information on metro.net translated to their language. Even though most non-English speakers have their browsers set to their preferred language that translates the web page content on a regular basis, it is important that the “translate” button is easily found on the metro.net site. Metro has the ability to translate all of its content to 16 languages. As part of the immediate website improvements, that button is being relocated to a much more prominent location.

During the after-action review, it was also determined that there wasn't evergreen information available on metro.net that communicates to riders what to do during an unplanned emergency, how to get up-to-date information, and what to do in the event that Metro cannot provide transit services. To mitigate this, staff are developing a Customer Experience Toolkit that will be placed on metro.net. Among other things, it will provide information about what to do in the event of an unanticipated service shut down when Metro cannot get riders to their destinations. For example, there will be instructions for the public to take an alternative transit option and submit a verifiable receipt for reimbursement. It will also provide information on how they can receive updates on service interruptions during emergencies. It is anticipated that the toolkit will launch by the end of this calendar year with a campaign to educate the public of this new resource. When the platform is secured for a texting notification option, instructions for opting-in will also be added to the Customer Experience Toolkit.

Communications will also continue to leverage its alerts system to publish disruption information that reaches a large percentage of riders through the *Transit* app, Google Maps and Apple Maps. Staff will continue to use our partnership with *Transit* app to improve the accuracy and impact of our rider tools and communications related to planned and unplanned service suspensions.

Staff have also identified other tactics to reach a wider audience during emergency situations. These improved tactics generally include traditional and social media/blogs, web updates, telephone, live voice announcements and digital assets. They can be activated through the Emergency Operation Center during an event and allow for remote changes to messaging in real-time. A list of these tactics and the process flow chart can be found in Attachment B (Public Notification Plan).

After action reviews have also revealed the need to conduct more research to find more effective ways to provide information to Metro's most marginalized and vulnerable customers. As part of Metro's efforts to improve equitable outcomes, staff will gather data to better understand the needs of our customers and explore additional tactics that allow us to consider needs and disparities, where possible, in emergency decision-making and better reach riders with essential travel information during emergencies, as well as during regular service disruptions.

Engage Service Councils for Review & Feedback

This report will be shared with our Service Councils in November 2020 to allow for any feedback and

concerns they may have. Metro will gather their input and use it as we continue to review and enhance our protocols and procedures for future service shutdowns.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

Metro's protocols for shutdowns will have a positive impact on the safety of our frontline employees and riders.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Recommendation supports Metro Strategic Plan Goal 2 -To deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system.

NEXT STEPS

Metro, in collaboration and coordination with our Board and internal/external partners, will continue to review and update our policies and procedures for service continuity during emergency situations in a manner that is safe, responsible, and upholds local and state directives for the overall safety and well-being of the communities and county we serve. Metro will implement the changes proposed in the Public Notification Plan to ensure that staff is prepared to act, when faced with another emergency situation.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Motion 39
Attachment B - Public Notification Plan

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