

**Board Report**

File #: 2021-0057, **File Type:** Informational Report**Agenda Number:** 9.

**FINANCE, BUDGET, AND AUDIT COMMITTEE
MARCH 17, 2021****SUBJECT: OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG) FINAL REPORT ON REVIEW OF METRO
MEASURES TO REDUCE COVID-19 TRANSMISSION****ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE****RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE Office of Inspector General (OIG) Final Report on Review of Metro Measures to Reduce COVID-19 Transmission

ISSUE

In November 2020, the Metro Board Chair requested the Office of Inspector General (OIG) to review Metro patrons' compliance with COVID-19 orders and guidelines by federal, state, and local agencies, and Metro's handling of social distancing and other measures to help our community and assist in Los Angeles County's desire to address the pandemic impacts. To address Metro Board's request, we performed reviews and observations on passengers' compliance with social distancing, use of masks, and related issues on Metro buses and railcars. We also reviewed Metro's policies, procedures, and measures taken to comply with federal, state, and local public health orders and guidelines.

BACKGROUND

The goal of this review was to determine whether the public is complying with federal, state, local government, and Metro requirements to wear a mask and practice social distance on the Metro System. We also performed procedures to identify if Metro has taken appropriate measures recommended and/or required by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), State of California Physical Distancing Protocol, Los Angeles City and County Social Distancing Protocol and Federal instructions. In particular, the objectives of this review were to:

1. Determine whether Metro has policies and procedures in place to help reduce COVID-19 virus transmission;
2. Observe and document Metro operators' and passengers' use of face masks and social distancing practices; and
3. Determine whether Metro passengers comply with Metro signage and announcements

suggested by CDC, and ordered by the State of California, City and County of Los Angeles particularly concerning social distancing protocols and use of face masks.

DISCUSSION

Findings

Our review found that Metro generally complied with and has taken appropriate measures recommended and/or required by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, State of California Physical Distancing Protocol, and Los Angeles County Social Distancing Protocol. Metro has been proactive in monitoring and adapting to evolving situations related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The actions taken by Metro to address the COVID-19 pandemic have been numerous, consistent and on-going. Among others, Metro has issued the following key policies, procedures, measures, briefs, and updates to help reduce COVID-19 virus transmission since the pandemic was declared:

- Metro Public Health/Pandemic Plan for Infectious/Communicable Diseases
- Metro Digital COVID-19 Reporting System User Guide
- Metro USG HVAC System & COVID-19 Changes or Modifications
- Metro Digital COVID-19 Reporting System User Guide
- Metro Operations General Notice - Required Face Coverings
- Metro COVID-19 Daily Measures
- Metro General Order - Mask and Physical Distancing Requirements
- Metro COVID-19 Daily Brief to Employees
- Metro Weekly, Bi-Weekly, Monthly Updates on Response to COVID-19
- Metro Micro
- Metro Street Team

However, our review of sample bus and railcar video recordings found that notwithstanding Metro's efforts, there were instances of non-compliance with federal, state and local agencies recommendations for wearing facemasks and practicing social distancing by Metro staff and passengers that need to be addressed to ensure a healthy, safe and secure environment for the community and all Metro employees and its passengers. This report includes 15 recommendations.

Recommendations

We recommend the following:

Operations:

1. Continue to communicate with bus and rail operators to wear a mask and wear it properly.
2. Continue to educate and train bus and rail operators on how to handle situations when passengers do not comply with the federal, state, and local guidelines to reduce COVID-19 transmission. When passengers do not wear masks or observe social distance, Operators could make an announcement.

3. Create regular pre-made announcements to run every couple of minutes to reinforce the requirements of wearing a mask and observing social distance.
4. Review signage that could be placed in buses.
5. Continue to identify and evaluate cleaning methods to combat COVID-19 throughout bus and rail systems and facilities that yield maximum efficacy and ease of use.
6. Coordinate schedule and route of buses to testing and vaccination locations.
7. Continue to identify and apply effective technology for ventilation on Metro bus and rail systems, facilities, and in Gateway to combat the spread of COVID-19 virus.
8. Bus Operations Control should instruct operators to open doors for 20 seconds at each stop even if there is no passenger boarding, in order to effectuate the ventilation system that it designed to rely on obtaining fresh air in that way.
9. Consider other methods of increased ventilation such as converting a fixed close window to an opening window.
10. Authorize bus operators to stop accepting passengers when they reach their maximum passenger COVID-19 load and call it in to BOC so they might make other arrangements for patrons not permitted to board. Operators seem now confused if they are permitted to not accept overfull boarding.

System Security and Law Enforcement:

11. Direct transit security officers and fare inspectors to issue citations to riders who are warned to put on a mask but refuse to comply without the assertion of medical condition that precludes wearing mask. This is based on the Metro Customer Code of Conduct which authorizes officers to cite for violations to follow authorized representatives' lawful orders including those based on the County's or City's executive orders.

Board Members:

12. Ensure executive orders issued by your municipalities are written to require that masks be worn before entering a public transit facility or vehicles rather than just "in" a facility or vehicles to minimize having to allow persons to enter before action can be taken.

Risk, Safety and Asset Management:

13. Continue to remind staff to comply with all measures implemented by Metro to reduce COVID-19 virus transmission.
14. Implement a policy requiring all employees to wear a mask in Metro's in-person meetings in addition to social distancing and authorize management to send employees home who refuse to observe mask and social distancing rules after being warned to do so.
15. Consider installation of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) vending machines for the sale of face masks and hand sanitizers in Metro facilities, stations, and vehicles. Our limited research found that there are vendors who can deliver PPE vending machines within a few weeks after the order is placed.

In early 2020, the OIG issued a report on the use of PPE at Metro Divisions that offered several recommendations to Metro Operations similar in nature to the recommendations in this report to protect Metro employees from the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. The recommendations largely focused on reiterating the importance of complying with local government and agency directives to use PPE including: wear a mask, practice social distance, clean and wipe shared surfaces before and after use, and use hand sanitizer when entering shared areas.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial or budgetary impact by accepting the report, but compliance with the recommendations would allow Metro to achieve increased efficiency and a safer environment for both the public and Metro employees.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The recommendations in this report support Metro's Strategic Plan Goal 5, "Provide responsive, accountable, and trustworthy governance within the Metro organization".

NEXT STEPS

Metro management should consider adoption of the recommendations proposed in this report.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Final Report on Review of Metro Measures to Reduce COVID-19 Transmission
(Report No. 21-AUD-05)

Prepared by: Lorena Martinez, Administrative Analyst, (213) 244-7345
Myra Taylor, Senior Auditor, (213) 244-7306
Asuncion Dimaculangan, Senior Auditor, (213) 244-7311
Yvonne Zheng, Senior Manager, Audit, (213) 244-7301
George Maycott, Sr. Director, Inspector General-Audit (Interim), (213) 244-7310

Reviewed by: Karen Gorman, Inspector General, (213) 922-2975