



Board Report

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**REVISED**  
**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE**  
**JUNE 15, 2022**

**SUBJECT: METRO OBJECTIVES FOR MULTIMODAL HIGHWAY INVESTMENT**

**ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**RECOMMENDATION**

CONSIDER:

- A. ADOPTING the proposed Metro Objectives for Multimodal Highway Investment (Attachment A); and
- B. RECEIVING AND FILING the report back on FY23 Budgeted Multimodal Highway Investments.

**SOLIS & DUPONT WALKER AMENDMENT TO ATTACHMENT A, OBJECTIVE 2:** Recognizing LA County’s history of inequitable highway investment policies and construction, work with local communities to reduce disparities caused by the existing highway system and develop holistic, positive approaches to maintain and improve the integrity and quality of life of those communities with minimal or no displacement during the implementation of highway improvements.

**ISSUE**

LA County’s position as the nation’s most populous county, the home of the Western Hemisphere’s most vital seaport complex, and the steward of the world’s 18<sup>th</sup> largest economy poses significant transportation demands, policy challenges, and unequal impacts for a region comprising a socioeconomically and racially diverse array of 88 cities and over 130 unincorporated communities.

Our region’s ability to thrive, grow together, and develop a more inclusive, equitable, sustainable, and vibrant economy depends upon its ability to plan for, invest in, and implement a well-functioning, multimodal and multipurpose transportation system that moves people and goods seamlessly and sustainably throughout the region and provides access to opportunity for every resident. At the heart of this shared use, complex, and oversubscribed transportation system is the expansive highway system that serves local communities, regional mobility, and the national economy by linking residents to opportunities, commuters to jobs, patients to healthcare, students to education, customers to businesses, goods to markets and families to one other. Metro is leading the region in

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discussing and understanding how to invest in the LA County highway system within this multimodal framework in such a way as to support shared economic, sustainability, and equity goals.

A set of proposed objectives - goals that support the broader vision of mobility, sustainability, equity, economic vitality, and quality of life - are needed to provide a clear view on how Metro can engage our partners to develop a modernized and more comprehensive approach to investing in our important highway system as part of this larger vision. Upon adoption of these objectives, Metro will work with its regional, state, and local partners to develop strategies to advance them.

As part of the FY23 Budget proposal, Director Bonin requested a report back on the planned expenditures for Highway Investment. This report provides the response and demonstrates how it aligns with the proposed objectives for multimodal highway investment.

## **BACKGROUND**

As the regional transportation authority for Los Angeles County, Metro's mission is to provide a world-class transportation system that enhances the quality of life for all who live, work, and play within LA County. The public also entrusts Metro to implement recent voter-approved measures (R in 2008 and M in 2016) which call for leveraging investment into a multimodal transportation vision for the county developed in partnership with regional stakeholders.

Both Measure R and Measure M include a significant subfund category for highway-related projects (20% and 17%, respectively) intended to provide local funding toward the implementation of major highway projects and subregional programs, as determined by input received from local jurisdictions and subregional Councils of Government, to improve regional mobility, economic competitiveness, air quality, and the movement of people and goods throughout LA County.

To inform and accomplish this mission, Metro leads with equity, defining it as follows:

*Equity is both an outcome and a process to address disparities, to ensure fair and just access to opportunities, including jobs, housing, education, mobility options, and healthier communities.*

The experience in implementing highway capacity and improvement projects varies from subregion to subregion based on community impacts, characteristics of the project, and priorities established by local jurisdictions. For example, the San Gabriel Valley and the North County subregions have supported major highway expansion projects designed to improve safety and traffic flow at key chokepoints on the freeway system, at the State Route 57/60 Confluence and the steep Calgrove grade on Interstate 5 (I-5) North, respectively. These improvements, which collectively have received \$563.9 million in discretionary grant awards from state and federal partners, seek to improve safety and capacity on those freeway facilities in confined areas with minimal displacement impacts and few residential neighborhoods directly adjacent to each project site.

In contrast, other subregions like the Gateway Cities feature communities that have long suffered impacts on health, air quality, mobility, and quality of life as a result of being directly adjacent to existing freight-focused freeway facilities such as the I-710 South, where widening the freeway would

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cause displacement and bring more trucks—mostly diesel-powered—near low-income households and communities of color impacted over generations by highway investment decisions mired in a legacy of inequitable policies. The Board’s suspension of the I-710 South environmental process in May 2021, followed by its adoption of a No Build alternative last month for that project in place of the previously approved Locally Preferred Alternative 5C, demonstrates that different circumstances yield very different outcomes.

In addition, over the past couple of years, the Board has passed motions to expand the eligibility of highway investments to include complete streets.

Consequently, Metro needs to determine a set of objectives that will create a more holistic, multimodal, and equitable process that will result in a better approach to moving people and goods, a resilient multimodal transportation system and more equitable outcomes for communities in need of greater investment, improved access to opportunities, better mobility options, improved health and a more vibrant quality of life.

This focus on articulating a new set of objectives for multimodal highway investment comes at a critical time when our state and federal partners are redefining how they will invest in highway projects to leverage local funds. Over the past few years, Governor Newsom’s administration has sought to link transportation funding decisions to improving equity and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. The State has also amended the environmental review process (CEQA) through SB 743 so that development projects including roads and highways will be required to mitigate Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMTs).

Similarly, the federal government has identified through its funding programs the inclusion of these same goals, notably through the United States Department of Transportation’s (USDOT) reconfiguration of programs like the Better Utilizing Investments to Leverage Development (BUILD) into Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) to include a greater focus on this more comprehensive approach to delivering transportation investments to uplift equity-challenged communities. New programs like the National Electric Vehicle Infrastructure (NEVI) and the Carbon Reduction Program specifically fund infrastructure that helps reduce carbon dioxide emissions from on-road highway sources. USDOT’s focus on racial equity under Secretary Buttigieg also manifested itself in the 2021 decision to halt construction of the I-45 widening project in Houston due to possible civil rights violations caused by the impacts on predominantly minority and low-income communities adjacent to and subject to displacement by the project (<https://www.politico.com/news/2021/04/01/dot-texas-highway-equity-478864>).

Equitable processes help lead to equitable outcomes. For Metro to lead with equity and drive investment into its many disadvantaged communities impacted by freeway facilities, the agency must not only align with these developments at the state and federal levels but also articulate a vision on how Metro can create a better multimodal transportation system for all of LA County by strategically investing in its highway system in a more community-focused manner to reduce disparities and not generate greater burdens and inequities. To achieve this the CEO recently realigned Metro’s highway programs into the new Multimodal Integrated Planning Unit of Countywide Planning & Development to address the need to have a comprehensive multimodal planning approach and to strengthen our relationships with local communities and key institutional stakeholders. This re-

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alignment also ensures Metro can deliver current and future Measure R and M highway investments in a manner that is consistent with current State and Federal policies, as well as Metro's own sustainability goals. Under the Multimodal Integrated Planning Unit, highway investments will be evaluated and scoped using the objectives outlined in this report, in collaboration with our agency and regional partners, and through a meaningful public engagement process.

## **DISCUSSION**

Metro's strategy for investing in the LA County highway system must be updated to align the agency with state and federal policies and funding opportunities while simultaneously supporting community improvement and equitable advancement for local residents, especially those most impacted by past, current and future use of our region's many highway facilities. Staff proposes the Multimodal Highway Investment Objectives found in Attachment A for Board consideration.

### **FY23 Budget Multimodal Highway Investments**

The application of the proposed objectives in Attachment A is well-illustrated by the FY23 budget for multimodal highway investments, which emphasizes a shift towards integration of multimodal elements in projects while addressing subregional priorities and prior funding commitments. The budget proposal includes \$634 million for our highway program - about seven percent of the overall budget. A summary of the FY23 Multimodal Highway Budget is included in Attachment B. Some highlights of the adopted budget are provided below.

Projects that are currently in construction or nearing construction completion (prior commitments) account for 33% of the FY23 Multimodal Highway Budget. All the freeway/highway projects in the FY23 budget, including those in construction, are either targeting notorious safety hotspots and traffic chokepoints, complete streets, or adding HOV and/or ExpressLanes. Several of these projects-for example, the SR-57/60 Confluence improvements in the San Gabriel Valley and the I-5 North HOV and Truck Lanes in the North County-have received strong community and subregional support, do not have right-of-way incursions into residential communities, address serious accident and traffic congestion locations caused by truck/vehicle conflicts, and have received competitive discretionary grant commitments (\$563.9 million) from state and federal partners that heavily leverage Measure M funding.

Metro has shifted the focus of the highway program toward projects that can be used by buses, carpoolers, bicycles and pedestrians, or projects that help older and existing roads work better. For Metro-led operational highway improvements, project-specific Vehicle Miles Travel (VMT) and Green House Gas (GHG) assessments have been completed as part of the environmental review and approval processes. A summary of available VMT/GHG information for Highway Programs is provided as part of the FY23 Multimodal Highway Budget summary in Attachment B.

Complete street improvements on roads near freeways are part of most highway projects, and help make streets more hospitable, safer, and more attractive to pedestrians and cyclists. Furthermore, the Board-approved update to the Highway Subregional Fund Eligibility Guidelines has resulted in more locally-led Complete Streets projects being funded this fiscal year. The Highway Program budget includes \$225 million in local street projects in cities across LA County, which include

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pedestrian and bike improvements. Metro staff is responsible for the Complete Streets program and will continue to work with local jurisdictions to ensure adoption of local complete streets policies consistent with Metro's program and the Complete Streets Act of 2008. As of today, 62 of the 89 jurisdictions in LA County are compliant with Metro Complete Streets Policy 6.2.

The Highway Program budget also supports the development of new bus lanes to speed up our bus system and make buses more reliable and less prone to getting stuck in traffic (\$11.1 million in FY23).

Finally, the FY23 Multimodal Highway Budget also includes \$20 million in funding for soundwall construction, as part of the countywide soundwall program, which helps reduce noise in impacted, oftentimes disadvantaged communities across LA County.

### **DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT**

Adoption of Metro's proposed Objectives for Multimodal Highway Investment will support the development of a safer and more community-focused multimodal transportation system that will seek to reduce impacts experienced by commuters and residents from impacted communities adjacent to the LA County highway system.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Adoption of Metro's proposed Objectives for Multimodal Highway Investment would have a positive financial impact to the agency, providing greater competitiveness for state and federal discretionary grant opportunities by aligning Metro with new state and federal highway policies and objectives.

#### **Impact to Budget**

No impact to Metro's budget is anticipated as a result of Board adoption of this item.

### **EQUITY PLATFORM**

The proposed Metro Objectives for Multimodal Highway Investment seek to incorporate several considerations and principles of equity in how Metro plans, invests in and implements highway projects in LA County.

Central to these objectives is the inclusion of communities that have been and are most likely to be impacted in the development of highway-related projects and investment strategies through more robust and early public engagement processes that seeks to incorporate their voices into planning.

Additionally, the proposed objectives also provide a new focus on the outcomes of highway investment strategies by seeking to reduce disparities first and maximize benefits based on needs, rather than mitigating harms after a general strategy is determined. By prioritizing the quality of life of local communities-including low-income and communities of color-Metro can transform how it invests in highways into a more holistic, multimodal, community-centered approach to moving people and goods through and near highway facilities in LA County.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

The proposed Metro Objectives for Multimodal Highway Investment provide a more comprehensive and multimodal approach to improving the regional highway system in support of Metro’s overall investment strategy in a multimodal, equitable and sustainable transportation system that improves local communities while also improving the flow of people and goods throughout the region. By bringing community values and benefits into the policymaking on highway investment, Metro seeks to **“enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity” (#3).**

How Metro invests in the LA County highway system will lead to better choices in providing **“high-quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling” (#1)** by creating transit and active transportation modes of travel for residents in and traveling through local communities. By doing so, especially through investment in managed lanes that allows transit usage, Metro endeavors to **“deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system” (#2).**

This vision for the LA County highway system requires collaboration with federal and state partners, Caltrans District 7, regional stakeholders and local communities in concert to develop a better LA County system of transportation, thus affirming the Strategic Plan goal to **“transform LA County through regional collaboration and national leadership” (#4).**

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The Board could choose not to adopt the proposed Metro Objectives for Multimodal Highway Investment. Doing so could prevent Metro from aligning how it develops investment strategies for highway corridors in LA County with state and federal policies and local community engagement.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff will work with subregional Councils of Governments to identify ways to implement these objectives in a manner consistent with those subregions’ communities and needs.

Staff will continue development of Metro’s VMT Mitigation Program with local and State entities to evaluate the VMT impacts on Metro’s highway improvement projects and establish a VMT mitigation program that meets the needs of projects on the State highway system.

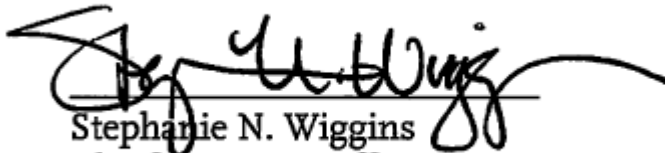
## **ATTACHMENT**

Attachment A - Metro Objectives for Multimodal Highway Investment  
Attachment B - FY23 Multimodal Highway Budget Summary

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