



Board Report

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**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 20, 2022**

SUBJECT: LA METRO TREE POLICY

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION

ADOPT Metro Tree Policy (Attachment A).

ISSUE

In April 2022, the Metro Board of Directors approved a motion (#2022-0259, *Creating a Metro Tree Policy Motion*) to develop an agencywide Tree Policy. The Tree Policy developed here is in direct response to the intent of the Motion.

This policy clarifies and standardizes LA Metro’s practices for protecting the urban canopy throughout its construction program. It also indicates our commitment to a sustainable replacement strategy where tree removal is unavoidable.

The Tree Policy also recognizes the benefits that tree canopies provide to our customers- including shade and protection from extreme heat and improved air quality. Because of the value that a healthy urban canopy provides to our riders, Metro is committed to providing high quality care and maintenance of the trees on our own properties, and to pursuing partnerships with cities and local jurisdictions to install trees to provide long-term shade along transit corridors.

BACKGROUND

Since the early 2000s, Metro has been working to create a more environmentally sustainable, equitable and resilient public transportation system. Metro’s commitment to climate action and resilience is included in several planning documents such as the 10-year Sustainability Strategic Plan *Moving Beyond Sustainability* (MBS), the *Climate Action and Adaptation Plan* (CAAP), the *Customer Experience Plan*, and the *Long-Range Transportation Plan* (LRTP). Protecting, planting, and maintaining trees is a component of these plans.

Trees are a critical part of our region’s green infrastructure and provide multiple benefits for our communities including improved air quality, stormwater management, shade, reduction in urban heat,

carbon storage, bird and other pollinator habitat, and reductions in psychological distress. Trees are also valuable resources to provide in the long-term shade at transit transfer locations. Trees, vegetation, and natural surfaces typically absorb less heat and cool off more quickly than the built environment.

DISCUSSION

LA Metro has an important relationship to the urban canopy across many of its enterprises, but the most significant connection to tree issues is currently with our capital program where we have many large projects under construction across Los Angeles County. It is common that in the process of building large projects, LA Metro is faced with options for preserving or removing and replacing trees.

In recognizing the environmental benefits of trees, LA Metro commits to a consistent and sustainable approach to mitigating the impacts of our construction program. The attached Tree Policy (Attachment A) outlines the key elements of this approach:

1. Protecting trees through planning, design and construction, and maintenance.
2. Replacing any trees removed (when necessary) at a 2-1 ratio, or at a 4-1 ratio in the case of heritage trees. This replacement ratio is in line with the requirements of other local jurisdictions.
3. Adopting species, palette, and planting strategies that maximize opportunities for native species, carbon capture, mitigating urban heat effect, stormwater capture, and use of recycled water for irrigation.
4. Committing to a three-year establishment period for the new trees planted and encouraging creative approaches to tree replacement planting within the impacted area, including but not limited to first-last mile pathways, parkway strips, parks, or schools (however, Metro will not support planting trees in parkway locations that have the potential to damage our buses or impede their operation).

In addition to the overlap between our construction of capital projects and the urban forest, Metro has several other ways in which we touch on issues related to trees, including those that are planted at our maintenance and office facilities, and those trees located at or near our bus stops and train stations. In looking at opportunities to take a sustainable and resilient approach to trees at these facilities and our projects, the Tree Policy also requires the following:

- Adopting sustainable practices for maintaining and, where possible, planting new trees on Metro facilities.
- Partnering with local jurisdictions to plant and establish street trees along transit corridors in equity-focused communities.
- Exploring opportunities for community engagement around trees and green infrastructure.

The objectives of maintaining or planting trees on Metro properties or in conjunction with Metro funded projects are to:

- Provide a safe, pleasant, and high-quality experience for system users,
- Reduce transit rider exposure to high heat conditions,
- Improve air quality in alignment with the MBS targets,
- Mitigate tree loss that may occur from construction projects,
- Increase green spaces and expand the urban forest, and;
- Support climate action through carbon sequestration.

Commitment to Collaboration

A Guiding Principle of the Board adopted *Moving Beyond Sustainability* strategic plan commits to strengthen sustainability efforts through leadership and collaboration with regional partners and agencies. With support from this policy, Metro will continue coordinating closely with local jurisdictions in planning and design of capital projects on the protection of existing trees and the replacement or planting of new trees in the Los Angeles County.

Many organizations are already engaged in urban forestry efforts in Los Angeles County. Metro will support plans and projects undertaken by local jurisdictions to plant and establish street trees along transit corridors in equity-focused communities, and as part of LA Metro's Complete Streets Policy.

LA Metro will also collaborate with the Metro Sustainability Council, local agencies and nurseries to educate and promote the significance of the native trees, and to ensure that specified trees in the LA Metro Tree Palette are available for replacement of trees removed as part of the construction program.

Stakeholder Engagement

Staff conducted several internal and external stakeholder engagements to get feedback and recommendations on the viability and effectiveness of the Tree Policy. These stakeholders and the dates they were consulted included:

- LA Metro Tree Policy Working Group- including Countywide Planning & Development, Systemwide Design, Facilities Contracted Maintenance Services, Construction, Security, Transit Operations, Operations Liaison and Planning (06/03/2022, 06/16/2022, 09/13,2022);
- LA Metro Sustainability Council (05/13/2022);
- Tree Policy Workshop - with environmental and other stakeholders (08/24/2022), and;
- Los Angeles Conservation Corps (09/13/2022).
- Caltrans (10/6/2022)

Feedback from the stakeholders were incorporated in the final version of the policy as presented in Attachment A.

Implementation Plan

LA Metro will ensure the implementation of the Tree Policy through the following steps:

- Update internal plans, documents and specifications governing tree removal, replacement, species selection, establishment periods, and maintenance.
- Integrate the goals and objectives of the Tree Policy into planning efforts.
- Conduct internal training to ensure understanding and consistent application of this Policy.
- Collaborate with cities, local agencies and non-profits to identify and pursue opportunities to support the planting and maintenance of trees along high ridership, low canopy corridors in LA County.
- Collaborate with local agencies and nurseries to ensure availability of sufficient stock of the trees from the LA Metro Tree Palette.
- Identify and pursue Federal, State, and local funding opportunities aimed at maintaining current tree inventory and increasing tree canopy/coverage specifically along LA Metro transit corridors and properties.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

No immediate financial impact is associated with the adoption of the tree policy and its implementation strategies. Implementation of the Tree Policy will be incorporated into the budgeting of planning, execution of capital projects, and facility maintenance projects and programs. operations programs. Those funds will be controlled by the respective project and program managers at appropriate cost centers.

EQUITY PLATFORM

For Metro, equity is part of the foundation of the decision-making, planning and operations. Metro is committed to eliminating areas of inequity, discrimination or implicit bias within our policies, procedures, and practices.

The disparities in tree canopy coverage among different parts of LA County are stark: many affluent neighborhoods exhibit tree canopy coverage of up to 40%, while lower income areas in the Los Angeles County may have coverage of 10% or less, with a corresponding difference in the ambient air temperature of several degrees. The result is that people who rely on the transit and live in neighborhoods with low tree canopy coverage or other forms of shade experience more exposure to high heat while waiting at or walking to and from the transit stops.

LA Metro will prioritize projects using criteria for reducing heat and other impacts to Equity Focus

Communities (EFCs) and other disadvantageded communities. LA Metro will ensure that all mitigation efforts are maximized within EFCs, and that all replacement trees are planted back in the same areas that they are removed. Metro will also focus any proactive tree planting efforts within low canopy/high ridership corridors. In no case, shall invasive or trees that damage the sidewalks or may pose a hazard be considered acceptable.

LA Metro will engage with representatives of local jurisdictions and non-profits in the planning and design of capital projects to coordinate the protection of existing trees and the replacement or planting of new trees. Where the required replacement of trees on LA Metro property is not possible, LA Metro will assess to determine the support of the plans and projects undertaken by local jurisdictions to plant and establish street trees along transit corridors in Equity Focus Communities, and as part of LA Metro's Complete Streets Policy.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

This policy supports Metro's second, third, and fourth Strategic Plan Goals. The actions implemented due to this policy will deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system (Goal #2). The strategies and actions outlined in this policy advocate for equitable access to opportunity in alignment with Metro's Equity Platform (Goal #3). This policy also aligns with the need to collaborate with regional agencies to protect, preserve, maintain and increase the tree canopy for Los Angeles County (Goal #4).

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In consultation with internal and external stakeholders, this Tree Policy was developed in direct response to Motion #2022-0259. Staff does not recommend rejection of this policy.

NEXT STEPS

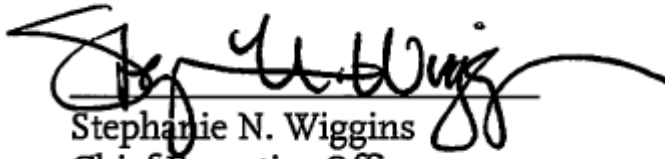
Upon Board adoption, the Office of Sustainability is committed to working across internal departments and with external partners and stakeholders to implement the actions under the Tree Policy. The Office of Sustainability will periodically report on the progress of implementation.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A. LA Metro Tree Policy

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