



## Board Report

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### OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE NOVEMBER 17, 2022

**SUBJECT: FULL RESTORATION OF METRO BUS SERVICE (7 MILLION REVENUE SERVICE HOURS) AS PART OF DECEMBER 2022 SERVICE CHANGE**

**ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE a status report on the full restoration of Metro bus scheduled service (7 million revenue service hours) effective December 11, 2022 as part of Metro's December 2022 service change.

#### **ISSUE**

Metro will return to a full 7 million revenue service hours (annualized) as part of the bus service change effective Sunday, December 11, 2022. This is the final phase of restoring the full pre-COVID 7 million revenue service hours (annualized) based on the NextGen Bus Plan approved by the Metro Board in October 2020. With these changes, annualized bus revenue service hours will increase from 6.7 million revenue service hours to 7 million revenue service hours, the final phase in restoring full scheduled service following the reduction made in February 2022 due to a shortage of bus operators.

#### **BACKGROUND**

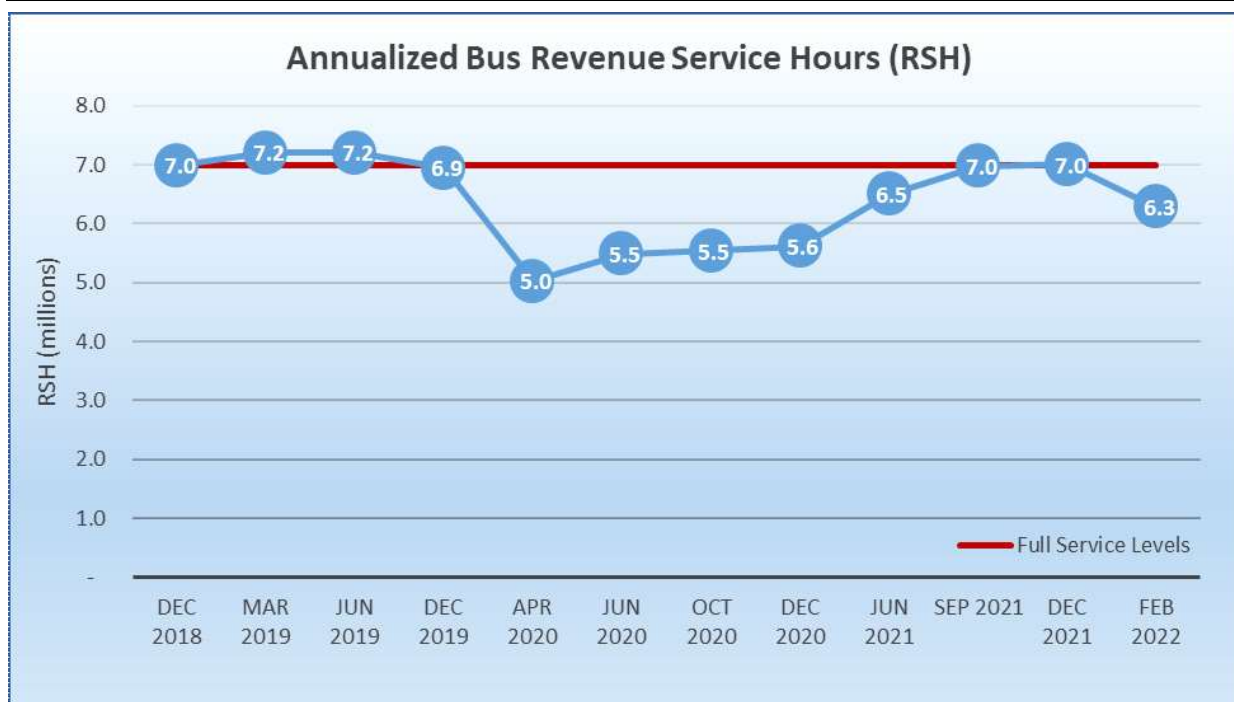
Metro's twice-annual service change program allows Metro to improve the customer experience through revised transit routes and schedules. However, since the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, multiple service changes have been implemented to respond to the impacts on ridership and operator availability:

- At the beginning of the COVID pandemic, service levels were reduced by 30% in **April 2020** from 7.0M annualized Revenue Service Hours (RSH) to 5.0M - representing the deepest cut in service during the pandemic. The reductions were made because of three factors: 1) 70% decline in bus ridership, 2) significant loss of sales tax revenues, 3) high service cancellation rates close to 20% due to operators' COVID infections, taking care of family with the virus, and childcare needs due to the Safer at Home orders.
- As ridership rebounded to about 50% of pre-COVID levels in **June 2020**, service levels were increased to 5.5M annualized RSH to meet additional demand and to ensure social distancing.

- **Motion 10.1 of September 2020** (Attachment A) stated that Metro should prepare an FY21 Operations Recovery Plan that outlined a clear decision-making framework for restoring service and identified the financial and human resources needed at each stage of recovery.

By **June 2021**, ridership rebounded to 65% of pre-COVID levels. As such, and per Board approved Motion 27.1 (Attachment B) by Director Garcetti, service levels were increased to 6.5M annualized RSH.

- Service levels were fully restored to 7.0M annualized RSH in **September 2021** as directed by Motion 27.1.
- Unfortunately, due to the Omicron variant of the COVID virus, Metro experienced a significant increase in operator absences in late 2021/early 2022. This, coupled with the existing operator shortage, consistent with the National labor shortage and higher attrition rates, resulted in a significant shortage of available operators and thus an increase in canceled service (as high as 15%-20%) and ordered call backs of available operators to work. These cancellations disproportionately impacted Equity Focused Communities and contributed to operator fatigue, burnout, and low morale.
- To stabilize the system, a strategic service reduction was made throughout the network, with an equity focus that prioritized higher service levels allocated to Equity Focus Communities with highest propensity to use transit. The changes used a modified version of the NextGen frequency tiers. This temporary service reduction (7.0M RSH reduced by 10% to 6.3M RSH) was implemented in **Feb 2022**.
  - This temporary reduction resulted in a much more reliable and predictable system for our customers, more balanced passenger loads, evened out headways, and demonstrated valuing of our employees by significantly reducing the ordered call backs that were fatiguing our operators resulting in higher attrition.



*Conditions for an Equitable and Reliable Service Restoration*

At the January 2022 Board meeting, Staff reported that full-service restoration (7.0 M RSH) requires all conditions below to be met:

- No pandemic spike, no more than 30 new COVID cases per month for operators.
- Metro operator numbers (4,003) required to meet the needs of 7.0M RSH.
- No more than 200 mandatory (ordered) call-backs per week systemwide; and
- No more than 2% systemwide bus service cancellations.

The first service restoration was implemented in June 2022, increasing service from 6.3 to 6.5 M RSH (annualized), while a second phase implemented in October 2022 increasing service from 6.5 to 6.7 M RSH (annualized).

Given the shortage of operators, it is anticipated that cancellations and ordered call backs will slightly increase when the December 2022 service change is implemented, as anticipated in previous presentations on service restoration planning. However, as staffing levels increase, cancellations and callbacks are expected to decrease. Similarly, with the June 2022 service changes, cancellations and callbacks increased. However, as of the end of September 2022, the above metrics are each improving:

- New Operator COVID cases per month showed a significant drop from 154 cases in August to 61 cases in September and are likely to meet the target of no more than 30 new cases in the month of October.
- Active bus operator numbers are trending up (3203 as at October 8th). This trend should

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continue following a successful hiring fair on September 24<sup>th</sup> which yielded 230 conditional offers.

- Ordered call backs are also trending down, dropping from 686 in August to 599 in September.
- Bus service cancellations reduced in September compared to August (weekdays 3.2% versus 4.7%; Saturday 3.5% versus 4.0%; Sunday 7.2 versus 10.5%).

Staff will continue to track these metrics closely following the October 2022 service change, the second round of service restoration. There are no changes to rail service levels as part of the December 2022 service change, following the successful launch of the new K Line service on October 7, 2022.

## **DISCUSSION**

The December 2022 service change follows the same service restoration framework used for the June 2022 and October 2022 service changes. This framework focuses on service quality, valuing our employees, and restoring the NextGen Bus Plan service levels. This change restores 300,000 annualized revenue service hours, increasing from 6.7 to 7.0 M RSH (annualized).

An additional 8 weekday, 4 Saturday, and 3 Sunday schedules have been reviewed and adjusted to value our operators by giving them the time needed to operate each trip safely and reliably and obtain rest breaks at the end of trips. Additional long shift lengths will also be reduced. These changes also provide more reliable service for Metro riders.

The changes are consistent with Board approved Motion 43 (Attachment C) by Directors Mitchell, Solis, Bonin, and Garcetti for service restoration and are based on the NextGen Bus Plan. The restoration has 54 weekday, 24 Saturday, and 23 Sunday lines seeing increased service frequencies. The changes are also responsive to customer feedback on the previous service changes, gathered either directly from our riders while promoting service changes at bus stops, through the Metro Customer Service call center, the Metro website, and social media blog (The Source), as well as at the five Metro Regional Service Council meetings each month. A small number of bus route and stop changes are proposed as part of the December 2022 service change, including NextGen Bus Plan changes in San Pedro for Lines 205, 246, and 550 in conjunction with changes to the LADOT San Pedro DASH service. Line 212 will also be adjusted to serve the new Downtown Inglewood K Line rail station. These changes are detailed in Attachment D.

Implementation will include staff attending major stops to inform riders of route changes, as well as printed materials (summary brochure, service change notices, and schedules for each impacted line) available on buses, a special service change section on Metro.net, social media and Source posts, and signage placed at all impacted bus stops informing of the changes.

Metro continues to focus on new operator hiring and retention to continue the full-service restoration of 7 million revenue service hours (annualized) consistent with the NextGen Bus Plan.

## **EQUITY PLATFORM**

The December 2022 service change will improve both the quality and quantity of service provided

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across the Metro bus network including in EFCs. 24 of the 63 bus lines seeing added service and 2 of the 8 lines with revised schedules for improved on time performance in the December 2022 service change have greater than 50% of their line miles located in EFCs. Please also refer to Attachment E map and Attachment F service frequency table. The additional service added in the December 2022 service change ensures Metro completes the process of restoring the full 7 million revenue hours of service planned under the NextGen Bus Plan. This plan allocated the highest service levels to EFCs where high quality transit is a key to enhanced mobility for residents. Metro will continue to receive feedback on the changes directly from riders at bus stops, through the Metro Customer Service call center, the Metro website, social media blog (The Source), and at the five Metro Regional Service Council meetings each month.

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

The service changes support strategic plan goal #1: Provide high quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling. The service changes also respond to the sub-goal of investing in a world class bus system that is reliable, convenient, safe, and attractive to more users for more trips.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Staff will implement the December 2022 service change on Sunday, December 11th, with the marketing of the changes occurring beginning November 28<sup>th</sup> and continuing up to and beyond the implementation date.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Motion 10.1  
Attachment B - Motion 27.1  
Attachment C - Motion 43  
Attachment D - Description of December 2022 Service Change  
Attachment E - Map of December 2022 Service Improvements  
Attachment F - Metro Transit Service Frequencies - December 2022

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