



Board Report

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PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE MEETING
JANUARY 17, 2024

SUBJECT: OPEN AND SLOW STREETS GRANT PROGRAM CYCLE FIVE

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION

CONSIDER:

- A. AWARDING \$5 million to the Open and Slow Streets Grants Program Cycle Five to fund 16 events scheduled through December 2025 (Attachment A); and
- B. REPROGRAMMING Cycle Four funds not expended by December 31, 2023, up to the amount of \$500,000, towards Cycle Five (Attachment A), increasing the total available funding amount for Cycle Five to \$5.5 million.

ISSUE

The Open and Slow Streets Grant Program funds events that are designed to close streets to vehicular traffic, allowing Los Angeles County residents and visitors to experience alternative modes of transportation. The primary goal of Open Streets events is to promote walking, cycling, and the use of public transportation. By doing so, the program aims to encourage the development of multimodal policies and infrastructure at the city and community levels.

Cycle Four of the Open and Slow Streets Grant Program ended on December 31, 2023. Board approval is needed to fund Cycle Five and reprogram the unused funds from Cycle Four.

BACKGROUND

In September 2013, the Metro Board approved the Open Streets Competitive Grant Program framework in response to Motion 72 by Directors Villaraigosa, Molina, Najarian, and Wilson (Attachment B). This framework includes the following:

- A grant program based on a two-year cycle.
- An annual allocation of funds of up to \$2 million.
- A competitive grant process and program.
- A technical process for collecting data and evaluating funded events.
- Funding for support of planning, coordination, promotion, and other related organizational

costs.

Summary of Open Streets Events to Date - Cycles One, Two, Three, and Mini Cycle

Staff developed a comprehensive framework and competitive grant process to solicit and evaluate Open Streets applications throughout Los Angeles County. So far, the Metro Board has funded four cycles of Open and Slow Streets and a Mini Cycle. The grant program has sponsored 70 events, spanning 248 miles of Open and Slow Streets activities across 38 different jurisdictions.

During its June 2014 meeting, the Metro Board approved a grant of \$3.7 million for 12 events in Cycle One. In September 2016, Cycle Two received \$4.14 million for 17 events. In Cycle Three, \$4.53 million was awarded for 15 events, and the Metro Board directed staff to conduct an additional Mini Cycle for the applicants who were not selected for funding in Cycle Three to reapply for consideration. The Mini Cycle received \$1.05 million for five events. In Cycle Four, approximately \$7 million was awarded for 19 events across Los Angeles County. This includes \$2.5 million per year for the two-year cycle that was allocated through the annual budget process and an additional \$2 million per the Board Motion 9.1 (Attachment D) by Directors Hahn, Solis, Garcetti, Sandoval, and Dutra on December 2, 2021 to award up to 19 events.

COVID-19 Impact and Slow Streets Concept

The Slow Streets concept was developed during Cycle Three in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the "Safe at Home Order" implemented in March 2020. In May 2020, the Board passed Motion 40 (Attachment E) by Directors Garcetti, Solis, Garcia, Bonin, and Fasana which allowed the CEO to negotiate administrative scope changes for Cycle Three and the Mini Cycle based on written requests from the grantees. The purpose of this motion was to facilitate the implementation of the Slow Streets concept, which includes:

- Allowing the expansion of one-day events for an extended period.
- Replacing larger one-day events with smaller neighborhood events.
- Providing space within the public right of way to support vending and dining activities,
- Providing education, encouragement, and monitoring of safe physical distancing per Safe at Home Orders in support of community-based leadership.

As of November 2021, only two grantees from Cycle Three and the Mini Cycle have completed an amendment to their agreement. The amendments mainly involved minor changes or reprogramming of funds for Slow Streets events. Following a Board Motion in June 2021, staff recommended that Cycle Four applicants be allowed to propose Slow Streets, Open Streets, or a combination of multi-day events or extended routes for funding consideration. Metro received three applications under this new concept in Cycle Four.

Cycle Four Summary

In June 2021, the Board approved the revised Metro Open and Slow Streets Grant Program Cycle Four Package and Guidelines and authorized the total grant funding available for two-year cycles to \$5 million. At this meeting, the Board also authorized staff to administratively release unchanged

Open Streets and Slow Streets applications and guidelines packages in future cycles without returning to the Board. Based on these recommendations, staff has continued to accept applications under the same concept for Slow Streets, Open Streets, or a combination of events.

The application package and guidelines focus on the following:

- Per Board recommendation, a funding ceiling of \$500,000 per event application.
- Focus on regional distribution and disadvantaged communities and equity.
- Events that promote innovation.
- Increased participation opportunities and event promotion.
- Open and Slow Streets events that encourage social distancing include extended routes or multi-day events and outdoor activities such as business and educational activities.

DISCUSSION

Open and Slow Streets Grant Program Cycle Five

In the summer of 2023, staff administered the application process for a new biannual Open and Slow Streets Grants cycle. The program is open to all cities and councils of government (COG) county-wide. To spread awareness of the new cycle application process, staff sent emails and workshop invitations to all municipalities and COGs in Los Angeles County and to the Los Angeles County Public Works. The website was also updated with current information. A virtual workshop was conducted and 32 representatives from 16 entities attended. Special presentations and event production advice were provided to assist potential applicants to enhance their application process. Staff also provided an opportunity to answer questions from prospective applicants.

Outreach

An information workshop was held in preparation for Cycle Five. The meeting was conducted virtually, allowing representatives from municipalities and COGs located in different parts of Los Angeles County to attend easily. Attendees included staff members from the cities of Los Angeles, Santa Clarita, Vernon, Long Beach, Lancaster, Downey, Santa Monica, Calabasas, Huntington Park, and South Pasadena. The South Bay and San Gabriel Valley COGs also participated in the virtual workshop.

During the workshop, attendees were provided with an overview of the program, including its background and information specific to Cycle Five. Attendees also received a preview of the application and guidelines, followed by a question-and-answer session. In addition, there was a presentation on lessons learned and the planning process of an Open Streets event. The workshop aimed to equip cities and entities with the necessary technical support and answers to aid in developing their applications and production needs for these events.

At the end of the session, participants were encouraged to send additional comments or questions regarding the application and guidelines to OpenStreets@metro.net <<mailto:OpenStreets@metro.net>> for staff to address.

Program Criteria and Guidelines

The Open Streets Grant application and guidelines have remained consistent from previous cycles and use the same criteria (Attachment C). Clarifications and technical support have also been provided in certain areas throughout each application process cycle. These areas include but are not limited to allowing for innovation in the scope of events, accommodating multi-jurisdictional events, and prioritizing events that benefit Equity Focus Communities. The minimum score needed to be eligible and recommended for funding is 70 points, as stated in the application guidelines. Therefore, only the top ranked events will be recommended for funding. Per the guidelines, there is no guarantee that applicants will receive full funding request. If grant applicant is unable to accept amended award amount and commit to produce the event as scoped, award will be available to next highest scored application.

Cycle Five Funding Availability

Through the approved annual budget process, \$2.5 million is allocated for the Open Streets Grant Program each year. Therefore, \$5 million is available for a two-year cycle. Staff also recommends reprogramming an additional \$500,000 from a canceled event during Cycle Four for a total of \$5.5 million in available funding for Cycle Five.

This additional \$500,000 is available due to the cancellation of the Eastside Open Streets Event by the City of Commerce. Since 2022, staff has worked with the City of Commerce to try to schedule the event; however, during the summer of 2023, the City of Commerce informed staff that they could not produce the event and would be giving up their grant. These funds could not be reprogrammed to the next highest-scoring Open Streets event in Cycle Four due to insufficient time for event production before the cycle ended on December 31, 2023. Therefore, staff recommends that this \$500,000 be made available to Cycle Five applicants.

Applications Received and Evaluation Panel

A total of 28 applications were received for Open Streets Cycle Five by the application deadline of 5 p.m. on August 29, 2023, with a total requested amount of approximately \$9.9 million. Of these 28 applications, 22 were from communities defined by Metro as Equity Focus Communities, and six were new applicants to the program.

An evaluation panel comprised of staff from Metro's Operations Department, Metro's Office of Equity and Race, and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) assessed the applications based on their feasibility in terms of event production, adherence to Metro Open Streets guidelines, connectivity to transit, and opportunities for partnerships to host the event.

To fulfill the \$5.5 million in funding available for Cycle Five and to increase the number of awards, four applications are recommended to be fully funded with the requested amounts, and 12 applications that received multiple awards over the life of the program are recommended to be partially funded with 80% of the requested amounts (Attachment A). All recommended events received a score of 70 points or higher to be eligible, which is consistent with the Board-approved application guidelines. Staff recommends partially funding the longstanding events in order to achieve the original goals of the program to provide seed funding to allow more new participants to

experience active transportation and public transportation for the first time. Any applicants who received Open Streets funding for five or more events prior to Cycle Five are considered to be in the longstanding category.

Cycle Five Evaluation Reporting

As in previous cycles, in Cycle Five, jurisdictions will be provided with standardized data collection templates to evaluate the success of their events. These templates have been used since Cycle One to measure and assess the program's success. The templates cover various aspects, including attendance, public transportation access, event impact on transportation, and impact on local businesses. However, the primary objective is to measure the effects of these events on nearby communities and assist municipalities in increasing the use of sustainable modes of transportation.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

The Open Streets Cycle Five Program will not have a safety impact on Metro or its employees as the events are held outside Metro-owned property.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Funding for the first year of Metro's Open Streets Cycle Five program is included in the FY23-24 budget in cost center 0441, under project number 410077, Open Streets Grant Program. Since this is a multi-year program, the cost center manager will be responsible for budgeting for these events every year.

Impact to Budget

Local funding from Proposition C will be utilized for the Cycle Five events. The funds are not eligible for Bus and Rail Operating and Capital expenses. Proposition C includes 25% of funds eligible for transportation system management/demand management (TSM/TDM) programs such as Open Streets events. SCAG identifies Open Streets events as Transportation Demand Management (TSM/TDM) program in their 2012 Regional Transportation Plan Congestion Management Toolbox - Motor Vehicle Restriction Zones. Should other eligible funding sources become available, they may be used instead of the identified funds. In addition, should any remaining funds from Cycle Four not be programmed for events in Cycle Five, these funds may be carried over to a future cycle.

EQUITY PLATFORM

Cycle Five of the Open Streets and Slow Streets Grant Program aims to provide the residents of Los Angeles County, particularly those in Equity Focus Communities (EFCs), with the opportunity to walk, bike, or roll in their neighborhoods. Fifteen of the 16 proposed funding events are located in EFCs. By producing Open Streets events in EFCs, constituents from disadvantaged communities will also be able to experience and enjoy car-free events. Grantees and their production entities will work closely with Metro Operations and Communication's staff and local bus providers to ensure that transit services are minimally disrupted and that grantees reach out to communities that may be affected by the events.

All grantees are required to distribute surveys to event participants and nearby businesses using a data collection template created by an external consultant. The goal of the surveys is to understand the benefits and effects of Open Streets events on the community, including information such as the participant's gender, age, and zip codes. All surveys will be supported by Metro translation service and other accessibility services to support participants with limited English proficiency and disabilities.

Furthermore, awarding points to candidates who organize their events in EFCs enables Metro to engage in events and focus on disseminating vital information to individuals with fewer transportation options. This encompasses providing extensive details about transportation and service options and updates on newly launched programs and initiatives.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Cycle Five of the Open Streets Program aligns with the third goal of Metro's strategic plan. The program aims to promote car-free and car-light mobility options among local communities and stakeholders and provide them with opportunities to experience these modes of transportation for the first time. This way, Metro can encourage sustainable transportation choices through Open Streets events. Additionally, these events allow Metro staff to share the latest information and address any queries from the communities they serve.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

It is possible that the Board may choose not to fund Cycle Five of the Open Streets Program and not to reprogram any remaining funding from Cycle Four. However, this decision would not align with Metro's objectives of promoting sustainable modes of transportation in Los Angeles County. Furthermore, this would negatively impact Metro's efforts to reach historically disadvantaged communities. Therefore, it is strongly advised to continue funding the Open Streets program.

NEXT STEPS

With the Board's approval, staff will notify all selected grantees and execute the grant agreement between Metro and each chosen grantee administratively.

Additionally, staff will implement the post-event data collection and assessment process, which includes investing in active transportation infrastructure and promoting sustainable modes of transportation. Staff will also revisit the program criteria, considering the program is now ten years old, to ensure the Open and Close Streets Grant Program will be able to maintain its vision and value on promoting sustainable transportation in the region.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Open Streets Grant Program Cycle 5 Evaluation Result and Recommend Grant Amount
Attachment B - Board Motion 72 - June 2013

Attachment C - Open Streets Cycle Five Application Package and Guidelines

Attachment D - Metro Board Motion 9.1 - December 2021

Attachment E - Metro Board Motion 40 - May 2020

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