



## Board Report

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**OPERATIONS, SAFETY AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE  
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
OCTOBER 18, 2018**

**SUBJECT: NEXTGEN UPDATE: TRANSIT COMPETITIVENESS AND MARKET POTENTIAL**

**ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE an update on NextGen transit competitiveness and market potential information.

### **ISSUE**

On June 28, 2018, the Board of Directors approved Motion 38.1 in relation to Item 38: NextGen Bus Study Service Parameters. The Motion directed the NextGen Bus Study to endorse travel speed, service frequency, and system reliability as the highest priority service parameters to guide the work of the project. With these service parameters defined, this report responds with detailed findings on where these service parameters fit as Metro seeks to prioritize service concepts in the next phase of the project.

### **BACKGROUND**

The goal of the NextGen Bus Study is to design a new bus network that is more relevant, reflective of, and attractive to the residents of LA County. Since 2014, Metro has seen a decline in bus ridership around 20%. This is consistent with many transit agencies across the nation. There are a number of potential explanations for the ridership decline, so it is important to fully understand these issues, particularly as it relates to the diverse needs of LA County.

While Metro's bus network carries over 70% of combined Metro bus and rail ridership, the bus network has not seen major changes in over 25 years. Today, there are more people, more places to go, and more ways to get there. As a result, Metro's bus network has fallen out of alignment with the way people need to travel today.

### **DISCUSSION**

The NextGen Bus Study seeks to improve the bus network for current, former and potential customers. While it is critical to examine the data, it is important to engage with the community and

understand their preferences. As a result, the project has completed a robust campaign of outreach to date.

- 113,000 Multi-lingual Take Ones
- 350,000 Database Contacts
- 30+ Community Based Organization, Faith-Based & Community Events/Presentations
- 25+ Regional Service Council Presentations
- 18+ Community Pop-Up Events
- 10 Rap Sessions with Bus Divisions
- 3 Working Group Meetings
- 3 Customer Care Focus Group Sessions
- 2 Da Vinci High School Student Workshops
- 2 Telephone Town Halls
- 2 Technical Advisory Committee Meetings
- 2 Internal Working Group Meetings

The NextGen Bus Study has determined that there are four types of riders.

- 7% Frequent (ride 3-4 times per week)
- 22% Occasional (ride 2-3 times per month)
- 55% Infrequent (ride 1-2 times per year)
- 16% Non-Rider

While the number of frequent riders only accounts for 7% of all LA County residents, frequent riders represent 80% of all Metro bus boardings. However, the frequent rider base has been declining, as there are a number of publicized factors for this, including affordable car loans, more reliable cars, ease of getting a driver's license, rideshare expansion, and displacement. This means that every frequent rider lost accounts for 2-3 times loss in ridership. The question becomes whether it is prudent to continue prioritizing a shrinking ridership base or explore emerging markets which may have different travel preferences.

According to the Metro Customer Survey conducted in 2017, 31% of current riders stated that their main reason for riding for convenience. Some other positive attributes included not wanting to drive in traffic, good for the environment, and cheaper than parking. Primary improvements desired among current riders were more frequent and reliable service. When compared with Non-Riders, their main reason for not riding is because the bus is too slow from traffic and too many transfers. However, both current riders and non-riders agree that the most important service parameters Metro should focus on are being fast, frequent and reliable. This is consistent with the service parameters outlined in Motion 40.1.

With existing levels of service, Metro cannot be fast, frequent and reliable along every corridor, all day and everyday. Therefore, policy choices must be made to prioritize where and when it makes sense to implement these parameters.

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While many people perceive the Metro bus network to not go where people want to travel, the Metro system in fact covers 85% of all trips in LA County. In many cases, however, these trips are not time competitive with other options. The study examined transit speed competitiveness by using a combination of TAP data and cell phone, location-based data to learn where and when people wanted to travel for both transit and non-transit trips. These trips were then calculated through trip planners to compare travel times and establish which markets are compatible for transit. The analysis revealed that transit can be competitive with other trips so long as it does not take more than twice as long as driving.

A transit journey generally consists of two components, the walk/wait time at the bus stop, then the on-board time as the bus is traveling. These two factors make up total transit travel time. For short trips, the walk/wait time is more critical to riders, as studies show the perception of wait time can be 2-3 times the actual time. For longer trips, the on-board time becomes more critical, as riders spend the majority of time traveling on the bus as opposed to waiting at a bus stop. This reveals that to be competitive for short trips, frequency is critical for minimizing the walk/wait time. To be competitive for long trips, travel speed is critical for minimizing the on-board time. Travel speed can be improved by a number of strategies, including dedicated bus lanes, transit signal priority, and bus stop consolidation.

Today, Metro captures the greatest market share on long distance riders traveling over 10 miles. However, the overall market for long distance trips, whether transit or non-transit, represents only 16% of total trips taken in LA County. The largest amount of total trips are within a shorter distance of 1-5 miles, representing 46% of total trips taken in LA County. If Metro can match its transit share of this 1-5 mile segment with the long distance segment, bus ridership would increase by 500,000 trips.

In order to address the large, short distance trip market, Metro must understand when, where and why these trips generally occur. Short trips serve a variety of purposes, including workers traveling to a local business, single mothers running errands with children, and people traveling for dining or entertainment. These trips all share a similar attribute that the travel occurs primarily during the midday and evening period. This is in contrast to the long distance, commute trips which tend to be during the morning and evening rush hour, focused on major employment centers. As a result, while Metro service currently serves the morning and evening commute trips well, there are missed opportunities for midday and late evening travel when many short distance, non-commute trips are being made.

In summary, there are two areas where Metro should focus on to better meet the needs of LA County travel. First, Metro should build on its success of long distance, commute trips by improving on-board travel times. Second, Metro should enter the short distance, non-commute market where nearly 50% of total LA County trips are made by improving frequencies to reduce wait time at bus stops. These areas for improvement will be selected based on a data driven analysis and extensive public outreach.

## **DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT**

The recommended action of improving on-board travel times and service frequencies will enhance Metro's ability to provide service that is safe and reliable.

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## **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

Approval of this recommendation supports the following Metro Strategic Plan Goals: Provide high-quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling. Deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system. Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity. Provide responsive, accountable, and trustworthy governance within the Metro organization. This project will improve safety, service, and reliability in an effort to provide a world-class transportation system that enhances quality of life for all who live, work, and play within LA County.

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The fulfillment of this project could be accomplished through maintaining the existing bus network. For this project, staff does not recommend this approach. Staff asserts that there are distinct advantages to Metro in better responding to meet the needs of where, when and why people travel in LA County today. As a result, Metro expects bus ridership to improve both in quantity and quality.

## **NEXT STEPS**

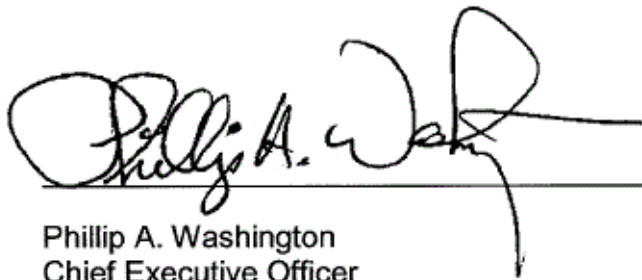
Staff will continue working with the NextGen Working Group to prioritize service concepts, then return to the Board in January 2019 with a recommendation on service concepts. If approved, staff will begin translating service concepts into line-by-line improvements for service changes starting in December 2019 and continuing through June 2020.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - NextGen FAQ

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