



Board Report

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EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE NOVEMBER 15, 2018

SUBJECT: TRANSIT LINE OPERATIONAL NAMING CONVENTION

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION

CONSIDER:

- A. AUTHORIZING the CEO to establish a Transit Line Operational Naming Convention to change the current naming convention to a color and letter designation for rail lines and bus rapid transit lines; and
- B. APPROVING a phased implementation plan that takes advantage of planned capital projects and a phased transition through the completion of the Regional Connector Project.

ISSUE

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) is implementing the largest transportation expansion program in the nation. As Metro grows, the agency will add more rail and bus rapid transit (BRT) lines across LA County. In addition, when the Regional Connector Project is complete, the agency will unite the operations of the Blue and Gold Lines, providing a one-seat ride between Azusa and Long Beach, and the operations of the Gold and Expo Lines, facilitating a one-seat ride between East LA and Santa Monica. Now is a timely opportunity for the agency to establish a consistent operational naming convention for the rail and BRT system that can sustain the agency's expansion and enhance the customer experience.

BACKGROUND

Metro's current transit line naming convention is inconsistent, and the system is growing and changing. All current line names are based on colors (Blue, Red, Gold, Purple, etc.) with one exception - the Expo Line. As the system grows, continuing with color names will mean selecting line names based on shades of color (i.e. Lime, Rose, Aqua, Olive, Lavender, etc.) rather than basic colors. This can pose visual and language barriers and can sometimes be difficult to decipher on maps and signage.

DISCUSSION

There are currently eight rail and BRT lines operating in Metro's system. With the passage of Measure M in 2016, the agency will build out and operate several additional rail and BRT lines in the coming years. Staff believes the time is right to establish the naming convention of the future due to the following logic:

Clarity and Consistency

- The agency needs a clear, consistent, uniform wayfinding system to enhance the riding experience.
- Clarity of information and making it easy to use the system reflects the goals of The Metro Vision 2028 Strategic Plan, which commits to the agency being customer-focused and working to improve customer satisfaction.
- Adding a second identifier (i.e. letters or numbers) to the line identification will improve legibility of signage and informational materials.

The Timing is Right

- The New Blue Improvements Project is an opportunity to launch a new naming convention at minimal cost.
- The Crenshaw/LAX Light Rail Project will soon be fabricating signage and a new naming convention can be incorporated at no additional cost.
- The Regional Connector Project will unite the Gold and Blue Lines between Azusa and Long Beach, and the Gold and Expo Lines between East LA and Santa Monica, which will change the existing operations and how the agency will refer to the lines.

World-Class System

- Metro already serves a diverse population that lives, works and plays in LA County, which will grow, especially when the agency welcomes the world for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.
- Major international transit systems utilize this degree of clarity and consistency, which is considered an industry-wide best practice.

Staff researched naming conventions used by various transit agencies around the world and found some common alternatives: colors and numbers, colors and letters, and colors only. In some cases, agencies name their lines for destinations or geographic location. Colors are used in all cases to define the differences among lines on maps and other informational materials. However, because similar colors can be difficult to decipher, colors are often paired with a second identifier to improve legibility.

Public Opinion Research

Staff conducted public research in collaboration with a consultant partnership of Consensus and FM3 Research through a series of focus groups, an online public survey and pop-up events. In these research efforts the team tested the alternatives most commonly used in the transit industry: colors and numbers, colors and letters, colors only and Metro's current naming convention, a combination of colors and geographic location. Five focus groups were conducted at different locations around LA County with a cross-section of participants representing diverse backgrounds from each county

supervisory district. The focus groups were conducted with English-speaking riders, English-speaking non-riders, Spanish-speaking riders, English-speaking visually impaired individuals, and Korean-speaking residents to get feedback from a group whose language uses a different alphabet. While focus groups do not result in statistically precise data, they are an opportunity to collect qualitative feedback that helps guide a rationale for preferences.

Several findings emerged from the focus groups. Participants felt that consistency across the system is the most important factor when naming lines. They also said if Metro decides to change its operational naming system, to do it as soon as possible to give people the chance to get used to it as the system grows.

Following the focus groups, staff conducted an online survey to get quantitative research data and Metro's consultant team held field research pop-up events at some Metro rail stations and community events. Both research efforts tested ease of use and navigation of the four naming conventions, and which one was easiest to recognize and use if riders were in a hurry.

The survey was targeted to a diverse cross-section of geographic and demographic representation across LA County via Facebook. In the pop-up engagement events, staff showed participants the naming alternatives on boards and cell phones and recorded their reactions through the online survey. In all, the effort resulted in 3,500 completed surveys from current riders, potential riders and potential visitors including English and Spanish-speaking participants.

When participants were asked which naming option would be easiest to understand and navigate, colors and numbers and colors and letters ended up in a virtual tie. Many respondents feel that having a second identifier along with the color provides more clarity and helps to differentiate the lines from one other. A challenge of adding letters as a second identifier is that people sometimes want to associate letters with something else, like E means East or Express, or S means South or Santa Monica. The biggest challenge of adding numbers is that they conflict with both the agency's number-based bus system as well as its rail station platform numbering.

Once all research results were compiled, a team of cross-departmental staff and consultants held a work session to evaluate the research along with industry best practices and lessons learned to build the staff recommendation for Metro's future transit line naming convention.

Various factors were considered in shaping the staff recommendation for a future operational naming convention. Clear, consistent, simple information enhances the customer experience and makes riding Metro less intimidating. Legacy names like the Expo Line, Gold Line, Crenshaw/LAX Line, etc. and the operational names of the lines can live in harmony. People can still refer to the legacy or corridor names, but consistent operational names are important for navigation purposes. And finally, no naming convention is perfect; there are benefits and challenges with all of them.

Taking all factors into consideration, staff believes the best transit line naming convention for the future is colors and letters for both rail lines and bus rapid transit lines. This prevents confusion with the numbering of the bus system and rail station platforms and provides an ample number of letter names to accommodate Metro's planned transit lines. Staff recommends assigning line names based on the chronology of line openings, so the Blue Line would be the A Line, Red Line the B Line, etc.

Phased Implementation Approach

Staff recommends transitioning to the new transit line naming system through a phased implementation plan that minimizes costs and takes advantage of planned capital projects (i.e. New Blue Improvements Project, Crenshaw/LAX Project, Regional Connector Project). The Blue Line would be the first line to debut the new naming convention when the line reopens to the public after the New Blue Improvements Project.

With the opening of the Crenshaw/LAX Line and simultaneous operational changes to the Green Line, the rest of the lines would then transition to their new names with the exception of the Gold Line. When the Regional Connector Project is complete, the north segment of the Gold Line will join the Blue Line (the A Line) and be shown as a blue line on the map to show a one-seat ride between Long Beach and Azusa. Also at that time, the east segment of the Gold Line will join the Expo Line (the E Line) and be shown as a gold line on the map for a one-seat ride between East LA and Santa Monica. This will prevent the Gold Line from having to change to a letter name twice. Following the completion of the Regional Connector, the conversion to the new naming convention will be complete.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Staff has developed a cost estimate for a phased approach to change signage and customer information across the system, as well as marketing and outreach to educate the public. The estimated cost for phased implementation is \$8.9 million.

As the gradual conversion is made, staff recommends that changes in signage and information are funded from system advertising revenues.

If the Board chooses to keep the existing naming convention but decides to change the naming convention in the future after some capital projects are complete, it will require retrofitting signage and customer information, which will ultimately result in increased costs.

NEXT STEPS

If the Board approves the staff recommendation, staff will begin the process of transitioning to the new naming convention, starting with the Blue Line while the New Blue Improvements Project is underway. This will take advantage of the shutdown to change the naming convention of the line during the project so that the line can debut with its new name when it reopens to the public. Staff will also work with the relative Metro departments to complete the transition to the new naming convention with the completion of the Crenshaw/LAX and Regional Connector Projects.

A robust public education and marketing program will be a key component to helping riders understand the system's naming convention, while also helping non-riders find the experience easy, inviting and less intimidating. So, Communications staff will develop and rollout a comprehensive public education program during each phase of the naming convention implementation program.

As the agency works to achieve the customer satisfaction goals of the Metro Vision 2028 Strategic Plan, implementing a consistent, easy-to-understand, customer-focused transit line naming

convention is a significant step in enhancing the overall customer experience.

ATTACHMENT

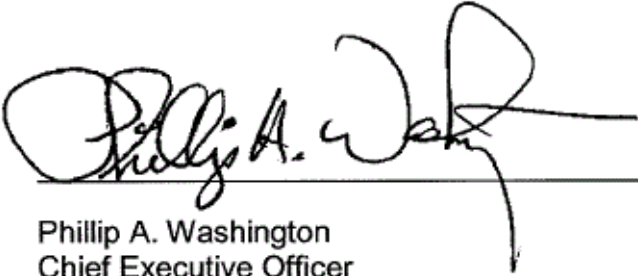
Attachment A - Summary of Public Opinion Research and Staff Recommendation

Attachment B - Line Naming Change Cost Estimate Summary

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