



Board Report

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Agenda Number: 24.

**OPERATIONS, SAFETY AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE
JANUARY 20, 2022**

SUBJECT: QUARTERLY UPDATE ON METRO’S HOMELESS OUTREACH EFFORTS

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE Update on Metro’s Homeless Outreach Efforts.

ISSUE

Metro continues to fund and deploy C3 (community, city, and county) street-based teams to conduct homeless outreach services throughout Metro’s transit system to connect riders with supportive resources and housing. Multi-disciplinary outreach teams, in partnership with the County’s Department of Health Services, Los Angeles City Attorney’s Office (LA DOOR), and the Dream Center conduct outreach on the system daily.

Staff provides quarterly updates to this Committee on its continued outreach efforts to assess the impacts of Metro’s outreach initiative on homelessness within Los Angeles County, on Metro’s system,, and assess the impacts on Metro’s overall customer experience. This quarterly report outlines the outreach efforts throughout the months of September, October, and November 2021.

BACKGROUND

Historically, Homeless Outreach & Strategic Planning was managed by System Security & Law Enforcement. As of November 2021, at the direction of Metro’s Chief Executive Officer, Homeless Outreach & Strategic Planning efforts have been realigned to the Office of the Chief of Staff within the Office of the CEO.

Since 2016, Metro has made significant progress in addressing homelessness on the Metro system by expanding its resources and partnering with community-based organizations and outreach through the Department of Health Services. Metro has connected individuals with supportive resources and housing throughout the COVID-19 pandemic at an increased rate. Metro’s street-based outreach teams, People Assisting the Homeless (PATH), are deployed daily on the Metro system to meet individuals and connect them to services and housing. Since 2017, PATH connected with 10,264 individuals experiencing homelessness on the Metro system. PATH has successfully connected 2,571 individuals with interim housing, including crisis and bridge housing.

To address the countywide housing shortage - Metro expanded its outreach services to include funding for interim housing and supportive services for individuals on our system at the Home At Last shelter in South Los Angeles.

In October 2021, the Board approved Amendment Number 4 to the Letter of Agreement for Multidisciplinary Street-Based Engagement Services with the Department of Health Services. The Letter of Agreement extended the term of the Agreement for People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) through June 2023. The Letter of Agreement also extended the Home At Last interim-housing program through January 2022.

DISCUSSION

People Assisting the Homeless (PATH) Outreach on the Metro System

Metro's homeless street-based outreach services are provided by PATH under the Department of Health Services' administration. Metro funds eight street-based outreach teams deployed seven days a week on Metro's system. These forty PATH staff make up multi-disciplinary teams of outreach workers, case managers, addiction specialists, clinicians, and medical personnel. Every day, PATH collects data regarding homeless outreach on Metro's system - including the number of contacts, engagement/enrollment, placement, and challenges.

By tracking the number of daily contacts throughout the system, Metro can assess the number of unhoused individuals PATH serves on the Metro system daily. PATH has shared that initial contact is important, and often individuals take more than one contact or meeting before they are willing to initiate the process of receiving services and housing. . When an individual agrees to receive services, they are enrolled in the countywide Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) managed by the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (LAHSA). The HMIS is an online database that stores the relevant information for individuals and allows organizations to track the services they provide to individuals and assess their needs as they move towards better care and housing placement.

During this period, Metro's PATH homeless outreach teams contacted 605 individuals on the Metro system, a 15% increase over the previous quarter. This number does not show the total picture of homelessness on Metro's system, but it indicates that PATH teams are successfully engaging with homeless individuals and building trust, which is the first step to connect unhoused individuals to the services and housing that they need.

PATH engaged or enrolled 440 individuals, a 10 percent increase over the previous quarter. This increase in enrollment indicates a willingness by individuals to receive services and shows that PATH is successfully building connections with unhoused Metro riders.

Connection to housing and supportive services is Metro's core goal in its ongoing outreach efforts. PATH refers individuals to interim shelters and housing and tracks that data through interim housing placement, linkages to permanent housing, and permanent housing placement. As a homeless service provider and outreach partner, PATH can access a network of existing housing and supportive services for each client, including short-term/emergency housing and interim and permanent housing. During this period, PATH was able to refer 151 individuals to interim housing and permanently placed 71 individuals in housing. This shows that the C3 system is working. Figure 1 below shows the data collected from September - November 2021.

Compared to the previous quarter, interim housing placement was down significantly - this is due in large part to COVID quarantine restrictions placed on interim shelter locations. When interim shelters find positive COVID cases among residents, they are required to immediately lock down the facility and not accept any new referrals for the quarantine period. This has shown to be a challenge during the months of October and November, where Metro's Home At Last facility was on quarantine for extended periods during those months. PATH accesses other housing resources, like Project RoomKey motel vouchers, and other facilities to match clients with interim housing while they provide supportive services to ensure successful long-term housing

placements.

Contacts and Engagements are the first steps to connecting unhoused Metro riders with the housing and services they need. The Interim Housing, Linkage to Permanent Housing and Permanent Housing Placement graph shows the number of individuals that Metro has been able to connect with housing. This is a key indicator that Metro’s funding for these efforts shows that we are a partner in the fight to end homelessness in LA County.

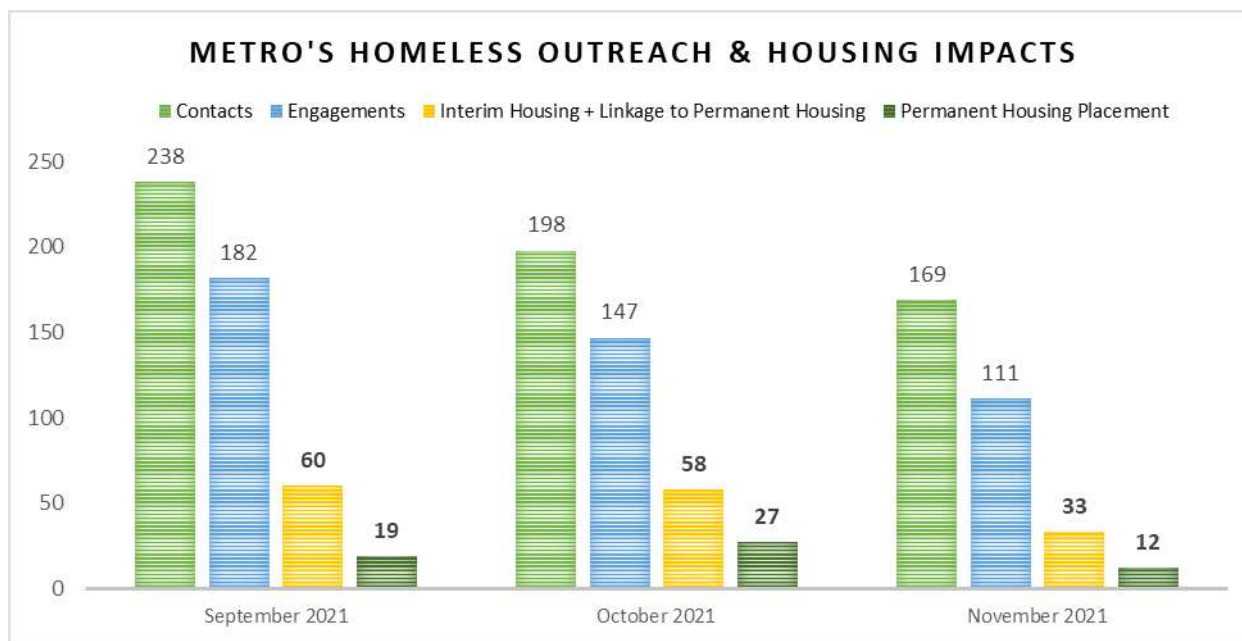


Figure 1. Metro’s Homeless Outreach and Housing Impacts September - November 2021.

Coordination with System Security & Law Enforcement on Outreach

The outreach efforts through the pandemic focused on the rail system stations and rail cars - due to Metro’s Operation “Shelter the Unsheltered” program to complement Facilities Maintenance’s heightened cleaning protocols on the rail system. PATH teams are deployed throughout the system, providing daily outreach to individuals from 3 a.m. - 3 p.m. Additionally, PATH teams are deployed to active encampments reported to be on or adjacent to Metro-owned facilities, property, and right-of-way.

Due to the heightened cleaning protocols required by MetroPATH teams are also assigned to end of rail line station platforms to conduct outreach to individuals at five key rail stations, North Hollywood, 7th/Metro, Union Station, Long Beach and Santa Monica. The data from this targeted effort is represented in PATH’s systemwide outreach data. This effort continues to be a collaboration between Metro’s Homeless Outreach, System Security & Law Enforcement, and Operations departments since it involves coordination with law enforcement and Metro security to offload individuals from train cars at the end of the line.

For the Operation “Shelter the Unsheltered” program, PATH outreach teams are at key rail stations as a resource for individuals who want to receive help and be connected with housing. This program was especially impactful during the height of the COVID pandemic in the spring of 2021, and it helped Metro connect hundreds of individuals with interim housing options quickly and effectively. We are now finding that the effort will need to be re-evaluated for its effectiveness during the summer and the fall. Metro also maintains no-cost partnerships with LA DOOR and the Dream Center to conduct outreach at Metro rail stations.

System Security & Law Enforcement continues to oversee the partnership with law enforcement for the homeless outreach teams to be deployed on the Metro system and at encampments on, and adjacent to, Metro-owned property. City of Los Angeles Police Department deploys the HOPE team, LA County Sheriff's Department deploys MET team, and Long Beach Police Department deploys the QOL team to engage and provide outreach to unhoused individuals during the hours that PATH is not on the system, and also at encampment sites. These law enforcement teams are multi-disciplinary, like PATH, but also include specially trained law enforcement officers, who are trained on trauma-informed response, as a part of the teams.

During the period of September - November 2021 law enforcement partners outreach included:

- LAPD HOPE: 540 Contacts, 81 Referrals, 38 Housed*
- LASD MET: 2,348 contacts, 12 Referrals, 13 Housed*
- LBPD QOL: 257 Contacts, 65 Referrals, 4 Housed*

*Combined housing placement data shows individuals placed in shelter, motel, Veterans Administration housing, family reunification, transitional/long-term housing, detox and rehab)

Outreach at Encampment Sites Countywide

There are hundreds of encampments on or near Metro-owned property, facilities, and right-of-way reported and tracked annually. Outreach at encampment sites requires daily response and close coordination between Metro's PATH teams, System Security & Law Enforcement, Operations/Facilities Maintenance departments. Metro has instituted an encampment response protocol that requires homeless outreach teams to be the first point of contact to connect individuals to services at the reported site. Staff has found that outreach efforts are generally successful in connecting unhoused individuals with services and housing. However, some individuals are not receptive to services and require follow up from law enforcement.

Currently, Metro has an active encampment list of 12 locations countywide that Metro is tracking. . Encampment outreach efforts require PATH teams to be re-deployed to various sites around the county that are not necessarily near bus or rail stations, taking PATH resources off of the bus and rail system frequently. If individuals accept services or housing placement, their personal property is transported to the housing site or facility. The encampment then requires a special post-engagement clean-up team to ensure that the site is cleared of debris, trash, or potential biohazards. Encampment site response requires Metro funding for the homeless outreach and engagement, system security and law enforcement response, facilities and maintenance clean-up, and infrastructure improvements to secure areas and ensure that employees, the public, and Metro assets remain safe.

Better coordination with LA City Council, County of LA homeless service providers, and dedicated outreach teams would allow for more engagement. It could help limit individuals from returning to the encampment sites after being cleared. Encampments are often reported to Metro that are in the public right of way, posing severe safety and risk to Metro assets at bus and rail divisions, specifically. Metro is currently working on a long-term strategy to address the issues near Division 1 (1130 E 6th St, Los Angeles, CA 90021) and Division 2 (720 E 15th St, Los Angeles, CA 90021).

Home At Last (HAL) Interim Shelter Program

PATH teams who meet clients on the system who ultimately accept a referral to an emergency or interim housing location often have to call multiple shelters to find a space for the new client. During the COVID crisis - shelters had limited space due to strict restrictions. The Home At Last (HAL) shelter, located in South Los Angeles, was a Department of Health Services (DHS) COVID emergency shelter through February 2021. The shelter was set to close and is now funded by Metro. This shelter remains open to serve 80 individuals. It is

an added resource to connect individuals to emergency housing and the supportive services needed to move individuals from unhoused to “housing-ready.”

Although COVID restrictions have begun to lift, and permanent supportive housing around LA county may become available, there is still a need for additional shelter beds. Staff is recommending an extension and additional funding to extend this program until June 30, 2022, in a separate item for the board's consideration in January 2022.

Interim Housing for Families and At-Risk Individuals

PATH places individuals at interim housing facilities countywide, including some motel locations through the county's motel voucher, Family Solutions Center, and Project Roomkey programs. Typically - when Metro's PATH teams engage with families with children and at-risk individuals, such as individuals with severe mental and/or physical health needs, a motel is an alternative to typical communal interim housing facilities for single males and females. The county has limited interim housing options for families and high-need individuals. Due to limited funding and strict restrictions on Project Roomkey, Metro funds interim housing and motel stays for specific individuals. Attachment B provides details on client cases and details on expenditures.

Extended motel stays are expensive in comparison to some other interim-shelter placements. However, sometimes this is the only option to rapidly house individuals met on the system. PATH teams work diligently to ensure that individuals and families placed in motels are connected to supportive services such as medical and social services and continue to work to find permanent housing. PATH also has partnerships with motels to negotiate discounted room-rates for referred clients. PATH staff has confirmed that the Family Solutions Center which provides housing services for families with children and pregnant women, has a backlog of pending placements. They have also confirmed that flexible funding is currently frozen for motel vouchers administered by the People's Concern, the lead homeless service provider for the Service Planning Area 4 - Central Los Angeles Metro area. The flexible funding should become available again in spring 2022 for PATH to serve clients through Metro's outreach.

Metro SSLE Bus & Rail Point-In-Time One Day Homeless Observation/Count

On August 25, 2021, Metro SSLE in collaboration with our Law Enforcement partners and Operations conducted a one-day Point-In-Time Homeless Count on all directly operated bus and rail lines. Law enforcement observed and counted persons who appeared to be homeless on trains and in stations at 7 a.m. and again at 7 p.m. Bus Operators observed and reported the number of individuals who appeared homeless on-board buses at various times throughout the day - 12 a.m., 2 a.m., 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.

The figure below shows that many homeless individuals observed on the Metro system are on the bus lines. The Metro Service Council area with the highest concentration of homeless individuals observed during the August 25, 2021, count is the Westside/Central Los Angeles area. On the bus system - 95.7% of the total population observed was present during the early morning hours - 2 a.m. - 6 a.m. Compared to the January 2021 Point-In-Time count, there was a 26.4 percent decrease in the number of individuals observed on board trains and at rail stations. This could indicate the increase in PATH outreach efforts on-board rail and at rail stations.

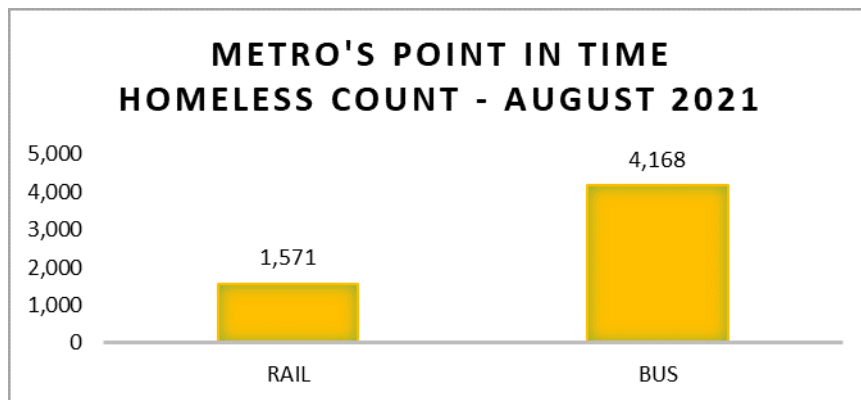


Figure 2. Metro's SSLE Homeless Point-In-Time One-Day Count - August 25, 2021.

With the Homeless Outreach effort transitioning to the Office of the CEO a new methodology for collecting data on the comprehensive assessment of homelessness on the Metro system will be developed and used moving forward. Staff is working with the Customer Experience department and with external partners to ensure that, moving forward, Metro's Point-In-Time count reflects the methodology, metrics and accuracy of the county and LAHSA's annual counts.

Outreach Impacts

It is important to have realistic measures of success in implementing a program like Metro's homeless outreach program. As the function transitions from System Security/Law Enforcement to the Office of the CEO, staff is redefining what success is and the program's goals. Staff will report back to the Board regularly with updates and to share the program progress and impact.

To-date - the outreach efforts have been successful in connecting riders experiencing homelessness with much-needed support services and housing options. Since 2017:

- **Over 5,300 individuals have been engaged by PATH teams and entered into the county's Homeless Management Information System for follow-up, assessment, and services.**
- **And nearly half - more than 2,500 have been connected with emergency and interim housing.**
- **Over 500 individuals have been permanently housed through Metro's work with DHS/PATH.**

This model has proven to work - and continues to be successful in helping the City of Los Angeles and the County in its fight to end homelessness.

Local, State and Federal Funding

Currently, Metro uses Operations funding to support the homeless outreach efforts annually. Homelessness in LA county continues to grow, and it is reflected in the continued work that Metro's PATH and partnerships do month over month. To sustain and improve Metro's overall impacts to reduce homelessness on Metro's system additional funding will be needed in the future. There is available funding for affordable housing and improved homeless response services locally, statewide, and nationally. Currently, Metro is not a dedicated recipient of any of these funds. Staff will be working with LA City Council Districts and LA county Supervisorial Districts and transit agencies statewide to identify short and long-term funding sources that can assist Metro in this comprehensive response effort.

Comprehensive Evaluation

Recovery from the pandemic offers an opportunity to reexamine our current program and partnerships to

better coordinate, avoid duplication of efforts, and effectively leverage and maximize resources. Staff will engage the services of a consultant to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of Metro's homeless programs and provide recommendations for how Metro should best structure its investment in homeless programs to yield the most benefits for the transit system and our customers while also providing solutions that connect the homeless to appropriate housing and supportive services. This will further create opportunities to align homeless strategies, resulting in better leveraging and coordination of services and funds.

EQUITY PLATFORM

Expanding Metro's efforts to address homelessness on the transit system will directly benefit people experiencing chronic homelessness, African-Americans, and Latinos who disproportionately experience homelessness in LA County, specifically. Data from the 2020 LAHSA point-in-time count shows that a majority (over 64%) of individuals experiencing homelessness are male, and over 35% are African American individuals and families experiencing chronic homelessness. In comparison to statewide available data - African Americans represent 5.6% of California's total population - but 31% of those receiving homelessness services are African American.

Increasing local, state and federal funding and efforts in specific LAHSA designated Service Planning Areas throughout LA County that have higher concentrations of homeless individuals will address the most need and directly impact Metro's efforts to invest in Equity Focus Communities. Metro has invested in outreach services that span the Metro system. With greater coordination and expansion into areas with the most need - Metro can form additional low or no-cost partnerships with service providers and other agencies in equity focus communities to ensure that our outreach efforts are equitable and effective. An assessment of which communities have the highest need is needed to provide more effective outreach.

Statewide, 47% of homeless individuals are awaiting permanent housing placements. Reducing homelessness outreach and interim/short-term housing options will adversely impact PATH's ability to connect individuals to the services they need while they wait for permanent housing and will have a disproportionate impact on chronically unhoused families and individuals in Los Angeles county.

NEXT STEPS

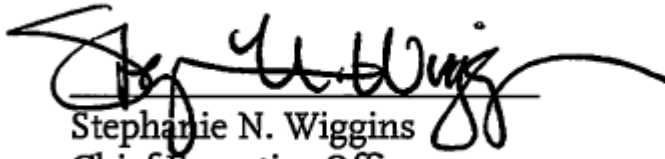
Staff will engage the services of a consultant to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of Metro's homeless programs and staff will return to the board in June 2022 with recommendations.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - September - November 2021 - PATH Homeless Outreach Data & Motel Report
Attachment B - September - November 2021 - Operation "Shelter the Unsheltered" Data

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