



## Board Report

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### OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE OCTOBER 20, 2022

**SUBJECT: OCTOBER 2022 SERVICE CHANGES AND RESTORATION**

**ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE a status report on October 2022 service change and restoration of 200,000 annualized bus revenue service hours.

#### **ISSUE**

Metro traditionally implements transit service changes (bus and rail) in June and December of each year. Metro plans to implement an additional service change effective Sunday, October 23, 2022, a second phase to restore the full pre-COVID 7 million revenue service hours (annualized). With these changes, annualized bus revenue service hours will increase from approximately 6.5 million revenue service hours to 6.7 million revenue service hours.

#### **BACKGROUND**

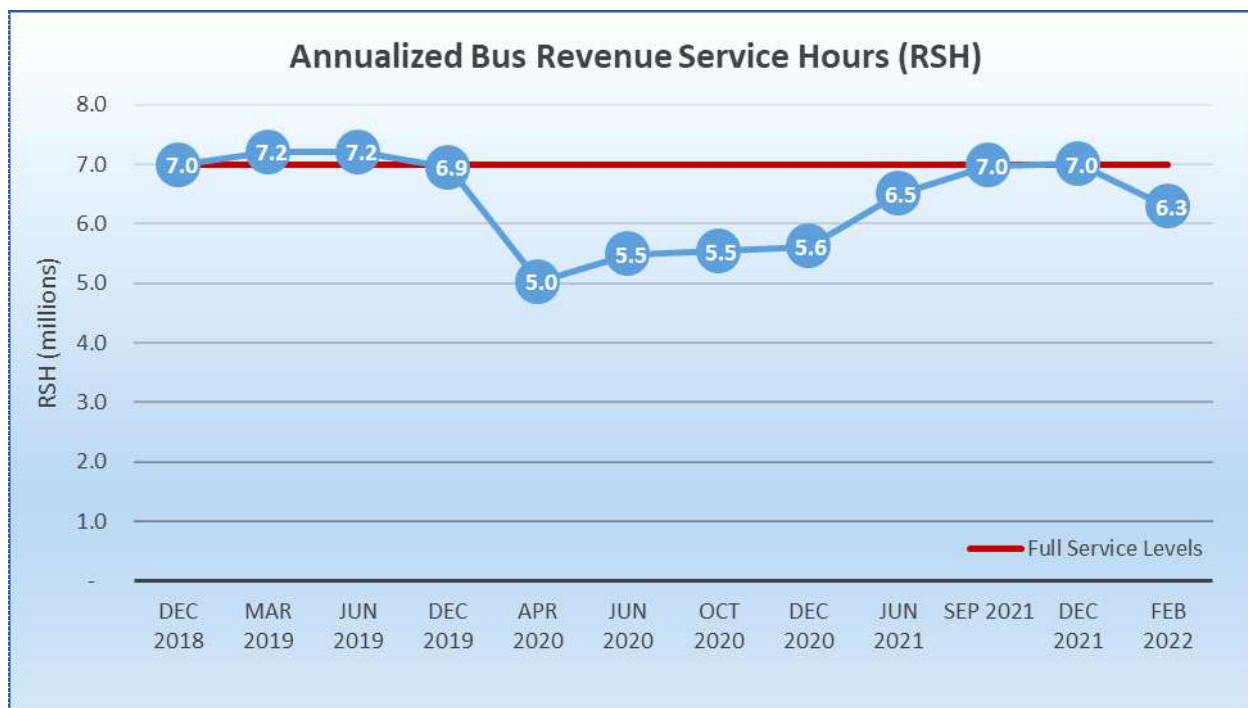
Metro's twice-annual service change program allows Metro to improve the customer experience through revised transit routes and schedules. However, since the onset of the pandemic in early 2020, multiple service changes have been implemented to respond to the impacts on ridership and operator availability:

- 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 as a result 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.
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*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).

Given the shortage of operators, it is anticipated that cancellations and ordered call backs will slightly increase when the 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 caes in September.
- Active bus operator numbers are trending up (3178 as of the end of September). This trend should 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 as the October service change, the second round of service restoration, is implemented. While there are no changes to rail service levels as part of the October 2022 service change, the change was coordinated with the launch of the new Crenshaw K Line service on October 7, 2022.

## **DISCUSSION**

The October 2022 service change follows the same service restoration framework used for the June 2022 service changes. This framework focuses on Service Quality, valuing our Employees, and restoring the NextGen Bus Plan service levels. This change restores 200,000 annualized revenue service hours, increasing from 6.5 to 6.7 M RSH (annualized).

An additional 17 weekday, 16 Saturday, and 15 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 prioritized lines with the highest load factors, with 15 weekday, 5 Saturday, and 5 Sunday lines seeing increased service frequencies, with 3 other weekday, 2 Saturday, and 1 Sunday lines gaining a small number of extra trips to accommodate increased ridership. 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 October 2022 service change, including NextGen Bus Plan changes (Lines 78, 212, 224, 237, 534, 690) and adjustments for the opening of the Crenshaw K Line rail service (Lines 40, 111, 210, 211, 215 and new C & K Line Link between the C and K Lines). These changes are detailed in Attachment D.

Implementation will include staff attending major stops to inform riders of changes, as well as printed materials (summary brochure and schedules) 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 October 2022 service change will improve both the quality and quantity of service provided

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across the Metro bus network and especially in EFCs. 11 of the 15 bus lines seeing added service and 12 of the 19 lines with revised schedules for improved on time performance in the October 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 October 2022 service change ensures Metro continues 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 equity focus areas 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 and 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**

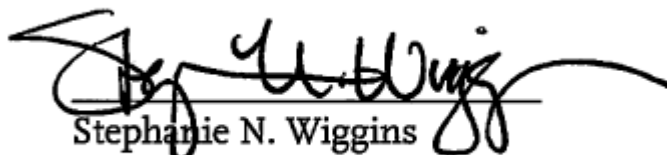
Staff will implement the October 2022 service change on Sunday, October 23, with the marketing of the changes occurring beginning October 10<sup>th</sup> and continuing up to and beyond the implementation date.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

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

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