



Board Report

File #: 2016-0693, **File Type:** Motion / Motion Response

Agenda Number: 8.

**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 19, 2016**

SUBJECT: TRANSIT TO OPEN SPACE AND PARKS MOTION RESPONSE

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE REPORT RESPONDING TO BOARD MOTION ON OPEN SPACE AND PARKS

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE status report on **Transit to Open Space and Parks Motion response.**

ISSUE

On June 23, 2016, the Metro Board of Directors approved a motion (Attachment B) directing an action plan to better connect communities to open space and parks. The motion required a report back to the Board on the October 2016 agenda.

DISCUSSION

This report details a preliminary review of park access issues and describes a work plan for addressing those issues. In summary, Metro staff will initiate a strategic planning process to achieve the following objectives:

- Analyze park access needs across the county with a focus on disadvantaged park-poor communities. Review and evaluate prior efforts by Metro and other transit agencies to improve open space access;
- Guide decision making on future projects and investments;
- Engage potential partners and other stakeholders; and
- Recommend potential Metro and partner activities to improve access to parks and open space.

As noted in the Board Motion, Los Angeles County has a wealth of open space and recreational assets. Often, however, those assets are out of reach for many county residents, particularly for lower income disadvantaged communities. Access barriers include physical distance, lack of transportation options for non-auto owners, as well as periodic heavy traffic and constrained parking

especially for popular destinations at peak times. At the same time, lower income and disadvantaged communities would benefit most from improved access, especially in places that have inadequate opportunities for local recreation and physical activity, and that suffer from poor air quality, or other conditions that lead to poor health outcomes. A 2016 study by the LA County Department of Public Health concluded a clear correlation between economic hardship, reduced local park space, and premature mortality and cardiovascular disease among other health issues.

Technical Approach

Metro's proposed work in addressing the motion emphasizes connecting park-poor disadvantaged communities to regionally significant open space. As such, the work effort will define and analyze key indicators including:

- Park needs - Metro's effort will index availability of parks, open space, and recreational opportunities within the county. There have been numerous prior efforts at creating a park inventory in Los Angeles County, including the recent Los Angeles County Comprehensive Parks and Recreation Needs Assessment (hereinafter LA County Needs Assessment) which we can draw upon and adapt for a countywide effort focused on transportation. The LA County Needs Assessment ranked 188 study areas in the county into five categories of need based on availability of parks compared to population.
- Disadvantaged communities - Similarly, there are several current measures for disadvantaged communities, including the CalEnviroScreen scoring method used in Cap-and-Trade and other state funding programs. The LA County Needs Assessment, although it did not consider socio-economic or health indicators in its needs ranking, did include a compilation of indicators, with a focus on health and air quality. Other methods include the USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity (PERE) Environmental Justice Screening Method, and the Public Health Alliance of Southern California's Southern California Health Disadvantage Index. Metro's effort will review available methods and determine which is most applicable to this work effort.
- Park/Open Space Facilities of Interest - Metro's work effort will identify which park facilities are of most interest due to a variety of factors including size, features, and demand. It is noted that the recent LA County Needs Assessment includes an inventory of parks as well as a typology that may be directly applicable for Metro's efforts. That project categorized parks into four types - Local Parks, Regional Recreation Parks, Regional Open Space, and Natural Areas; the latter two include most National Monument and Recreation Areas, as well as other mountain and beach destinations. As intended by the Motion, any subsequent Metro project to improve access may be focused on large regional scale facilities such as mountains and state and federal non-urban parks, but the strategic planning effort will also consider the opportunities for access improvements at a variety of scales.
- Measures of Accessibility - A key component of Metro's analysis will be to establish measures

of accessibility, which are typically expressed in terms of ability to access destinations within a specified time frame. As with other indicators, there is a substantial body of work to build on in this area, including, notably, within the Environmental Justice analysis for SCAG's Regional Transportation Plan, which looks at ability to access open space from a specified location by both auto (within 30 minutes) and public transit (within 45 minutes).

Taken together, the compilation and analysis of these indicators will determine areas of focus for any Metro or partner project or investment. This effort will point toward investment recommendations that connect the most disadvantaged and park-poor communities to the facilities of greatest interest in a cost-effective way.

Process

We anticipate engaging in a 6 to 9 month strategic planning process (after procurement) in order to carry out the direction included in the motion. This process will include engaging a working group consisting of public agency and community stakeholders as well as affected Metro departments, and will result in a final report and set of recommendations for further Board consideration.

Available Data

As noted, the LA County Needs Assessment covers much of the same material that staff anticipates analyzing for our upcoming effort and will serve as a major source of data. To the extent appropriate, we will seek to define terms consistently with the county report.

SCAG includes measures of open space accessibility as part of the Environmental Justice analysis to the Regional Transportation Plan.

Non-profit and advocacy organizations, notably the City Project and the Trust for Public Land, have conducted independent analysis of transit-to-parks and transit-to-trails opportunities. We have begun discussions to understand this work and to access data for Metro's upcoming effort.

Current Transit Service

We have prepared a preliminary analysis of current Metro transit service to Regional Open Space and Natural Areas as included in the LA County Needs Assessment. Through this, we have found that 461 Regional Open Space or Natural Areas are served by transit (Metro rail and bus, municipal, and regional rail) within ¼ mile, while 764 such locations are served within 1 mile. This is a preliminary screen that does not take into account important factors such as frequency or travel time, but provides some indication of the scope of future analysis and opportunities for enhanced connections. The results of this preliminary review are shown in a map as Attachment A.

Project Examples (Past and Current)

The strategic planning process will include a critical review of access projects, including those with

direct Metro involvement, others in Los Angeles County, and from around the country. This will be done to establish best practices and lessons learned that will guide any future investments or projects, noting that many prior projects have suffered from distinct flaws that can result in poor utilization and high costs. To date, we have compiled a preliminary sampling of projects from the region, state, and out-of-state, including:

- ParkLINK Shuttle - Led by the Mountains Recreation and Conservancy Association, the ParkLINK shuttle ran from 2005 to 2007, circulating within the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area and connecting to communities and transit facilities within Calabasas.
- Muir National Park Shuttle - Initially a partnership with Marin County, the National Park Service and Golden Gate Transit, the responsibility for this service shifted in 2009 solely to Marin County Transit District (Northern California). MV Transportation currently operates the service since 2012, and in 2013 the Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy began administering the fare collection process.
- Boulder County, Colorado - Boulder County provides free shuttles during the summer from a Denver Rapid Transit District Park-and-Ride to a popular mountain trailhead on US Forest Service Land.
- City of Duarte - During the spring of 2016, the City of Duarte ran a shuttle on Saturdays from the Duarte Gold Line station to the popular Chantry Flats trailhead in the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument. The shuttle was well used, but the limited-term pilot was shortened due to fires around the destination.
- Los Angeles County Topanga/Beach Shuttle - Los Angeles County currently runs a shuttle connecting Warner Center, Topanga Canyon, and Will Rogers State Beach.

Parallel, Complementary Planning Efforts

- San Gabriel Mountains National Monument Transportation Plan - As part of the monument designation, the US Forest Service was directed to collaborate with other agencies to develop a transportation plan focused on visitor access, sustainability, and other goals. This is an on-going process expected to result in a final plan in by October 2017.
- California Long Range Transportation Plan - This is a USDOT effort focused on transportation infrastructure within federal lands. The plan does not directly allocate funding, but can be useful to highlight needs and set priorities for future federal investment.

Funding Opportunities/Fund Availability Review

Our strategic planning effort will also consider potential funding sources for access improvements.

Of note for externally-available funding is the Federal Lands Access Program, which provides approximately \$250 million annually in grants for transportation facilities serving federal lands. Metro funding available for parks access will be determined through the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) update process, which will need to prioritize this potential use of funds against other needs and their requisite cash flow demands. The open space/parks access strategic planning process may result in funding recommendations, potentially to include individual pilot or demonstration projects. Funding sources for comparable projects awarded through Metro's Call for Projects program include Proposition C (25%), federal Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ), and federal Regional Surface Transportation Program (RSTP) funding.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Based on a review of comparable prior projects, Metro staff estimates that the cost to carry a strategic planning process as described in this Board report is approximately \$300,000 for professional services. \$75,000 is anticipated to be required in FY17, and the funding is included in the FY17 budget in Cost Center 4340, Sustainability Policy and Programs, under Project Number 450009, Sustainability Demonstration Projects.

Since this is a multi-year project, the cost center manager and the Chief Planning Officer will be accountable for budgeting the cost in future years, including any option exercised.

Impact to Budget

The funding source for this project is Propositions A, C, and TDA Administration, which is not eligible for bus and rail operating and capital expenditures.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board may consider alternative actions to address the intent of the June 2016 Motion on Parks and Open Space access. This could include initiating short-term pilot projects to test and evaluate access improvements for selected locations, or providing direct project funding on a competitive basis through a "Call"-like process. Staff's recommendation is made given the sporadic and varied history of such projects, suggesting that a more thorough analysis and input process would facilitate successful efforts.

NEXT STEPS

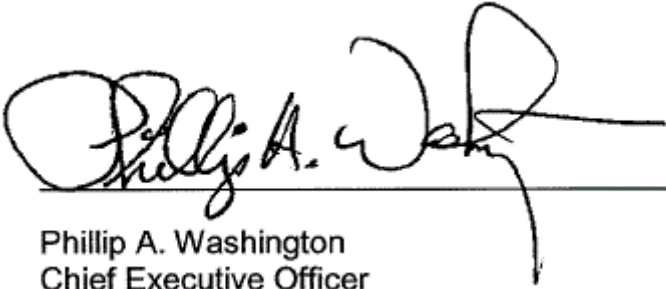
Pending approval of this item, staff will proceed with budget actions and procurement. We anticipate initiating a strategic planning process within six months, and will provide progress reports to the Planning and Programming Committee periodically.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Regional Open Space and Natural Areas Accessible by Transit
Attachment B - June 23, 2016 Board Motion, Transit to Open Space and Parks

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