Los Angeles County
Metropolitan Transportation
Authority
One Gateway Plaza
3rd Floor Board Room
Los Angeles, CA

Metro

Board Report

File #: 2017-0755, **File Type:** Informational Report **Agenda Number:** 42.

AD HOC CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE
NOVEMBER 16, 2017

SUBJECT: PROCEDURES TO MITIGATE SERVICE DISRUPTIONS

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE report on procedures for customer support and mitigating loss of service due to planned and unplanned service disruptions.

ISSUE

Service disruptions impact the quality of service delivered to our customers and their overall experience. When Metro encounters delays or disruptions to service, a series of mitigating actions are put into place employing failure management strategies and informing customers of the incident. This includes collaboration with a number of departments and leveraging multiple channels of communication ranging from onboard announcements to social media posts. Managing through major service disruptions requires coordination, timing, sound communication and effective advance planning.

DISCUSSION

Metro Bus Operations encounters service disruptions on a daily basis due to construction detours, special events, police activity and many other instances. For planned incidents, the Special Events Desk within Bus Operations Control (BOC) issues Detour Notices to Bus Divisions for operators working affected lines. These Detour Notices are also entered into the onboard Advanced Transportation Management System (ATMS), when a timely notification is provided. Customer Care, Media Relations and the Social Media team are also notified so that they can relay information to customers. Furthermore, Vehicle Operations (VO) is notified so field supervisors may post temporary signage at affected bus stops, informing customers where they can board buses on detour. The VO unit also monitors the area to ensure customers are waiting for buses in the correct location during a detour.

For unplanned events, such as accidents obstructing the road or police activity, bus operators must notify BOC. The operator is then instructed to safely detour around the incident area and reports to BOC on the route which they operated. While the bus is on detour, the operator will make passenger stops where it is safe to do so. The VO unit either confirms that the detour route is the best way to

proceed for other buses or they update BOC with a different detour route. VO units will also post temporary bus stop signage until normal operations has resumed. BOC informs Customer Care, Media Relations and the Social Media team of the incident and detour route being used.

While Bus Operations incidents can often be isolated to one location, Rail Operations incidents often impact the entire line, as trains are limited to operating within the tracks available and can only maneuver at track crossovers that may be several miles apart. Occasionally, an incident on the Blue Line may result in cascading delays on the Expo Line, and vice versa. Because of track infrastructure constraints, Metro prepares and executes a comprehensive strategy to keep Metro Rail customers moving, as a rail incident typically impact a greater amount of customers compared to a bus incident.

Metro prepares for disruptions by planning and conducting quarterly drills based on actual service disruption scenarios. These exercises prepare staff for assimilating into their established roles as situations occur. However, the dynamic nature of a service disruption means no two incidents are ever the same. Day of week, time of day, location, weather conditions and many other variables play a role in how Metro responds to an incident. Metro strives to continuously improve based on experience from each incident that arises.

As customer communication is important to safely and reliably transport customers, Metro has a comprehensive public address (PA) system to provide travel information. During rail service disruptions, the PA system is used to quickly and effectively inform customers of the situation and alternate services until the incident has cleared. PA announcements can be made remotely by Rail Operations Control Center (ROC), locally at selected rail stations, by a field supervisor; and by train operators onboard their vehicle. In parallel, Customer Care, Media Relations and the Social Media team are notified to inform customers through their channels. PA systems are inspected regularly at each station and onboard each railcar for volume and clarity to ensure customers can reliably listen to and understand critical announcements while riding the system. If field personnel or customers report faulty PA equipment, Metro dispatches maintenance personnel to troubleshoot and bring the PA system back to working order.

At the first sign of a rail incident, the Rail Operations Control Center (ROC) coordinates a response that begins with identifying a staff member to serve as the Incident Commander (IC) for coordinating support to immediately restore service and provide updates. The first 5-10 minutes are crucial to properly assessing the disruptions, effectively notifying stakeholders, the public and anticipating when service will be restored. Closed circuit television (CCTV) observers make frequent station announcements over the public address system and update the Transit Passenger Information System / Variable Message System (TPIS/VMS) at stations. Field supervisors are dispatched to provide passenger support and relay field conditions to ROC staff. Train operators are also directed to make frequent, scripted announcements to passengers onboard. These scripts are installed in each train operator cab to explain the majority of incidents to customers and ensure consistent messaging both onboard and from ROC. Furthermore, the Metro social media team is notified to update Metro.net, Metro's Twitter feed and local news media during commute traffic updates. The social media team is also able to monitor public discussion of the incident and relay social media reaction back to Metro Operations, which provides a real-time feedback loop on customer impacts. Finally, Metro's Transit Security is dispatched to the scene of the incident to ensure the safety and security of

passengers and employees.

Bus Bridges

When a bus bridge is needed as a result of trains unable to proceed through a segment, a number of actions must take place to fully implement. Planned bus bridges for maintenance are scheduled and coordinated in advance to provide ample time for support departments to assemble and for customers to be notified.

However, unplanned bus bridges as a result of emergencies require many departments to divert their attention away from normal duties. During rush hour periods, implementing a bus bridge can sometimes take over one hour to organize. This is due to limited resources available as nearly every bus and operator is already scheduled for their normal assignment, heavy traffic to reach the incident location, and street closures associated with a major incident preventing buses from quickly reaching customers. Other external challenges include serving Metro Rail stations located around narrow, one -way or dead end streets which restrict bus turning movements and necessitate additional travel time to safely serve customers.

Bus vehicle capacity is also significantly smaller than train capacity, so customers must often wait for several buses to clear customers until they are able to board. As an example, it can take six or more buses to serve affected customers from only one train. Furthermore, if an in-service bus is redirected to a bus bridge assignment, there is a likelihood that bus passengers waiting for the redirected bus are negatively impacted with a trip cancellation. Bus operations makes every effort to minimize those impacts by prioritizing their request to buses that are out of service or from lines with frequent service where the next bus is scheduled just a few minutes later.

Support Staff and Communication Efforts

As Metro does not employ dedicated station staff for customers, this places the responsibility on CCTV observers, train operators, bus operators, and field supervisors to convey these messages to inform and direct customers. However, the dynamic nature of incidents result in shifting strategies as tracks or streets are reopened, police investigations are completed, or when medical emergencies are cleared. This would be a significant financial commitment within all other agency priorities. Effective communication between Metro and first responders are critical to determining the duration of the service outage and allows customers to plan in advance for alternate travel patterns. For now, Metro employs a small team of Blue Shirt staff, originally responsible for supporting the transition to faregates, for the support of special events and major incidents. Their ambassadorship has been well received by customers, especially during major incidents.

Example: Incident at 7th Street/Metro Center

One example of a major disruption which resulted in a positive outcome occurred on July 26, 2017. A track fire occurred in the Blue and Expo Line tail track at 7th Street/Metro Center, resulting in the loss of a critical track segment used to quickly reverse trains at the Downtown LA terminus.

A bus bridge was quickly established between 7thStreet/Metro Center and Pico Station to ferry passengers to departing trains. Staff was deployed throughout 7thStreet/Metro Center and along the path to the bus bridge to direct customers between bus and train. Field supervisors were on scene to manage both Bus and Rail Operators and dispatch buses as soon as they were safely boarded.

Once train service was restored to 7th Street/Metro Center, train movement was reconfigured to allow work crews to continue making repairs while restoring train service into 7th Street/Metro Center. Historically, all Blue and Expo trains would discharge all customers on Platform 1, proceed into the tail track area to reverse directions, then board passengers on Platform 2. With the damaged tail track out of service, Metro devised a plan to modify terminal operations to board and alight all Expo Line trains from Platform 1 and all Blue Line trains from Platform 2. This change in service required a substantial amount of customer outreach to inform passenger crowds of which platform to board either the Blue or Expo Line. Therefore, Metro deployed staff from various departments, including the Blue Shirts and field supervisors to direct customers to new platform assignments, answer customer questions and reduce confusion. Station signage within 7th Street/Metro Center was also updated within days to reflect the new service plan. Shortly thereafter, automated announcements onboard each Red Line railcar were updated to notify transferring customers of the platform change.

The results of this modified service plan were well received by the public with the clear delineation of platforms dedicate to each of the Blue and Expo Lines. As such, Metro intends to continue this service plan for the foreseeable future. Crowds are now evenly distributed between Platform 1 and 2 vs previously when both Blue and Expo Line boardings occurred on Platform 2. Also confusion is minimized as to which line a customer is boarding. Finally this plan requires one less train to maintain existing service levels on each line, reducing cost of operations.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

The ability of Operations to effectively support customers through service disruptions reduces customer confusion and frustration, improving the safety and quality of their experience.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Receive and filing this report would have no financial impact to the agency.

NEXT STEPS

Metro intends to continuously improve responsiveness to both planned and unplanned service disruptions. In the short term, Metro recognizes opportunities to improve customer care during unplanned emergencies. Customer feedback generally centers on two themes- lack of information/staff availability and excessive wait times for bus bridges to arrive. It is therefore imperative for Metro to continue placing customers first through preparation, training, communication, and follow through.

Prepared by: Stephen Tu, Sr. Manager, Transportation Planning, (213) 418-3005
Conan Cheung, Sr. Executive Officer, Service Planning, Scheduling and Analysis (213) 418-3034

Reviewed by: James T. Gallagher, Chief Operations Officer, (213) 418-3108

Phillip A. Washington
Chief Executive Officer