



Board Report

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PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 15, 2023
OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 16, 2023

SUBJECT: REIMAGINING WESTLAKE/MACARTHUR PARK STATION THRU PILOT INTERVENTIONS

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE the report on Reimagining Westlake/MacArthur Park Station Thru Pilot Interventions.

ISSUE

Westlake/MacArthur Park Station, served by Metro B & D Lines (Red/Purple) and nearby NextGen Tier 1 bus lines, has been impacted by societal challenges impacting public safety and Metro’s ability to deliver good customer experience for transit riders and support frontline employees who maintain this station. In an effort to equitably address the inappropriate activities that impact the station’s original mission to serve the community, Metro is taking a thoughtful, collaborative and multipronged approach to addressing these complex issues with the intent to restore safe and reliable transit service for its customers and the surrounding community that Metro serves.

BACKGROUND

Westlake/MacArthur Park Station (WLMP) is located just west of Downtown LA in the Westlake District on Alvarado St between Wilshire Bl and 7th St. It is located across the street from MacArthur Park. WLMP is located in one of the most dense neighborhoods in the United States and served by all-day, frequent Metro Rail and Bus service, with nearby buses operating 24 hours per day. There are typically over 22,000 daily boardings and alightings within the station footprint. Previous rider surveys indicate that 94% of Metro riders along the Alvarado St corridor do not own or have access to a car, indicating that they rely on Metro service for their access to work, school, medical, and all-purpose trips. This station resides within an Equity Focused Community.

In 2022, Metro released the latest results of its Customer Experience Survey, revealing that female rail ridership has declined to 44% with nearly 1 in 2 women citing crime, harassment, and safety as top concerns on Metro. These results are consistent with previous agency findings in the How

Women Travel report.

Within a 2-month period last summer at WLMP Station, there were 57 calls for service to the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), or nearly one law enforcement call each day. MacArthur park has a history of drug activity that predates the opening of this Metro station in 1993, and has impacted the station. Since December 2022, there were 26 reported medical emergencies at WLMP, the majority of them suspected drug overdoses. In the entire calendar year, there were six fatalities and one shooting at WLMP, nearly all related to suspected drug activity.

Metro also experiences significant maintenance challenges due to the misuse of this station. In December 2022, there were nearly 75,000 emergency swing gate activations reported at the faregates, or nearly once every two minutes. Metro maintenance crews who respond to the station for repairs have encountered multiple instances of work trucks burglarized when they return. The vending program on the plaza level, which officially ended in 2020, continues to operate in an informal/unregulated setting.

There is also persistent trespassing in emergency exit corridors which serve as ancillary areas for Metro personnel who maintain critical station equipment in these non-public corridors. Trespassers in these ancillary areas pose significant safety issues for Metro personnel. During recent inspections of these corridors, a number of individuals have been identified, many of which have previous warrants. These individuals also leave behind a significant amount of trash, drug paraphernalia, and biohazard waste including feces and vomit on stairwells and walls, used syringes and condoms. As these non-public corridors lack routine airflow as in the public station areas, these corridors have grossly repulsive odors that are unhealthy without personal protective equipment (PPE).

Observations from Metro personnel and CCTV cameras reveal persistent loitering under tampered electrical receptacles, physical fighting, individuals wielding weapons, harassment and intimidation of transit riders waiting for their next train or bus, prostitution, and erratic antisocial behavior which may be from individuals under the influence of drugs. System Security and Law Enforcement (SSLE) has confirmed the majority of drug issues at WLMP are related to heroin, methamphetamine, cocaine, fentanyl and opiates.

On balance, the inappropriate, non-transit activities permeating WLMP has deviated from the agency's core mission to deliver safe and reliable transit service, and Metro plans to restore safety and civility through reimagined public safety improvements and an improved customer experience for our riders that need it the most.

DISCUSSION

Given the significant public safety challenges outlined above, Operations has convened an agency taskforce and is leading a collaborative effort with SSLE, Countywide Planning & Development, Office of the Chief of Staff, Customer Experience and Program Management to reimagine how WLMP Station could better serve the community by improving public safety and service reliability through a strategic deployment of customer-facing staffing, maintenance crews, engineering controls, and community programming of plaza areas. This has included a significant number of site visits incorporating multiple departments and well documented by Systemwide Design. Below are pilot

interventions in progress or planned:

Plaza / Street Level

On the street level, there are significant areas that are not useful for transit riders and inappropriately used by others. This largely stems from the station footprint not being appropriately sized for the transit needs in this location, including an underutilized, secondary station entrance located just steps away from the main entrance. The terraced landscaping has created hiding areas for public defecation and drug use, while the oversized concrete plaza has facilitated an open air drug sale marketplace. Low-profile curbs surrounding the plaza are used for loitering, smoking, drug sales, sleeping and skateboarding. Bike racks and the adjacent Park & Ride lot are virtually unused, even though these amenities are available. To better serve the community by addressing these issues, the following interventions are being piloted:

- A proposed restructured vendor marketplace developed in collaboration with the County, City, and community that activates the plaza, promotes business sustainability and growth, and creates a community space for weekly community events
- Rightsizing public footprint of plaza by securing non-functional sections of the plaza, including terraced landscape, inconspicuous corners, while also preserving functional space for a vendor marketplace
- Closure of secondary (north) entrance and passageway, which directs all customers to the nearby, fully accessible main entrance, naturally facilitating public safety through more foot traffic. This closure was previously enacted during the COVID-19 pandemic and re-implemented in January 2023.
- Creation of a new, flexible use space that can be opened to support community programming such as weekly concerts, fitness classes, and other activations beneficial to the community
- Additional plaza lighting and CCTV cameras for enhanced visibility and deterrence of unwanted activities

Mezzanine / Concourse Level

Staff has documented persistent loitering and drug activities around TAP Vending Machines, map display cases, tampering with electrical receptacles, drug activity and prostitution under decommissioned phone booths, and misuse/damage of faregate equipment. Few passengers pay fare if faregates are broken/held open. As a result, the taskforce is working on the following pilot interventions:

- New station kiosk to be fully staffed and visible to public during station hours, assisting with customer questions and faregate entries
- Low Income Fare is Easy (LIFE) program on-site signups, providing those with the greatest need an opportunity to use the fare gates appropriately even if they do not have sufficient fare
- Homeless outreach partnerships
- Transit Ambassador staffing
- Fare collection interventions
 - New partitions to deter “reach-around” non-emergency uses of emergency swing gates
 - Faster leaf-gate closure to prevent “tailgating”
 - Reactivation of alarm chirp when emergency swing gate is opened

- Explore “paddle-style” gates used in San Francisco, Atlanta, Baltimore and London, England
- Updated “fare required” signage to current Metro Rail Design Criteria standards
- Personalized station announcements to remind public that station is monitored
- Introduction of ambient background music, also played in public settings like malls, stores, and restaurants
- Sealing off decommissioned phone booths where drug use takes place underneath former phone book vestibules
- Removal of maintenance power outlets in public areas that have been tampered with to eliminate electrical hazards to the public
- Exploration of smarter CCTV cameras using digital analytics to flag unwanted behavior to CCTV observers and dispatch assistance more effectively, being cognizant of potential bias when developing assumptions in the analytics model

Platform / Track Level

Staff has observed erratic, antisocial behavior at platform ends, rummaging through trash cans that result in debris strewn all around and onto trackway, and laying across seating areas which prevents customers from seating amenities while waiting for their next train. In particular, customers have stated that they prefer to wait at platform ends because there is more onboard seating at the fronts and ends of trains, but they do not feel comfortable waiting at these platform ends before the train arrives. To address the nuisance activities observed on the platform and restore a safe, waiting area for the next train, the following interventions will be piloted:

- Lighting upgrades have been completed to brighten the platform area and improve line-of-sight visibility, including retrofit from older fluorescent lighting to brighter LED fixtures.
- Increased pressure washing and station detailing. Facilities Maintenance now has a dedicated custodial staff for this station and conducts deep cleanings several times per week. Despite these efforts, the station still experiences cleanliness issues related to non-transit users of the station.
- Modify existing benches for upright seating. Currently, benches are misused for laying down, drug use, and other unwanted activities. The existing benches are molded into the platform foundation, so the taskforce is looking at tactical interventions using floating dividers and perforations to preserve the bench while restoring the original intent of the design.
- Increasing fresh supply of airflow in the station public areas to remove odors and fumes caused by smoking and other non-transit uses that permeate through the station

Ancillary / Non-Public Areas

Given the challenges posed by trespassers entering into station ancillary areas via emergency exit corridors, the taskforce is partnering with local law enforcement, transit security and local jurisdictions to identify solutions to deter this behavior:

- Expanding intrusion warning system that has shown up to 70% reduction in unwanted entries at other stations
- Revised signage and regulatory language to ensure city attorney can prosecute for trespassing

- Increased inspections of ancillary areas to remove trespassers more frequently

With these pilot interventions packaged together, the overall objective is to deter non-transit loitering and restore WLMP for safe and reliable transit as its primary use case, ensuring that everyone who enters the station uses the fare gates appropriately and departs on the next available train, and those arriving by train exit the station in a reasonable timeframe.

EQUITY PLATFORM

The intent of this work is to provide public safety and reliability improvements to Metro riders in and around WLMP, which 9 in 10 bus riders are BIPOC, 94% do not own a car and therefore rely on Metro service, and nearly 6 in 10 are below the poverty line. Further, WLMP is operated by Metro lines that serve Metro's Equity Focus Communities. Staff is building upon previous community input received during previous projects involving the community and key stakeholders, such as the street vendor market pilot in 2017 and the adjacent Alvarado St Bus Priority Lanes completed in 2022, and will conduct a more focused equity analysis of impacts to marginalized groups as a result of this project.

Improving transit service by reimagining public safety at our stations increases access to opportunity for groups who may not have those opportunities today. Further, these pilot interventions allow Metro to better serve its customers through better reliability as a result of fewer disruptions to service.

This project will include some form of rider outreach, including surveys and key stakeholder engagement, blending a data-driven approach with customer feedback and staff will commit to centering marginalized community feedback to ensure marginalized voices are heard and equitable outcomes are reached. This project will use multilingual rider surveys. These survey results would then be incorporated into future reports to ensure that riders' voices are centered throughout the ensuing discussions.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Recommendations support strategic plans:

Goal #1: Provide high quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling. Improving the speed and reliability of the bus network will reduce transit travel times, as well as improve competitiveness with other transportation options.

Goal #2: Deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system. These initiatives help to move more people within the same street capacity, where currently transit users suffer service delays and reliability issues because of single occupant drivers.

Goal #3: Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity. With faster transit service and improved reliability, residents have increased access to education and employment, with greater confidence that they will reach their destination on time.

Goal #4: Transform Los Angeles County through regional collaboration and national leadership.

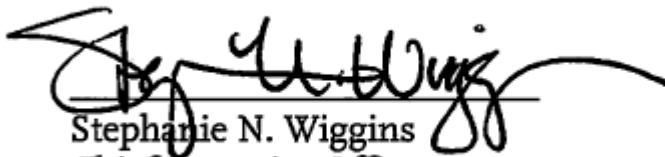
Because Metro does not have jurisdiction over local streets and arterials, collaboration with other partner agencies such as LADOT, Caltrans, City and County of Los Angeles are necessary to ensure these speed and reliability improvements are successfully implemented.

NEXT STEPS

The WLMP Agency Taskforce will continue a phased implementation approach as pilot interventions become ready for debut. During this period, Metro plans to collaborate with partner agencies and key stakeholders. In June 2023, staff plans to conduct passenger intercept surveys to understand how customers have responded to these pilot interventions as part of ongoing project outreach. If this program is successful, Metro could look to expand elements of these interventions to other stations where similar challenges persist, with the intent to use the right tools in the right place. Staff plans to provide further details about this project, including survey findings and an update on the proposed vending program in Summer 2023.

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