

**Board Report**

File #: 2023-0190, **File Type:** Informational Report**Agenda Number:** 37.

**OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE
APRIL 20, 2023****SUBJECT: FISCAL YEAR 2024 METRO BUS AND RAIL SERVICE PLAN****ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE****RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE a report on Metro Bus and Rail Service Plan for Fiscal Year 2024.

ISSUE

Each fiscal year, Metro's Operations budget reflects assumptions on bus and rail service levels planned for the year. This report will outline those assumptions for Fiscal Year 2024.

BACKGROUND

Metro's biannual service change program allows Metro to improve the customer experience through revised transit routes and schedules. The implementation of new transit services resulting from major capital projects is also captured in each fiscal year's operating budget.

The COVID pandemic resulted in multiple service changes being implemented to respond to the impacts on bus and rail ridership and operator availability since April 2020. Bus service was fully restored in September 2021, and rail service was improved to 8-minute weekday peak light rail and 10-minute peak heavy rail (subway) service.

Unfortunately, the COVID Omicron variant active at the end of 2021/early 2022, coupled with a national shortage of bus operators, resulted in a significant shortage of available operators and increases in canceled service (as high as 15%-20%). To stabilize the system, a strategic 10% bus service reduction and an adjustment to 10-minutes for light rail peak service, and all day, all week 15-minute heavy rail service was made in February 2022.

Bus service levels were gradually restored in 2022, with service added back in June, September, and December 2022 as new bus operator hiring permitted. As of December 2022, bus service is back at the full pre-COVID 7 million annualized revenue service hours on which the NextGen Bus Plan is based. Rail service levels remain reduced but meet current demand, which is continually monitored. The initial operating segment of the Crenshaw Line also opened in October 2022 between Westchester/Veteran and Crenshaw/Expo Stations. The new Regional Connector light rail corridor

through downtown LA, with associated changes creating the new A (Long Beach - Azusa) and E (Santa Monica - East LA) light rail lines, is expected to open in the second quarter of CY2023.

DISCUSSION

The Fiscal Year 2024 budget assumes the following bus and rail service levels:

Bus: Continued operation of 7 million bus revenue service hours (annualized) based on the NextGen Bus Plan. Ridership for bus overall for the month of February 2023 compared to February 2022 was:

- up 15.4% for weekdays
- up 8.3% for Saturdays
- up 23.0% for Sundays

Comparing February 2023 with pre-COVID February 2019 ridership was:

- 75.5% recovered weekdays
- 86.3% recovered Saturdays
- 98.4% recovered Sundays

With the continued efforts to recruit and retain operators, full bus service has been delivered with increased reliability. The most recent week shows service cancellation rates below those for the last four weeks before the service change in December 2022. It is also lower than the same week a year ago when service had been reduced by ten percent in response to the impact of the COVID Omicron variant spike and shortage of transit operators.

% Cancelled Service	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
Pre- Dec 2022 Service Change 4 week Average	3.2%	3.9%	7.4%
One Year Ago WE 3/26/22	3.4%	4.5%	9.7%
Week Ending 3/25/23	2.2%	0.9%	5.9%

Operator mandatory overtime (ordered call backs), a major pain point for operators, has also been reduced by over 30 percent from an average of 770 for the first three weeks after the December 2022 service increase to 529 for the first three weeks of March 2023. This should continue to reduce as more new operators are hired.

Refinements will be implemented in conjunction with new bus lanes and other NextGen speed and reliability initiatives that can support improved peak frequency planned under NextGen. Service will also be adjusted to meet load standards (avoid regular crowding with less than one percent of weekly trips exceeding the load standard) and on-time performance targets. Metro expects to be fully staffed with bus operators throughout FY24 to allow for reliable delivery of all bus services.

Light Rail: Light rail ridership in February 2023 for average weekday was 57.3 percent of the February 2019 (pre-COVID) average weekday ridership, with 65 percent for Saturday and 70.3 percent for Sunday. Ridership has increased 0.4 percent on weekdays, 14.1 percent on Saturdays, and 6.8 percent on Sundays, comparing February 2023 versus February 2022.

The light rail network in FY24 will include a full year of operation of the new Regional Connector with

the new A Line (Long Beach - Azusa) and E Line (Santa Monica - East LA). Regional Connector is expected to open before the end of FY23. This extension will result in four segments of the light rail network from Long Beach, Azusa, Santa Monica, and East LA, merging through one trunk segment through downtown LA. As such, the Regional Connector represents a major change to Metro rail operations, and significant new complexities, including:

- Coordinating the pullouts for the two lines from four separate rail divisions;
- Three car types shared between the four divisions;
- Remote train overnight storage, including on the mainline along the Eastside Extension;
- Coordination of trains from four different segments of the network through two junctions with limitations on the number of cars within the Regional Connector at any one time;
- Isolating the impacts of planned and unplanned service adjustments along one segment of the network from the remaining three segments.

Metro will launch the Regional Connector with the existing 10-minute peak and 12-minute midday and weekend service frequencies using 3 car trains for both the A and E lines to allow time to become familiar and gain experience in the new operating procedures brought on by the complexities of the new network before restoring service to an 8 minute peak and 10 minute base service level.

C and K line services will also remain at current levels (10 minute peak and 12 minute or 15 minute off peak and weekend) to be consistent with the other light rail lines. These light rail service levels using 2 car trains are meeting current ridership levels with no regular crowding of trips.

Within the FY24 service plan, it is intended to increase all light rail services to an 8-minute peak and 10-minute midday weekday based on a successful period of operating the Regional Connector services, continued ridership recovery, and availability of additional light rail operators. Staff will keep the Board apprised of these factors as planning continues for this increase in light rail service.

Heavy Rail Subway (HRT): For the beginning of FY24, the B & D subway lines will continue operating a 15-minute daytime all week service frequency. This current service level is meeting demand without any consistent crowding issues. Ridership in February 2023 compared to February 2019 (pre-COVID) is 60.4 percent recovered weekdays, 84.8 percent recovered Saturdays, and 89.7 percent recovered Sundays. Ridership has increased in February 2023 versus February 2022, with a 6.4 percent increase on weekdays, a 15 percent increase Saturdays, and a 57.1 percent increase Sundays. Staff will continue to monitor ridership, loads per trip, operator, and fleet availability with the intent of increasing to a 10-minute daytime all week service frequency during FY24.

Rail Frequency Adjustments: Before COVID, LRT operated at a 6 minute peak and 12 to 15 minute off peak frequency. Given the increase in remote work by weekday commuters, along with the desire to create an all day, every day frequent network as demonstrated by NextGen, the FY24 LRT and HRT service plans both reflect a new peak and off-peak service level. LRT peak hour frequencies will be standardized at 8 minutes and off-peak service will be enhanced to 10-minutes (previously 12-15 minutes) . HRT will operate at 10 minutes throughout the day versus pre-COVID service levels of 10 min peak and 12 minute off peak. As discussed above, the phase in of these frequencies will be contingent on demonstrated successful operation of Regional Connector service, availability of fleet

and operators, and ridership recovery.

EQUITY PLATFORM

The FY24 Metro Bus and Rail service plans follows the NextGen service principles with fast, all day every day frequent, and reliable bus and rail service. NextGen maintains a focus on providing high service levels in Equity Focus Communities where reliance on transit service for mobility is greatest. Planned peak and off-peak rail service improvements in FY24 will also support the improved mobility of all rail riders, including those from Equity Focus Communities, helping them efficiently access jobs, services, and education opportunities.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

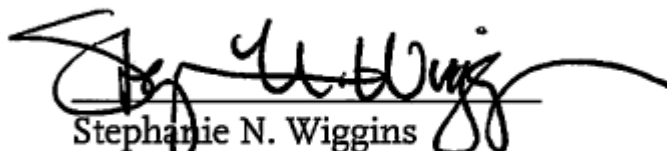
The service changes support strategic plan goal #1: Provide high quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling. The service changes also respond to the sub-goal of investing in a world class bus system that is reliable, convenient, safe, and attractive to more users for more trips.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will implement the FY24 service plan as budgeted in the FY24 Metro Operating Budget. This will be accomplished through service changes in June and December 2023, consistent with Metro past practice of making service changes twice yearly in June and December.

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