

SUBJECT: CORONAVIRUS RECOVERY TASK FORCE

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

Receive and file this status report on the recently established Coronavirus Recovery Task Force.

ISSUE

This is the first communication of Metro's Coronavirus Recovery Task Force. The purpose is to report on progress to date and highlight early action items.

BACKGROUND

To help Metro respond and recover, the Recovery Task Force will recommend early action items while it develops a final report. Early action items are intended to be timely, short-term actions that Metro can take to respond to changing circumstances; or actions Metro can take quickly to prepare for mid-to-long term relaunch and recovery.

The list of early action items below was drawn from ideas shared by members of the task force, ideas in the recovery concept memo, and from emerging best practices drawn from news reports and other research. These ideas rose to the top as early action items because they were timely, impactful, had positive impacts on cost savings/ revenue and/or would bring equity benefits.

DISCUSSION

Each early action item is summarized as follows:

1. Recommendation -- what are we suggesting?
2. Justification -- why are we recommending this action?
3. Rapid Equity Assessment -- what are the likely equity impacts and are there strategies to mitigate unintended consequences?

1. Customer Survey

Recommendation: Survey Metro customers on their current transportation patterns and modes, future transportation plans, and customer experience.

Justification: Help identify how quickly ridership may recover and gain insights on customer experience priorities, including what would make customers feel safe to use our services.

Equity: Survey can determine how different racial and income groups have experienced

transportation during the pandemic and how they plan to travel in the future.

2. Safe / Slow Streets

Recommendation: Ask Metro Board to authorize cities that received 2020 Open Street grants to repurpose some or all of funding on safe/slow street programs; and explore ways to encourage other LA County jurisdictions to implement slow/safe streets.

Justification: Create more space for safe, distanced walking and biking for transportation and recreation; showcase how road space can be repurposed for more multi-modal transportation.

Equity: Low income communities are more overcrowded, and this is an equity opportunity to prioritize park-poor communities, areas with high levels of vehicle collisions and injuries and few bike lanes. The task force has discussed opportunities to encourage cities to partner with CBOs for outreach and education.

3. Cleaning

Recommendation: Test, adopt and publicize new cleaning methods such as UV, ozone and cleaning robots while also increasing publicity of existing cleaning practices, especially through videos.

Justification: Testing and implementing new cleaning will advance health and safety for riders and employees; publicizing current and new cleaning practices will help inform and reassure riders currently using the system and those who will be making transportation decisions as stay at home orders are modified.

Equity: Enhanced cleaning will benefit Metro's primarily low-income riders. Look for opportunities for small and DBE businesses in any new cleaning contracts and study side effects of new cleaning methods to protect sensitive riders/staff.

4. Bus-Only Lanes

Recommendation: Partner with local jurisdictions to accelerate implementation of bus-only lanes in areas that Operations has identified as past congestion hot spots.

Justification: The current period of lighter than usual vehicle traffic is a chance to implement more bus lanes with fewer immediate conflicts with traffic and parking. Bus-only lanes will allow greater speed and reliability, helping keep buses competitive with single occupancy vehicles. Faster travel can also contribute to more frequency and less crowding.

Equity: There is an equity opportunity to prioritize bus-only lanes on routes used by essential workers and those that connect equity-focused communities. To allow input from and to get information to Limited English Proficiency (LEP) populations and riders

without smartphones, Metro can streamline outreach, rapidly introduce lanes, and survey riders for feedback.

5. Masks

Recommendation: Explore ways to distribute masks to riders to help the recently-introduced face covering requirement succeed. Distribution of masks can focus on hot spots identified by bus operators, riders and public health data.

Justification: Distributing masks can increase compliance with face-covering requirements, enhancing health/safety benefits. It can also help avoid conflicts and uncertainty if customers try to ride without masks.

Equity: Focus distribution in areas where residents lack resources to purchase masks. Use culturally competent education to implement the new face covering requirement rather than law enforcement, which might target marginalized communities.

6. Contactless ticketing option and free off-peak fares

Recommendation: Rapidly introduce a contactless, visual ticket purchase and payment option in new Transit App as an option to accompany TAP card payment. To smooth out demand, also make off-peak service free for a limited, promotional period. Note: this is not intended to change current fare enforcement practices.

Justification: A non-contact option for fare payment will reduce physical risks and help reassure customers. An additional method of fare payment may also increase revenue during a period in which fares are not being enforced. A limited-time promotion with free or reduced non-peak fares can help encourage customer to download the Transit App and can help reduce crowding during peak times.

Equity: Many riders, including low-income riders, have smart phones and will have more options for fare payment. Temporary free fares can benefit cost-burdened riders. We should monitor enforcement to make sure there is not unfair targeting of any disadvantaged groups.

7. Telecommuting

Recommendation: Update Metro telecommute policy to allow more staff to telecommute even after the pandemic; and begin to engage major employers, agencies and other stakeholders to develop a regional pact to expand telecommuting and implement staggered work hours where feasible.

Justification: Telecommuting can help avoid a surge in single occupancy vehicle trips and congestion when more businesses open.

Equity: While white-collar workers are usually more able to telecommute, there are

equity benefits including expanding job opportunities for people with disabilities, and for workers caring for children and the elderly or sick. Metro should track the demographic details of telecommuters to understand who benefits and if there are unintended consequences.

8. More frequent service

Recommendation: Restore more frequent transit service to stay ahead of demand, and retain rear door boarding as an option.

Justification: Restoring more frequent bus and rail service in stages and retaining rear door boarding on buses as an option can make transit competitive and enable greater physical distancing and reduced overcrowding. There is evidence that service cuts during past crises led to long term reductions in ridership.

Equity: Prioritizing more frequent service and retaining rear door boarding on lines experiencing overcrowding can help essential workers and equity communities through mobility gains and health protection.

9. Capital Projects

Recommendation: Prioritize and re-examine major capital projects in a recovery framework based on enhancing mobility, ridership, equity, and Title VI compliance, health (more distancing/frequency) and economic development. Projects can be examined in terms of priority, mode, scope and delivery method.

Justification: Budget challenges, the economic and job benefits of capital construction, and the opportunity for a new normal of mobility without congestion provide an opportunity to re-examine Metro's capital program and maximize the positive impacts of each project and the system as a whole.

Equity: Prioritizing capital projects solely based on fiscal factors could lead to decisions that negatively impact equity communities or cause Title VI challenges. A broader analysis should include equity and also consider impacts to SBEs, DBEs, DVBEs.

10. Bike Share

Recommendation: Study options to enhance the Metro Bike Share program, with goals of more locations (especially equity-enhancing locations) and more use. Two options to study are as follows:

- Rebid contract with potential partners, such as municipalities and college campuses, to develop a no-cost, countywide bike share system
- Bring Metro Bike Share operation and maintenance 'in-house' as a core Metro operation performed by Metro staff that can be located at all Metro stations.

Justification: Metro Bike share has seen a lower reduction in use than Metro bus, rail

and parking, suggesting that there is interest in bike share as a physically-distanced transportation option. Many cities around the world are promoting biking as an alternative to driving during and after the pandemic. Other bike share systems in the region are struggling, providing an opportunity to reexamine bike share in LA county.

Equity: Improving bike share can enhance equity if more bikes are available in areas where low-income residents live and work. Study of options for bike share should examine locations, cost and payment options, and messaging/promotion to diverse communities.

11. Homeless services and partnerships

Recommendation: Expand social service resources and partnerships, including on-site services, to increase ability to connect unhoused riders with services and housing.

Justification: The presence of people taking non-essential trips prevents social-distancing, threatens the public health of all riders, and makes many customers feel uncomfortable. Research shows that enforcement is not effective in addressing homelessness. Transit agencies cannot solve the problem of homelessness alone, but with the right policies, partnerships, and programs, they can create a safer and more comfortable environment for all transit users. Additionally, helping unhoused riders find housing and services contributes to Metro's strategic plan goal 3.4 of helping solve homelessness.

Equity: This presents an equity opportunity by helping unhoused people find housing and services and allows essential riders to socially distance and reduce the public health risks.

12. Alternative services

Recommendation: Pilot and expand alternative services like microtransit, mobility on demand, and partnerships with other transportation network companies (TNCs) and micro-mobility companies in areas where this may be a more cost-effective means of restoring mobility services.

Justification: It will be challenging to in the near-term to bring back full transit service on all routes (due to the need for less crowded vehicles and funding challenges). Therefore it will be critical to pilot alternatives to traditional transit. This can include Metro MicroTransit, the Via Mobility on Demand (MOD) service, as well as other partnerships with TNCs and micro-mobility companies. In addition to providing mobility options, this is an opportunity to pilot and learn from a variety of non-Single Occupancy Vehicle (SOV) alternatives.

Equity: Similar to the Via MOD service, this recommendation can prioritize equity-focused communities and people with challenges accessing both traditional and new transportation services.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Receiving and filing this report has no financial impact or impact to budget. The Task Force will evaluate the cost impacts of each recommended action as they advance towards implementation. The Task Force will report on the financial impacts of any actions requiring Board approval on a case by case basis, in addition to providing regular updates on these initiatives, new initiatives, and the Recovery Plan.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

This is a broad suite of recommendations specifically developed to align directly with Vision 2028 Goals. The Task Force seeks to be responsive; bring leadership to the recovery to marshal positive change in the face of this crisis; support and enhance communities and lives; adapt to changing contexts to deliver outstanding trip experiences; and provide high quality mobility options for essential trips and in coordination with a safe recovery.

NEXT STEPS

Staff plans to pursue these early actions, develop further recommendations, and continue towards the delivery of a Recovery Plan. Staff also plans to report back to the Board regularly.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Presentation

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