CASE STUDY
PALLETS RETURN PROGRAM

Breaking the Cycle
Metro’s Central Maintenance Facility (CMF) relies on wooden pallets to distribute materials and supplies to support daily operations at its facilities across LA County. In 2018, Metro’s Pallet Return Program prevented approximately 2,100 tons of wood waste from going to landfills, substantially reducing the GHG emissions associated with organic waste disposal.

CMF implemented a program to replace the standard wooden pallets used for inventory storage and distribution with heavy-duty block wooden pallets. The new pallets are far more durable than conventional slatted pallets and can survive an average of five times the number of trips, increasing opportunities for reuse. CMF’s automated storage and retrieval system safely stores the pallets, further extending their useful life.

CMF’s warehouse inventory contains 95% of the replacement parts required by bus and rail divisions to ensure vehicles operate safely and efficiently. Consequently, CMF fulfills nearly 360,000 inventory requests per year. Minimizing the material packaging and goods movement in this distribution process has a significant impact on reducing solid waste and greenhouse gas emissions.

Being Resourceful
Reducing waste begins with throwing less away, but it also requires considering material lifecycle and sustainability goals in agency-wide procurement decisions. The Pallet Return Program is not only a waste prevention measure, but it is also one of Metro’s many sustainable procurement initiatives.

The heavy-duty wooden block pallets were purchased with upstream and downstream impacts in mind. They contain recycled wood materials and are strictly evaluated for usability before being slated for disposal. This reduces raw material extraction, keeps wood waste out of landfills and substantially reduces operational expenses.

CMF’s heavy-duty pallets last nearly five times as long as their standard wooden counterparts, preventing approximately 2,100 tons of wood waste from going to landfills each year.