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**EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE
JUNE 20, 2013
SYSTEM SAFETY AND OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
JUNE 20, 2013**

SUBJECT: IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY AT METRO**ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE****RECOMMENDATION**

Receive and file report on Improving Accessibility at Metro.

ISSUE

Metro is required by Federal and California law to meet various codes and regulations to ensure that our services and facilities meet minimum levels of accessibility for persons with disabilities. These codes and regulations represent the minimum level of service that we must provide for persons with disabilities and Metro is discovering that as we attract more riders with disabilities the minimum requirements are no longer adequate. The Metro Department of Civil Rights Programs Compliance has looked at transit systems worldwide and found a number of best practices that can be implemented here to improve the customer experience for people with disabilities. These initiatives go above and beyond the minimum requirements we now strive to meet. This report will update the Board on actions that have recently been taken, new steps that will be implemented in our next bus and railcar deliveries and future enhancements that are being developed at Metro.

Los Angeles Metro now transports more people in wheelchairs on board our buses (about 80,000 per month) than any other transit system in the United States, including New York (about 66,000 per month on their combined bus and rail networks) which carries about 6.5 times as many people as Metro every day. The goal of the Civil Rights Compliance Department is to work towards making Los Angeles Metro a world leader in ensuring our facilities and services are accessible for persons with disabilities.

DISCUSSION

1. ADA Requires Priority Seating to be Designated for Seniors and Disabled on Buses and Rail Vehicles

Priority Seating Identification

In addition a new pictogram has been created to identify these reserved seats and to clarify that the seats are for all seniors and anyone who has a disability. The common accessibility pictogram of a wheelchair does not convey the message that the space is also available for seniors who may not have a disability.

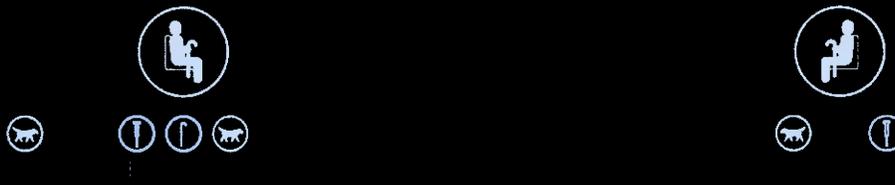
Figure 1 - New Pictogram and Decal for Reserved Seating



In addition to decals identifying the reserved seats a special seat covering has been developed that has the new pictogram woven into the fabric. The fabric will be produced in a color that contrasts with the other seats on buses and rail vehicles to distinguish the reserved seating and further discourage younger and fully ambulatory persons from sitting in the reserved seats.

The new decals will be installed on the existing fleet. The order of 550 new buses will include the new fabric seat covering and buses in the existing fleet will be reupholstered with the decaled fabric as the buses are rehabilitated.

Figure 2 - New Reserved Seat Fabric for Bus and Rail



Priority Seating Location

The ADA requires seats to be identified as “Priority Seating for Seniors and Persons with Disabilities.” Metro currently meets this requirement, however in most cases the seats identified as “Priority” on buses are also the seats which must be flipped up to provide space for wheelchairs. Bus operators are required to ask persons in the priority seats to voluntarily move if the space is required to accommodate wheelchairs, however operators do not have the authority to order passengers to vacate the seats. Indeed seniors and persons with disabilities point out that they have priority for the seats. Unfortunately this means that wheelchair passengers are being denied boarding, and are being asked to wait for the following bus.

In response, Metro will no longer designate the flip up seats as being “Priority” seating for seniors and persons with disabilities. The closest fixed seats to the front door will now be identified for seniors and persons with disabilities; this arrangement will meet regulatory requirements and reduce the confusion and competition for the limited number of wheelchair spaces on each bus. In addition the language on the decals will be changed to strengthen the message. The seats will be identified as being “**Reserved**” for seniors and persons with disabilities. This is being done to reduce the occurrence of younger and more ambulatory persons not moving to give these seats to persons in need. The location of the reserved seats is shown in Figure 3.

Space for Persons with Walkers

Persons who board our buses with walkers are currently required to secure the walkers in the same area set aside for mobility devices, including wheelchairs and sit in a nearby area. Walkers must be secured as they can become dangerous projectiles in case of a sudden stop. If both wheelchair spaces are occupied someone with a walker cannot be boarded as it is not safe to have the walker unsecured and blocking the aisle.

In the order of 550 buses a new seating configuration is being used that will create space for a walker and/or small grocery buggy in addition to the two required mobility device positions. The space will be located in front of the first two curbside forward facing seats and behind the panel for wheelchair securement. The area will also have one center facing flip up seat. The flip up seat will be the fifth seat designated as reserved for seniors and persons with disabilities. Prior to the reconfiguration this flip up was located in the wheelchair securement area and would have been unavailable when a wheelchair is present. By relocating outside of the wheelchair area the total number of available seats when there are two wheelchairs on board is increased by one or each bus can now carry two wheelchairs and one walker. In this position the walker is compartmentalized and does not need to be secured.

Figure 3 - Relocation of Single Flip Up Seat to Create Walker Position



Original layout of New Flyer bus.



Revised layout with flip up seats in down position.



Revised layout with flip up seats in up position accommodating two (2) wheelchairs and one (1) walker.

2. ADA Requires Two Positions for Persons in Wheelchair on Buses More Than 22 Feet Long and Each Position to be Equipped with Securement Hardware

Articulated Buses

Metro fully complies with the requirement to provide two positions for persons with wheelchairs on all of our buses. In the past 10 years, boardings of persons in wheelchairs has increased from about 3,500 per month to more than 80,000 per month. The growth has likely been the result of the introduction of low floor buses, and service improvements such as the Metro Rapid and growth of the connecting rail system. During this period Metro introduced more high capacity 60' buses throughout the system and 65' articulated buses on the Metro Orange Line which enabled reduction of headways while maintaining passenger capacity. However, these high capacity articulated buses only have two positions for wheelchairs, and if headways were reduced the capacity for carrying wheelchairs was also reduced. Metro is now working with the companies that supply wheelchair securement systems to create a design that will allow us to install a total of three positions for persons in wheelchairs, all accessible via the bus' front door and ramp. It is anticipated that the next purchases of articulated buses will have three wheelchair positions.

Securement Systems

In the United States almost all transit wheelchair securement systems are based on the wheelchairs riding in a forward facing position. In order to ride safely in as forward facing position the wheelchair should be secured using a three or four point system, and the passenger should be secured to the wheelchair via lap and shoulder belts. For the passenger's safety, when the wheelchair securement is declined the lap and shoulder belt securement is not applied. The FTA allows transit systems to decide if they wish to require passengers to be secured. Metro has had a long standing policy to allow passengers to choose not to be secured, and the majority ($\frac{3}{4}$) our passengers using wheelchairs refuse securement when offered by operators. Each year Metro pays out significant sums in claims from wheelchair customers who are injured as a result of riding in unsecured wheelchairs.

There appears to be several reasons why riders prefer to ride unsecured:

- Passengers with disabilities do not want to be blamed for delays of up to five minutes while operators complete securement
- Passengers with disabilities do not like to have their personal space invaded as operators work to secure their wheelchair
- Some persons with disabilities like to maintain their independence and do not wish assistance
- Many wheelchairs or mobility devices are challenging to safely secure

In Canada and Europe these issues have been largely eliminated by the adoption of a rear facing wheelchair position. Substantial scientific research has proven that riding in a rear

Figure 5 Q'Pod 3 Point Securement System for 550 New Buses



If the proposed configuration is supported and funded by the Board of Directors, Metro will also investigate the potential to retrofit some of the new buses in the existing fleet with the dual forward and rearward facing system.

Identification of Wheelchair Spaces

The ADA does not include any specific requirements for the identification of the spaces required for wheelchairs riding on buses or rail vehicles. On all Metro bus and rail vehicles except the Red and Purple subway lines the space for wheelchairs is co-located with flip up seats. On buses the operator is required to ask any passengers sitting on those seats to please move and allow a passenger using a wheelchair to board. However the operator cannot require passengers to move from these seats, and many passengers do not. The result is that the wheelchair passenger is left to wait for the next bus.

Many transit systems around the world, including a handful in the United States, designate the floor area with the International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA) and a different color. Metro has specified the next order of 550 buses to include this type of identification. This identification will be incorporated into the existing fleet as buses are rehabilitated. In addition decals will be added that state the space is “**Reserved**” for the use of mobility devices. The same decals will be used on buses and railcars. Figure 4 shows how the floor identification and decals will look on the New Flyer buses.

3. ADA Requires Space to be Provided for Persons in Wheelchairs on Railcars

Wheelchair Positions

The existing light rail cars have two wheelchair positions per articulated pair. Each position on a light rail car is co-located with flip up seats. Each married pair of subway cars has a two wheelchair positions in areas that are shared with bikes.

Metro has embarked on a program to separate the bike and wheelchair areas on each married pair by adding a new and separate area for bikes. The wheelchair area will be further identified and delineated by adding a floor marking similar to that being provided on the buses. It will be identified with blue flooring and the ISA symbol. The exterior doors of the subway cars will be marked to show which ones have a wheelchair position adjacent and which ones have seating for seniors and disabled. Decals will also be provided to advise cyclists which doors are closest to the bike area.

The new order of Light Rail vehicles will have two wheelchair positions per each car half, or a total of four positions per articulated pair. Each position will be co-located with a flip up seat and be marked with decals and floor identification. A separate area will be provided for bicycles.

The new floor identification system will be installed on existing subway and light rail vehicles as they are being rehabilitated.

Figure 6 - Decal and Floor Marking For Mobility Devices on Rail Vehicles



4. Station Provisions for Visually Impaired

Between Car Barriers

The ADA includes a requirement for between car barriers to be installed on rail vehicles or rail platforms to prevent pedestrians from falling between cars. Metro developed a unique approach to this requirement and became the first agency in the nation to install the yellow delineator tubes now found at all of our stations. The system has been adopted by several other rail systems in the U.S. This has proven more effective than barriers mounted on railcars.

Figure 7 - Between Car Barriers at Rail Station

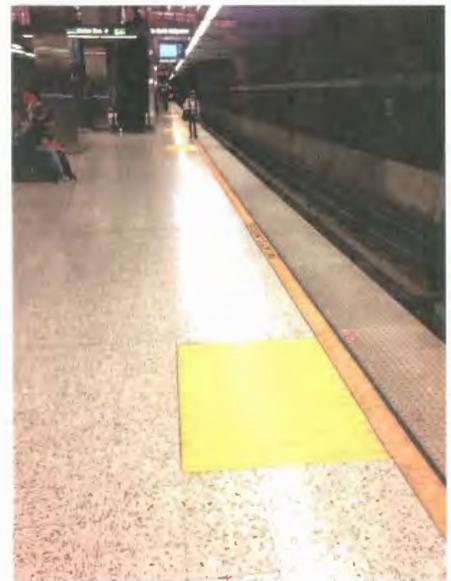


Directional Bars at Doors

California Title 24 requires that raised yellow directional bars be located on rail platforms in each location that doors on a rail vehicle are usually found. Metro is beginning a program to install these bars at every rail station where they are currently not installed. This includes all of the light rail stations and most subway stations. The purpose of the directional bars is to give visually impaired persons using cane tactile information on where they should stand when waiting for a train.

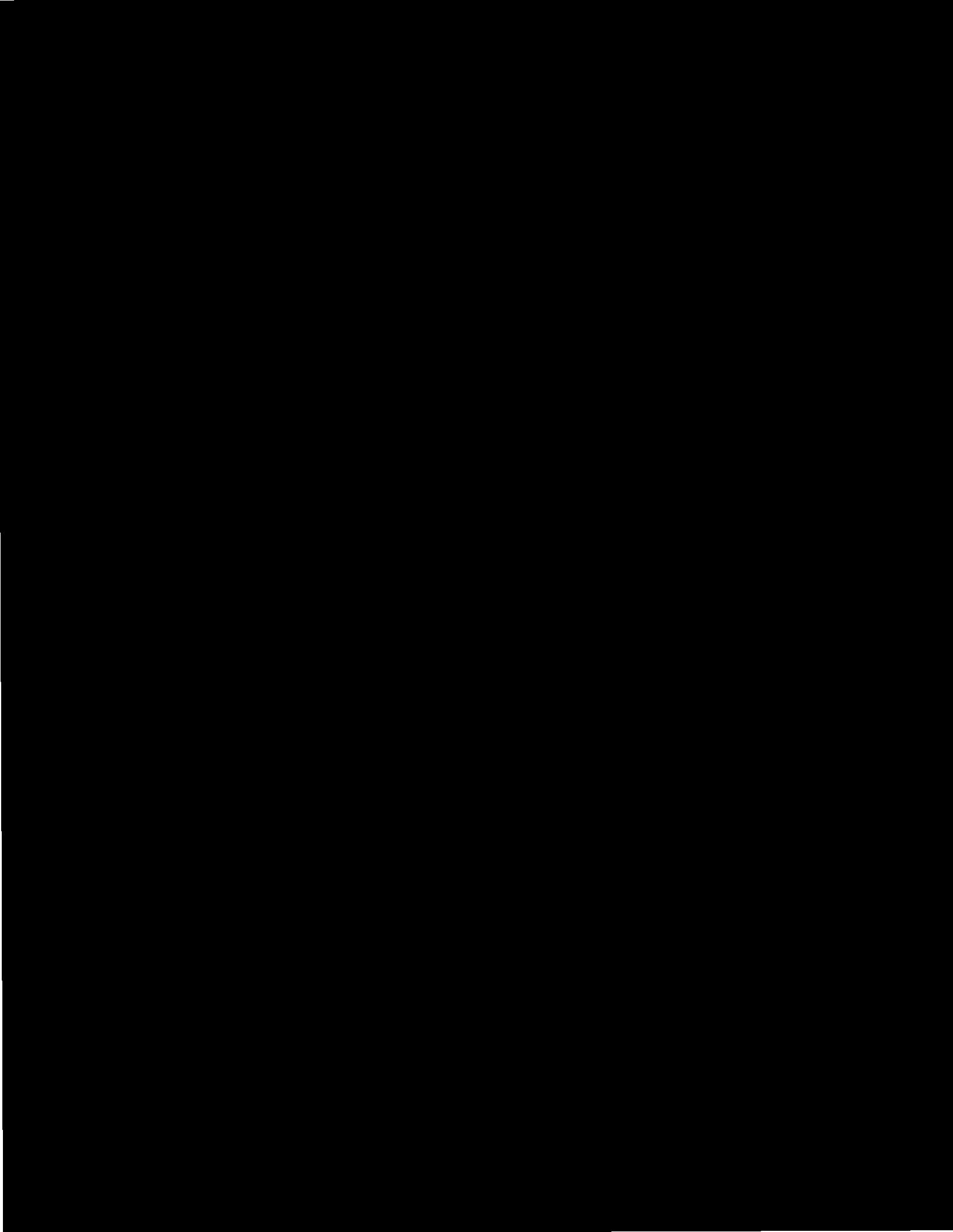
The specific Title 24 requirements do present some issues for Metro, as not every train operates with the same length of consist for every service day or for the entire day of service, and not every light rail vehicle has doors in exactly the same location. As a result Metro will be installing the directional bars only at locations where there are doors on the minimum consist.

Figure 8 - Example of Directional Bars (Purple Line)



Directional Bars for Accessible Path

The ADA and California Title 24 include three main provisions to assist visually impaired passengers using rail stations. These are:



small, and many of the messages were presented in colors that did not provide sufficient contrast.

The system is being updated and brought into compliance with the standards required by the ADA. The larger font size is more readable for everyone, and the correct use of colors now means that the messages are easier to see in all conditions.

Figure 10 - Sample New TPIS Screen (left) and Previous Non-Compliant TPIS (Right)



Hands Free Intercom

Figure 11 - New Hands Free Assistance Intercom on Red Line

The Metro decision to latch the fare gates at some rail stations created potential challenges for persons with disabilities that would prevent them from tapping fare cards to unlatch the turnstile. Metro staff working with the Accessibility Advisory Committee developed a hands free intercom to allow people unable to use their arms to contact the Rail Operations Control Center and request the remote unlatching of the accessible turnstile.

The hands free devices were designed and assembled in-house using off the shelf parts and to the best knowledge of Metro staff this is the first time this technology has been used for such an application anywhere. Staff intends to work with designers and integrate this type of technology in other areas such as elevators to improve the accessibility of our rail stations for all users.



- New directional bars to better identification of the safe, accessible path and waiting areas for persons with visual impairments

FINANCIAL IMPACT

When the work described in the preceding section requires the expenditure of funds that is has not been budgeted a separate report will be brought forward identifying the source of funding and requesting reallocation. Much of the work identified in the preceding section will be completed within the existing programs and budgets including renovation or rehabilitation. It is anticipated that taking these proactive measures to improve accessibility will reduce potential future claims and lawsuits related to the civil rights of persons with disabilities.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

In general terms most of the proposed actions described in this report are above and beyond the existing minimum state and federal regulations for providing access for persons with disabilities. Making transportation facilities and services accessible to persons with disabilities is a civil rights issue and failure to act to maintain and enhance the accessibility of Metro would make the agency potentially liable even if we meet the minimum requirements of the law. The exponential increase in the numbers of people with disabilities served by the Metro System in recent years calls for Metro to think above and beyond the status quo requirements and to anticipate the needs of the large numbers of people served who are disabled. The aging population of baby boomers will mean that Metro will need to safely and effectively accommodate more and more people with disabilities in the future.

The alternative of not acting to improve accessibility was considered, but rejected due to the risk of increased claims and potential financial penalties for not making a best effort to accommodate persons with disabilities.

NEXT STEPS

The Board of Directors will be asked to approve the reallocation of funds to support enhanced wheelchair securement on the order of 550 New Flyer buses. At the time this report was prepared staff were working on finalizing the costs and identifying the source of the funding. Staff will be proceeding with planning and implementing the other initiatives described in this report. A report will be brought back to the Board to report on the progress of the initiatives.

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