

54 ORGANIZATIONS AND 276 INDIVIDUALS SUPPORT 7 KEY CHANGES IN METRO'S FY22 BUDGET - MAY 2021



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TO: Metro Board of Directors
CC: Phil Washington, CEO, Los Angeles Metro
DATE: May 25, 2021

Dear Metro Board of Directors,

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, have reviewed Metro's proposed FY22 budget and identified several concerns with the proposal as it stands. The Los Angeles region is only just beginning to emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, which has devastated the lives of Angelenos for more than a year. Metro's core ridership consists overwhelmingly of working class Angelenos, and particularly those from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities, whose lives and livelihoods have been imperiled to a disproportionate degree.

We are grateful that the Board of Directors, as the governing body of the county's largest transportation provider, has repeatedly invoked Equity and a Just Recovery as important priorities for Los Angeles County in the months and years to come. However, we firmly believe that this rhetoric must be backed up with financial commitments and changes to pre-existing spending priorities if it is to have the material impact on the lives of Angelenos that we know it can.

Unfortunately, the proposed FY22 budget bears all too many hallmarks of the pre-pandemic "old normal" to suggest that Metro intends to be an active partner for Angelenos hoping to "Build Back Better." Restoring the old status quo would not only be insufficient, it would be a tone deaf response to the needs of Metro's riders, for many of whom the last 12 months have been the most difficult of their lives. Metro occupies a position of unique power to advance regional equity, but it cannot do so through passive, unambitious budgets or by queuing after so-called "choice" riders.

It is past time for Metro to be visionary: Angelenos deserve nothing less than the world's best bus network, right here in Los Angeles. It is only through this vision that Angelenos will choose to Join The Movement onto transit in significant numbers.

As representatives of a broad coalition of transit advocacy groups, community leaders, policy analysts, and members of the riding public, we are hopeful that the Board of Directors will give serious consideration to the points discussed below and act to address our concerns in this year's budget.

1. Expand bus service to meet existing needs.

Metro says that without federal support, "restoring transit services to pre-pandemic levels would not be possible." We do not accept this to be true. In fact, Metro had sufficient funding from sales tax receipts to restore bus service during the FY21 budget year, but declined to do so despite multiple direct orders from the Board of Directors.

It is troubling to hear Metro falsely suggest that federal aid is required to return to the pre-COVID baseline, especially given the poor service quality that was widespread before the pandemic began. Bus service has become so degraded over the last 20 years that Metro would have to provide 8.6 million service hours in FY22 to serve the same number of miles that its fleet served in 2000. That is 1.5 million service hours more than are budgeted in FY22. An hour of bus service simply is not what it used to be.

We believe the highest priority for Metro in the upcoming budget year needs to be building trust with existing transit riders and improving the quality of bus service on city streets. That means Metro should use federal stimulus money to begin the first true expansion of bus service since the end of the federal consent decree. Restoring the previous baseline is simply not good enough for our bus riders.

2. Accelerate and prioritize bus capital improvements:

Metro's bus network is caught in a vicious cycle. As riders depart due to the slow, unreliable service the agency provides, they frequently begin driving alone, contributing to traffic that makes buses slower and less reliable. Metro alone can break this cycle, but the proposed FY22 budget fails to address bus speeds.

Metro has identified \$1 billion in key capital projects (like bus only lanes and all-door boarding) that would help resuscitate bus speeds. Despite that, Metro proposes to spend just \$8.2 million on these projects in FY22. At this rate, it would take more than a century to implement NextGen's speed improvements.

Over the past few years, Metro's Transportation Infrastructure Development (TID) budget has grown exponentially, while allocations for the bus network have remained flat. We would like to see bus capital improvements funded as part of the TID program and added to Metro's short and long term plan documents. Metro should plan specific bus capital spending projects and aggressively pursue federal grants and loans to implement them as quickly as possible.

3. Replace armed police with unarmed Metro personnel and social workers.

Metro's policing contract has proven to have dramatic shortcomings. Security costs on board the system have more than doubled in the last 8 years, driven in part by more than \$100 million in cost overruns that were incurred without Board approval. Add to this that Metro has remained reliant on the presence of armed police officers on buses and trains, and it is clear that Metro has fallen considerably behind in reimagining public safety for transit riders.

We are tentatively encouraged by the convening of Metro's Public Safety Advisory Committee, however, we remain concerned about the continuing conflation by Metro of rider safety and security concerns with the need to keep police on transit. Riders want and deserve a safe riding experience, but we know that armed police are not well equipped to keep all riders safe. Black, brown and unhoused

riders on transit are exposed to discriminatory enforcement, trauma, incarceration, or worse with the continued presence of police on buses and trains.

Consequently, we are not content for Metro to wait until the end of the current bloated policing contract to start making changes. Metro should act immediately to increase its spending on social workers and unarmed Metro employees working as attendants inside stations and on buses.

4. Commit to fare free bus service through FY22.

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Metro has not been collecting fares on board its buses. Although this change was enacted primarily for health reasons, it also benefited Metro's predominantly low income bus riders. As Los Angeles begins its economic recovery, Metro should commit to helping bus riders not to fall further behind by keeping buses free throughout FY22.

We believe that the positive impact to bus riders in keeping the bus system free throughout the upcoming year far outweighs the revenue loss that will be experienced by the agency, where ridership and fare collection are already down. Metro has budgeted for \$73 million in fares for FY22, which is less than \$.01 of every dollar that the agency expects to receive. With \$769 Million in budgeted but yet-to-be expended Federal CRRSA Act Resources, and at least \$1 Billion in operations-eligible funding from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), Metro has the moral obligation to use these pandemic recovery funds to help those who need bus and rail service the most--low-income families and essential workers.

Metro needs to build trust with transit riders. For far too long, the agency has been letting down its constituents with poor service quality and repeated failures to show that it understands what life in this city is like for them. Metro can begin to establish that it is willing to put the needs of bus riders first by committing to keep buses fare free in FY22.

We stand in solidarity with the Bus Riders Union, SAJE, ACT-LA and others in no means testing and fare free transit for all.

5. Prioritize Equity Focused Communities in the expenditure of federal stimulus money.

In March 2018, Metro adopted the Equity Platform, and, in June 2019, the agency adopted a definition of Equity Focused Communities. However, we have yet to see these tools result in the prioritization of meaningful resources for these communities. Equity cannot wait - and it cannot be successful unless it is used by Metro to steer funding.

It is long overdue for Metro to target resources for our high need communities. We would hope Metro would make use of the close to \$2 Billion dollars that it will receive in federal funding for COVID relief to accelerate projects in Equity Focused Communities. In particular, funds should be used to improve bus stops, increase service, and make the riding environment more accessible.

6. End support and planning for freeway widening projects.

In FY22, over half of the budget for highway spending is allocated to the study or construction of freeway widening projects. It is unfathomable that with all we now know about climate change, with the increasingly dire projections of the Environmental Protection Agency, and with air quality continuing to worsen, that Metro could still be promoting freeway widenings as an acceptable course of action for our region.

Metro has a responsibility to the communities it oversees to put a halt to all plans for freeway expansion. These air-choking projects cut against the agency’s mandate to improve public transportation and achieve Los Angeles’s climate goals. Any funding designated for freeway expansions should be redirected to transit and active transportation in Metro’s Equity Focused Communities.

If this Board and Metro are truly committed to addressing greenhouse gas emissions caused by single-passenger vehicles, freeway expansion or widening should not be funded. In addition, Metro has budgeted for Interstate 710 North and/or “early action” projects when Caltrans has announced the project will not be moving forward.

7. Allocate resources to ensure greater procedural equity in FY23 budget-making.

Prior to the release of the FY22 budget draft, Investing in Place [submitted a letter to Metro](#) requesting that the agency introduce procedural equity into the budget-making process. Procedural equity includes supporting the ability of groups most affected by Metro initiatives to engage with decision makers and to impact the decision making process.

As Metro deemed it too late in the process to implement several of our requests, we would like to reiterate their importance for the FY23 budget year. This is an opportune time to develop a process for FY23 budget and to work with communities to create a more inclusive timeline and strategy for next year’s budget process.

For follow up on this letter, please contact Jessica Meaney at jessica@investinginplace.org.

Sincerely,

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ACT-LA, Laura Raymond

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Los Angeles Walks, John Yi
Maternal and Child Health Access, Lynn Kersey
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