

# INVESTING *in* PLACE

March 24, 2021

TO: Metro Board of Directors

RE: General Public Comment Metro Board Meeting 03/25/21

CC: Phil Washington, CEO & Christina Goins, Interim Board Secretary, Los Angeles Metro

Dear Metro Board of Directors,

As the fiscal year comes to an end, it is essential for Metro to commit to improving procedural equity at its upcoming public meetings. Investing in Place defines procedural equity as the presence of organizational structures and policies that support the ability of the groups who stand to be most affected by agency initiatives to access spaces where decisions are made, to engage authentically with decision-makers, and to impact the decisions that are made. We regard procedural equity as a central characteristic of a healthy organization, one in which the just provision of services and accountability to the public are prioritized. As Los Angeles County begins to reopen, Metro has a duty to expand community participation at its Board meetings to improve transparency and inclusiveness.

Some requests we would like the Metro Board to implement include:

**1. Allowing at least 30-day public review of the FY22 budget and future budgets before first public hearing**

It is imperative that Metro provide at least a month for the public to review the FY22 draft budget if riders and community members are to have an adequate opportunity to submit input and comments to the Board of Directors. Last year, when Metro was preparing to adopt the \$6 billion FY21 budget, the public had only two weeks to review and make comments. This abbreviated review period came despite the budget process being delayed by several months due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the draft budget was adopted with only minor changes.

Metro has scheduled its FY22 budget hearing for May 19, 2021 with Board adoption scheduled for May 27, 2021. We would like to see Metro commit to make public its draft budget 30 days before the hearing, on April 19. Allowing organizers, advocates, community members and people who ride the bus the time they need to give feedback before the hearing would result in a more equitable budget process. Metro has many transformative proposals in the FY22 budget and it is important

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that the public be given the opportunity to give informed responses to those proposals.

## **2. Making public comment by telephone permanent**

Like government agencies across California during the pandemic, Metro has shifted in the last year to allow members of the public to make comments remotely during its meetings. This change, although made to accommodate extreme circumstances, has had positive impacts on the inclusiveness of public meetings at Metro. The agency should commit to making telephonic comment an option at all meetings permanently.

A permanent option to participate in meetings remotely would increase access for more members of the public to join in the decision-making process, even if they are unable to take time out of their day to be present physically.

## **3. Publicly posting written public comments for committee and Board items**

We would like Metro to commit to making the public comments it receives on all items before committees or the Board of Directors available online on a regular basis. These comments are important public records that form a basis for assessing the agency's accountability to its constituents.

The City of Los Angeles posts public comments next to each committee item, which helps policymakers, community organizers and advocates and community members easily see the full conversation. Conversely, at Metro, the public are not able to see comments without making a specific request. Publicly posting public comments will align the Metro Board with public agency best practices.

## **4. Framework on what the Metro Board of Directors, with the input of community voices, need from the next Metro Chief Executive Officer**

Los Angeles County community members provide a large majority of Metro's revenues each year through self-assessed taxes. As the agency prepares to welcome new leadership, that same community should be invited to steer the conversation around what Metro needs to look for in a new CEO. Community members and grassroots organizations should be able to provide interview questions for the Metro Board to ask interview candidates. The Board of Directors should be transparent

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individually and as a whole about their goals for the new CEO, so there is a shared understanding of what success looks like for the agency.

## **5. Providing clear analysis of revenues eligible for operations and other spending categories with clear descriptions of activities included in each category**

Metro should commit to providing clear, public analysis within its draft budget of revenues it believes are eligible for different spending categories, including operations, capital, maintenance, and so on. We also request a commitment to clear documentation in the draft FY22 budget, and on-going budgets, of where the operations-eligible funds are being allocated in the budget. For example, is any operations-eligible money going to support capital projects unrelated to the operation (such as debt service or capital expansion instead of capital rehabilitation or replacement). These commitments will provide an irreplaceable boost to the equity of Metro's budget process, by increasing the ability of community members and organizations to provide informed comment and analysis on agency budget and priorities.

While we understand that Metro's many revenue streams are tied directly to expenditures of certain types, there is no clear source to which the public can turn to see how Metro is spending its "discretionary" funding. Within categories like operations, there are many different activities that can be funded. Some of these are in line with - and some are at odds with - the priorities of bus riders and the communities in which they live. Metro should be willing to show its work and demonstrate that it can be transparent about how it is choosing to use funds, so that the public can determine whether those choices are a good representation of what it wants.

Sincerely,



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