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LOS ANGELES WALKS

March 20, 2019

Re: NextGen Bus Study

Dear Metro Chair Supervisor Sheila Kuehl and the Metro Board:

We, the undersigned partners, believe the NextGen Bus Study may be the most important work Metro is doing today. Measures R and M are pouring tens of billions of dollars into our rail network, but buses already handle more than 70% of Metro’s daily ridership. With the LA region’s expansive roadway network, buses will continue serving as the workhorse of our region’s transit system. It’s imperative that we do everything we can to ensure our bus network offers safe, accessible, dignified, frequent, and reliable transportation that results in increased economic opportunity, improved health, and wellness outcomes.

Transit ridership has been falling in metro areas across the U.S., including Los Angeles, [but cities like Seattle](#) have demonstrated that when buses get priority, riders prioritize the bus. Based on early updates from Metro staff, we are concerned that the NextGen Bus Study may miss the opportunity to put forward a similarly bold vision for the future of bus service in LA County, as well as set us down the path to achieving the goals of Vision 2028. We are writing to urge the Metro Board of Directors to aggressively invest in a world-class bus network that Angelenos deserve.

Below are the priority issues that the undersigned partners hope to see addressed before the conclusion of the NextGen Bus Study.

- 1) Apply the Equity Platform Framework to the NextGen initiative and disclose to the public how Metro will use data -- including transit ridership goals and solicited rider feedback -- to shape a new bus network.**

Early last year (February 2018), the Metro Board adopted their Equity Platform -- a milestone agency commitment to make decisions informed by need. And this year (January 2019), Metro staff acknowledged in a status report the *importance* of equity to the NextGen Bus Study. Since Metro has yet to define 'equity' and its metrics of success, the NextGen Bus Study should describe its approach to defining and achieving equity.

We understand that Metro staff are developing datasets and maps that can be used to analyze community transportation accessibility by reflecting neighborhood demographics and socioeconomic data. But, these maps remain inaccessible to the public to date and appear to be separate from the NextGen Bus Study. **We urge Metro to apply the Equity Platform Framework when shaping a new bus network, specifically by bridging transportation accessibility gaps reflected in Metro's equity analysis.**

Additionally, NextGen Bus Study teams led by Metro have solicited the opinions of many current Metro riders, former riders, and infrequent/non-riders. However, Metro has not clearly stated how it will weigh the opinions of each group in its decision-making. **We urge Metro to place substantial weight in the NextGen analysis on the lived experiences of current and former riders who identify the ways in which bus service is falling short and what can be done to improve bus service for riders today.**

2) **Remove the NextGen study constraint disallowing recommendations for increased bus service funding.**

Up to this point, Metro's remarks on the NextGen Bus Study have focused on trade-offs within the transit network. For example, Metro is asking the public whether they would prioritize wider service coverage or more frequency *within a fixed budget*. When Metro officials artificially constrain their recommendations this way, Metro discourages its NextGen staff from making recommendations that could meaningfully improve bus service, especially if such recommendations increase Metro's bus budget. This approach limits Metro's prospect of truly reshaping bus service to expand transportation access.

In addition to a revenue-neutral scenario, the study should also explore a "budget increase" scenario. This additional scenario could demonstrate how supporting an expanded bus network might increase ridership, through a range of possible strategies from low-cost to high-cost options. The study would also necessarily explore how reaching desirable outcomes, like increasing ridership, could increase farebox revenues, and consequently render a "budget increase" recommendation feasible.

If Metro artificially constrains the study to disallow recommendations for increased bus service funding, Metro impedes what could otherwise be a meaningful opportunity to enable greater transportation access with bus service. **We urge Metro to remove the NextGen study constraint disallowing recommendations for new bus service**

funding and explore a range of bus “budget increase” scenarios that could transform bus service throughout LA County.

- 3) **Integrate city officials with Metro staff on this bus service study to achieve regional coordination of the public right-of-way and to move agencies toward shared goals of expanding dedicated transit-only lanes, sharing data, and improving transit amenities.**

Public buses (and even some train lines) in LA County do not operate with travel priority in public rights-of-way, thus delaying transit riders and perpetuating perceptions that transit service is unreliable and slow. We can make meaningful improvements to support faster bus service by developing a network of dedicated transit-only lanes throughout the region. Metro’s Silver and Orange Lines [arrive on-time around 90 percent of the time](#). These are some of Metro’s best performing buses because the Silver and Orange Lines travel with priority in managed or exclusive bus lanes.

What has been missing in the NextGen study thus far is a discussion of trade-offs between transit and privately-operated automobiles, which dominate the public right-of-way. While Metro operates most public transit service in LA County, Metro does not have authority over roadways on which buses travel. City officials have authority over how roadways are allocated, maintained, and operated. Therefore, city officials have a critical role in untangling public buses from privately-operated automobile traffic.

Without changing how cities prioritize road space, Metro can’t deliver meaningfully improved bus service. Developing a region-wide network of dedicated bus lanes should be a top recommendation in the NextGen Bus Study. Metro has recently made a strong case for the benefits of congestion pricing, and [similar bold action is needed to support bus-only lanes throughout the county](#). **We urge Metro Directors to instruct staff to work in partnership with city officials, the County of Los Angeles, and Caltrans to produce a priority list of early right-of-way action items as part of the NextGen study to be implemented with the rollout of the NextGen service plan.** The actions should include bus lanes, bus boarding islands, traffic signal priority, queue jump lanes at intersections, and bus shelters. These actions should be prioritized based on the Equity Framework, as well as potential to reduce rider delay, improve on-time performance, and increase operating efficiency. These right-of-way actions should be coordinated with other speed and reliability improvements that Metro directly controls, including expansion of all-door boarding.

Sincerely,

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