



**Metro**

Los Angeles County  
Metropolitan Transportation Authority

One Gateway Plaza  
Mail Stop 99-3-1  
Los Angeles, CA 90012-2952

Hilda L. Solis  
Chair

July 7, 2021

## **Open Letter to the Chief Executive Officer**

Dear Stephanie,

Today marks an extraordinary milestone for Metro. It is the first time in the agency's 28-year history that two women of color are at the helm as its Chief Executive Officer and as the Chair of its Board of Directors. In these new roles, you and I have the opportunity to transform Metro into an organization that champions equity and puts our riders and residents first. This opportunity comes at a time when communities across Los Angeles County are grappling with the aftermath of a highly contagious and deadly pandemic. For more than a year, our residents have endured severe economic hardship, health disparities, and housing insecurity with communities of color taking the brunt of those impacts. The pandemic has undoubtedly deepened structural inequities that will be felt across the county for years to come.

In light of these inequities, we must ask ourselves, "What can Metro do better?" No matter how well we excel at a particular task, there is always room to do better. We can create a better transit system. We can foster a better, stronger economic recovery for the county. We can push to re-imagine and re-design our highways to better serve residents. All of this can be accomplished by basing all of our work on a single principle: Bringing Equitable Transportation To Every Resident, or B.E.T.T.E.R. for short. Now more than ever, our constituents will be relying on the services that Metro provides and we must be ready to meet the moment. I am writing this open letter to communicate my priorities for the year in hopes that we can develop a shared vision for the future of the agency and the role Metro plays in bringing equitable transportation to every resident in Los Angeles County.

### Priority #1: Supporting Transit Riders

During the worst of the pandemic, Metro's ridership dropped drastically from 1.2 million daily trips to just over 500,000 trips on its transit network. As we begin recovering from the pandemic, Metro will be faced with the challenge of restoring its ridership. This challenge is compounded by the fact that Metro's transit patronage was already declining year over year for almost a decade prior to the pandemic. The ridership decline can be attributed in part to a recent explosion in vehicle ownership in the region. From 1990 to 2000, Southern California added 0.25 vehicles per new resident compared to almost 1.0 vehicle per new resident by the end of 2015. Metro's buses are the workhorse of its transit network and when buses are stuck in traffic, travel times increase and reliability worsens. Transit riders comprise the county's essential workforce and represent the low-income, Black and Latinx communities most impacted by the pandemic.



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Transit riders need better service, and they need it now in order to return to any sense of normalcy. To provide better service, Metro needs to invest more funding in operations, homelessness outreach, and alternatives to law enforcement.

Metro can also better support transit riders by building more affordable housing near high quality transit. Over the next few years, as we build projects on the Twenty-Eight by '28 list, Metro will be acquiring many properties. These properties will be used for construction staging, new stations, parking lots and maintenance facilities. Affordable housing can and should be built on these properties as part of major capital projects, and not after the fact. Investments in affordable housing near transit are crucial, considering that transit riders come from some of the most disadvantaged neighborhoods in the county and have average annual incomes of just \$18,000. These are the residents that need affordable housing the most. By improving transit services and tapping into affordable housing projects, we can help prevent the displacement of vulnerable communities and give support to riders that need it the most.

#### Priority #2: Equitable Recovery

With an \$8 billion annual budget, Metro has the capacity to foster economic growth throughout the entire county. While we are spending down infrastructure dollars to build major capital projects, we should think not only about the populations the projects will support but the individuals that are building those projects as well. We can advance an equitable recovery for the county by creating well-paying jobs targeted towards underserved communities through the acceleration of major capital projects like the Gold Line Eastside Extension and the West Santa Ana Branch, and initiatives such as Twenty-Eight by '28. Metro can also work towards developing new pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs, and engaging more women in construction trades.

Furthermore, Metro can explore strategies to help our small business communities grow and prosper. Over the last year, the county lost more than 400,000 jobs and saw 7,500 small businesses permanently close. Small businesses make up over 90% of the businesses in Los Angeles County and employ hundreds of thousands of low wage workers. Metro already does so much for our small business community, but we can always do better. We can expand programs like Eat Shop Play to businesses along existing transit corridors that have been heavily impacted by the pandemic, and we can create supportive programs for vulnerable street vendors and microentrepreneurs that rely on Metro station activity to generate business.

#### Priority #3: Re-Imagining Metro's Highway Program

For decades, Metro and other agencies across the United States have built freeway projects at the expense of communities of color. As Supervisor for Los Angeles County's First District, I can see the disparities created by highway construction every time I look at a map of the areas I proudly represent. Communities like Boyle Heights and unincorporated East Los Angeles are



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occupied by numerous freeways that were intentionally built there during the height of federal highway investment. These tangles of overpasses and trenches displaced thousands of residents and continue to divide neighborhoods and concentrate pollution in these communities. Other parts of the county have seen these impacts as well. For example, the 105 Freeway – also known as the Century Freeway – displaced over 25,000 residents as part of its construction.

Historically, highway investments have favored cars over anything else. Today, we have the chance to change that for the better. Just last month, the Metro Board of Directors took action to allow Metro’s Measure R and Measure M highway dollars to be used towards projects for all users of the road. These highway dollars will now support everyone on the road, whether you walk, bike, roll, take transit, or drive. Communities along corridors like the 710 South should not be burdened with displacement and pollution even more than they already are. That is why my third priority is to re-evaluate Metro’s investments in highway programs to protect communities from displacement and environmental pollution.

With these priorities in mind, I stand ready to partner with you to lead Metro in bringing equitable transportation to every resident. Together, we can build a better Metro.

Sincerely,

Hilda L. Solis  
Metro Board Chair  
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors Chair, First District

cc: Metro Board Members