



Metro Board of Directors

Via email to Metro Board Secretary Christina Goins at goinsc@metro.net

Subject: **CONCERNS with Items 45 & 46 - Fareless Transit Pilot Program**

Dear Metro Board of Directors,

As you consider launching a fareless transit pilot program this month, Alliance for Community Transit - Los Angeles (ACT-LA) and our community partners urge you to commit to launching a universal fareless transit system in Los Angeles.

We have been listening to transit riders and are attaching a sample of their concerns. Metro buses have rightfully waived fares this past year and essential workers, who have been hit the hardest by COVID-19, still need no fares to stay afloat. Please see attachment for specific quotes and background info. This is a sample of testimonies from among the hundreds of thousands of low-income people that ride Metro daily.

Metro must:

1) Commit to launching a universal fareless transit system in Los Angeles

- Report back on options including a pass-free option
- Participation rates in Metro's low-income fare program are low because applicants do not have capacity, resources, or documents necessary to apply to the program and sustain participation.
- Proof of income is especially difficult for immigrant communities to produce.

2) Direct staff to report back on the following by mid-year budget adjustment in November/December 2021:

- Outline steps to end existing fare system contracts and produce a workforce transition plan to ensure no net loss of public sector jobs;
- Outline the cost of maintaining fare collection systems, fare enforcement systems, and any other fare systems and explain how the savings on not having this fare infrastructure could go towards sustaining universal fareless transit.
- To the extent existing contracts are limiting Metro's ability to launch a universal pass-free system, Metro staff must report on the necessary steps to ending these contracts.

3) Continue back-door boarding and forgo fare collection until a fareless program begins.

- The physical, emotional, and economic toll that the COVID-19 pandemic and its fallout is having on Los Angeles residents cannot be overstated. Reinstating fares on buses now would provide a new burden on families who are already overwhelmed.
- As Metro continues to consider both short- and long-term options for fare-less transit, it must continue to forgo fare collection until a fareless program begins.

Please see the attached transit riders testimonies collected by Women Organizing Resources Knowledge and Services (WORKS).

Sincerely,

Alliance for Community
Transit - Los Angeles

ACLU of Southern California

Advancement Project
California

Community Power Collective

Investing in Place

Jobs to Move America

Koreatown Immigrant
Workers Alliance

LA Black Worker Center

LA Forward

Los Angeles County Bicycle
Coalition

People for Mobility Justice

Strategic Actions for a Just
Economy (SAJE)

Willowbrook Inclusion
Network (WIN)

Women Organizing
Resources, Knowledge and
Services (WORKS)

Dorothy E.



"I want to be effective in helping the residents I work with. They need access to transportation, period. They don't need to jump through hoops to prove that they deserve the discount. They need an application free, fare free transportation."

Dorothy E.

Metro rider for over 10 years

Now riding 28, 687, 780,

Red and Gold Lines.

I live in Pasadena and travel by bus daily. I work in Northeast LA at a permanent supportive housing building. I work with tenants to connect them to transportation resources. Most of the residents are in General Relief, some are in SSI and other safety net programs. We are talking about communities that otherwise would have no means to sustain themselves. They also have specific physical and mental health conditions, and for many, this is the first time they are housed in decades.

In the last four years I have helped our tenants, one by one, to apply for the LIFE program. I have witnessed how difficult it is to apply. Not only to apply but to stay enrolled. I see them struggle to follow prompts using their phone and most can barely use the computer. This process was a monthly cumbersome ordeal that deterred many of the tenants, many who urgently need access to public transportation, from applying.

Also, as an employee responsible to sign tenants up for the program, it was not an efficient use of my time, it increased my work load and frankly robbed me from supporting tenants in a more meaningful way. I found myself on long holds with Metro and I would have to drop calls so I could attend to other pressing matters.

Most of the tenants have stress and anxiety. Applying requires a lot patience, calling, following automated prompts, waiting on hold. Over the years I have seen participation dwindle. On average, 12 tenants would request help with transportation needs but since we moved to the LIFE program I have seen that only a third of the residents stay with it. Others have missed doctor's appointments, visits to family and the ability to go to the food bank. Communities like this, and all bus riders, need to have full access to a service they have already paid for.

Metro should work with the people instead of having the people work to prove to the agency that they deserve the discount. We need a fare-less public transportation.

#PeoplesTransit #FareFreeTransit

Concepción B.

"Having a fare free transit would help me and my family to be able to pay other bills and perhaps begin to save some little money for emergencies."

Concepción B.

Metro rider for over 30 years

*Now riding 20, 720, 28, 728, 30, 66,
200, 210, 710, 910, 950,
Red and Gold Lines.*

*Here standing with teenage daughter inside
an overcrowded 28 bus line, April 24, 2021.*



I live in central Los Angeles. I am the mother of four, a wife and a Metro rider.

Currently, I have one student in junior high, another one in high school and one in College. All my kids ride the buses and trains like me.

For years my family could not afford bus passes at once, or at the start of the month, so we paid, per trip, to take my children to school and extracurricular activities daily.

In recent years have been receiving treatment for a health condition and I travel regularly to the Martin Luther King Hospital. I catch the 910 or 950 buses that run on the freeway. This means I pay extra for the zoning. Sometimes I find myself praying that the fare box is not working, not because I don't want to pay, but because I don't have enough money to pay beyond my pass. It is stressful and embarrassing to not have money for the fares.

We buy three monthly passes, but we struggle to gather the funds every month. We have only one income; \$2,600 monthly. I know residents in Los Angeles already pay into the transportation system through taxes. **I believe transportation can be free.**

Having a fare free transit could benefit families like mine. We could cover other expenses such as internet and the electric bill which have increased a lot in cost in the last year. We could also afford to buy more food, my medical bills and take care of other family needs so we can stay healthy during these hard times.

#PeoplesTransit #FareFreeTransit

Cecilia G.

"I have lived in Los Angeles all my life and have seen the changes in public transportation. The change we need during these hard times is of a FREE service. Metro is not only important, it is essential for me and thousands of people of color. Let's FREE Metro."

Cecilia G.

Metro rider for 50 years

***Now riding line 18, 68, 78, 251, 770, Dash D,
Red, Orange and Gold Lines.***



I'm a 7th generation Angelina woman from Boyle Heights. My family has been using public transportation since those services started here in Los Angeles. We do not have cars because we know the importance of public transportation. I know all the lines and have ridden Metro since it was called RTD. As a student my parents would buy my bus pass and as a young adult I remember when paper transfers were discontinued. This affected me because it meant I had to pay more per trip since I could only afford the weekly bus passes. Currently I have a tap card and I load it as I go. I already live pay check to pay check and with the pandemic my salary has been compromised so I need to be extra careful with my finances. Each week I plan ahead to see how many trips I can afford. I could probably qualify for discount programs but it is a pain in the butt to apply. I know in the past I planned to apply but it meant taking time off of work to go to the Metro offices. I decided not to apply because I could not afford to miss work.

During this last year I had to visit relatives in the Valley and to get there I take the 68 bus, to the Red Line, to the Orange Line and then make my last transfer to get to their house. In several occasions I have chosen not to go check on my relatives because I can't afford the train fares and I have various health conditions myself. I have to think about securing my medical care insurance which is an extra financial concern. I read the stats, and as a woman of color, I get paid .55 cents per dollar. We don't live in a system of equity here. I have to make so many decisions daily and monthly just to stay afloat. I can't afford a car, nor do I believe that is the solution. **Public transportation should be a basic service included and guaranteed for all, not a worry and source of concern. It's time to make Metro free.**

Dorothy E.



"I was unhoused for years and poor. Many times I could not pay \$1.25 for the train ticket, which cost me 24 hours in jail. That was not right. We want public transportation that is free of charge."

***Dorothy E.
Metro rider for over 10 years
Now riding 28, 687, 780,
Red and Gold Lines.***

I have been a bus and train rider for the last 10 years. Before that I had my van. It was my home and my transportation until the sheriff impounded it because I had a ticket I could not pay. They took my van, my housing, all my possessions and my means of generating income as I made jewelry to sell so I could sustain myself and my dog, Gunnar. Then came the day for me to appear in court and I was afraid of getting on the train because I did not have money to pay the fare. At the same time, I did not want to miss court, so I still took the train downtown. Once I was getting on the train the Metro police caught me, ticketed me and jailed me. I missed my court date. I spent a whole day in jail for not having \$1.25. I felt trapped. **This happened on 3 different occasions. That was not right. Not only was I criminalized for being poor, for trying to do what I could to make my life better and not live on the streets, but my time was wasted. The City's money was wasted in police salaries and jailing me.**

We need real solutions for transit dependent communities. Policing and ticketing people for not being able to pay is not a solution. **The solution, especially for people who can't afford it and those who are trying to come off the streets, is to have zero fares and to allow everyone who needs transportation to have access to this service.**

I was unhoused for so long and jailing me for not having a \$1.25 fare did not help me, nor did those experiences make my life better. I see people still experiencing these injustices now. We can do much better. **We need a fare free transit now. We need to spend money on what the riders really need and that's quality transportation service.** What we also need is more bus stops with shelters and with no anti-homeless sitting. This is harsh and uncaring.

Maribel D.



“Haven’t we already paid for our transit system? In taxes? Because paying to get on the bus and train every time is really disposable income for people. This is extra money that you are taking away and that it could pay for a bill or food. Low-income families have already paid Metro through their taxes and honestly don’t have enough in their checks every month to be paying these fares.”

Maribel D
Metro rider since childhood
Now riding line 45,
Red and Gold Lines

I am a Lincoln Heights resident and I see it is still tough on families right now and will be for a long time. It has been tough for people for a long time! People have to make choices every day on what they are going to spend money on. This goes back to when I was a kid. My mom had to choose to buy a bus pass or give me money for snacks at school. She would ask, “Do I take the bus or feed my child today?”

At the end of the day when you think about it if you spend \$5 here for one ride and another \$5 for another that becomes a meal for a family. This is causing a lot of stress for people who have to make decisions with the little money they have. The City wants people to take transit. But if people can’t afford the fares, what do you think they are going to do? They can’t pay. I see some people are now just choosing to walk and ride bikes because buses are too expensive.

Making free fares permanent would help a lot of people, and would have helped people like my son. My son is very creative and wants to be an artist. He secured himself an apprenticeship but he had to take a couple of buses to get to it. But the problem was that he had to dig into his personal savings to pay for the bus. We didn’t save all that money for him to be taking buses. But he had to make a choice. Not do his apprenticeship? Here is another example of someone who is making no money but doing good things who should be able to afford taking the bus without stress. If you are volunteering or doing an apprenticeship all transportation should be free. **It should be free for all people.**

Martha S.



"I don't have a car and I spend a lot of money in transportation. I want a transportation system that stands for the people. I want a fare free service."

Martha S.

***Metro rider for over 30 years
Now riding 20, 720, 70, 76, 78,
180, 780,
Red and Gold Lines.***

I live in Monterey Park and travel from my city to El Monte, to downtown, East Los Angeles, and Chinatown. I have two part-times jobs and spend an average of \$250 in transportation monthly. It is a lot for me alone. Sometimes I wonder if it's worth even going out to work. We are in a pandemic and in the last year I have been able to save a little money because Metro buses are not charging the fare.

Aside from Metro I ride Montebello, the Dash, and also ride Foothill buses. Too bad they are charging. They did not give us a break during Covid19.

I believe that we need a transportation system that is free of charge. In my case, I would be able to stretch my dollars. It feels like I am working just to pay the fares. Rent is very expensive, and the bills are piling.

Having a free transit system would also help us reduce traffic. There are studies showing that more people would choose to get on the buses and trains, save money and even time looking for parking. I am also concerned about climate change and pollution. **There are so many cars in Los Angeles, everywhere. There would be no better remedy to these problems and an incentive for all in the city than having a fare free transit for all.**

Martha M.



"I am making hard decisions in order to stay housed and take care of my health. Metro can expand the fare free service to the trains. We need to recover financially."

Martha M.

***Metro rider for over 32 years
Now riding 45, 78, 79, 910, 950,
Red, Blue and Gold Lines.***

I am a renter in Lincoln Heights. Having no fares to travel on Metro buses has helped me a lot in the last year.

During this time of the pandemic I lost the few jobs I had. I have taken care of small children for years and traveled far away to Los Feliz and the Beverly Connection areas for work. Now I have no real or secure income except for earning a little bit here and there by taking on sewing jobs, cooking for people or caring for my granddaughter and other odd jobs. This does not mean that I have no expenses.

I had to make drastic decisions early last year and moved in to my brother's apartment because I could not afford rent on my own. Currently I travel regularly to USC, to the school of dentistry, for a dental treatment which is long, painful and expensive. I need thousands of dollars to pay for it. For me every penny I can save counts toward my teeth, toward my health, which in turn means getting back to work and stability. I take the 45 bus line, to the Red line, then I transfer to the Blue line to get to my dental appointments. Many times I don't have the money for the train ride so I find myself taking more buses or walking more which results in more transfers or time spent each way.

Public transportation is not a luxury. It is a means to generating income. It is a connection to health services. It is a means to remaining involved in my community and being able to see my family.

I ask the Metro Board to reassess priorities and make trains free also, not only for now, but forever. We can't recover if we don't come together. The people of the City and County of Los Angeles are in dire need financially.

We need real options and means to remain able to take care of ourselves and be able to get back to whatever jobs we can find.

Nicole C.



"You are constantly having to have to pay for each ride but not everyone has it. It's a stress and a struggle. I was already homeless with my children, and I did not have any fare money and the cops ticketed me."

***Nicole C. and children.
Metro rider for over 30 years.***

I have ridden buses and trains throughout my life. As a single mom sometimes I didn't have the money for my fares. Sometimes I would jump on and I would sit there and be so worried that I was going to get caught. I wonder to myself what would happen if they stopped me in front of my kids. But sometimes it was just too hard to come up with the money for all of us and I just needed to get us on the bus. I would tell my son, "Just don't say anything." It was the choice I often found myself having to make because I didn't have the money. A lot of people, moms like me, have to make choices like this. We need to get to the doctors. We need to get to the store. I was a single mom at the time. The stress was awful but I needed to do what I needed to do for my children. It is a terrible position to put people in, especially moms just trying to take care of their kids.

At the end of the day the fare should not be a point of stress. One time I did get caught. I was ticketed by the cops. They pushed me against the wall as if I was hardcore criminal and treated me as if I had committed a huge crime. It made me feel really bad. I was already homeless and I didn't have any money. I was just trying to get from point A to point B. My ticket became a warrant and I ended up in jail. It is crazy to me that you can end up in jail because you can't afford to ride the train. I wasn't hurting anyone but I was made to feel like a criminal for riding the train.

Riding trains and buses when we all pay taxes for the system is a public right. No one should go to jail over it.

Ofelia V.



“As a tax payer and a low income woman I know I have paid my fair share. Being able to travel without the worry of fares would help my economy and perhaps allow me to begin to save for emergencies.”

Ofelia V.

***Metro rider for over 30 years
Now riding line 18, 30, 51, 68, 78,
79, 204, 207, Red and Gold Lines.***

I live in East Los Angeles. I rely on buses and trains to go to work and school. For me, public transportation is really important. It is my only and best option to travel in such a geographically spread out city like Los Angeles. I am a very active person and involved in my community so in order to make my activities happen I have to be on top of my financial and time planning.

It has been a blessing to travel with no worry about fares in Metro in the last year. At the same time, I do need to catch trains so I put as much money as I can in my tap card and sometimes it lasts 5 days, other times 7 days, depending on how many trips I take. Many times I have chosen not to travel because I don't have the money to do my errands, especially near the end of the month. Sometimes I have neglected visiting people I care about for the same reason.

As a woman, having buses running frequently is also really important. I am an actor as well, and in order to make it to my performances, most of which are scheduled at nighttime and on weekends, I ride buses late. Waiting alone, in the dark and as a female, in the streets, is not safe. In the trains, “safety” is different. I see so many police officers and the sheriffs, uniforms everywhere, and that does not provide me with a sense of security. I actually get more stressed. I know in this country there are many tax collections, so we ought to invest those moneys in transportation. When we talk about transportation we are talking just about the most basic services people need.

We ought to do better for the people in this city! We already paid for transportation. We need transportation that is free for all the riders that depend on it!