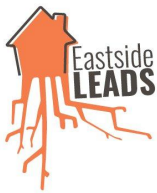


July 27, 2023

Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority
One Gateway Plaza Los Angeles, California, 90012-2952

Re: Prioritize A Universal Fareless Metro to Advance Equity And Increase Ridership





Dear Metro Board of Directors and CEO Stephanie Wiggins,

The Alliance for Community Transit - Los Angeles (ACT-LA) is a coalition of 44 organizations fighting for housing and transit justice in Los Angeles County. We strive to create equitable transit systems and communities for all people in Los Angeles, placing the interest of low-income communities and communities of color first as we create a more sustainable region. ACT-LA believes LA Metro should be a sanctuary for the public, where Metro’s train and bus are fareless, and integrated into people’s daily lives and neighborhoods. Metro should serve as a public system where all people feel safe, access information, and receive a high level of service.

Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE) and ACT-LA recently released a report outlining the benefits to going universally fareless for both riders and Metro and how eliminating fares will advance equity in the region.¹ As the report emphasizes, 63% of Metro riders earn less than \$25,000 and 86% of riders support a fareless system. During Metro’s defacto fareless program from 2020 to 2022, riders reported greater mobility, significant relief to their household budgets, and more use of the system. Riders of color, particularly Black riders, are disproportionately cited and arrested by law enforcement for fare evasion. In reinstating universal fareless operation, Metro would be making good on the equity platform the agency launched in 2018, committing to “reduce and ultimately eliminate disparities in access to opportunities.”

	CITATIONS FOR FARE EVASION	PERCENT OF TOTAL (16,393)
American Indian/Alaskan Native	16	0.10%
Asian/Pacific Islander	244	1.49%
African American	8,746	53.35%
Hispanic	4,230	25.80%
Other	991	6.05%
Unknown	211	1.29%
White	1,955	11.93%

¹ “The Road to Transit Equity: The Case for Universal Fareless Transit in Los Angeles,” May 2023.

Metro would also benefit from the boost in ridership that accompanies fareless service. Cities that implemented fareless have seen increases from 20% to 750% thereafter, an outcome with further benefits for local public health and safety. In addition to eliminating potential disputes between riders and operators over fares, a fareless program, with increased ridership, is a community safety strategy that guarantees more eyes on the system. In Kansas City’s fareless program, 80% of riders said fareless increased their sense of safety. Metro, in its own analyses, has also identified fareless as a climate intervention strategy, estimating that a fareless program could reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 50-60 billion miles through 2047.

TABLE 1. FAREBOX RECOVERY RATIO OF US TRANSIT AGENCIES WITH LARGEST RIDERSHIP (FISCAL YEAR 2019)		
	UNLINKED PASG RIDES	FAREBOX RECOVERY RATIO
MTA New York City Transit (NYCT)	3.45B	52.6%
Chicago Transit Authority (CTA)	455.8M	40.7%
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro)	379.7M	14.6%
Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA)	366.7M	44.6%
Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA)	354.7M	33.0%
Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)	308.3M	35.0%
New Jersey Transit Corporation (NJ TRANSIT)	267.3M	43.3%
City and County of San Francisco (SFMTA)	223.3M	23.0%
MTA Bus Company (MTABUS)	135.1M	26.3%

The benefits of going fareless far outweigh the costs. Fares make up under 2% of Metro’s overall budget and there are no indications that fare revenues will rebound to pre-pandemic levels, given current low ridership and the recently-initiated fare-capping changes that will, if implemented as envisioned, bring in less revenue than the previous fare structure. As the report found, nearly 75% of fare revenues go toward TAP administration and fare enforcement. Metro is currently expending significant resources to administer and enroll riders in LIFE and GoPass programs; meanwhile research tells us that the communities that stand to benefit from such means-tested programs are poorly served by the barriers to enrollment.

A universal fareless program is a key strategy for addressing equity, climate, and public safety challenges. We urge that Metro pursue universal fareless transit in the immediate, to eliminate the inefficiencies that come with administering fares and focus public money and time on turning Metro into the world-class, leading transit agency it aspires to be.

Signed,

Alliance for Community Transit-Los Angeles (ACT-LA)
Active San Gabriel Valley
Aetna Street Solidarity
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)- Southern California
Beverly-Vermont Community Land Trust
Bici Libre
Bike LA
Catalyst California
Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights (CHIRLA)
Center for Biological Diversity (CBD)
Climate Resolve
Community Power Collective (CPC)
Democratic Socialists of America (DSA-LA)
Eastside Leads
Esperanza Community Housing Corporation
Fideicomiso Comunitario Tierra Libre
Inquilinos Unidos
Investing in Place
Jobs to Move America (JMA)
KIWA
LA Forward
Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC)
Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust
NoHo Home Alliance
People for Mobility Justice
Public Counsel
Rising Communities
SAJE
Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)
Thai Community Development Center (Thai CDC)
Transiting Los Angeles
Willowbrook Inclusion Network (WIN)