

Metro Blue Ribbon Committee

Meeting #4

Tuesday, May 4, 2010
9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Metro, Windsor Room, 15th Floor
One Gateway Plaza, Los Angeles

DRAFT MEETING SUMMARY

I. INTRODUCTION

On May 4, 2010, Metro hosted the fourth meeting of its Blue Ribbon Committee—a collaborative group of key stakeholders representing system users, local transit operators, and community and business interests. The purpose of the meeting was to:

- Discuss transit signage and communications
- Define service quality elements
- Discuss tradeoffs between service provision and customer satisfaction

Background

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA, or Metro) convened the Blue Ribbon Committee to help guide the development of a regional transit services concept, which will serve as the blueprint for the agency's continued development of integrated systems and services. Metro is at a critical planning juncture as the agency seeks to leverage Measure R funds to continue to improve the network while addressing significant operating deficits. Current deficits are the result of reductions in state funding and services revenues as well as system inefficiencies.

Metro's success in leveraging Measure R funds will be contingent on innovative thinking stemming from a solid base of sound planning practices. The Blue Ribbon Committee will advise Metro on how to meet challenges related to serving the diverse needs of passengers, communities, and operators, while also increasing the effectiveness and attractiveness of the regional transit system for current and potential users.

Critical elements for consideration are systems integration and coordination, quality and attractiveness of services, attention to customers and employees, and an emphasis on sustainability.

Meeting Format and Attendees

Meeting facilitator Daniel Iacofano of MIG introduced himself and co-facilitator Pat McLaughlin, reviewed the agenda for the morning, and then led a round of self-introductions. Committee members in attendance were:

Neil Bjornsen, Metro Citizens Advisory Council

Donald Camph, El Segundo Employers Association

Diana Ho representing Larry Eisenberg, Los Angeles Community College District

Genevieve Giuliano, University of Southern California

Alex Gonzalez, Metro San Gabriel Valley Sector Governance Council

Rena Kambara, Metro South Bay Sector Governance Council

Jim Lefton, Los Angeles Department of Transportation

Antonio Le Mons, FAME Assistance Corporation

Kymerleigh Richards, Metro San Fernando Valley Sector Governance Council

Wally Shidler, Metro Gateway Cities Sector Governance Council

Jerard Wright, Metro Westside/Central Sector Governance Council

Also in attendance were: Catherine Bator, Westside Central Governance Council; Nikki Padayao, Northrop Grumman Corporation; and Phil Aker, Los Angeles Department of Transportation.

Metro staff in attendance were Ed Muncy, Conan Cheung, Athena Thai, David Hershenson, Scott Page, Vivian Tran, Bruce Shelburne, Pete Serdienen, Dana Woodbury, Cosette Stark, and Lynda Bybee.

Dr. Iacofano began the meeting by announcing that the primary focus for the day would be service quality. He also summarized the tasks ahead, noting that the Committee has two more meetings on their schedule. At the June 1 meeting, the Committee will begin to develop policy recommendations based on their discussions and findings to date, and on July 6 will approve their policy recommendations for presentation to the MTA Board. Between now and the next meeting, the Committee would be asked to begin to form policy directions based on notes from previous meeting discussions. Meeting presentations and summaries will be available on the Committee's internal website.

Dr. Iacofano went on to review key take-aways from the previous Committee meeting on April 6, 2010, at which BRC members participated in a series of tradeoff exercises. The exercises revealed a consensus that reliability is paramount to quality service. Other points that had emerged with some level of consensus among members were: that high priority should be placed on a comprehensive span of service, particularly in high density areas; that all operators should strive to create a coordinated, integrated, and unified system, and Metro's role should be as convener of coordinated service providers rather than as a directive force; and that ease of use should also be a major focus of service.

I. TRANSIT SIGNAGE

Dr. Iacofano introduced Catherine Bator of the Westside Central Governance Council, to talk about communications and signage as contributors to ease of use for riders. Ms. Bator presented a series of slides comparing assets and shortfalls of public transportation signage and communications tools in Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, and Portland, OR. She highlighted differentiating qualities of transit information delivery in each city, pointing out the importance of presenting relevant and accurate information within the spatial constraints of particular communications formats.

She presented case-studies from each city highlighting effective presentation of vital information, including:

- Schedules
- Maps
- Hours of operations
- Connections to other lines
- Headways
- Neighborhoods served (indicated in New York with inset maps or map highlights)
- Major landmarks
- Riding and ticketing rules
- Safety information
- Phone numbers for real-time service
- Websites for more information
- Special notices for changes in service and public meetings

She emphasized that this information is often not clear or readily available in the Los Angeles MTA system.

Committee discussion points regarding signage included:

- Overcoming traditional territories and providing integrated information for the public is an important part of a coordinated system
- While providing on-board information for passengers is a worthwhile goal for interior signage, we should keep the recognition showcase featuring operators and passengers
- Signage and information approaches should recognize cost, size and scale factors and other constraints such as ADA and maintenance as well as challenges presented by private sector-funded shelters and the attendant agreements
 - However, passenger convenience goals require that we find ways to overcome these barriers

- We should seek cost-effective design and information enhancements – good design doesn't necessarily cost more
 - Everything doesn't need to be done at once – a well-planned strategy can be implemented incrementally
- Consider less emphasis on advertising and more on information

II. SERVICE QUALITY ELEMENTS

Conan Cheung of Metro gave a presentation on service enhancements. He reviewed Metro's current policy, trends, and tradeoffs related to cleanliness, passenger loading, operator courtesy, customer information, service reliability, speed, safety and security, service coordination, and network simplicity—all primary factors of service quality.

Discussion points that emerged during and following Mr. Cheung's presentation included:

Moving Toward Simplification – Rail as the Backbone

- The speed advantage of transferring to rail can be trumped by the perception of inconvenience caused by the transfer
- Transfer policy and cost is key to success of being able to cut back bus service that duplicates parallel rail service
- Mobility barriers are also an important factor – examples are working escalators, clear signage and addressing safety concerns
- Rail use should be incentivized
- Additional capacity on the connecting buses needs to be provided so that a passenger can ride with confidence that they will get a seat
- The question is – should we continue to layer buses in parallel to rail? Under what conditions does this make sense?

Dealing with Delay – Factors and Solutions

- Dealing with delay requires a holistic approach – delay factors and solutions are linked:
 - Delays related to fare payment are linked to bus design, including farebox location, the location of the TAP card reader and policies such as acceptance of paper currency
 - Overall bus design is linked to passenger clumping and crowding near the front entrance -- level boarding is a benefit at the front but the placement of the rear door requires stairs to board, resulting in delays
 - Passengers are unwilling to move to the back of the bus because of concerns with safety and security

- Cleanliness can affect the perception of safety

III. SERVICE PROVISION VERSUS CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Dr. Iacofano introduced a series of interactive exercises to rate priorities of systems attributes, and to assess tradeoffs related to speed, reliability, and passenger loading. Exercise details, results, and discussion points are summarized below:

System Attributes

Participants assigned zero (lowest priority) to three (highest priority) points to nine different service quality attributes. Each participant was allowed a total of 16 priority points to allocate among the nine attributes. Results are summarized in the table below, with attributes listed in order from highest to lowest overall priority rank:

| Attribute | Total Points |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Reliability | 32 |
| Travel Time | 27 |
| Safety (onboard and at stations) | 26 |
| Network Simplicity | 24 |
| Customer Information | 22 |
| Cleanliness | 20 |
| Coordination with Munis | 19 |
| Passenger Loads | 15 |
| Operator Courtesy | 11 |

Discussion points related to the system attributes exercise included:

- Reliability and safety are linked
- While this group ranked reliability higher, research shows that safety is key
 - It is especially important at night
 - Perception of safety involves the nature of shelters (well-lighted, visible) and service frequency
- Students polled viewed customer information as an important factor
- We should caution that these rankings are by people who are transit professionals and other people who are very familiar with transit

Speed Tradeoffs

Participants weighed the benefits of higher frequency service against the tradeoff of fewer access points, with higher frequency services implying further walking distances. Overall, Committee members preferred a compromise between frequency and access. Specific are summarized here:

| Frequency/Walk Tradeoff | Total Votes |
|--|-------------|
| Arrives every 10 minutes/walk 3 blocks | 9 |
| Arrives every 5 minutes/walk 6 blocks | 2 |
| Arrives every 20 minutes/walk 1 block | 0 |

Discussion points related to the speed tradeoffs exercise included:

- Acceptability of walk time is dependent upon when the passenger has to walk (night vs. day)
- Reliability is a factor—if more frequent service implies more reliability, frequency will trump walking distance
- Walking moderate distances is considered by some to be an asset

Reliability Tradeoffs

Committee members were asked to choose a preferred frequency (2, 5, or 10 minutes), with the tradeoff of giving up a respective 2, 1, or 0 of the following conveniences: geographic access, time span coverage, or frequency of service.

The unanimous choice was schedule reliability within 5 minutes, which came with one convenience tradeoff. Participants voted as follows:

| Tradeoff | Total Votes |
|--|-------------|
| Geographic Access (greater walking distance) | 6 |
| Time Span | 4 |
| Frequency | 2 |

Discussion points related to the reliability tradeoffs exercise included:

- 5 minutes is the wait time “threshold of pain”
- Greater walking distances were chosen by 50% of participants as an acceptable tradeoff for 5-minute reliability
- Time span was also chosen because with reliability within 5 minutes, we can “give” on frequency

Loading Tradeoffs

In a similar format to the above exercise, participants chose whether to always sit (sacrificing two tradeoff factors), to have a 50% chance of being seated (sacrificing one tradeoff factor), or to always stand (sacrificing no tradeoff factors).

Most (all but one) chose a 50% chance of being seated if only one factor (geographic access, time span or frequency) were sacrificed. Tradeoff factor preferences are summarized here:

| Tradeoff | Total Votes |
|--|--------------------|
| Geographic Access (greater walking distance) | 5 |
| Time Span | 4 |
| Frequency | 3 |

Discussion points related to passenger loading tradeoffs included:

- Standing is preferable to walking (for some)
- Tolerance for standing depends upon trip duration
- Passenger education helps when dealing with load factors
 - Offer your seat to elderly or disabled passengers:
 - “No skinny guy taking up two seats’
- Frequency can be sacrificed if reliability is assured
- Savvy bus riders know how to maximize the chance of a seat being available by considering schedule, time of day, arrival of previous bus, etc.
- Overall, tradeoffs can be categorized as passenger comfort features (passenger loads, cleanliness, safety, courtesy, customer information) and operational factors (simplicity, travel time, reliability, coordination with munis)

Dr. Iacofano asked for final comments and questions related to service quality. One member noted that service quality attributes could be categorized into operational attributes (safety, speed, comfort, courtesy, reliability, and cleanliness) and infrastructural attributes (simplicity, seamlessness, and information).

IV. CONCLUSION

Dr. Iacofano reviewed next steps, which would be to define policy concepts and statements. Mr. Cheung summarized preliminary policy directions based on group discussions and asked members to log onto the Committee’s internal website to review documents and refine policy concepts and statements:

Example policy concepts and statements

- Rail and other priority services such as bus rapid transit form the backbone of the system and other modes are designed to complement, supplement and support
- Density is the core determining factor for service levels
 - Service should be focused first in high-density areas and be scaled to fit the overall density and passenger demand in the service area.
 - Less frequency is required as density decreases
- Service reliability is a major factor – if reliability can be ensured, service can be less frequent and other barriers such as concern with personal safety while waiting for the bus can be lessened
- A seamless system of services should be provided with a centrally-coordinated, cooperative planning process that includes routes, fares and passenger information
- Fare coordination and rationalization – including making the TAP card work for everyone – is a cornerstone of a system that is convenient for the passenger
- The passenger should always be kept informed through a coordinated, accessible and understandable information system

Upcoming Meetings and Milestones

Prepare for July Board Meeting (tentative schedule pending confirmation)

- June 1: Discuss and concur on service planning principles and policy statements and directions
- July 6: Finalize report to Operations Committee and Board
- Operations Committee Report-out by BRC: July 15, 1 p.m.
- Board Meeting: July 22, 9 a.m.

Requests and Action Items

- Bring back examples of integrated information and how it can work
- Create a laundry list of barriers to implementing ideas that the BRC has brought forward, including policy and procedural recommendations of how we can address them