

MINUTES*

MAC MEETING OF JUNE 17, 2020



The METRO Advisory Committee (MAC) met on Wednesday, June 17, 2020. The meeting was held via teleconference. *Minutes are “summary” minutes, not verbatim minutes.

1. CALL TO ORDER at 6:02 PM.

2. ROLL CALL - The following MAC Members were present via teleconference, representing a quorum:

Veronica Elsea, Chair	Michael Pisano
Joseph Martinez, Vice Chair (<i>Joined 6:22 PM</i>)	Becky Taylor
Jessica de Wit	James Von Hendy
Jason Lopez	

Additional METRO staff and presenters:

Alex Clifford, CEO/General Manager	John Urgo, Planning & Development Director
Angela Aitken, Chief Financial Officer	Rina Solorio, Interim Asst. Operations Manager
Ciro Aguirre, Chief Operations Officer	Pete Rasmussen, Transportation Planner II
Margo Ross, Chief Operations Officer	Donna Bauer, Administrative Specialist
Isaac Holly, IT and ITS Director	

3. COMMUNICATIONS TO THE METRO ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Mr. Pisano thanked Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) for an amazing job in responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic to ensure the safety of its employees and riders.

Mr. Pisano also mentioned that Santa Rosa CityBus uses a bus pass and parking pass together to encourage people to use their buses and suggested it may be something for METRO to explore.

Jason Lopez announced his resignation from MAC due to a relocation.

3.1 – June 10, 2020 Email from Alan K

Rina Solorio, Interim Assistant Operations Manager, responded to the email from Alan K. She announced that METRO’s website has been updated with regard to Customer Service’s hours and TVM locations. Chair Elsea recommended addressing the customer’s remarks of not knowing where to email concerns about METRO. She suggested emphasizing the “Contact Me” link on the home page of the website to make it easier. Ms. Solorio responded that METRO would review that.

4. RECEIVE AND FILE MINUTES FROM THE METRO ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF FEBRUARY 19, 2020

MOTION: ACCEPT AND FILE THE MINUTES FROM THE METRO ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING OF FEBRUARY 19, 2020

MOTION: PISANO

SECOND: LOPEZ

MOTION PASSED WITH 6 AYES: Elsea, de Wit, Lopez, Pisano, Taylor, and Von Hendy. Martinez was absent.

5. COMMUNICATIONS FROM METRO ADVISORY COMMITTEE (MAC)

Chair Elsea reported that on February 28, 2020 she gave the second half of the 2019 MAC update to the METRO Board of Directors (Board). Some of the topics dealt with alternative on-demand transportation, marketing of the passenger code of conduct, Capitola Mall, Kaiser in Scotts Valley, legislation, alternative fuels and possibly changing MAC bylaws. She expressed to the Board how interested, committed, and involved this Committee is and what a great job the members are doing.

Michael Pisano thanked Chair Elsea for mentioning the on-demand transportation. He's been fascinated with that aspect, especially with the GO Santa Cruz Program.

Becky Taylor added her thanks to Chair Elsea for all that she does for MAC.

6. INTRODUCTION OF MARGO ROSS, NEW CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER

Alex Clifford, CEO/General Manager, introduced Margo Ross as METRO's Chief Operations Officer and gave a brief history of her transportation background. COO Ross expressed her excitement with joining METRO.

Chair Elsea and other MAC members welcomed COO Ross and invited her to attend any or all of the MAC meetings that she could.

7. COVID-19 UPDATE

CEO Clifford gave an oral update on COVID-19 and METRO's response to it, such as allowing employees to telecommute, reducing service to weekend levels, social distancing on the buses, enforcing essential travel, and eliminating fares.

METRO anticipates receiving \$20 million under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. This anticipated funding allows METRO to avoid drastically reducing expenses.

Starting June 15, 2020, METRO began collecting fares again. Discussion ensued on the pros/cons of telecommuting versus returning to an office environment and how this could affect METRO's ridership in the long term.

Chair Elsea brought up the pass ups that are happening and remarked that it is hard to plan a trip not knowing if she would be passed by because capacity on the bus had been met. She also inquired if anything is open at Pacific Station. CEO Clifford said it is currently not open. In preparation for resuming fare collection, the Ticket Vending Machine (TVM) was moved to the outside of the building and the same was done at the Watsonville Transit Center for accessibility.

Chair Elsea said one of the challenges for riders is the disappearance of public bathrooms. With the extended waits for buses, it can get uncomfortable for riders. CEO Clifford said it is difficult for transit to own and operate restrooms because even in a non-COVID environment, it is costly to the organization. The building will continue to be closed for now to try to reduce the risk of introducing COVID-19 into the environment.

Vice Chair Martinez asked if the empty Customer Service booth at the Watsonville Transit Center could be used by the vendors to sell food. CEO Clifford said that Angela Aitken, Chief Financial Officer, has been talking to the vendors to see what can be done.

Discussion followed on Cabrillo College and UCSC's decisions to offer online courses in the Fall and the impact it would have on METRO's revenues.

James Von Hendy mentioned the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is recommending people drive their own individual cars and not take public transportation and asked what METRO is doing to counter that narrative. CEO Clifford said the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) represents transit agencies nationwide and is reaching out to the CDC to see if that opinion can be changed. In addition to that, an article "Fear of Public Transit Got Ahead of the Evidence" by Janette Sadik-Khan and Seth Solomonow posted in *The Atlantic* that dispels that notion.

John Urgo, Planning and Development Director, added some information from a recent survey METRO is conducting. The survey shows that the CDC is wrong in their assertion and that more than three-fourths of those surveyed said they are very likely or will return to our service. He gave a brief breakdown of the results. There were several questions on the survey asking what METRO

can do to encourage riders to return and overwhelmingly the response was to improve and increase service and restore service to pre-COVID levels. The survey has only been out a week but the responses received are encouraging.

8. DRAFT FY21 AND FY22 OPERATING BUDGET AND FY21 CAPITAL BUDGET AS PRESENTED TO THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS ON MAY 15, 2020

Angela Aitken, Chief Financial Officer, reviewed the budget that was presented to the Board on May 15, 2020. She referred to it as the pre-COVID budget (i.e., one that would have been valid if COVID-19 had not occurred). The intent is to bring this budget to the Board so that METRO has an adopted budget by June 30, 2020. As information evolves, we may need to put forward an amended budget. Angela spoke to various slides regarding revenues, expenses, reserves, and capital budget projects.

Chair Elsea commended everyone involved in the preparation of the budget for their flexibility, creativity and time.

Mr. Pisano thanked Ms. Aitken for the thorough presentation. He asked if the Alternative Fuel Tax Credit is just for the compressed natural gas (CNG) buses or does it include electric buses, bio fuels, and any other carbon-saving fuel. Ms. Aitken said it is based on CNG usage.

Mr. Pisano remarked that employees at UCSC have been tracking all of their hours spent on COVID-19 so that it can be reported to FEMA for reimbursement. He asked if METRO was pursuing that path as well. Ms. Aitken replied yes; there is an opportunity to get reimbursement through FEMA.

9. UPDATE ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY SYSTEMS (ITS)

Isaac Holly, IT and ITS Director, informed the members that due to COVID-19, the Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) project has been stalled. However, the vendor will be back on site in early July to finish installing the necessary components on the buses. Once completed, we will publish AVL and the real time passenger information component via web portal and app. We are also looking at early October to start installing e-signage at the bus stations with both real time passenger information and METRO specific information. Director Holly added that the new signage will be ADA compliant with an audible component.

Mr. Pisano asked if there were any plans to have the UCSC shuttle buses be part of METRO's AVL project. Director Holly said he has already talked to the vendor and they have contacted UCSC. UCSC may want to see how things play out with our system first before moving forward.

10. MOBILE RESPONSIVE WEBSITE

Director Holly said METRO has a desire to have a mobile responsive website. In order to have that capability, we would need to redesign the current website. We don't have the staff resources to build this, so we are looking at designing a spec and going out to bid to have a site built for us.

Chair Elsea added, for those using voice-over, the current METRO website works well on our phones. Director Holly said we got to that point by collaborating with you.

11. DEMONSTRATION: MOBILE TICKETING APP

Pete Rasmussen, Transportation Planner II, spoke to the presentation. After giving a brief background on the process, he highlighted the benefits of purchasing, storing, and accessing the pass on a smartphone. He walked through a purchase, showing the various app screens to accomplish this, activation and finally the live ticket.

Implementation includes testing the accessibility features of the app with Vista Center for the Blind and Visually Impaired. METRO is currently pursuing a relationship with MasterCard to install electronic validators on the buses. We hope to launch this app on the Hwy. 17 Route this Fall. If the pilot goes well, we would expand the app to the fixed route fleet in 2021.

Discussion ensued on the location of the validator on the bus, how transfers would be handled and if a change card will be used in the future.

12. SERVICE PLANNING UPDATE

John Urgo, Planning & Development Director, introduced himself and provided a brief background of his work in transit.

a. Quarterly Ridership Report

Due to the Shelter-in-Place order in the latter half of March, overall ridership is down substantially.

a.i. COVID-19 Service Recovery Planning

Director Urgo said METRO has been focused on transporting essential workers in healthcare. We have really pared down our service and as shelter-in-place starts to lift, we are look forward to bringing service back. As more establishments are opening up, we are seeing ridership increase and this is causing more pass ups. To address this, Bus Operators are calling in when a pass up happens and we are adding service on the most used routes—71, 69, 35 and 66. We're looking at a phased approach to restoring service, trying to follow demand but also getting ahead of it to the extent that we can and to the extent that we know which sectors of the economy are opening, both where and when.

Discussion followed on handling the demand when the Boardwalk fully opens. Director Urgo said one thing that is going to help us this summer is running fewer UCSC trips and diverting that service to other routes.

b. Stops

b.i. Enterprise Technology Center

Director Urgo said it is going to be hard to add any type of service to this location in the immediate future while we are dealing with all of the service issues due to COVID-19. One thing being explored is comingling paratransit trips with on-demand microtransit trips.

c. Other Projects

c.i. Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis

Director Urgo said the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission (SCCRTC) has narrowed down the transportation alternatives for the rail corridor to four options--light rail, heavy rail, bus rapid transit and autonomous road/train with rubber tires. These four alternatives are advancing to a more detailed analysis so that a preferred alternative can be presented by late Fall.

c.ii. Capitola Mall

Mr. Rasmussen said we haven't had any communication with the developers of the Capitola Mall project recently due to COVID-19.

c.iii. Legislation Regarding Fare Structures

CEO Clifford gave a quick overview of Assembly Bills 1350, 2176 and 2012. All three bills were withdrawn from the current legislative cycle and moved to consideration in 2021.

13. ALTERNATIVE FUELS FOR BUSES

Ciro Aguirre, Chief Operations Officer, reminded the members that by 2040 METRO will be required to be all electric and by 2025 required to begin purchasing at least 25% of our vehicles as electric. The initial trials performed with an electric bus on Hwy. 17 were not successful or to our satisfaction. Now we are looking at fixed route, local service for the battery-electric buses.

METRO has received grant money to purchase four Proterra E2 Max buses with 660 kWh hours of battery capacity. We anticipate delivery of these buses in August 2020. We have already installed the infrastructure at the Judy K. Souza Facility.

Our intent is to charge the bus once, deploy it into service, have it run its full eight hour or plus route and then head back to the Judy K. Souza Facility for recharging. Based on all of the specifications and what we have been advised by our consultants, these buses will not only have the range capability but the power to maneuver into traffic easily and maintain speed limits.

METRO is also considering adding fuel-cell buses to the fleet. We have been attending conferences to learn more about these buses and the infrastructure required. COO Aguirre elaborated on the pluses and minuses of this type of bus. We think our fleet is going to become a mixture of both battery-electric buses for local routes and fuel-cell buses for more strenuous, challenging commuter routes over Hwy. 17.

Mr. Pisano thanked COO Aguirre for the information and asked if our hands are tied on using bio fuels past 2040 unless legislation changes. COO Aguirre said that is correct. The use of bio fuel could be integrated now into existing diesels but those diesel engines are running very clean. He relayed an experiment performed by VTA over a six-year period using bio diesel on some of their fleet and the results showed there was an increase in maintenance wear on certain fuel system components. Because of the restrictions that California will be placing on the purchase of diesel propulsion, METRO will keep trying to buy more CNG buses to hold us over and spending our resources in researching battery-electric and fuel-cell buses.

Vice Chair Martinez asked if all of the mechanics are being trained on this new technology. COO Aguirre responded that by having the diesel electric hybrids in the fleet, the mechanics have been exposed to the electrical componentry of that propulsion system which mirrors the battery-electric buses. There will be additional training as needed.

14. COMMUNICATIONS TO THE METRO CEO

Hearing none, Chair Elsea moved to the next item.

15. COMMUNICATIONS TO THE METRO BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Chair Elsea announced she would do the next semi-annual MAC update at the Board of Directors' meeting on Friday, June 26, 2020. She proposed that MAC offer its gratitude to the Bus Operators for being on the front lines and putting their lives in jeopardy. All MAC Members were supportive of this suggestion.

16. ITEMS FOR NEXT MEETING AGENDA

- METRO COVID-19 General Update
- Information Technology Systems Update
- Mobile Ticketing App Update
- COVID-19 Service Recovery Planning Update
- Transit Corridor Alternatives Analysis Update
- Capitola Mall Update
- Comingling ParaCruz Trips and On-Demand Microtransit Trips Update

17. DISTRIBUTION OF VOUCHERS

Donna Bauer, Administrative Specialist, will mail out the vouchers to all members on Thursday, June 18, 2020.

18. ADJOURNMENT

The next MAC meeting is scheduled for August 19, 2020 at 6:00 PM. The location has yet to be determined.

Meeting adjourned at 7:59 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Bauer
Administrative Specialist

Pursuant to Section 54954.2(a)(1) of the Government Code of the State of California, this agenda was posted at least 72 hours in advance of the scheduled meeting at a public place freely accessible to the public 24 hours a day. The agenda packet and materials related to an item on this Agenda submitted after distribution of the agenda packet are available for public inspection in the Santa Cruz METRO Administrative Office (110 Vernon Street, Santa Cruz) during normal business hours. Such documents are also available on the Santa Cruz METRO website at www.scmtd.com subject to staff's ability to post the document before the meeting.