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BOARD REVIEW



In the face of budget deficits, Board initiates hiring freeze; considers impact, direction of Measure R funding

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By GAYLE ANDERSON

Working through a lengthy agenda at its November meeting held Dec. 4, the Metro Board approved motions that took steps to develop a "Bus Service Improvement Plan" that would serve as a guideline for Measure R funding and initiated an immediate hiring and promotion freeze as well as banning new consulting contracts.

The Board considered the following items, among others, on its November agenda:

Item 6: Bicycle Locker Rental Program

The Board approved a staff recommendation to increase bicycle locker rental fees and delegate to the CEO the authority to raise bicycle locker rates by the rate of inflation. At issue is utilization of lockers at locations where the lockers may be fully leased, but also remain empty when commuters use other means of transportation. Higher pricing and shorter lease terms may help to encourage greater use of lockers now at premium demand due to increased rail ridership and the need for more secure bicycle parking.

Items 7, 8: Programming recommendations for State Proposition 1B

It is anticipated that Los Angeles County will receive \$275.5 million for eligible regional transportation projects from the voter-approved Proposition 1B State and Local Partnership Program (SLTPP). The Board adopted the Planning and Programming Committee recommendations directing \$130 million for highway capital projects, \$145.5 million for transit capital and safety projects, including the San Fernando Valley Canoga Project, various bus and rail projects, proposed Metrolink safety improvements, and the 2009 Countywide Call for Projects.

Also approved were programming recommendations for \$90.2 million in State Proposition 1B Transit Modernization Funds for miscellaneous transit

projects, including purchase of buses, rebuilding buses and rail rehabilitation. The authorization implements bus and rail priorities already identified as necessary to maintain equipment and facilities for regional transit services in a state of good repair.

Item 35: Metro Red Line Station Canopies contract modification

The Board authorized construction of 14 new canopies over exposed escalators and stairs and entrances to Metro Red/Purple Line subway stations. The action increases the current contract modification included in the FY09 budget by \$804,364. The modifications adhere to the established goals of the Entrance Canopy Program and include design, lighting, drainage and weather protection criteria.

Item 44: Contract modifications for the Pomona/Atlantic Parking Structure

The Metro Board of Directors today approved spending an additional \$8.7 million for a three-story parking garage that will serve the Atlantic terminus station on the Metro Gold Line to East Los Angeles.

The new three-story garage will have 286 parking spaces. It is scheduled to be completed six months after the new light rail line opens next summer. It was initially planned to have 127 surface parking spaces at the Atlantic Boulevard and Pomona Street location.

Altogether, Metro has budgeted \$13 million for the parking garage.

Item 46: Bus System Improvement Plan

Also approved as amended was a motion by Board Chair Villaraigosa to document by Feb. 9 the type of bus service improvements recommended by the public and to determine a "Bus System Improvement Plan" for Measure R funding. The directive asked CEO Roger Snoble to report the findings to the Board at the March 2009 meeting. The Measure R funding considers purchases of new clean fuel buses, a fare reduction or freeze, added bus lines, more frequent service and longer hours of operation. An amendment by Director Mike Antonovich asked the CEO to try and close the operating deficit by 2011 without using Measure R funding if possible.

Item 51: Hiring and promotion freeze

The motion by Director Ara Najarian and Board Chair Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa initiates a freeze on hiring new employees, promotions and any other form of compensation increase (except as required by Board-ratified MOUs) and bans new consulting contracts except those related to safety, Measure R implementation, legal support services, congestion pricing, Homeland Security grants and Proposition 1B funding directives. The motion is effective immediately as of Dec. 4.