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L.A. Metro Board Approves Bold New Transit Ambassador Program to Help Improve the Customer Experience

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Rick Jager June 23, 2022

In a continuing effort to maintain a safe, clean and reliable transit system, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) Board of Directors approved moving forward with a bold new Transit Ambassador Pilot Program that will provide a dedicated staff of diverse, specially trained individuals to offer in-person support to Metro Bus and Rail riders. Metro will launch this new program in the fall.

The pilot program will employ up to 300 transit ambassadors from diverse L.A. County communities who will be specially trained in customer service and rail and bus safety. Ambassadors will have a strong visible presence on the Metro system and help customers find their bus or rail line, purchase their fare, and more. The program is an added layer to Metro's overall public safety ecosystem that includes security, law enforcement, crisis response teams, and homeless outreach that advance the goal of a safer public transit system.

"This pilot program will be a win-win for our riders and employees when it launches later this year," said Metro Board Chair and Los Angeles County Supervisor Hilda L. Solis. "Transit ambassadors on our trains, buses, and at key transit hubs will help riders navigate our system, assist them with fare payments, and quickly address their issues. They will play a critical role in making our system feel welcoming for all and in bringing back ridership."

The Metro Transit Ambassador Program is modeled after others in San Francisco on the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system and in Philadelphia on Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority's (SEPTA) transit system, and is a critical initiative of the Customer Experience Plan and received input from the Public Safety Advisory Committee.

The program aims to have ambassadors on the Metro system from 5 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday through Friday, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. on weekends, and during hours to support special events. The ambassadors will be welcoming faces on the system and will wear special uniforms, so riders easily identify them. They will be equipped with cell phones and radios to contact appropriate Metro staff for assistance easily.

Prior to being deployed, all transit ambassadors must complete training by Metro that will include cultural and situational awareness, unconscious bias training, disability awareness, customer service, trauma-informed response, and other personal and public safety courses.

Ambassadors will be supplied under contract for up to five years to Metro by Strive Well-Being Inc., a Small Business Enterprise firm for \$27.76 million, and RMI International Inc. (RMI), a Minority Business Enterprise firm for \$95.09 million. The total contract value is estimated at \$122.8 million.

Using already established organizations and personnel to develop ambassadors for the program, Strive Well-Being proposes recruiting ambassadors from three community-based organizations: Union Station Homeless Services, Communities Actively Living Independently & Free, and Homeboy Industries. RMI proposes to supplement its recruitment of ambassadors by working with WorkSource Regional Business Services and the Southeast Los Angeles County Workforce Development Board. Both companies proposed offering starting pay above LA's living wage.

Metro riders in recent surveys showed overwhelming support for a Transit Ambassador Program. Riders noted they wanted to see more Metro staff riding the system and assisting patrons. The pilot program will be housed with Metro's Customer Experience Department. As the program evolves, Metro will use customer feedback and other data to refine the program.

"It is our top priority to improve the customer experience – including making sure our riders feel safe," said Metro CEO Stephanie N. Wiggins. "In the coming months, we expect customers will see a noticeable difference with our transit ambassadors in place. Once they deploy, transit ambassadors will greet riders and help our customers have positive interactions with our system. Ambassadors will also work closely with community-based crisis intervention teams and be able to call dedicated safety personnel when needed quickly. Thank you to the Metro Board of Directors for approving this new program; I look forward to its full deployment."

For more information, please visit www.metro.net (<http://www.metro.net>).

Additional Quotes:

Holly Mitchell, Los Angeles County Supervisor and Metro Board Member

"To every Metro rider, bus driver, maintenance worker, friend, family member and every day Angeleno who has called me office with concerns about safety on Metro, we hear you. The LA Metro Board has been focused on proven investments to make Metro safer. Transit Ambassadors will serve as an unarmed, trained, friendly presence to welcome people to Metro every day, to help people navigate Metro, and to help riders respond to situations so they don't feel deserted on our system. We look forward to new contractors who will help ensure Transit Ambassadors become a part of the fabric of our communities and our transit system."

Janice Hahn, Los Angeles County Supervisor and Metro Board Member

"Our priority as Metro Board members is to ensure that our riders are safe while using our system. I am grateful to the Public Safety Advisory Committee, which has helped shape this transformative initiative to make Metro safer and more enjoyable for all of our riders."

Mike Bonin, Los Angeles City Council Member and Metro Board Member

"This is another huge step by Metro to create a transit system that is safe and welcoming for all passengers. With this significant investment in transit ambassadors, along with crisis response teams and enhanced homelessness outreach, Metro is at the forefront of reimagining public safety. I applaud the work of the Public Safety Advisory Committee, which elevated the voices of passengers and pushed for this transformative change."

Jacquelyn Dupont-Walker, Metro Board Second Vice Chair

"Metro's new pilot Transit Ambassador Program will make our system a more welcoming experience for all and will help in our efforts to both retain and attract new riders to the system. I'm glad to see that our contractors have been assigned a small business utilization goal to ensure that their staffing will reflect the communities they serve."

Note to Editor: Metro Operators are crucial to keeping LA moving. Metro is currently hiring more than 500 bus operators and is offering a \$3,000 bonus for coming aboard. This is a great career opportunity. Metro offers competitive hourly rates starting at \$20.49 with benefits that include health insurance, tuition reimbursements, paid training, retirement plan options and flexible working hours. Please encourage friends, family and community members to become a part of the Metro team that provides excellence in service and support and keeps our region moving. Apply at metro.net/driveLA (<https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%253A%252F%252Fjobs.metro.net%252Fjobinformation.aspx%253Fbno%253D000999-090&data=04%257C01%257CHonorj%2540metro.net%257C6c13704187d045e65ac08d968b48c54%257Cab57129bdfbd4caca77fc74c40364af%257C0%257C0%257C637655946917581780%257C>)

About Metro

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) is currently providing lifeline service for essential trips and frontline workers. Metro continues building the most ambitious transportation infrastructure program in the United States and is working to greatly improve mobility through its Vision 2028 Plan (<https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.metro.net%2Fabout%2Fmetro-vision-2028-plan%2F&data=02%7C01%7CjagerR%40metro.net%7Ccc06477f8609462f2c6f08d8567618e2%7Cab57129bdbfd4caca77fc74c40364af%7C0%7C637354412504359729&sdata=5UoeSkyo5UIPQ>)

Metro has proudly pledged to the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Health and Safety Commitment Program (<https://gcc01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fthesource.metro.net%2F2020%2F09%2F09%2Fmetro-commits-to-national-effort-to-ensure-health-and-safety-of-returning-transit-riders%2F&data=02%7C01%7CjagerR%40metro.net%7Ccc06477f8609462f2c6f08d8567618e2%7Cab57129bdbfd4caca77fc74c40364af%7C0%7C637354412504359729&sdata=og6f7ReGhLAh>) to help ensure the safe return of transit riders as the U.S. recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic.

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