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Dave Sotero October 27, 2022

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's (Metro) Board of Directors today approved the agency's first tree policy to help preserve and grow L.A. County's urban tree canopy, which will help protect Metro customers from extreme heat and improve air quality for Metro's transportation construction program and transit properties. Metro's tree policy is the first of its kind among transit agencies across the country.

This policy clarifies and standardizes Metro's practices for protecting the urban tree canopy throughout its construction program. It also establishes the agency's commitment to a sustainable tree replacement strategy when tree removal is deemed unavoidable to build Metro projects.

Trees are extremely beneficial to the environment, and they can help reduce health and safety impacts on transit riders. L.A. County's urban tree canopy helps improve air quality, manage stormwater, reduce urban heat, and provide shade, carbon storage, and a habitat for birds and other pollinators.

"We are committed to addressing climate change and helping alleviate health risks for our transit customers. This new tree policy will give Metro the guidance it needs to help protect existing trees and look for partnerships that provide more equitable access to shade and canopy throughout the L.A. County region" said Glendale City Council Member and Metro Board Chair Ara J. Najarian.

Metro will also seek out ways to use trees to provide shade at rail and bus stations, right-of-way, transit centers and at Metro maintenance and administrative facilities. The agency will encourage and support partnerships that expand urban canopy on transit corridors.

"I thought that it was time to get a tree policy on the books so we can assure neighborhoods that we are not only protecting our urban canopy, but adding to it," said Los Angeles County Supervisor and Metro Director Janice Hahn, who authored the motion that led to this policy's creation and adoption. "This policy will mean cleaner air, more shade for pedestrians, cyclists and transit riders, and more walkable, livable, and beautiful neighborhoods."

"Trees provide our customers with shade and protection from extreme heat, and they also improve the air quality of the neighborhoods we serve," said Metro CEO Stephanie Wiggins. "We are proud to be the first transit agency in the country to implement a tree policy, and we look forward to working in partnership with community, municipal, and county partners on its implementation."

The policy also requires a minimum tree replacement ratio of 2:1 (or 4:1 if the tree is considered a heritage tree), planting California-native or other drought tolerant trees and collaborating with regional partners, local agencies and communities during the planning and design of capital projects.

In 2020, the Metro Board adopted the Metro Sustainability Strategic Plan, which includes commitments increasing runoff infiltration, capturing capacity for stormwater and reducing nitrogen oxide and particulate matter emissions in this decade.

An L.A. County Climate Vulnerability Assessment found that, by 2050, nearly 2.2 million people will be residing in areas with exposure to extreme heat and many of them are transit riders. Exposure to heat exacerbates pre-existing health conditions and increases risk of death.

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