



## Board Report

**File #:** 2021-0786, **File Type:** Informational Report

**Agenda Number:** 38.

### EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE JANUARY 20, 2022

**SUBJECT: LIFE PROGRAM DOUBLE ENROLLMENT UPDATE**

**ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE the Low-Income is Easy Fare (LIFE) Program Update in response to Motion 40.

#### **ISSUE**

Increasing enrollment in the LIFE Program is an important interim step for an expansion of the Fareless System Initiative (FSI). Staff has continued to advance efforts to revamp the LIFE Program in advance to fare resumption on January 10, 2022, and double the number of new LIFE program enrollees by the end of 2022.

#### **BACKGROUND**

At its September 2021 meeting, the Board approved the FSI funding plan for Phase I (K-14) and Motion 40 by Directors Mitchell, Solis, Garcetti, Sandoval, Bonin, and Dupont-Walker, revamping the LIFE Program (Attachment A). Recognizing the expansion and enhancement of the LIFE Program will alleviate the impact of fares on low-income riders while Metro continues to seek funding to implement FSI Phase 2 (low-income adults), staff has continued to employ strategic and tactical actions that lend to streamlining and enhancing the LIFE program, increasing enrollments into the program, and furthering access to public transit for low-income riders.

As directed in Motion 40 (Attachment A), staff is to return to the Metro Board of Directors (Board) in January 2022 with an update on LIFE program changes. The following serves a program update in complement to staff's reporting to the Board on September 16, 2021, October 21, 2021, and November 18, 2021.

#### **DISCUSSION**

As directed in Motion 40, staff developed a LIFE Program Strategic Double Enrollment Plan (Enrollment Plan) to double the number of LIFE program enrollees by the end of 2022. The comprehensive Enrollment Plan was presented to the Board in December 2021. As presented, The Enrollment Plan served as a framework for strategies, tactics, and activities to increase program

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enrollments. The Enrollment Plan is delivered in partnership with LIFE Program administrators, FAME and IILA, a network of CBO partners, public agency social service providers, and regional transit operators and other internal and external partners of Metro.

The plan focuses on increasing LIFE program enrollments through tactics such as: direct enrollment, co-enrollment, and marketing, promotion and referrals. The Enrollment Plan focuses on increasing enrollments in the LIFE Program through transformative approaches such as:

- A streamlined LIFE application process that enables on-the-spot enrollment and allows applicants to self-certify;
- Online application enrollment;
- Allows low-income applicants to gain access to the program through direct enrollment and co-enrollment with existing County of Los Angeles and city social services programs;
- Deep discounts such as the three months of fareless transit to new enrollees once fare collection resumes; and
- Recognizing the goal to increase program enrollment during the ongoing challenges and complexities of the COVID-19 pandemic which has disproportionately impacted vulnerable people, households, and communities, the Enrollment Plan is centered with the core themes to inform, identify and enroll low-income people throughout Los Angeles County in a manner that meets people where they are in life.

Additionally, the Enrollment Plan is centered around the core strategies:

- **Identify:** Employ wide-ranging efforts to identify qualifying program participants.
- **Inform:** Leverage Metro's coordinated, proactive outreach and engagement plan to inform low-income riders, people, and households about the enhanced LIFE program and discounted transit benefits to support program enrollment.
- **Enroll:** Mobilize LIFE Program community partners, public agencies and Metro staff to facilitate networked resources to create a seamless and streamlined process for people to apply self-certify and In addition to the highlighted milestones, staff has successfully completed various actions and tasks in support of the LIFE Program enhancement, half-off fares campaign, and fare resumption in January 2022.

Staff initiated early actions in advance of the 90-day promotional period commencement date of October 12, 2021, and the 45-day enrollment period beginning November 26, 2021. As a result of the early actions, staff successfully implemented the series of promotional and enrollment activities and improvements as outlined in Board Motion 40. Specifically, staff met the following 45-day enrollment activities and improvements for the resumption of fare collection on January 10, 2022:

1. Provide three months of fareless transit to new enrollees as an incentive to enrollment, beginning upon the resumption of fare collection.

- Date Achieved/Completed: October 15, 2021
- 2. Expedite a streamlined application system that enables on-the-spot enrollment, and the immediate issuance of LIFE Program benefits through a process that allows applicants to self-certify qualification in the program.
  - Date Achieved/Completed: October 31, 2021
- 3. Develop a plan to double the number of LIFE Program enrollees by the end of 2022.
  - Date Achieved/Completed: November 5, 2021.

## A. Program Enhancements

Staff successfully enacted enhancements to the LIFE program in advance to the 90-day promotional period such as but limited to:

- **Simplified LIFE Program Enrollment:** LIFE Program eligibility and enrollment process was streamlined to include an option for low-income applicants to self-certify household income, to provide applicants the option to provide a photo-identification vs. overly burdensome forms of identification, and to provide applicants the option to request a TAP card thus eliminating the requirement for individuals to possess a TAP card as a condition of applying.
- **LIFE Program Online Application Portal:** Metro developed and launched an online-application portal that supports unlimited applicant enrollment through an easy-to-use web-based portal. The online portal supports direct enrollment at any time and location, and at the ease and discretion of the applicant. The simple, 4 step, on-line portal allows any individual with access to a computer or smart phone to register for the program. The portal has also incorporated the option to self-certify. Since the Launch of the Online Portal on November 2, 2021, almost 46.9% of all new enrollments are done online and continues to grow.
- **LIFE Program Application Enhancements:** The LIFE Program application was streamlined to provide a more seamless process that provides low-income applications the option to self-certify. The streamlined application provided the opportunity for early user testing of the application as well as the self-certification process 39% of new enrollees have self-certified.
- **Applications at Customers Centers:** Metro Customer Centers began accepting LIFE applications at the beginning of September. A total of 924 applications have been received at our customer centers.
  - East Portal - 56%

- Wilshire - 23%
- Baldwin - 12%
- Rosa - 5%
- EastLA - 4%

The early actions and the LIFE program enhancements and 35 direct enrollment pop-up activities have contributed to 8,197 new enrollees from September 23, 2021 through January 2, 2022. The new enrollees bring the total LIFE program enrollments to 99,283 as of January 2, 2022, which is on-pace with staff's projected enrollment targets to achieve the double enrollment goal by December 2022.

Following chart summarizes the new enrollments between September 23, 2021 through January 2, 2021.

| Enrollment Update   | # Enrollees   |
|---|---------------|
| <b>Total Enrollees (as of 9/23/21 - per Board Report)</b>           | <b>91,086</b> |
| New Enrollees (9/23/21 - 10/31/21)                                  | 602           |
| New Enrollees (11/1/21 - 11/28/21)                                  | 2,407         |
| New Enrollees (11/29/21 - 12/5/21)                                  | 910           |
| New Enrollees (12/6/21 - 12/12/21)                                  | 1,128         |
| New Enrollees (12/13/21 - 12/19/21)                                 | 1,227         |
| New Enrollees (12/20/21 - 12/26/21)                                 | 902           |
| New Enrollees (12/27/21 - 1/2/22)                                   | 1,021         |
| <b>TOTAL New Enrollees (Rolling/Cumulative): 9/23/21 - 1/2/2022</b> | <b>8,197</b>  |
|   |               |
| <b>Progress % to Goal</b>   | <b>9%</b>     |
|   |               |
| <b>TOTAL Enrollees (Participants) as of 1/2/2022</b>                | <b>99,283</b> |

The early program outcomes are directly attributed to coordinated activities such as:

- Focused efforts to deliver tangible program enhancements;
- Completed initial phase of updates to the LIFE website, brochure, and FAQ's
- Coordinated acceptance of self-certification applications at Metro Customer Service Centers and Santa Monica's Blue: The Transit Store
- Comprehensive community-centered outreach and robust multi-cultural public engagement campaign supporting the LIFE program enhancements, half-price fares campaign, and fare resumption;
- Coordinated collaborative activities with the LIFE program administrators, FAME Assistance Corporation (FAME) and the International Institute of Los Angeles (IILA);

and

- Collaborative partnerships with regional agency partners, community based organizations (CBOs), municipal transit agencies, and others.

## **B. Community-Centered Outreach and Robust Multi-Cultural Public Engagement**

Metro launched a comprehensive education and outreach plan comprised of a complement of strategies leveraging social media, print, radio and online advertising in local and community publications, in-person outreach. The campaign included strategies focused on earned, owned, and paid media channels such as ethnic and hyper-focused local media (print, radio, electronic), convenience store onesheets, bus benches, fast food screens, laundromat banners, billboard posters, and utilization of Metro's digital and systemwide static assets.

Additionally, staff worked in collaboration with Civilian and the contracted multi-cultural marketing firm, Any One Collective, to develop messaging and creative concepts that represented the diverse community of riders and people that Metro serves and reimagined the look and feel of the LIFE program. The new campaign has been used along all printed and digital assets for LIFE and the half-off fares/fare resumption campaign. In addition, the public engagement campaign has extended to social media, and Metro has reached approximately 2.5 million users across social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

### **Community Relations Efforts**

- LIFE Information emailed to:
  - Approximately 200k stakeholder emails weekly
  - 3,000 Faith Base Leaders
- LIFE Social Media Kits sent to Partners for Community Distribution
  - Federal, State, and Local Elected officials
  - Council of Governments & 88 Cities within LA County
  - Municipal Transit Agencies
  - Community Based Organizations
  - K-12 Schools, Colleges and Universities
  - Large Employers
  - Senior and Recreation Centers
  - Healthcare, Housing, Transportation, Labor, and Business advocacy organizations

- Federal, State, and Local social service government organizations
- LIFE Information Distribution
  - Metro Sponsored Community Meetings- Included in each presentation dedicated LIFE information slide
    - 23 Events in November
    - 14 Events in December
  - Included in all project and construction notices, weekly lookaheads, and service alerts distributed by Community Relations includes a link to LIFE program
  - Next Door Post Online local community platform- Hyperlocal.
    - Posted to all Neighborhoods in Los Angeles County- 1.8 million users

### **C. Regional Collaborative Partnerships**

In an effort to support the double enrollment goal, staff has focused efforts to establish regional collaborative partnerships to support promotion, outreach, direct enrollment and co-enrollment for new LIFE program enrollees. The coordinated efforts have attributed to early partnerships with regional agencies, contracted community based organizations (CBOs), and Metro's Faith Based Leaders Roundtable. In effort to advance equity by leveraging the expertise that municipal agency partners, CBOs and faith leaders brings, efforts have been employed to:

- Contract services of Korean American Federation LA (KAFLA) and YMCA Greater Los Angeles to provide grass-root outreach and referral services for the LIFE program, canvass Metro buses and trains to assist qualifying riders with application for enrollment in the LIFE program in accordance to Motion 40, and support with the public engagement campaign for LIFE and fare resumption.
- Partner with the City of Los Angeles Community Investment for Families Department and the network of Family Source Centers to support information sharing, promotion, and referral of clients to Metro's LIFE program.
- Partner with Los Angeles County Development Authority to support information sharing, promotion, and the referral for Section 8 recipients and stakeholder communities to Metro's LIFE program.

Moreover, Metro has established a network of partners to further the goal fo double the enrollment of LIFE program participants and provide access to public transit services for low-income riders throughout Los Angeles. The network of partners extends to the expansive collaborative of social service providers and CBOs within FAME and IILA's network of providers that support the LIFE

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program, along with KAFLA's additional outreach services provided through a network of CBO sub-partners such as: Koreatown Youth & Community Center, Homies Unidos, Hwarang Youth Foundation, Partnership for Growth LA, and Anti-recidivism Coalition (ARC).

Efforts will continue to expand the LIFE program regional collaborative in support of the LIFE program Enrollment Plan.

## **EQUITY PLATFORM**

The LIFE Program Strategic Double Enrollment Plan is a multi-pronged plan centered on partnering with the LIFE program administrators, CBOs, and public agency service providers within Los Angeles County's diverse communities and specific geographic areas to build awareness of the LIFE Program and the benefits afforded through enrollment; including to identify qualifying low-income riders, people and households; and to help facilitate the enrollment or co-enrollment of vulnerable people in the LIFE Program. The Enrollment Plan is supported by a communications and public engagement plan that commits to providing non-English translation and multilingual, culturally appropriate materials. Additionally, the plan seeks to meet community members where they are to reduce barriers to Metro updates and information. The plan also leverages targeted outreach efforts through Metro's equity focus communities (EFCs) and census tracts mapping. These efforts target messaging and access to enrollment to economically vulnerable people in our communities and improve access to transit through discounted passes and the enhanced LIFE program.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

The LIFE program supports strategic goal #3 "Enhancing communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity" by providing financial relief by reducing the cost of riding transit for all riders, especially the most economically vulnerable people in our communities.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Staff will continue to focus efforts on advancing the Enrollment Plan, formalizing additional regional partnerships with community-based organizations and public agency service providers such as the DPSS, LACDA, and others in support of co-enrollment and/or mass distribution of LIFE program information to existing clients and/or program applicants, and assessing the program's performance and measurable outcomes. Lastly, staff will return to the Board in April 2022 with a LIFE program enrollment update.

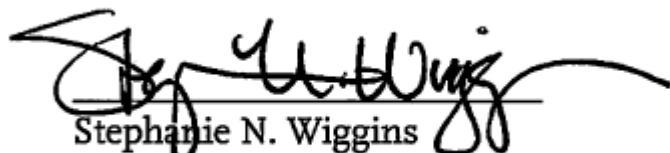
## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Motion 40 - Fareless Systems Initiative (FSI)

Prepared by:

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Chief Executive Officer





## Board Report

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File #: 2021-0627, File Type: Motion / Motion Response

Agenda Number: 40.

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**REVISED**  
**REGULAR BOARD MEETING**  
**SEPTEMBER 23, 2021**

**Motion by:****DIRECTORS MITCHELL, SOLIS, GARCETTI, SANDOVAL, BONIN, AND DUPONT-WALKER**

Related to Item 35: Fareless System Initiative (FSI)

Effective March 23, 2020, former LA Metro CEO Phil Washington ordered that all passengers shall board the rear door when entering an LA Metro bus and, accordingly, removed the requirement for bus passengers to use the fare box. This practice was established to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmissions on transit and to protect transit operators at the front of the bus from potential exposure to COVID-19. While put in place as a health pandemic response, this practice has been one of the most effective strategies in our region to respond to the economic pandemic our communities face.

Riders and community advocates quickly embraced LA Metro's fare free bus service and in August 2020, CEO Washington announced the formation of the Fareless System Initiative (FSI) Task Force to study the potential for continuing fare-free service as a recovery strategy to continue after the pandemic. The Task Force's research confirmed what riders already know; that LA Metro's riders are overwhelmingly low-income people of color for whom transit fares are an economic burden and for whom fare enforcement perpetuates racial disparities. Furthermore, the Task Force found that a fareless system would grow ridership and help the region meet its mobility, congestion reduction, and sustainability goals more effectively than almost any other LA Metro initiative. Buoyed by these findings, on May 27, 2021, the Board directed staff to proceed with FSI, subject to a final financial plan, which is before the Board for consideration today.

The financial plan identifies funding for free student passes as Phase 1 of FSI. Staff has moved quickly to build on the previously existing U-Pass program to expand free student passes to students in every participating school district throughout the county. However, the financial plan does not identify the funding needed to move forward and launch Phase 2 of FSI, which would serve all low-income riders. In the interim, staff proposes to build on the existing LIFE Program as a first step toward FSI Phase 2, until additional funding can be secured.

Increasing enrollment in the LIFE Program is an important interim step for an expansion of FSI. If implemented, it will create a pre-qualified pool of applicants for FSI Phase 2. While enrollment has grown since its launch in 2019, the LIFE Program still falls far short of its intended impact, largely due

to intimidating, restrictive, and tedious enrollment barriers. The current LIFE Program design will require an overhaul to meet the needs of eligible low-income riders. Namely, the LIFE Program must be far easier to enroll in, more accessible, easier to pay for, and truly affordable for low-income riders.

Our communities are still faced with a dual economic and health pandemic that racial and economic inequalities have further exacerbated. Programs across this region-created to support families in need-will be expiring later this year, despite evidence that these programs have collectively spurred a record drop in poverty (as much as half according to the Urban Institute). Costs will quickly escalate for families, many of whom are still unemployed, taking care of children and loved ones at home, and paying off rental debt. LA Metro must do more to prevent the resumption of fares from exacerbating economic distress among economically vulnerable people in our communities. Removing financial barriers for those who cannot afford transportation creates a lifeline for those who need access to essential travel.

Revamping the LIFE Program will alleviate the impact of fares on low-income riders while preparing LA Metro to implement FSI Phase 2.

**SUBJECT: AMENDMENT TO FARELESS SYSTEM INITIATIVE (FSI)**

**RECOMMENDATION**

APPROVE Motion by Mitchell, Solis, Garcetti, Sandoval, Bonin, and Dupont-Walker that the Board direct the Chief Executive Officer to:

- A. Develop a plan to double the number of LIFE Program enrollees by the end of 2022.
- B. Expedite a streamlined application system that enables on-the-spot enrollment and the immediate issuance of LIFE Program benefits through a process that allows applicants to self-certify qualification in the program. Applicants should attest that their information and eligibility in the program is accurate under penalty of fine.
- C. Ensure the fare capping pilot approved by the Board in March 2021 applies to LIFE Program participants.
- D. Expand partnerships with local, state, and federal public benefit programs to automatically enroll members in LIFE upon qualification.
- E. Partner with community-based organizations to canvass LA Metro buses and trains to enroll qualifying riders.
- F. Provide three months of fareless transit to new enrollees as an incentive to enrollment, beginning upon the resumption of fare collection.
- G. Evaluate whether qualified applicants can enroll in the LIFE Program with the next generation of touch screen TAP Vending Machines.

WE, FURTHER MOVE, that the Board direct the Chief Executive Officer to:

- H. Continue the current boarding practices until prospective participants can enroll-on-the spot and self-certify their eligibility, with no less than 90 days for promotion and 45 days for enrollment before fare collection resumes. The resumption of fare collection should also be subject to a 45-day awareness-building period that fares collection will resume as detailed in Attachment I of the September 2021 FSI report (Board File 2021-0574).
- I. Return to the Board in January 2022 with an update on LIFE Program changes.
- J. Conduct a LIFE Program evaluation - in partnership with community-based organizations -- to:
  - 1. Develop additional strategies that support the enrollment of new participants in the LIFE Program.
  - 2. Survey and convene current and prospective LIFE Program enrollees on how well the current program meets the needs of eligible applicants.
  - 3. Review current benefit levels and recommend changes, as appropriate.

**BONIN AMENDMENT:**

I would like Metro staff to come back to us in your next report with a more reasonable evaluation of the benefits and costs of going truly fareless. This analysis needs to consider:

- A. A phased approach that winds down contracts rather than breaching them.
- B. The cost of anticipated upgrades and maintenance of our fare collection system that could be avoided.
- C. Realistic ridership and fare revenue forecasts that take into account actual ridership trends, use today's ridership as a baseline, and factor in already Board-approved discounts, including today's actions.
- D. Operational savings from reduced bus dwell times and reduced staff needs for fare collection and enforcement.
- E. Validating cost assumptions from munis.
- F. Looking more holistically at Access Services, including potential savings from Federal waivers and coordination with Microtransit; and
- G. Look at universal \$26 pass proposal from Bus Riders Union.

**KUEHL AMENDMENT:**

Report back on the communication plan.