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TRANSMITTAL DATE: November 9, 2023

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TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Paul Hubler, Chief Strategy Officer

SUBJECT: Trip Planning and Fare Payment Integration Strategic Plan

Issue

This report presents information on the recent study report prepared to develop strategies that will help remove barriers to integrating trip planning and fare payment while enhancing the accessibility and affordability of Metrolink’s network to support a seamless travel experience for current and future riders.

Recommendation

Receive and file.

Strategic Commitment

This report aligns with the Strategic Business Plan commitment of:

- **Customers are our Business:** Providing prospective and continuing customers with better real-time information about the availability and attractiveness of trips and integrating this information with easier ways to pay for and validate fare payments is key to making trips on Metrolink trains easier. Enhancing the customer experience is important to attracting and retaining customers to the Metrolink system.

Background

Metrolink has been developing a broad set of tools to facilitate the sharing of service information and the purchase of tickets to ride the system. These tools include a web-based interactive schedule, an online train tracker with real-time information on the current location of

trains, and a mobile ticketing smartphone app. Recently, the transit industry best practice has been to integrate these tools in trip planning and fare payment and validation. The integration of various trip planning and fare payment tools into a single tool and process makes trip planning and fare purchases easier for customers and should attract more people to try Metrolink and more existing passengers to continue to ride.

Transit travel tools integration is essential since Metrolink's network functions as a connective regional spine of rail transit across a vast six-county service area. The Authority currently has transfer agreements with most local transit providers in Southern California, which minimizes additional fares when our customers transfer between transit providers. Integrating these transfer agreements into various information and sales channels and app-based fare payment processes will be critical to preserving and improving the customer experience.

Discussion

Metrolink's Strategic Business Plan identifies customer experience improvements, fare policies, unified ticketing, and enhanced partnerships as key strategies supporting the agency's mission and vision. Focusing on Trip Planning and Fare Payment integration, the scope identified several objectives, all related to making the customer experience easier:

1. Enable a seamless multi-modal travel experience for trips taken in Southern California.
2. On a smartphone, customers can plan and pay for trips with maximum "one-click" ease.
3. Minimize cost and complexity barriers to multi-operator trips.
4. Improve transparency around trip planning and fare payment information for trip makers unfamiliar with the system.
5. Simplify real-time data to ensure accuracy for travel times and transit connections.
6. Improve business processes and incorporate technology in trip planning and fare payment.

The final report, developed by Cambridge Systematics in partnership with Hatch LTK and Arellano Associates, is a strategic plan that synthesizes the existing trip planning and fare payment ecosystem at Metrolink, outlines potential ways of thinking about market profiles and specific needs different customers may have in trip planning and fare payment tools, presents a review of best practices in tool integration in the transit industry, and offers a set of recommendations for the Authority moving forward.

To achieve the objectives, the study recommends:

1. Hybrid approach to Apps: In the recommended scenario, Metrolink develops a hybrid / dual approach to mobile app strategy, allowing Metrolink to maintain the control associated with its own Mobile application while supporting the provisions for data sharing and ticket sales through third party apps.

Metrolink's primary effort would be to develop its own app. Information about trips and schedules would be focused or tailored to the specific needs of the Metrolink regional rail

system and other passenger-rail operators (e.g., Pacific Surfliner). With the app under the direct control of Metrolink, Metrolink could focus marketing and fare discounts on specific features of Metrolink's system (e.g., distance based-fares, free transfers to participating operators, the Rail-2-Rail agreement with the Pacific Surfliner, fare discounts and promotions, and loyalty program perks).

Concurrently, to introduce Metrolink to a broad audience, Metrolink information, and fares can be published and featured on third-party apps by continuing to provide static and real-time data feeds.

2. Openness to Open-Loop Payments: The second recommendation is for the Authority to consider the incorporation of open loop payments as a supplemental approach to fare payment and validation. The open loop system would allow passengers to pay the fare from their account via credit card, smart card, or mobile phone which are read or scanned by electronic validators during the trip (typically at the beginning and end of each trip). This payment approach would make it easier for first-time or infrequent riders to access the system, thus expanding Metrolink's market of prospective passengers.

The Trip Planning and Fare Payment Integration Strategic Plan outlines a general sequence of initiatives to implement and improve integrated trip planning and fare payment over a critical period for Metrolink and regional mobility leading into 2028. During this period, Metrolink will be completing the first phase of the Southern California Optimized Rail Expansion (SCORE) capital improvement program. Metrolink will also be preparing for the operation of enhanced service both to leverage the infrastructure investment and to meet the needs of regional milestone events such as the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Meanwhile, the State of California, through the California Integrated Travel Program (Cal-ITP) has identified and is facilitating several key areas of enhancement for trip planning and fare payment including technological solutions and organizational models.

Longer-term, broader regional changes in mobility and technological advances will also influence integration opportunities, with potential for growth in flexible first- and last-mile services offering new modes for integration. Emerging technologies may change how riders access travel information, and payment forms may become even more frictionless with sensor-based interactions or geofencing that do not require active validation. These trends are difficult to predict with certainty but point to the complexity of travel and mobility integration and the need to constantly revisit and update the strategies.

Next Steps

Authority staff should continue with the procurement of the Metrolink Mobile App, integrating improvements to trip planning tools, the fare payment interface, discounts and free transfers, and connecting service. Parameters of a pilot test of Open Loop payment configurations should continue to be explored with Cal-ITP. A study can reveal a roadmap laying out specific strategy for broader application of Open Loop fare payment. As technology changes, Metrolink will continue to revisit and update the strategies outlined in the report.

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Attachment(s)

[Attachment A - Trip Planning and Fare Payment Integration
Presentation - Trip Planning Fare Payment Integration](#)