



ITEM ID: 2023-173-0

TRANSMITTAL DATE: May 19, 2023

MEETING DATE: May 26, 2023

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Paul Hubler, Chief Strategy Officer

SUBJECT: Service Growth Development Plan Update

Issue

This report presents an introduction to, update on, and early results from the Service Growth Development Plan (SGDP) project. The SGDP seeks to establish a consensus plan, developed with input from Member Agencies, for Metrolink growth ranging from short-term optimization opportunities for implementation as early as this fall to target growth circa 2028 and potential growth in later years.

Recommendation

Receive and file.

Strategic Commitment

This report aligns with the Strategic Business Plan commitments of:

- **Customers are Our Business:** We respect and value our customers, putting them at the heart of all we do, and work hard to attract and retain new customers by understanding their needs and finding new and innovative ways to delight them. The service plans being developed as a part of the Service Growth Development Plan are being crafted to make it simpler and easier for passengers to choose to ride Metrolink. These customer-centric endeavors will connect more passengers to more places in a way that is intuitive and easy for new riders to navigate the system.
- **Modernizing Business Practices:** We will improve our operational efficiency, through transparency, objective metrics, and streamlined governance, reducing reliance on subsidy while bringing our system into a state of good repair and investing in the

development of our employees. The service plans being developed as a part of the Service Growth Development Plan are carefully fashioned to unlock economies of scale and provide cost-effective service (and ridership) growth.

Background

The Strategic Business Plan called for serving a broader set of markets such as leisure travelers and non-office commuters, running more cost-effective service, and leveraging targeted capital investment. Since then, as the region has recovered from the pandemic, the Authority has observed stronger recovery among these new target markets than in its traditional white-collar office commuter base. Prior work in service planning has been completed to support the SCORE Program, including the 2020 SCORE Cost/Benefit Operations Analysis (CBOA). The SGDP builds on these strategic objectives by adapting them to the lasting impacts of COVID, incorporating feedback from member agencies and other partners, and refining operational and fiscal modeling.

The SGDP does this with the goal of setting a concrete and actionable program for service transformation and growth, to be presented for consideration by the Board.

Discussion

Metrolink's ridership in the second half of 2022 was slightly more than 40% of the same period in 2019. However, different markets have recovered at different rates. Whereas weekday peak period travel remains below 40%, midday ridership has reached 50% and weekend ridership around 65%. Furthermore, most of the trains that Metrolink suspended in March 2020 that have not yet been brought back operated during the midday, dragging the midday recovery number down. On a per-train basis, midday ridership is around 80% of 2019. These ridership values, on the main, continue to inch upwards, consistent with other data illustrating that riders are coming back, but not as strongly in a key demographic: the white-collar traditional office commuter. Remote work and hybrid work schedules remain common, and the white-collar commuter customer group – Metrolink's historic core market – may never fully ride in the same patterns or at the same frequency as they did before the pandemic.

Most of Metrolink's pre-pandemic service was built around the needs of that white-collar commuter customer group, but its expansion plans were not tied to that market segment. The SCORE Phase 1 program primarily focuses on filling in the midday and reverse-peak markets, to make Metrolink a better option for a greater variety of new travelers and travel purposes.

Midday travelers are fewer in number per hour than peak commuters, but not by much. Streetlight Data from Spring 2022 indicates that all-mode travel between Metrolink station pairs more than 10 miles apart during the midday is only 1/3 less than the level seen during the peak morning commute hours. In aggregate, it's still a sizeable market, and the cost to service it is typically less than commuter service due to operating economies of scale.

Furthermore, the SCORE Phase 1 program calls for customer-friendly schedules that are regular, repeating, bidirectional, and synced across lines in a way that not only makes it easier to ride, but also connects more station pairs through timed transfers. The Streetlight mobile device data indicates that only 62% of all-mode travel between Metrolink station pairs is

between stations connected by a single line. 38% of all demand is between station pairs that would require a transfer. That would represent an over 60% increase in the size of the market Metrolink could tap if it could effectively serve cross-line markets.

Both opportunities – serving more time-of-day markets and more geographic markets – remain strong. Better serving them involves evolving Metrolink to a service profile that is more balanced and regular across the day. Such a profile would be more cost effective, increasing utilization rates for fleet, facilities, and train crews. It may allow the use of shorter or lower-capacity train consists in some cases.

The SGDP team is currently working on several service plan variations and will return to the Board with updates over the next few months.

Next Steps

Staff will return to the Board with updates over the next few months and will present a scenario of service growth produced with member agency input.

Prepared by: Rory Vaughn, Manager, Planning and Development
 Roderick Diaz, Director, Planning and Development

Approved by: Paul Hubler, Chief Strategy Officer

Attachment(s)

[Presentation - Service Growth Development Plan Update](#)