September 1, 2015

Philip A. Washington
Chief Executive Officer
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority
One Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA 90112-2952

Dear Mr. Washington,

RE: Stakeholder Input for potential 2016 Los Angeles County Transportation Sales Tax Measure

On behalf of the collaborative partners of LA THRIVES, I am submitting comments and recommendations on Metro’s proposed sales tax measure in 2016. LA THRIVES is a collaborative of organizations committed to equitable transit-oriented development (eTOD) that prioritizes investments in the production and preservation of affordable homes, protects the social fabric of neighborhoods, and allows residents to walk, bike and take transit to shops and services. We have roots in LA County communities, and long-term relationships with government agencies, elected officials, community-based organizations and others involved in issues ranging from public health to transit to environmental issues to local and regional planning. Our partners include the California Community Foundation, Enterprise Community Partners, Liberty Hill Foundation, Low Income Investment Fund, Move LA, Prevention Institute, and the Southern California Association of Non-Profit Housing.

We appreciate the strong leadership Metro has provided in recent years towards increasing mobility and economic opportunity while reducing congestion and air pollution for the region. Below is a set of guiding principles for Metro to consider which places a priority on: economic, environmental, and health equity; the needs of Metro’s predominantly low-income core transit riders; Metro’s recent investments in expansion of the transit system; and regional planning and implementation that meets the state’s Sustainable Communities Strategies goals. We also offer recommendations for solutions that could be incorporated into the investment plan for revenues from a sales tax measure that meet these goals and priorities.

Measure R, passed in 2008, greatly expanded the county’s transit system and continues to do so in significant ways. Since then, Metro has adopted a Joint-Work plan with the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to implement our region’s Sustainable Communities Strategy to significantly reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and has also developed its own Countywide Sustainability Planning Policy and Implementation Plan to further a comprehensive sustainability strategy. Additionally, in line with national trends, Metro has developed a more sophisticated role in making both housing and transportation affordable, including: establishing a target for affordable housing in its joint development portfolio; allowing for land discounts for those affordable housing units through land disposition in joint development; and participating in developing a Los Angeles Transit Oriented Affordable Housing Fund.

Recommended Principles for Transportation Investments

*Build on and extend the existing transit system’s capacity to increase mobility and create opportunities for low income residents while helping household budgets.*
Low income residents are more likely to be unable to afford to own a car, and thus make up a majority of Metro’s core transit riders. These residents also greatly benefit from infrastructure improvements that enable safe, comfortable usage of active transportation modes such as walking and biking. As Metro’s core transit customers, low income residents should be high priority for any transportation investments. Metro acknowledges that transportation investments can alter local real estate markets in ways that contribute to displacement of core transit riders and businesses serving those core transit riders. The next sales tax measure should include investments aimed at renter and small business retention by incentivizing local jurisdictions, where land-use controls are governed, to adopt such retention policies.

Help achieve Metro’s sustainability goals
Investments should build upon the framework of Metro’s Countywide Sustainability Planning Policy and Implementation Plan. This document provides an important roadmap for achieving sustainability goals of reducing air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions, improve public health, and enhance and restore natural systems.

Consider the linkage between land-use and transportation, and in particular expanding affordable options for housing and mobility for core transit riders
Metro has demonstrated great leadership and made significant policy changes recently that strengthen its role in meeting this goal, such as establishing a target for affordable housing in its joint development portfolio, allowing for land discounts for those affordable housing units through land disposition in joint development, and participating in developing a Los Angeles Transit Oriented Affordable Housing Fund. New revenues generated from a sales tax measure should continue to deepen Metro’s role in this integrated approach. Investments should build upon Metro’s partnership and Joint Work program with the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to implement SCAG’s Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy to meet the goals of SB 375 through integrated land-use and transportation planning. This approach emphasizes the need for preserving and expanding affordable options for housing and mobility together.

Investment guidelines should enable people who live and work along new and expanded transit corridors to have meaningful input with regard to the type of development that comes into their neighborhoods, with a particular emphasis on those most at risk of displacement
Metro’s own policy making should engage the full spectrum of the County’s diverse constituents. Further, investment and implementation guidelines should support and incentivize jurisdictions that have adopted and implement meaningful stakeholder engagement. Low-income core transit riders who are most at risk of displacement can be better reached in partnership with community serving organizations.

Recommended Solutions

- Create, adopt and/or communicate criteria for evaluating and targeting investments such as the requirements under the Federal New Starts and Small Starts, SCAG’s SCS strategy and SB375, Cap and Trade/Disadvantaged Communities CalEnviroscreen.
  Examples of data driven criteria, such as those presented in the Los Angeles Equity Atlas and those programs identified above, include:
  - Locations and rates of traffic injuries and fatalities
  - Poverty rate
  - Transportation and housing cost burden
- Car ownership
- Transit usage
- Air quality and pollution concentration
- Rates of diabetes and other chronic health conditions
- Race

- **Set higher goals for increasing share of active transportation and transit usage which will result in reductions of VMT and GHG through cost-effective transportation investments.**
  Suggested investment priorities include:
  - 1st/last mile infrastructure;
  - Active transportation infrastructure, shared mobility, and alternative mobility options;
  - Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) as part of a complete streets network, such as Move LA’s proposed Grand Boulevards concept;
  - Core operations that result in keeping fares low

- **Develop investment guidelines, incentives, and/or requirements that support community development and affordable housing and incentivize renter retention policies.**
  - Expanded participation in funding for transit oriented affordable housing, such as the new “TOAH” fund recently approved by Metro’s board;
  - Incentives and/or conditions for sub-regional allocations to jurisdictions which have adopted renter and small business retention policies such as demolition controls, limits on converting apartments to condominiums, rent control enforcement, and affordable housing preservation

- **Develop investment guidelines, incentives, and/or requirements that support stakeholder engagement policies.**

- **Continue to invest in long range local planning that results in integration of land use and transportation and maximizes other state resources such as Cap and Trade.**

Thank you for your consideration and your continued leadership. Please contact me for more information at tyee@lifund.org or (213)627-2042.

Sincerely,

Thomas Yee
Initiative Officer
LA THRIVES