



THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO

COUNCILMEMBER CHRISTOPHER WARD

THIRD DISTRICT

March 7, 2018

Hon. Georgette Gomez
Chairperson
Metropolitan Transit System (MTS)
1255 Imperial Avenue, Suite 1000
San Diego, CA 92101

Dear Chairwoman Gomez:

As the Chair of the San Diego City Council's Select Committee on Homelessness, and the Vice-Chair of the Regional Task Force on the Homeless (RTFH), I have been actively engaged in identifying some of the challenges we face as a regional community to make a difference for those experiencing homelessness and related impacts to our neighborhoods. While a highly complex social challenge with many root causes, solutions, and responsible public jurisdictions, we have done more in 2017 on the RTFH to bring all parties together to change directions to those embodying national best practices. These of course include creation of more permanent supportive housing, increasing access to mental health and social service assistance, providing emergency relief, coordinating data systems effectively across all service providers, improving street outreach, and more.

MTS could help with transportation assistance and legal forgiveness.

Next to housing, transportation remains one of the biggest daily challenges for those who are homeless. As you know, many persons with very- or extremely-low incomes do not have the means to afford standard transit fare, or habitually attempt to use the system without paying. Often this has resulted in fines, which in turn are unable to be paid and escalate with penalty to be a major legal and financial obstacle for overcoming homelessness. For example, an analysis of 2017 outcomes of the Homeless Court program, of the over 2100 crimes and infractions requiring resolution by the court, 933 were related to trolley and parking citations, most of which were a result of MTS fare nonpayment. The typical fine for MTS fare evasions is \$250 for the first two offenses and can go up to \$400 for each subsequent offense (per Penal Code 640).

While respecting MTS's need to both ensure customers are paying fares and using the law to deter nonpayment, we must be mindful of the extent compliance is even possible for this population. At the same time, we are trying to encourage those experiencing homelessness to participate in coordinated entry efforts to access homeless services and seek pathways for

housing and self-sustainability. MTS may have an opportunity to be a proactive partner in helping our regional efforts to improve homelessness by offering severely discounted transit passes, expedited legal resolution and forgiveness, or both to those who are showing a demonstrated effort to enter our homeless management information system, emergency shelter, transitional housing, or other program serving someone on a continuum of care. A shift in MTS policy can provide social assistance and a pathway to improvements that would lead them quicker to a position of being able to become a full fare customer of MTS.

MTS could help with workforce development efforts by providing employment opportunities.

Employment is a key component to addressing homelessness and outlined as a critical objective in Opening Doors, the federal plan to prevent and end homelessness. Employment does not just increase financial and housing stability, it also provides individuals with a purpose and can build self-worth. Communities across the country including Denver, Albuquerque, Stockton, and Portland have created innovative employment models for households experiencing homelessness, however some struggle with the connection to long-term housing and employment stability.

MTS can partner with the City of San Diego to identify employment opportunities or support resources which can serve as a critical piece of ensuring homeless assistance programs that are currently offered, such as Rapid Re-Housing (RRH) are successful, as the assumption with the RRH model is that the majority of households will increase their income through employment allowing for them to take over the rent and remain stable.

MTS could help with community outreach and engagement.

Some homeless people find refuge at MTS bus and trolley stops. There is opportunity for MTS to partner and train with the RTFH on how to best interact with homeless individuals. MTS staff often regularly interact with homeless people throughout the region. Over time, through repeated dialogue, MTS staff and outreach workers will be able to gain the trust of their street clients and are able to guide them into programs. Additionally, there is opportunity to coordinate with outreach teams, social service providers, and law enforcement across the region to connect individuals with services thereby also addressing neighborhood resident concerns about loitering and waste abatement.

MTS could contribute unutilized or retired assets for homeless services programs.

There is opportunity to use MTS assets like retired buses to service homeless individuals. In cities across the United States, retired busses have been restored and redeployed to offer mobile outreach clinics, mobile restrooms and showers and even temporary shelter.

MTS could help with mixed use affordable housing opportunities.

To address our broad need for housing solutions, I have been encouraging us as a City to look at all available public land for any opportunity for development of affordable housing whether

directly or jointly with other purposes. The County of San Diego completed a similar survey last spring and identified 11 properties to set aside for future affordable housing development opportunity. I am requesting that MTS consider partnering with us in this effort, to identify property that may be suitable for mixed-use housing, transit, or office purposes in the near future. Partnerships with the San Diego Housing Commission or San Diego Housing Federation may help yield additional feasible projects that help to satisfy both the regional housing crisis and improvement of MTS property.

I would look forward to discussing these requests further with MTS staff and you at your convenience. Please contact Pamela Ison in my office (PAIson@sandiego.gov, 619-236-6633) should you be interested in organizing a meeting to discuss these or related solutions.

Sincerely,

Christopher Ward



Councilmember, Third District
City of San Diego

cc:

Paul Jablonski, MTS CEO

Hon. Kevin Faulconer, Mayor