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**ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE**

**FIELD BRIEFING**  
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**TESTIMONY OF ROGER SNOBLE**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**  
**LOS ANGELES COUNTY METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION**  
**AUTHORITY**

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OF  
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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Los Angeles County Metropolitan  
Transportation Authority

Good morning, Senator Boxer, and welcome to Metro. As always, it is great to have you here today. You have been a tireless advocate for California's transportation needs, and in the two years since you were elected to chair the Senate Environment & Public Works Committee, you have advanced so many important issues to the forefront and we appreciate all of your efforts.

Also, thank you for your visit here last February to see firsthand how your efforts to appropriate \$80 million dollars in New Starts funding are helping to build the Gold Line Eastside Extension Light Rail Project. That project continues to proceed on time and on budget, with over 3.4 million work-hours without a lost time accident; an impressive record. We are set to open this line next June and I hope you will be able to join us for the grand opening.

I appreciate the opportunity today to provide testimony on the implementation of the New Starts program of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). These remarks are similar to comments I shared last year with the Section 1909 Commission and the U.S. Congress.

Let me begin by saying that the next authorization bill should not be business as usual. The current transportation program has been and continues to be incapable of fully addressing the investment needs of Southern California and the nation as a whole. It is time to embark in a bold new direction.

One example of that is the New Starts program that funds new transit capital projects. By way of background, Metro has spent the past 25 years presiding over an ambitious and aggressive effort to expand our rail network. During this period, we have spent over \$8 billion dollars building nine new fixed guideway projects in Los Angeles County. Over 64% of that funding has come from State and local sources. Metro has extensive experience with the FTA New Starts project development process. Four of our transit projects were developed and implemented under the New Starts process. And five of our transit projects have been designed and constructed without Federal New Starts funding. As a result, we have directly experienced the differences between the two and they are significant.

I would like to outline three fundamental reforms that would make the New Starts program a faster and more efficient tool to promote mobility and at the same time, lead to better air quality. This is an important point because in the new reauthorization bill, the relationship between mobility and our environment must be a policy priority. Thank you for leading the charge on this front.

The first fundamental reform is that the New Starts program needs a lot more money. China recently invested the equivalent of 3 years of New Starts funding for the entire United States into just one of their rail projects. Frankly, the level of transit funding in our country is a national embarrassment.

A bigger, more robust New Starts program is needed in order to meet the growing demand for transit investments nationwide. It is true that to address this demand would require several billion dollars in Federal funding. However, this would be an investment in infrastructure that would yield a huge national return -- in job growth, in the economic vitality of our cities, in congestion relief, and in air quality. Without venturing into an area beyond this Committee's jurisdiction, if the Federal Government can contribute billions of dollars toward rebuilding and improving the infrastructure in foreign countries, it seems reasonable to pursue a higher level of funding to tackle the substantial transportation infrastructure demands right here at home!

The second fundamental reform is the need to streamline and expedite the construction of worthwhile New Starts projects. Metro has experienced firsthand significant differences between building transit projects under the Federal New Starts process and building similar projects using our local process.

The most notable differences have to do with schedule and cost. First, the Federal New Starts process can add one to two years to the project schedule.

For example, on our remarkably successful federally funded Eastside Light Rail Project, Metro received a Record of Decision in June of 2002 and executed a Full Funding Grant Agreement two years later in June of 2004. This finally allowed us to start construction. In contrast, on the non-federally funded Exposition Project, we received a Record of Decision in February of 2006 and started design and construction that March. Likewise, on the Metro Orange Line BRT, we received environmental clearance in February of 2002 and were able to start construction shortly thereafter. Second, we estimate that the Federal process adds over 10% to the overall project cost. One critical aspect of this comparison bears emphasis. We have not found in Los Angeles County that the current oversight of Federal projects has any actual, demonstrable yield in terms of project success or performance.

The third reform is the urgent need to place a much higher value on linking land use and transportation in the approval of New Starts projects. This step is essential to sustain and increase the quality of life in our major metropolitan areas. The fact is, today all of the major urban areas in our nation face the reality of carbon emissions and its impact on global warming and air quality. In the case of California, state and local governments have implemented progressive laws and programs to address carbon emissions. Elevating the importance of land use in the New Starts program

will lead to the construction of projects that will play an important role in reducing carbon emissions.

Finally, I want to briefly touch upon the urgent need to overhaul the Section 5309 Fixed Guideway Modernization Program.

First and foremost, we need to grow the financial resources dedicated to this program. It is essential that all operational rail systems be maintained in a state of good repair. Building new projects is good but properly maintaining systems that today carry millions of riders per day is essential.

Second, unfortunately the program is currently structured in a way that disproportionately benefits older, mostly East Coast cities. These cities consume over \$1.1 billion dollars annually, which represents over 70% of the entire Fixed Guideway Modernization Program. And I should add, many of these same cities compete with Metro and others transit properties for New Starts funds, too. This leaves few resources for emerging transit agencies to count on.

I believe it is inequitable, for example, that the Philadelphia urbanized area receives almost twice the amount of funds that Los Angeles County receives from this program. This is especially true when you consider that Los Angeles County transit operators carry more people, on workdays, on our buses and trains, than the entire population of the City of Philadelphia. The Eastern transit properties are much older and truly need to be rehabbed,

but many newer systems are now 20-plus years old and are in need of mid-life repairs.

## **CONCLUSION**

Madame Chair, that concludes my testimony. I will be happy to answer any questions that you might have. Again, I appreciate the opportunity to provide Metro's views on these important transportation issues. Metro looks forward to working closely with you and your able staff in the months ahead as your committee begins to consider the reauthorization of SAFETEA-LU.