



June 23rd, 2021

Metro Board of Directors
One Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA 90013

Re: LA Metro Board Report: Buses with Optional Left-Side Boarding (File # 2020-0921)

Dear Metro Board Members and Staff,

As the organizations and stakeholders listed below we submit this letter to urge LA Metro to adopt electric, dual-side buses as the new standard vehicle type. This small change for LA Metro can provide the region multiple benefits including improving bus speed times, flexibility at the curb for bike lanes and Al Fresco dining, and high-quality service that residents need and deserve. As LA Metro and Los Angeles County invest hundreds of millions of dollars in multiple bus rapid transit (BRT) corridors in the coming decades, electric, dual-side buses will maximize community benefits of those transit investments and help move Los Angeles into a transit-forward region.

In particular, we **recognize the following community benefits of dual-side boarding:**

- **Moving buses to the center/left side of the roadway reduces delays.** The primary advantage of shifting BRT lanes to the center (or left side for one-way streets) of the road is to prioritize and speed up buses. In dedicated median lanes, buses don't have to contend with vehicles that are entering driveways, double-parked, or turning right at intersections. And center lanes eliminate conflicts with curbside bike lanes and on-street parking. Ideally, left-turn restrictions accompany center-running BRT lanes to minimize

how much turning vehicles delay BRT buses. Eliminating left-turn signal phases at many intersections along the BRT corridor often frees up more green light time for buses or walk time for pedestrians.

- **Left-side bus doors allow curb space to be prioritized for bicyclists and pedestrians.** Shifting bus lanes from curbside to a center-alignment can open up space for safer bicycle lanes. Instead of bikes and buses sharing a curbside lane, which creates conflicts where the bus pulls into and out of bus stops, center-running bus lanes create space for protected curbside bike lanes. People often feel safer riding a bike when they are physically protected from vehicles and can encourage some people to shift their trip along the corridor from driving to biking. This can lead to more customers pedaling through a business district. Likewise, by freeing up the curb space, sidewalks could be widened to create safer and more enjoyable walking streets. Parklets with landscaping, seating, or Al Fresco outdoor dining areas that are so essential during the COVID pandemic could be maintained or new ones created.
- **Single, center platforms, where buses board passengers are the simplest, most cost-effective, and efficient BRT station configuration.** Passengers can choose different travel routes and directions from the convenience and comfort of a single, central station. It is also safer since a single, center platform will have more “eyes” than two split stations would. One central boarding platform is more cost-effective to construct than two split platforms and simpler for passengers to navigate. Center platforms have a smaller footprint as well, allowing more space for landscaped medians and street trees, as well as on-street parking, and protected bike lanes.
- **Boarding doors on both sides of the buses allow different center station configurations to be selected based on the street width and context.** Some BRT stations can utilize single, center platforms, while others can have split stations if that’s more appropriate. The flexibility dual-side door buses offer ensures each BRT corridor design and station configuration can be localized and optimized for each roadway segment or neighborhood.

In addition to these community benefits, investing in dual-side buses can also **support LA Metro goals** by improving bus efficiency, reducing sub-fleet challenges, and help the agency become a national leader:

- **Standardizing to sixty-foot dual-side door buses allows quicker passenger boarding.** When a transit corridor has sufficient demand to warrant 60-foot articulated buses, the benefits of center-running bus lanes and single, center platform stations are clear. Sixty-foot buses can accommodate two left-side doors which allow quicker passenger boarding, whereas 40-foot buses cannot.

However, dual-side door 40-foot buses offer additional flexibility in the BRT corridor design. San Bernardino’s OmniTrans experience may offer valuable lessons for LA Metro. OmniTrans is planning to initially use electric dual-side door 40-foot buses on

their new West Valley Connector BRT corridor, and may transition to 60-foot battery electric buses in the future. These buses have one passenger door on the left and two on the right. An OmniTrans project planner indicated to ITDP the slightly slower boarding time through the one left-side door and slightly lower seated passenger capacity is outweighed by the flexibility of being able to have single, center platforms rather than split stations.

- **Limiting the vehicle types in LA Metro's fleet is a self-fulfilling prophecy.** Until new vehicle types are introduced, each BRT corridor that considers left-side boarding will continue to bump up against the barrier of being the first to introduce a sub-fleet. Until dual-side door buses are standardized in LA Metro's fleet, each individual BRT corridor project will have to clear the threshold of demonstrating sufficient benefit to justify introducing a sub-fleet. This extra barrier may cause left-side boarding alternatives to be eliminated from consideration prematurely. If LA Metro approved dual-side door buses as a new standard vehicle type, it would shift the status quo making it significantly easier for new corridors to consider the left-side boarding. When assessing alternatives, future BRT corridors would no longer have to consider the implications of introducing a sub-fleet, and could instead focus on the benefits left-side boarding brings to the corridor design and operations.
- **LA Metro has overcome the challenges of introducing a sub-fleet previously.** LA Metro already maintains and operates sub-fleets of buses with different lengths and propulsion. Sixty-foot articulated buses are now operated on the G (Orange) Line and in several other Bus Divisions. These articulated buses require specialized driver training and operating procedures, and more space at depots. Similarly, LA Metro recently introduced electric buses into their fleet. The benefits of electrifying the fleet superseded the additional cost of charging infrastructure and new restrictions in bus assignments. As LA Metro knows, a sub fleet does add complexity to bus route assignments and, in the case of battery electric buses that need to be recharged. The benefits of dual-side door buses warrant a new vehicle type and the impact of the operational limitations will decrease as the portion of dual-side door buses in the fleet increases.
- **L.A. Metro's bus procurement decisions can shape the future of the domestic electric bus market.** Three U.S. manufacturers, New Flyer, Proterra and BYD are willing to produce dual-side door battery electric buses of different lengths. Only a handful of U.S. transit agencies currently operate 60-foot battery-electric buses including [Spokane Transit](#) and [King County Metro](#). (Both operate New Flyer Xcelsior CHARGE buses and Spokane's have dual-side bus doors). And this won't change until demand from U.S. transit agencies for these vehicles increases. As one of the largest U.S. transit agencies, LA Metro has leverage and purchasing power. If LA Metro were to include dual-side battery electric buses in their upcoming bus procurements while also using strong contract language that incentivizes companies who have committed to quality jobs, wages, benefits, training and community partnership, it would expand the market for these buses that have the potential to be manufactured right here in LA County. Not only would other U.S. transit agencies benefit from more selection, as LA Metro

transitions its fleet to fully electric by 2030, but it may also find more vehicle options, better performance, and lower prices.

We the undersigned encourage LA Metro to embrace dual-side door buses to add essential flexibility into the planning and operations of the many BRT corridors planned across the County. Standardizing these buses will enable corridor planners to fully consider the tradeoffs of center-running BRT alternatives. Including center-aligned BRT lanes and stations on the corridors prioritized for BRT across the County will allow a reimagining of how those streets are utilized and which modes are prioritized. Future BRT passengers will benefit from transit priority, and bicyclists and pedestrians will enjoy safe and protected spaces as well.

Thank you,

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