

Transcript: State of the Agency 2024

*As delivered by Metro Chair Janice Hahn*

*Thank you, Stephanie, for that presentation and for your energy and passion for Metro.*

*And let's give a big round of applause to my friend Mayor Karen Bass for her leadership this past year as Chair of Metro.*

*Karen, you became Chair of the Board just a few months after getting sworn in as Mayor, and it has been a wonderful experience serving alongside you.*

*You've taken on big issues like safety and homelessness with grace and skill, and we are better off for your leadership.*

*Today, I take over as Chair of this Board, but my connection with this agency goes back to before its founding.*

*My dad, longtime LA County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, was the father of Prop A. Before that point, people doubted that voters would agree to tax themselves to pay for transit.*

*But he crafted a ballot measure that not only promised to build a rail network, but lower fares for bus riders and dedicate local return to cities to invest in their own transit. He campaigned at bus stops, meeting with riders and letting them know how Prop A would make things better for them.*

*And my dad was right -- in 1980, the voters of LA County agreed to tax themselves to invest in public transit.*

*And that successful Prop A became the template for future measures – Prop C, Measure R, and now Measure M – which are literally paving the way for Metro to build billions of dollars of new transit and infrastructure projects all across LA County.*

*But, my dad understood that if we ever hoped to get voters to agree to support transit again, they needed to see results. So the Blue Line was built in less than 10 years.*

*I remember being at the Blue Line's opening in 1990 and the promise that moment held. It is so good to see that, in just the few decades since, Metro has built on the work my father and his colleagues started, connecting communities across LA County with a rail network and bus system that hundreds of thousands of people count on every day.*

*And by the way – the Blue Line has been the workhorse of Metro and is the busiest of any Metro light rail line.*

*This year, we will open the new LAX station. President Reagan once said that the nine most terrifying words in the English language were “I'm from the government and I am here to help.” Well, in Los Angeles, the nine most terrifying words are ‘hey, can you pick me up from LAX?’ And at long last... your answer can finally be “no, Take Metro!”*

*And I am especially looking forward to starting early construction this year on the Southeast Gateway Line.*

*This line originally had been saddled with a bad name– the West Santa Ana Branch— which left people confused about the direction of the line and even what county it was in. The name was holding this project back -- so we held a countywide contest to change it. And this new name has given this project more momentum and enthusiasm in Sacramento and Washington DC.*

*Once it is fully complete, the Southeast Gateway Line will run from Artesia through the Gateway Cities and Southeast LA all the way to right here, in Union Station, giving a single-seat light-rail line to almost a quarter million residents who do not have access to a car.*

*I want to give a shout out to the many mayors and elected leaders from across the Gateway Cities and Southeast LA who have remained steadfast in their advocacy for this project. Many of you are here today. If you were a member of Eco-Rapid which has been advocating for this line for 20 years – please stand up. You are the reason this has come so far.*

*We need to expand our Metro rail network. But we know that these new lines and stations will ultimately fail if riders' top concern isn't whether the Metro system goes where they need it to -- but whether they will reach their destination safely.*

*The recent violent incidents we have seen on our buses and trains are alarming and troubling to every Metro board member. We have heard from riders who have been afraid just trying to take Metro home, and bus operators who worry about whether they can do their job safely. The status quo is unacceptable and needs to change.*

*So my top priority as the new Chair of the Metro Board of Directors is the safety of our riders and the safety of our employees.*

*Law enforcement is an essential part of that puzzle. I believe the recent surge in law enforcement ordered by Mayor Bass and our board was the right thing to do, and I have heard from riders who appreciated seeing more officers on their routes.*

*Last month, our board voted to move forward with a proposal to start our own Metro public safety department. The hope is that this will give Metro greater ability to deploy officers on our buses and trains who will be more seamlessly connected with our security teams, homeless outreach staff, and ambassadors. But we also have to recognize that this isn't a guaranteed success.*

*The reality is that this new agency will take time to stand up, and we need to focus on the safety of our riders right now. That means having our law enforcement partners at the table and more importantly on our platforms and on our trains and buses.*

*Many of the challenges we are facing on Metro are larger ones we face as a county, as a country, and as a society that are spilling onto the Metro system. These aren't problems that Metro can solve alone, but they are ones we must reckon with.*

*For example, we continue to struggle with how to assist our unhoused riders who are on the system simply because they need a place to just be. There is a better way than having people who are suffering from poverty, mental illness and homelessness sheltering on our buses and trains.*

*We need LAHSA, the County, and our cities to take the lead and work in partnership with Metro.*

*And I think we have a new and promising model in the Navigation Center in South LA that was unveiled last month, thanks to support from Mayor Bass and LAHSA.*

*For the first time, when unhoused people have to leave our trains at the end of the line in the middle of the night, our Homeless Outreach Teams have a place to take them where they can have a meal and a warm bed, and where they can get the help they need so they don't have to get on a train again in the morning just to be off the streets.*

*It is my hope that by leaning on our partners at LAHSA, in law enforcement, at our cities and at the County, Metro can do more to focus on its core mission: providing bus and rail service that is accessible, comfortable, convenient, and frequent. So, my third priority this year is to focus on the rider experience.*

*That means our buses, trains need to be clean and arrive on time and our stations also need to be clean, well-lit, and safe. It means our Metro system needs to be accessible to people of all abilities. I want Metro to work more closely with our cities to get more bus shelters installed to protect our riders from sun and rain.*

*When my father was a Supervisor, he would take a different route to the office through his district every day. And every time he came across a pothole, he would report it to his staff and tell them that, the next time he drove that road, he expected it to be fixed.*

*So, I am going to take a page out of my dad's book. I haven't ridden Metro as much as I should have in the past, but I am going to make it a point to ride more while I am Chair. And at our Board meetings, I am going to talk about what I experience as a Metro rider. That will mean calling out problems I see -- as well as praising the things that go right.*

*When I rode Metro a few weeks ago I saw Ambassadors who were doing a great job -- not only answering riders' questions but trying to be our eyes and ears on the system. I know there are days when our Ambassadors' jobs are relatively straightforward, but I also want to acknowledge that there are other days when they are not. Our board*

*asked that our Ambassadors be equipped with Narcan-- and since then they have been able to revive and save the lives of 190 people who otherwise could have died from an overdose. We have several of our Ambassadors here with us today -- and for everything they do -- let's give them a round of applause.*

*And that brings me to my last priority but certainly not my least: Supporting our Metro Employees.*

*Our buses and trains serve hundreds of thousands of riders every day because of our Metro employees. Our thousands of bus operators, our rail operators, our mechanics, our signal inspectors, our janitors and so many others keep this system going. When the COVID pandemic struck, they were the essential workers who made sure all the other essential workers in our county could get to their jobs.*

*And I want our workers to know that we have their back. That's why this year as Chair I will be meeting with the members of SMART, ATU, TCU, AFSCME, and the Teamsters. I know how important unions are to a strong workforce. I want to make sure our labor partners are heard and that they have a seat at the table.*

*Before I close, I want to thank my colleagues on the Metro Board of Directors. Each one of you has proven to be dedicated not only to improving the Metro system but to serving your constituents and the people of Los Angeles County. I am grateful for your support and especially to my Vice Chair Fernando Dutra.*

*So as I assume the Chairship of Metro, I do so understanding my responsibility to the people of LA County, the riders who count on Metro, and the more than 11,000 Metro employees who keep LA County moving every day.*

*Thank you all of your support.*