

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE SAN DIEGO METROPOLITAN TRANSIT SYSTEM
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

October 2, 2025

[Clerk's note: Except where noted, public, staff and board member comments are paraphrased. The full comment can be heard by reviewing the recording at the [MTS website](#).]

1. Roll Call

Chair Whitburn called the Executive Committee meeting to order at 09:04 a.m. A roll call sheet listing Executive Committee member attendance is attached as Attachment A.

2. Public Comment

David Rodger – Provided a verbal statement to the Committee during the meeting. David expressed frustration about declining safety at the Fifth Avenue Trolley station. He reported frequent drug use and sales between midnight and 5 a.m., and stated that when MTS closed the C St. corridor for work, the illegal activity disappeared, proving MTS's role as an unintended attractant. He appreciated seeing Sharon Cooney, MTS Chief Executive Officer (CEO), on the Trolley but urged all executives to ride it at 1:30 a.m. to witness conditions firsthand. He criticized MTS for failing to act and claimed it had become a transporter of drugs rather than a provider of safe public transit.

3. Approval of Minutes

Vice Chair Goble moved to approve the minutes of the September 4, 2025, MTS Executive Committee meeting. Board Member Hall seconded the motion, and the vote was 6 to 0 in favor with Board Member Montgomery Steppe absent.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4. MTS Financial Sustainability (Mike Thompson)

Mike Thompson, MTS Deputy Chief Financial Officer, presented on MTS Financial Sustainability. He discussed: strategic direction, Board direction on February 13, 2025, current five-year projection summary, revenue measure, potential Capital Improvement Program (CIP) impacts, operating budget, external funding, service and fares, Board Policy 42, major changes vs minor changes, and staff's recommendation.

Public Comment

Maria Cortez – Provided a verbal statement to the Committee during the meeting. Maria expressed support with the MTS staff recommendations and expressed gratitude toward staff for their dedication and transparency. Maria emphasized the importance of public participation, noting that many people were unaware of how impactful it could be to attend meetings and voice their opinions.

Committee Comment

Chair Whitburn thanked Ms. Cortez and acknowledged her input, along with feedback from other riders and Board Members, as influencing and shaping the adjustments reflected in the current staff recommendations.

Vice Chair Goble thanked staff for the thoroughness of the presentation. He suggested that, in the coming weeks, it would be helpful for the Board to receive additional context on what other transit agencies both in California and nationally were doing in response to similar challenges. He emphasized that current discussions appeared isolated, yet MTS operated within a broader

ecosystem of transit systems, and understanding that landscape could help inform the Board's decisions.

Ms. Cooney cited examples such as Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) and Dallas Area Rapid Transit (DART), both of which had implemented major service cuts and fare increases while relying heavily on state funding. She explained that even within California, funding streams varied significantly, such as Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) not receiving Transportation Development Act (TDA) funds, leading them to oppose efforts to expand TDA support statewide. She noted that she had personally advocated to increase the quarter-cent TDA sales tax to a half-cent at the Transit Transformation Task Force meeting, but that effort failed due to resistance from the Bay Area and the state administration. Ms. Cooney discussed BART's plan to pursue a 14-year ballot measure in 2026 and secure a state loan in the meantime.

Vice Chair Goble reiterated the importance of comparing strategies with other California agencies, since they all compete for the same limited state transit funding. Ms. Cooney stated that without a near term revenue measure, relying on loans with interest whether from federal financing tools or regionally through the San Diego Association Governments (SANDAG), it would only worsen the agency's financial position in the long term.

Board Member Fernandez expressed appreciation for the discussion and aligned himself with Vice Chair Goble's earlier comments and noted his interest in learning what other transit agencies were doing to address similar financial challenges. He mentioned reading that San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) had formed a dedicated revenue work group, which included not only their Board of Directors but also members of the Board of Supervisors and other government bodies with a stake in public transit. He believed this type of collaborative model could offer useful insights for MTS and reiterated his desire to examine solutions being implemented by other agencies.

Board Member Hall asked for clarification regarding a previous proposal for a 10% revenue increase, referencing a shift in focus in the current meeting toward saving \$10 million instead. He inquired whether the 10% increase had been completely abandoned and stated that he was personally open to a 20% increase if necessary to keep the agency financially stable. Mr. Thompson explained that the 10% revenue increase had not been discarded but was instead being addressed separately through the ongoing fare study being conducted by SANDAG. That analysis, which includes public outreach, would return to the Board with findings in the spring.

Board Member Elo-Rivera appreciated that staff had incorporated feedback from both the public and the Board following the previous meeting. Board Member Elo-Rivera supported moving the timeline for a future revenue measure, clarifying that it should not be seen as postponing the effort, but rather as creating a longer and more strategic runway to build a stronger coalition. He believed this extra time could be used to explore expanded revenue options at the state level. He referenced earlier comments from Vice Chair Goble, emphasizing that this was not just a local issue but a statewide concern. One of the challenges he raised was the equity of revenue measures like a sales tax, which disproportionately impact lower-income residents.

Board Member Elo-Rivera proposed that MTS take a leadership role in advocating for new, more equitable funding streams at the state level, including tourism-focused revenue options. He suggested exploring fees targeted at tourists, such as vehicle parking fees at hotels, or potential surcharges on luxury vehicles. He noted that these ideas might not yet be fully developed but believed they were worth exploring and could help avoid overburdening regular transit riders. Ms. Cooney mentioned concepts previously discussed at the advisory committee level, such as allowing transit agencies to implement a parcel tax, and highlighted that

legislative staff had participated in those conversations. She recommended incorporating these types of revenue strategies into MTS's broader legislative platform and acknowledged that more concrete details would become available in the final state report expected later in the month.

Board Member Elo-Rivera encouraged the Board to think broadly about local revenue generating strategies already underway or worth pursuing, such as billboard advertising and large-scale solar projects, which could either reduce operational costs or generate lease income. He concluded by urging the Board to prioritize revenue ideas that would not fall on the backs of low-income riders, reinforcing the importance of equity in the agency's financial planning. Board Member Elo-Rivera proposed adding a subpoint to the recommendation for MTS to pursue state legislation that would expand available transit revenue streams, with a focus on tourism-related fees and luxury vehicle surcharges.

Karen Landers, MTS General Counsel, confirmed the proposed language related to the revenue measure. She read it aloud as: *"MTS to pursue state legislation to expand transit revenue options focused on tourists, luxury vehicles, and other options besides a sales tax."*

Board Member Fernandez stated that as the Board continues to engage in long-term discussions, it would be helpful to have more detailed information available. He specifically asked for a risk register that outlines the agency's top 20 assets or so, to better understand the risks tied to the State of Good Repair program. In terms of revenue, he suggested that the Board receive a monetization overview showing the status and potential of current projects related to marketing, advertising, sponsorships, and billboards. He acknowledged that the request might delve deeper than usual but felt that with difficult decisions ahead, having more information would benefit the Board's decision making.

Vice Chair Goble suggested incorporating Board Member Elo-Rivera's earlier comments into the motion language by expanding item number four. Specifically, he proposed that the motion include continuing to pursue additional funding from regional, state, and federal sources, while explicitly referencing the elements that Board Member Elo-Rivera and Ms. Landers had just outlined, such as revenue options related to tourism and luxury vehicles. He emphasized that this would ensure those ideas were directly included, while still leaving room for staff to explore any additional funding opportunities they deemed appropriate. He expressed willingness to proceed with the motion under those terms.

Action Taken

Vice Chair Goble moved to forward a recommendation that the MTS Board of Directors provide the following direction to staff: 1) Move target for revenue measure from November 2026 ballot to 2028; 2) During the development of FY 2027-2030 Capital Improvement Programs, include shift of \$50M per year to the Operating budget; 3) Goal of \$10M in annual operational savings beginning with the FY 2027 Operating budget (excludes service changes); 4) Continue pursuing additional funding from regional, state, and/or federal sources including MTS to pursue legislation to expand transit revenue options through tourism, luxury vehicles or other options other than a sales tax. Board Member Elo-Rivera seconded the motion, and the vote was 5 in favor (Board Members: Fernandez, Dillard, Elo-Rivera, Whitburn, Goble) to 1 opposed (Board Member Hall) with Board Member Montgomery Steppe absent.

5. Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair (Sharon Cooney)

Karen Landers, MTS General Counsel, presented on the Appointment of Chair and Vice Chair. She presented on: Board Chair appointment process, Executive Committee next steps, and staff recommendation.

Public Comment

There were no Public Comments.

Committee Comment

Board Member Elo-Rivera took a moment to express appreciation for the leadership during a difficult time for the agency. He acknowledged that Chair Whitburn had stepped into a tumultuous and unstable situation, and while major challenges remained, he believed there was now significantly more stability compared to when the Chair assumed the role. He thanked both Chair Whitburn and Vice Chair Goble for their steady leadership and noted that, under their guidance, the agency had managed relatively well given the circumstances.

Chair Whitburn shared his appreciation for the current leadership and collaboration on the Board. He remarked that the Executive Committee functioned effectively, and the Board of Directors worked well together. He credited improvements in public transit to the combined efforts of Board Members, public input, riders, and a high performing staff. He concluded by expressing his optimism and enthusiasm for continuing that progress and working collectively toward further improvements in the region's transit system.

Action Taken

Board Member Hall moved to: (1) Reelect Stephen Whitburn as Chair for the next term, beginning January 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027; and (2) Reelect Steve Goble as Vice Chair for the next term, beginning January 1, 2026 through December 31, 2027. Board Member Elo-Rivera seconded the motion, and the vote was 6 to 0 in favor with Board Member Montgomery Steppe absent.

OTHER ITEMS

6. Review of Draft October 16, 2025 Board Agenda

Ms. Cooney informed the Board that an upcoming Comprehensive Operations Analysis (COA) workshop would follow a different format, featuring interactive activities and taking up a significant portion of the next Board meeting. As a result, she stated that the Financial Sustainability Plan discussion would be deferred to the November agenda to ensure there was sufficient time for both.

Ms. Landers shared that the proposed Disposition and Development Agreement (DDA) for 12th & Imperial, related to the first development adjacent to the transit center expansion, would be brought to the Board. She clarified that this project was part of a partnership with the San Diego Foundation. Additionally, she informed the Board that, due to the two-week gap between the Executive Committee and Board meetings, a few additional consent items were likely to be finalized and added to the October 16th agenda.

7. Staff Communications and Committee Member Communications

Chair Whitburn thanked MTS staff for organizing a successful Free Ride Day, which took place the previous day. He shared that many people tried transit for the first time, or the first time in a while, and expressed hope that riders were able to experience and appreciate the recent system improvements. He noted that staff were present at various transit stops throughout the day to greet riders and enhance the experience. The event received strong media coverage, and he expressed appreciation to the news outlets for helping spread the word. Most importantly, he thanked all the riders who participated.

8. Next Meeting Date

The next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for November 13, 2025, at 9:00 a.m.

9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 9:55 a.m.

/s/ Stephen Whitburn

Chairperson

San Diego Metropolitan Transit System

/s/ Lucia Mansour

Clerk of the Board

San Diego Metropolitan Transit System

Attachment: A. Roll Call Sheet