MINUTES

MEETING OF THE SAN DIEGO METROPOLITAN TRANSIT SYSTEM

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

July 16, 2026

[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 9:05 a.m. A roll call sheet listing Executive Committee member attendance is attached as Attachment A.

2. Public Comment

There were no Public Comments.

3. Approval of Minutes

Public Comment

There were no Public Comments.

Committee Comment

There were no Committee Comments.

Action Taken

Vice Chair Goble moved to approve the minutes of the May 14, 2026, MTS Executive Committee meeting. Chair Whitburn seconded the motion, and the vote was 6 to 0 in favor with Board Member Montgomery Steppe, absent.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4. Fare Freeze Program Update (Mark Olson and Israel Maldonado)

Mark Olson, MTS Director of Marketing & Communications, and Israel Maldonado, MTS Director of Fare Technology & Operations, presented on Fare Freeze Program. They presented on: Board direction recap, progress to date, PRONTO LIFE Eligibility & Qualifying fares, PRONTO LIFE application process, back end solution & system integration, next steps, implementation, branding/launch plans, cost/enrollment estimates and financial sustainability considerations.

Public Comment

Alex Wong – Provided a written statement to the Board prior to the meeting. The written comments is provided in the July 16, 2026 Final Meeting Packet.

Aria Grossman – Provided a verbal statement to the Board during the meeting. Aria, Policy Manager, Circulate Planning and Policy, stated that before a final decision was made on the LIFE Program, the public should be informed of the significant impacts the program could have on riders. Aria mentioned that the anticipated revenue loss and potential service reductions could significantly affect riders, including low-income riders. Aria urged the Board to provide the public with a model demonstrating how the program would impact transit service before making a final decision.

Committee Comment

Board Member Elo-Rivera thanked staff for bringing the presentation forward despite the tight timeline and for working with the County of San Diego to obtain the necessary information for the program. He emphasized that the goal of both MTS and the County of San Diego to make the eligibility process for the LIFE program easy and effective for the riders.

Mr. Maldonado responded that staff was planning a phased launch of the program. He stated that Phase I will provide valuable information to improve the LIFE program, including data on ridership volume and eligibility processing timeframes. Mr. Maldonado added that staff would use that information to enhance Phase II of the program.

Sharon Cooney, MTS Chief Executive Officer (CEO), added that the LIFE program would model the eligibility process used for the Youth Opportunity Pass (YOP) and the SDM pass. Board Member Elo-Rivera asked what lessons learned from the YOP re-enrollment are being incorporated into the LIFE program. Mr. Maldonado explained that the YOP verification process was less complex than the LIFE program because it required fewer verification steps. He added that staff is maintaining the same efficiency by utilizing the same online reduced fare portal, which has proven effective.

Mr. Maldonado stated that most automated and manual review cases were resolved within three calendar days and that applicants received a temporary 30-day verification period upon initial submission. He added that this process allows staff sufficient time to work with Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA) to efficiently verify a long-term eligibility. Ms. Cooney added that County staff who administer these programs indicated that obtaining a verification letter was relatively straightforward. She stated that riders could upload the letter and receive temporary 30-day verification while their application was being processed.

Board Member Elo-Rivera asked for clarification regarding the projected revenue reduction, given that the Board had approved a budget that did not include a fare increase. Ms. Cooney clarified that the projected revenue reduction was associated with the fare study. She explained that the fare study revenue had originally been included during budget development but later removed. Ms. Cooney added that staff had been directed to return to the Board in the fall with an updated revenue comparison once a decision regarding fare increases had been made.

Board Member Elo-Rivera expressed disappointment with some of the comments that appeared to place blame on low-income riders for potential service reductions. He stated that the service impact projections did not account for riders who might no longer be able to afford transit if fares increased. Board Member Elo-Rivera stated that it was unfair to suggest that all MTS riders would receive less service simply because lower-income riders would continue paying the same fare they currently paid. He emphasized that communication about the LIFE program should focus on informing the public about the program and ensuring that riders understood the enrollment process. Board Member Elo-Rivera added that pursuing non-fare revenue sources would help sustain transit services. He asked whether LIFE program participants would continue to use their existing PRONTO cards. Mr. Maldonado confirmed that LIFE program riders would be able to continue using their current PRONTO cards. He explained that when a LIFE program rider taps their card, the validator would indicate that a LIFE fare had been applied. Board Member Elo-Rivera emphasized the importance of avoiding the stigmatization of low-income riders and noted that participants in the program would continue paying the same fares they currently paid. He stated that low-income riders should not be blamed for broader funding challenges facing public transit and encouraged continued efforts to pursue alternative revenue sources beyond passenger fares.

Board Member Moreno thanked staff for the quick turnaround and the presentation. She also thanked Board Member Elo-Rivera and his staff for proposing the fare freeze program to support lower income riders. Board Member Moreno stated that numbers played an important role in decision making and cost benefit analyses. She noted that staff presentation referenced approximately 34,000 eligible transit pass holders could potentially benefit from the fare freeze program and asked how this estimate was calculated.

Mr. Maldonado explained that staff estimated eligibility by reviewing the number of individuals enrolled in CalFresh, CalWORKs, and/or Medi-Cal. He stated that staff excluded children and seniors ages 65 and older and individuals with disabilities who already qualified for other discounted programs. Mr. Maldonado added that approximately 7% of the remaining population was estimated to use transit and that staff adjusted the estimate to account for individuals eligible for multiple programs in order to avoid duplication.

Board Member Moreno thanked Board Member Montgomery Steppe and her staff for collaborating with MTS to obtain the data needed for the fare freeze program. She asked staff to confirm that there would be no overlap in the 34,000 eligible transit pass holders. Mr. Maldonado reiterated that the figure represented an estimate. He explained that, due to the limited timeframe available to compile the data, staff had not been able to conduct a more comprehensive analysis that would have incorporated additional factors and refinements.

Board Member Moreno stated that she was interested in understanding how staff had calculated the program costs for Phase I and Phase II. She emphasized that the estimate of 34,000 eligible transit pass holders was a key factor in the cost analysis and asked whether staff would be able to further validate that estimate by October. Board Member Moreno noted that a portion of the estimated 34,000 eligible participants might already be transit pass holders and stated that this could significantly affect the overall estimate and cost analysis. Mr. Maldonado responded that staff would work with the Finance department to provide more background on the numbers provided. He added that the current presentation was coming from a technical perspective to further understand how to scale up solutions. Ms. Cooney clarified that the estimate was based on existing transit passholders.

Board Member Moreno stated that the Board and public would have benefited from additional information explaining how the program estimates and projections had been developed. She also asked staff to explain how the application process would minimize administrative burdens for riders, noting that documentation requirements and in person enrollment challenges could create barriers for working families and other participants. Mr. Maldonado explained that the enrollment process had become significantly more accessible through a robust online platform that allowed riders to apply without appearing in person. He stated that applicants without internet access could receive assistance at the Transit Store. Ms. Cooney added that MTS also offered assistance through its call center for riders who encountered difficulties during the application process. She noted that the required documentation was generally already possessed by applicants because it was the same information needed to qualify for other county assistance programs. Board Member Moreno emphasized that reducing administrative barriers for obtaining reduced fare transit programs should remain a priority for the agency. She stated that administrative requirements could prevent riders from accessing programs, particularly individuals who were digitally disconnected, had limited English proficiently, or faced challenges navigating complex systems.

Board Member Moreno also noted that additional funding had recently been discussed at San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) and stated that available funding opportunities should be considered as part of the agency's overall financial planning. She thanked staff for the quick turnaround on the item and thanked Board Member Elo-Rivera and his staff for bringing forward the fare freeze proposal.

Vice Chair Goble asked whether staff had estimated the additional costs associated with implementing the LIFE program, including vendor expenses, system modification or conversion costs, administrative expenses and any staffing needs that might require additional positions. Mr. Maldonado stated that staff had not yet finalized an estimate of the additional implementation costs associated with the LIFE program. He explained that staff was concurrently defining the program scope and identifying potential costs, including administrative and system related expenses. Mr. Maldonado added that staff was first evaluating the use of existing resources and available capacity and would return to the Board for approval if additional funding was needed. Vice Chair Goble noted that reaching the estimated 34,000 eligible riders by October 1 would be a significant undertaking and acknowledged that not all eligible participants would likely be enrolled by that date. He asked whether riders who become eligible after a fare increase took effect would receive any credit or reimbursement for the higher fares they paid prior to enrollment in the LIFE program. Mr. Maldonado stated that MTS had mechanisms in place to make riders whole if they pay higher fares before becoming enrolled in the LIFE program. He explained that options such as goodwill credits or pass-based adjustments could be utilized and that the specific approach would depend on the policy direction provided by the Board.

Ms. Cooney stated that the implementation of the YOP program had also required significant effort and was launched successfully using an online enrollment portal. She explained that lessons learned from the YOP program had positioned staff to accommodate the anticipated volume of the LIFE program participants. Ms. Cooney added that the County would be an important partner in promoting the program to eligible individuals enrolled in qualifying assistance programs. She noted that the online application process and temporary 30-day approval period were intended to make enrollment as seamless as possible, and that staff would continue refining the program based on lessons learned during implementation.

Board Member Elo-Rivera thanked Board Member Moreno and Vice Chair Goble for their comments and questions. He stated that there had been discussions with the County regarding the possibility of allowing applicants to use existing benefit documentation, such as an Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Card, Benefits Identification Card (BIC) or CalSAWS documentation, along with a photo identification card, as part of the LIFE program eligibility verification process.

Ms. Cooney explained that obtaining a verification letter was a relatively simple process for individuals currently enrolled in qualifying assistance programs. She stated that the benefits cards, such as EBT cards, may not always reflect current eligibility because they could remain in circulation without an expiration date. Mr. Maldonado noted that using a verification letter offered an additional advantage because it included a case number that did not contain Personally Identifiable Information (PII). He explained that the case number could be used by MTS and HHSA to verify eligibility for the LIFE program while protecting applicant privacy and supporting long term verification efforts.

Board Member Elo-Rivera asked staff whether they recalled the estimated loss in revenue that had been projected due to a decline in ridership resulting from the proposed fare increase. Mr. Olson stated that staff had projected a ridership decline of approximately 2% to 3% as a result of the proposed fare increase. Board Member Elo-Rivera stated that if staff assumed a 2% to

3% ridership decline would occur with a fare increase, the analysis should also reflect the potential ridership preservation benefits of the program. He emphasized that excluding this factor did not present a complete picture and could unfairly imply that low-income riders were responsible for potential service reductions.

Action Taken

No action taken. Informational item only.

5. Proposed Ad Hoc Advocacy Committee (Julia Tuer)

Julia Tuer, MTS Manager of Government Affairs, presented on Proposed Ad Hoc Advocacy Committee. She presented on: Proposed committee membership, committee structure, committee purpose, time commitment and recommendation.

Public Comment

There were no Public Comments.

Committee Comment

Board Member Moreno thanked staff for the presentation. She stated that her comments made in June regarding a stronger advocacy strategy may have been misinterpreted and expressed concern that creating an Ad Hoc Advocacy Committee could slow progress by adding another layer of meetings. Board Member Moreno stated that meaningful engagement led by Chair Whitburn, Vice Chair Goble, and Ms. Cooney would be a more effective approach. She suggested that the agency develop a long term strategy for its Capital Improvement Program (CIP) and begin discussions with the region's state legislative delegation regarding future legislative priorities and funding opportunities.

Board Member Moreno noted that advancing major CIP projects could help offset funding challenges and referenced the agency's Zero Emission Bus (ZEB) transition efforts and related capital investments as an example of projects that should be considered as part of a multi-year advocacy strategy. Mike Thompson, MTS Deputy Chief Financial Officer, clarified that the funding referenced for the agency's ZEB transition projects had already been committed to those CIP's and was in the process of being spent. He stated that the funds were therefore not available for reallocation to other purposes.

Board Member Moreno thanked staff for the clarification, stating that it strengthened her point. She emphasized that the state legislators should be aware of the agency's future capital funding needs. Board Member Moreno suggested that MTS proactively communicate anticipated funding requirements for future years so that state funding opportunities could be pursued in advance.

Ms. Cooney clarified that the concept of an Ad Hoc Advocacy Committee had not originated from Ms. Tuer. She explained that the idea had been raised by several Board Members and was brought forward for committee discussion rather than as a specific recommendation. Ms. Cooney added that staff was already actively engaged in advocacy efforts similar to those being discussed. She noted that she had recently met with Assemblymember David Alvarez and stated that he was carrying legislation on behalf of MTS.

Board Member Moreno stated that she was providing her input on the proposed Ad Hoc Advocacy Committee and that she did not support the creation of the committee. She expressed the view that additional committee structures could unnecessarily bureaucratize the advocacy process and stated that stronger communication and engagement between the Board, agency leadership and elected representatives would be more effective.

Chair Whitburn acknowledged Board Member Moreno's comments and stated that her points regarding communication were well taken. He said that he could do a better job of keeping the Board informed about advocacy efforts and committed to providing more regular updates. Chair Whitburn noted that he had met with several state legislators and participated in advocacy efforts in Sacramento on behalf of the agency. He also stated that MTS had advocacy representatives in Sacramento and suggested that more regular updates regarding their activities could be beneficial to the Board. Chair Whitburn stated there were prior discussions about creating a greater role for Board Members in advocacy efforts through their relationship with elected officials and noted that the proposed Ad Hoc Committee was intended to provide a structure for that engagement.

Board Member Elo-Rivera suggested that staff should consider sharing legislative and advocacy developments between meetings. He noted that more consistent pre-Board meeting briefings could provide additional opportunities for Board Members to receive updates and offer feedback. Board Member Elo-Rivera emphasized the importance of leveraging the collective knowledge, experience, and relationships of Board Members to advance MTS's state and federal legislative priorities. He stated that many Board Members maintained strong relationships with elected officials and that utilizing those connections would be beneficial to the agency's advocacy efforts.

Ms. Cooney asked whether email was an effective method for sharing information and advocacy requests or whether the Board preferred a different approach. She noted that she had recently sent several emails requesting Board Member assistance with advocacy efforts but had received responses from only two Board Members. Chair Whitburn stated that he had seen the email and believed it was responsive to previous Board discussion regarding advocacy and legislative engagement. He expressed appreciation for staff's efforts to encourage Board Member participation in outreach to legislators. He added that, in addition to email communications, advocacy updates and opportunities for Board Member engagement could also be communicated during Board meetings.

Vice Chair Goble expressed reluctance to create an additional committee, noting that meetings require significant staff and Board resources and should provide clear value. He stated that the issue appeared to be more about improving communication than establishing a new policy structure. Vice Chair Goble suggested providing regular legislative and advocacy updates to the Board, on a quarterly basis through the consent calendar. He stated that a formal reporting structure would help Board Members understand ongoing advocacy efforts, identify gaps, and ensure the agency was engaging with the appropriate state and federal representatives. Vice Chair Goble added that increased communication regarding advocacy activities would be more beneficial than creating an additional committee.

Board Member Dillard stated that she maintained communication with local state legislators and would be willing to assist with advocacy efforts on behalf of MTS. She explained that providing Board Members with specific information, priorities, and requests would help them effectively engage with legislators and their staff. She expressed support for improving communication and providing clearer directions to Board Members regarding advocacy efforts. Board Member Dillard also agreed with her colleagues that creating an Ad Hoc Committee would not address the concerns raised and was not necessary at this time.

Chair Whitburn stated that the feedback provided by Board Members had been valuable and noted that there was little support for creating an additional committee and stated that the Ad Hoc Advocacy Committee would not move forward. Chair Whitburn directed staff to provide legislative and advocacy updates to the Board on a regular basis, including quarterly reports and written updates from both state and federal advocacy representatives. He also suggested identifying Board Members who were interested in participating in advocacy efforts so staff could engage them when opportunities arose to communicate with elected officials.

Board Member Moreno stated that she was willing to develop a strategic engagement plan for outreach to state and federal elected officials. She offered to review advocacy approaches used by other agencies and requested information on the agency's top priorities and major projects anticipated over the next five years. Board Member Moreno stated that identifying key projects and potential funding opportunities could help focus future advocacy efforts and added that she was willing to bring forward an initial framework for discussion and refinement by the Board and staff.

Karen Landers, MTS General Counsel, stated that staff's intent in responding to previous Board feedback was to encourage Board Members to leverage their expertise and relationships with elected officials in support of MTS advocacy efforts. She acknowledged the Board's desire for increased communication from staff but noted that effective advocacy also required feedback from and engagement with Board Members. Ms. Landers emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for Board Members to provide strategic input, share insights from their relationships, and help shape advocacy priorities. She added that staff was seeking ways to facilitate two-way communication and better utilize the Board's collective expertise and connections.

Board Member Moreno stated that a strategic plan could help guide advocacy efforts by identifying priority projects and funding needs well in advance. She noted that a proactive approach would allow Board Members and legislators to focus on long term agency priorities rather than responding to requests at the last minute. Board Member Moreno offered to develop a draft strategic engagement plan for Board and staff review.

Board Member Fernandez commented on recent email communications regarding advocacy efforts and appreciated the call to action sent to Board Members. He noted that effective advocacy depends on established relationships with elected officials and stated that he did not have relationships with some of the legislators identified in the request. Board Member Fernandez emphasized that a strategic advocacy plan would help Board Members understand funding priorities, project needs, and specific requests so they could more effectively advocate on behalf of MTS. He added that clearer direction regarding the agency's objectives would assist Board Members in their outreach efforts.

Board Member Elo-Rivera supported the development of a strategic advocacy plan and emphasized the importance of Board input early in the process. He stated that a clear strategy would provide context for advocacy requests, improve Board engagement, and help Board Members leverage their relationships with elected officials to advance MTS priorities. Board Member Elo-Rivera added that involving the Board in developing the strategy would strengthen communication and make advocacy efforts more effective.

Board Member Dillard stated that having a clear strategy would help Board Members effectively engage with elected officials and advocate for MTS priorities. She noted that she had an upcoming meeting with Congresswoman Jacobs and would welcome information on MTS priorities that she could discuss during that meeting. Board Member Dillard emphasized the importance of relationships, collaboration, and networking among Board Members and elected officials and expressed her willingness to assist colleagues by sharing connections and supporting coordinated advocacy efforts on behalf of the agency. Ms. Cooney stated that staff would provide information for the upcoming meeting with Congresswoman Jacobs. She noted that Congresswoman Jacobs had recently informed MTS that she would be advancing the agency's earmark request and added that staff would ensure Board Member Dillard had the necessary information to discuss and thank her for the support.

Chair Whitburn stated that the committee proposal would not move forward and that Board Member Moreno would instead develop ideas for a strategic advocacy plan. He added that staff would provide more regular updates from the agency's advocacy teams in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., engage interested Board Members in outreach efforts with legislative colleagues, and improve communication to keep the Board information of ongoing advocacy activities.

Action Taken

No action taken.

6. Downtown Layover Project (Brent Boyd, MTS and Rick Brill & Omar Atayee, SANDAG)

Brent Boyd, MTS Director of Planning & Scheduling; Rick Brill, SANDAG; and Omar Atayee, SANDAG, presented on Downtown Layover Project. They presented on: Project needs, bus layover existing conditions, project location, bus layover site conditions, project concept study, draft concept study alternative 1, draft concept alternative 2, draft project timeline and next steps.

Public Comment

There were no Public Comments.

Committee Comment

Chair Whitburn thanked SANDAG and MTS for prioritizing the project and stated that it would improve operator safety and comfort, free up curb space for downtown businesses, and reduce the impact of buses occupying city streets for extended periods. He also thanked staff for their stakeholder outreach efforts and asked whether engagement had included surrounding property owners to identify any potential impacts or concerns that may not yet have been considered.

Mr. Atayee stated that outreach to surrounding property owners had not yet begun because staff was still developing the initial project concepts. He explained that staff wanted to first establish a proposed concept before conducting community outreach and added that engagement with the community and nearby stakeholders would be part of the process to gather input and identify potential impacts.

Chair Whitburn requested that staff ensure surrounding property owners were informed about the proposed project and provided opportunities to offer input. He noted that property owners were familiar with the area and could help identify potential challenges or impacts that should be considered during project development. Mr. Boyd added that MTS had already met with several nearby businesses that had previously raised concerns about buses occupying curb space. He stated that staff had discussed the upcoming project with those business and noted that there was already some awareness of the proposal, even though the formal outreach process had not yet begun.

Board Member Elo-Rivera asked whether staff could provide the Board with a list of stakeholders that had been engaged regarding the project. He stated that understanding who had been included in outreach efforts, including impacted employees and other potentially affected groups, would help the Board identify any gaps in engagement. Board Member Elo-Rivera added that a comprehensive stakeholder list would assist the Board in ensuring all relevant parties had an opportunity to participate in the discussion.

Board Member Moreno thanked staff for the presentation and expressed support for the project, noting the importance of providing restrooms, break facilities, and parking accommodations for bus operators. She requested that bus operators be included as a stakeholder group and that their input be considered as the project moved forward. Board Member Moreno also asked whether the facility would include bus charging infrastructure and thanked staff for providing a project timeline. She concluded by requesting additional information regarding the projects funding sources and financing plan.

Mr. Atayee stated that the facility would not include bus charging infrastructure. He explained that the project was currently funded, with anticipated construction costs estimated at approximately $5M to $6M. Mr. Atayee noted that Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding and budgeted projected funds were available to support the effort. He added that additional funding may be identified in the future, some of which was programmed for right-of-way acquisition and potential property acquisition in the area.

Board Member Moreno sought clarification regarding the project funding and noted that the presentation referenced a total project cost of approximately $66.98M. She asked whether the previously mentioned $5M to $6M estimate applied only to the interim construction phase of the project. Mr. Atayee clarified that the $66.98M figure reflected the larger, long term effort involving acquisition of the entire block and potential future redevelopment. He explained that because that effort was taking longer than anticipated, staff had shifted their focus to an interim project with construction costs estimated at approximately $5M to $6M. Mr. Atayee stated the interim project would address MTS operational needs in a cost effective manner while preserving the opportunity to pursue additional development options in the future.

Mr. Boyd explained that the full project was expected to accommodate approximately 16 to 18 buses, while the interim project would accommodate approximately 8 to 10 buses. He noted that the interim facility would not fully meet the agency’s long term operational needs but would provide a near term solution while staff continued to evaluate future development opportunities for the site.

Board Member Moreno stated that the Board would benefit from receiving a breakdown of the project’s funding sources. She noted that FTA funding had been mentioned and stated that she was not aware if any CIP or earmarked funds were also being used to support the project. Board Member Moreno requested follow-up information regarding the funding structure and remarked that, based on the discussion, it appeared the project had secured the funding needed to proceed.

Vice Chair Goble asked staff for an update on the long-term vision for the parcel and any future development plans being considered for the site. Mr. Atayee explained that the long-term vision for the parcel was currently being evaluated through an ongoing planning study. He stated that the study was examining various development scenarios, including the potential scale, height, and mix of uses, as well as financial feasibility and market conditions. Mr. Atayee noted that the effort was being led by a separate project team and funded through a different funding source. He added that the study was expected to be completed within approximately six months, after which the findings would be shared and discussed with MTS and the Board. Vice Chair Goble stated that one of his goals for downtown was to encourage fewer surface parking lots and increased housing opportunities. He expressed appreciation for the long-term planning effort and acknowledged that any future redevelopment would also need to account for the operational needs of bus operators and transit vehicles. Vice Chair Goble stated that he looked forward to future discussions regarding the site and requested that staff continue providing updates on outreach efforts with bus operators, surrounding property owners, and other affected stakeholders.

Action Taken

No action taken. Informational item only.

7. 12th and Imperial Transit Center Rehabilitation Project Update (Heather Furey)

Heather Furey, MTS Senior Director of Capital Projects, presented on 12th and Imperial Transit Center Rehabilitation Project Update. She presented on: 12 & Imperial Transit Center area, National Avenue property, 12 & Imperial Transit Center current configuration and existing conditions, project need/concept, project timeline, expanded transit center design bringing concept reality and key diligence topics – utility relocation and storm culvert, transit center project status, project cost and project schedule next steps.

Public Comment

There were no Public Comments.

Committee Comment

Board Member Elo-Rivera thanked staff for the presentation and update and noted that rehabilitation of the transit center was badly needed. He asked whether staff had considered using the project as an opportunity to convert the station into a closed facility, limiting access to riders only while still maintaining transit operations.

Ms. Furey stated that staff was currently evaluating access control and rider only facility concepts as part of a broader systemwide study. She explained that the transit center would be reviewed within that larger effort. Ms. Furey added that when the rehabilitation project began approximately four years earlier, limiting station access was not a primary project requirement.

Ms. Landers added that access control measures would be needed to account for differences between Trolley and bus operations. She explained that Trolley riders are required to pay their fare before entering the platform area, while bus riders pay when boarding the bus. Ms. Landers noted that any gating or rider only access analysis would need to consider those operational differences and could require changes to existing fare enforcement practices. She further explained that while security personnel work to discourage loitering at transit centers, passengers are permitted to wait for their bus without having paid a fare in advance.

Board Member Elo-Rivera stated that he had raised the concept several years earlier as part of discussion about fare compliance, revenue and station access. He noted that given the station’s significant ridership he was interested in whether access control options had been evaluated and acknowledged that there could be ways to maintain bus access even if parts of the station were restricted.

Board Member Elo-Rivera then asked whether the project design had considered opportunities to generate non-fare revenue, including potential partnerships related to ongoing discussions with San Diego Community Power and other revenue generating initiatives.

Ms. Cooney explained that the site was a joint development opportunity to include housing. Board Member Elo-Rivera asked whether housing development was the only non-fare revenue opportunity being considered for the site. He inquired whether potential energy savings or other revenue generating opportunities had been evaluated as part of the project's design and planning process.

Ms. Landers explained that staff had not specifically evaluated energy savings or similar non-fare revenue opportunities as part of the project design. She stated that existing non-fare revenue at transit facilities was typically generated through advertising, retail kiosks, and related partnerships. Ms. Landers noted that the project was designed to maximize bus bays, passenger circulation, and the potential development parcel rather than retail space. She added that staff was exploring joint development opportunities, including potential ground floor uses, and anticipated additional non-fare revenue through advertising features such as digital kiosks and advertising displays, including a planned digital kiosk expected to generate revenue for the agency.

Ms. Cooney added that at the Palm Avenue station joint development project, the housing development was considering incorporating solar panels throughout the building's exterior to maximize electricity generation. She stated that similar opportunities could be explored for this site as the project advances into later design phases and a development partner is identified. Board Member Elo-Rivera emphasized the importance of incorporating the Board's broader priorities into project planning from the outset rather than after decisions had already been made. He stated that goals such as generating non-fare revenue, supporting housing development, and improving passenger amenities should be considered throughout the design process. Board Member Elo-Rivera expressed support for the project and its progress, noting the significance of the transit center given its high ridership and proximity to downtown destinations and new development. He encouraged staff to maximize the project's long term value and ensure it reached its full potential so that future stakeholders would view it as both an improvement and a comprehensive solution.

Board Member Moreno thanked staff for the presentation and congratulated the project team on securing Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) funding. She noted that projects in her district had also benefited from TCC funding and expressed appreciation for the efforts to obtain those resources. Board Member Moreno then asked for clarification regarding the white area shown in the project rendering and whether it represented a future housing component. Ms. Furey explained that the white area was intended to be a future development parcel. She stated that the project team had worked to maximize the size of the parcel to create opportunities for housing and other revenue generating uses as part of the site's long term development.

Ms. Landers explained that the development parcel referenced in the design was the same site for which the Board approved a Disposition and Development Agreement (DDA) with the San Diego Foundation and Cypress Equities in October.

Board Member Moreno thanked staff for the clarification and emphasized that, in downtown and central San Diego, future development considerations should extend beyond land use alone. She stated that the location and design of future development should be carefully considered and asked whether the area currently designated for bus operations would need to remain open air as part of the long term plan. Board Member Moreno further asked whether there were any legal requirements mandating that the bus operations area remain open air, noting that, as discussed by Board Member Elo-Rivera, future development opportunities could potentially include building above the site.

Ms. Cooney explained that, during the planning process, the San Diego Foundation worked with MTS to evaluate a variety of development concepts, including whether the site could support a platform structure with development above it. She stated that there was no requirement for the bus operations area to remain open air. Ms. Cooney noted that a national market assessment and analysis conducted with consultant support identified the current concept as the most viable option. She added that the proposed design would not preclude future expansion or additional development opportunities above the site. Board Member Moreno thanked staff for the explanation and remarked that the project appeared to function primarily as a bus facility despite being referred to as a transit center. She asked for clarification regarding the overall scope of work for the project, noting that while the adjacent rail component was important, the proposed improvements appeared to be focused on bus operations.

Board Member Moreno then asked whether the project would include amenities for employees, such as restrooms and operator break rooms. Ms. Furey clarified that the project was primarily focused on bus operations but would also include facilities for Transportation Network Companies (TNC's), passenger pick-up and drop-off activities, taxi stands, bike parking, and a bicycle repair station. She explained that employee restrooms were currently located at 12th & Imperial within the Mills building and stated that those restroom and breakroom functions were not being replicated as part of this project. Board Member Moreno asked whether bus operators using the facility would be able to leave their buses and access the Mills building at the transit station for amenities such as restrooms, break areas, and food options, or whether the facility was intended solely as a location for buses to stop and depart. Ms. Furey stated that she was not familiar with the specific bus scheduling and layover times but confirmed that those facilities were located nearby and available at the transit center.

Ms. Landers explained that buses currently using layover space on 14th Street provide operators with an opportunity to take a break during their routes. She noted that some operators already use their layover time to access nearby facilities, and the proposed project would allow those buses to park closer to the Mills building. Ms. Landers added that operators assigned to those routes would continue to have access to the existing restroom and break facilities at the transit center during layovers.

Board Member Moreno asked for clarification regarding funding identified for future fiscal years and referenced a previously mentioned $10M funding need in FY 2028 and 2029. She asked whether those funds were part of existing CIP allocations or another funding category, noting that staff had used a different term during the presentation and seeking clarification on the source of the anticipated funding. Ms. Cooney explained that when MTS was awarded the grant, construction and permitting costs were expected to be lower than current estimates. She stated that updated cost projections indicated additional funding would be needed and that those costs would need to be incorporated into future CIP budgets. Ms. Cooney noted that potential funding sources could include existing transportation and federal funding programs. She further explained that the project was not currently federally funded but could potentially be federalized in the future, which would require compliance with additional federal requirements and processes. Board Member Moreno asked if National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) would be required. Ms. Furey explained that federal projects are subject to additional requirements beyond those required under state regulations. She noted that federal environmental review requirements, including NEPA, may apply, although staff would need to confirm whether the project had already received the necessary federal environmental clearance. Ms. Furey stated that the primary difference involved federal procurement and contracting requirements, which add additional regulations and documentation for design and construction contracts. She added that while the design contract was not originally federalized, staff believed the construction phase could potentially be federalized if federal funding were pursued.

Board Member Moreno asked whether the project had been earmarked within the CIP and sought clarification on whether funding for the project had already been identified or would need to be programmed in future capital budgets. Ms. Furey clarified that the final $9.6M funding gap had not yet been identified withing the CIP. She explained that the project's current $14.4M budget consisted entirely of grant funding that had already been secured. Ms. Furey stated that staff now estimated the total project cost at approximately $24M, leaving a funding shortfall of $9.6M. She added that staff would seek to secure the remaining funding through the annual CIP budgeting process over the next several years. Board Member Moreno expressed hope that the remaining project funding gap could be addressed through future state and federal funding opportunities rather than solely through the CIP. She referenced the earlier discussion regarding advocacy efforts and encouraged pursuit of additional external funding. Board Member Moreno thanked staff for their work on the project, stated that the improvements were greatly needed, and expressed support for including the project amount in the agency's advocacy priorities moving forward.

Chair Whitburn thanked staff for the update and expressed support for the project. He stated he looked forward to assisting with advocacy efforts to help advance the project and noted that it aligned with the Board's broader goals of replacing underutilized parking lots with housing, particularly housing located near transit. Chair Whitburn acknowledged the complexity of the project and thanked staff for their work, stating that the project would provide significant benefits to both MTS and the downtown area.

Action Taken

No action taken. Informational item only.

OTHER ITEMS:

8. Review of Draft July 30, 2026 Board Agenda

Ms. Cooney stated that the LIFE program item had not been placed on the full Board agenda. She advised that, if the Committee wished, staff could bring the item forward to the full Board, otherwise, staff planned to provide an update on the program in September. Chair Whitburn confirmed that the update can be brought to the September Board meeting.

Vice Chair Goble noted that the upcoming Board meeting agenda appeared unusually light and remarked that, for the first time in three years, the Chair would not be attending a Board meeting.

Ms. Cooney noted that, based on preliminary attendance indications, the upcoming Board meeting could have difficulty achieving a quorum. She asked Board Members to notify staff as soon as possible if they expected to be absent so appropriate planning could occur.

Chair Whitburn thanked Vice Chair Goble in advance for serving as the Chair during the upcoming Board meeting and expressed appreciation for his willingness to lead the meeting in his absence.

9. Other Staff and Committee Member Communications and Business

Chair Whitburn provided an update on MTS's participation in San Diego Pride and Comic-Con events. He stated that MTS would once again support San Diego Pride by encouraging attendees to use transit to reduce congestion and parking demand and noted that MTS employees and a bus would participate in the Pride Parade. Chair Whitburn added that the agency's involvement reflected its commitment to inclusion, respect, and service to the community. He also reported that MTS was preparing for Comic-Con by expanding Trolley service, including operation of a service event line between the Balboa Avenue Transit Center and 12th & Imperial Transit Center. Chair Whitburn highlighted several Comi-Con activations, including wrapped Trolleys, a Disney sponsored activation at the Gaslamp Quarter Station, commemorative Comic-Con pins, and a sponsorship of the special event line by Magic: the Gathering. He stated that these partnerships were expected to generate additional non-fare revenue for the agency while enhancing the attendee experience. Chair Whitburn concluded by inviting Board Members to attend the Comic-Con transit service press conference scheduled for July 21 at the Gaslamp Quarter Station, where MTS would highlight its service enhancements, community partnerships, and role in supporting event.

10. Next Meeting Date

The next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for September 10, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

*Clerk's note: The Executive Committee was subsequently rescheduled to September 3, 2026 at 9:00 a.m.

CLOSED SESSION:

11. Public Comment for Closed Session

There were no Public Comments.

Closed Session Convened

The Committee convened to Closed Session at 11:10 a.m.

12. Closed Session - Public Employee Performance Evaluation/ Conference With Labor Negotiators – Chief Executive Officer Pursuant to California Government Code Sections 54957 and 54957.6;
Agency-Designated Representative: Stephen Whitburn, Chair
Employee: Sharon Cooney, CEO

Closed Session Reconvening

The Committee reconvened to Open Session at 12:28 p.m.

Karen Landers, General Counsel, reported the following oral report of final actions taken in Closed Session:

The Executive Committee continued this item to a date in September 2026.

13. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:29 p.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

SAN DIEGO METROPOLITAN TRANSIT SYSTEM
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

ROLL CALL

MEETING OF (DATE):	July 16, 2026	CALL TO ORDER (TIME):	9:05 a.m.
RECESS:		RECONVENE:	
CLOSED SESSION:	11:10 a.m.	RECONVENE:	12:28 p.m.
PUBLIC HEARING:		RECONVENE:	
ORDINANCES ADOPTED:		ADJOURN:	12:29 p.m.

REPRESENTING	BOARD MEMBER		ALTERNATE		PRESENT (TIME ARRIVED)	ABSENT (TIME LEFT)
Chair	Whitburn	☒	No Alternate	☐	9:05 a.m.	12:02 p.m.
City of San Diego	Elo-Rivera	☒	Whitburn	☐	9:05 a.m.	12:02 p.m.
County of San Diego	Montgomery Steppe	☐	Aguirre	☐	ABSENT	ABSENT
East County	Dillard	☒	Hall	☐	9:05 a.m.	12:02 p.m.
SANDAG Transportation Committee	Moreno	☒	Fernandez	☐	9:05 a.m.	12:02 p.m.
South Bay	Fernandez	☒	Downey	☐	9:05 a.m.	12:02 p.m.
Vice Chair	Goble	☒	No Alternate	☐	9:05 a.m.	12:02 p.m.

SIGNED BY THE CLERK OF THE BOARD: /s/ Lucia Mansour