

MINUTES
MEETING OF THE SAN DIEGO METROPOLITAN TRANSIT SYSTEM
EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

September 3, 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 9:07 a.m. A roll call sheet listing Executive Committee member attendance is attached as Attachment A.

2. Public Comment

[Clerk's note: Closed Session Public Comments were taken at the start of the meeting].

AJ Estrada, Political Director for the San Diego Building Construction Trades Council – Provided a verbal statement to the Committee during the meeting. AJ stated that MTS is an essential public service and expressed concern that this is often forgotten. AJ added that a trip that would normally take 10 to 15 minutes could take up to an hour by car due to freeway traffic and emphasized the importance of transit in a region that includes the largest land border crossing. AJ stated that more could have been done in recent years to support the Youth Opportunity Pass (YOP) and ensuring that employees had access to clean restrooms.

Brigette Browning, President of the San Diego Imperial County Labor Council – Provided a verbal statement to the Committee during the meeting. Brigette expressed concern regarding working conditions for MTS employees, particularly the lack of access to clean and adequately stocked restroom facilities for operators. Brigette stated that this emphasized the importance of treating employees with dignity and respect and also raised concerns about the impact of potential fare increases on transit dependent riders. Brigette urged MTS to improve support for both its workforce and the community it serves.

Miguel Ramirez, Bus Operator and shop steward with Teamsters Local 542 – Provided a verbal statement to the Committee during the meeting. Miguel stated that frontline employees continued to face unresolved safety and operational issues, including malfunctioning radios, communication systems, paratransit tablets and driver assaults. Miguel urged MTS leadership to improve accountability, address recurring concerns and implement lasting solutions to enhance employee safety and service reliability.

Peter Kennedy, Director of the Railroad Mechanical Department for SMART International – Provided a verbal statement to the Committee during the meeting. Peter expressed concern that the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) evaluation process did not formally include feedback from employees or their representatives and requested that the perspectives shared by workers be given consideration. Peter emphasized that while leadership helps set the agency's direction, MTS's success depends on the employees who operate and maintain the system.

Salvador Abrica, Teamsters Local 542 – Provided a verbal statement to the Committee during the meeting. Salvador reiterated concerns regarding ongoing safety and operational issues, driver assaults, equipment malfunction, and restroom accessibility. Salvador stated that temporary fixes had not resolved the recurring problems and urged MTS leadership to implement long-term solutions to improve employee safety and working conditions.

3. Approval of Minutes

Vice Chair Goble moved to approve the minutes of the July 16, 2026, MTS Executive Committee meeting. Chair Whitburn seconded the motion, and the vote was 7 to 0 in favor.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

4. Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Operating Budget Amendment (Mike Thompson and Mark Olson)

Mike Thompson, MTS Deputy Chief Financial Officer (Deputy CFO), and Mark Olson, MTS Director of Marketing and Communications, presented on Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Operating Budget Amendment. They presented on: FY 2027 Operating Budget Amendment, revenue assumptions – passenger fare revenue, consolidated revenues less expenses, preliminary 5-year forecast, non-fare revenue strategy update, Board direction – June 11, 2026, non-fare revenue growth, transit revenue & asset development strategy, non-fare revenue pillars, ten-year revenue growth potential, internal development and action, measuring outcomes, and staff's recommendation.

Public Comment

There were no Public Comments.

Committee Comment

Board Member Elo-Rivera thanked staff for the presentation and expressed appreciation for the revised framing of the information presented. He requested reassurance that the PRONTO LIFE program would be implemented concurrently with the proposed fare increases. Mr. Thompson confirmed that the PRONTO LIFE program was already active and available for eligible riders to apply. He stated that participants were scheduled to begin receiving passes on October 1st. Sharon Cooney, MTS CEO, added that applications for the PRONTO LIFE program had already been submitted and noted that participation was expected to increase as awareness of the program continued to grow. Board Member Elo-Rivera acknowledged the additional public outreach efforts and asked staff to provide more information on how riders were being informed about the PRONTO LIFE program, what was driving application submissions, and whether any feedback had been received regarding the application process. Mr. Olson stated that staff was developing an online user experience tool to gather feedback on the application process. He also noted that a communications toolkit had been distributed to MTS partners and community based organizations to help promote awareness of the PRONTO LIFE program. Mr. Olson added that staff would report back to the Committee once additional data had been collected from riders and participating organizations.

Board Member Elo-Rivera expressed appreciation for the transit and asset development strategy and noted that non-fare revenue would play an important role in stabilizing the agency's budget in future years. He also commended the use of distinct strategy pillars, stating that the approach provided greater clarity and focus for each area of work. Board Member Elo-Rivera inquired about Pillar 5, Retail & Concessions, asking about the inactive kiosks located at the City Heights Plaza and El Cajon Blvd. He acknowledged that the site is located on California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) property, but he stated that they have strong potential due to their high pedestrian activity and transit dependent populations. Board Member Elo-Rivera commented on Pillar 6, Event & Tourism, encouraging staff to pursue more proactive and strategic partnerships related to music festivals, concerts and major sports events. He stated that MTS should take a more aggressive approach to moving tourists throughout the city

and emphasized that expanding non-fare revenue opportunities could help reduce financial impacts on riders. Board Member Elo-Rivera also talked about Pillar 8, Energy & Sustainability Revenue, and asked whether additional discussions had occurred with San Diego Community Power. Mr. Thompson responded that no additional conversations had taken place but noted that San Diego Community Power's annual grant program would begin around December or January, at which time formal discussions would occur. Board Member Elo-Rivera encouraged staff to explore opportunities beyond grant funding, including potential cost savings and revenue generation on MTS properties through solar and other energy initiatives. He concluded by expressing support for the agency's increased focus on non-fare revenue, asset development, and the inclusion of PRONTO LIFE within the strategy, and he moved staff's recommendation.

Board Member Montgomery Steppe thanked staff for the timely preparation of the presentation, following the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG) approval of the fare increase and thanked Board Member Elo-Rivera for his leadership on PRONTO LIFE. She noted that there may be additional outreach opportunities, including food distributions events and other community based efforts, and stated that the County was willing to assist MTS in increasing public awareness of the program. Board Member Montgomery Steppe expressed enthusiasm for the transit revenue and asset development strategy, stating that it provided a structured approach to advancing the Board's goals related to non-fare revenue generation. She highlighted her interest in Pillar 9: Land Value Capture & Right-of-Way Value Creation, and expressed appreciation for staff's continued efforts to diversify revenue sources and seconded staff's recommendation.

Action Taken

Board Member Elo-Rivera moved for the Executive Committee to forward a recommendation to the MTS Board of Directors to enact Resolution No. 26-18 (Attachment A) amending the FY 2027 operating budget for MTS, San Diego Transit Corporation (SDTC), San Diego Trolley, Inc. (SDTI), MTS Contract Services, and the Coronado Ferry. Board Member Montgomery Steppe seconded the motion, and the vote was 7 to 0 in favor.

OTHER ITEMS

5. Review of Draft September 17, 2026 Board Agenda

Recommended Consent Items

Karen Landers, General Counsel, informed the Committee that three Board policies were scheduled on the consent calendar at the upcoming Board meeting. She explained that the proposed revisions to Board Policy No. 44, MTS Travel Expense Policy, would clarify reimbursement eligibility for airline seating expenses, address reimbursements when airline tickets are purchased using rewards point or miles, and update the IRS High Cost Localities attachment. Ms. Landers stated that the proposed revisions to Board Policy No. 30, Investment Policy, were part of the policy's regular two-year review conducted in coordination with the County to ensure compliance with current statutory requirements and would not affect MTS's existing investment practices. Ms. Landers also noted the update to Board Policy No. 26, Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) Program, reflected revised federal guidance and updated language without changing the program's purpose or operations. She asked whether the Board was comfortable keeping all three items on the consent calendar, noting that if any items were moved to the discussion calendar there would not be sufficient room to add it to the September 17, 2026 Board meeting agenda.

Ms. Landers also reviewed the four discussion items scheduled for the September 17, 2026 Board meeting, which included a budget agenda item, an update on the PRONTO LIFE program agenda item, a comprehensive operations analysis update agenda item, and the Administrative Penalty Program. Ms. Landers noted that the comprehensive operations analysis item had been deferred from the July 30, 2026 Board meeting due to quorum challenges. She added that the discussion agenda was already full and requested feedback from Board Members on whether all four discussion items should remain on the agenda or whether any should be postponed. Ms. Landers also briefly touched on draft agenda item 29, License Agreement for a Copley Park Division Digital Information Board Project, noting that this item aligned with MTS's efforts to expand non-fare revenue opportunities.

Board Member Montgomery Steppe asked staff about the capacity of the October Board agenda and whether some discussion items scheduled for September could be moved to October. Ms. Landers responded that the October agenda currently contained informational items, which could be deferred to accommodate some of September's discussion items.

Vice Chair Goble requested that staff review Board Policy No. 44, MTS Travel Expense Policy, noting that he did not recall seeing language related to luggage fees, including carry-on or checked baggage. Ms. Landers acknowledged the request and stated that MTS would generally reimburse for one checked bag.

Chair Whitburn confirmed that, with no objection from Committee Members, the three policy updates would remain on the consent calendar.

Chair Whitburn requested feedback from Committee Members regarding the discussion items scheduled for the September Board meeting and asked whether there were any items that should remain on the agenda or could be postponed until October.

Board Member Montgomery Steppe stated that she would be comfortable postponing the Administrative Penalty Program item, provided it was not delayed for an extended period of time. Chair Whitburn asked staff whether the item could be guaranteed placement on the October agenda. Ms. Landers sought clarification on whether the Committee preferred to keep the Administrative Penalty Program item on the September agenda in the event sufficient time was available for discussion or remove it entirely and defer it to October. Board Member Montgomery Steppe requested that the item remain on the September Board agenda, stating that it could be discussed if time permitted and, if not, be moved to the October Board meeting. Chair Whitburn stated that the item would remain on the September Board agenda with the understanding that, if time constraints required an item to be deferred, it would be moved to the October Board meeting and would be heard at that time.

6. Staff and Committee Member Communications and Business

There was no Staff or Committee Member Communications.

7. Next Meeting Date

The next Executive Committee meeting is scheduled for October 1, 2026, at 9:00 a.m.

CLOSED SESSION (ITEMS TAKEN OUT OF ORDER):

8. Public Comment for Closed Session

[Clerk's note: Closed Session Public Comments were taken at the start of the meeting].

The Committee convened to Closed Session at 9:50 a.m.

9. 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 12:50 p.m.

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

The Executive Committee conducted a public employee performance evaluation and conference with labor negotiators regarding the CEO and gave instructions to the Chair.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 12:51 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): 09/03/2026 CALL TO ORDER (TIME): 9:07 a.m.
 RECESS: _____ RECONVENE: _____
 CLOSED SESSION: 9:50 a.m. RECONVENE: 12:50 p.m.
 PUBLIC HEARING: _____ RECONVENE: _____
 ORDINANCES ADOPTED: _____ ADJOURN: 12:51 p.m.

REPRESENTING	BOARD MEMBER		ALTERNATE		PRESENT (TIME ARRIVED)	ABSENT (TIME LEFT)
Chair	Whitburn	☒	No Alternate	☐	9:07 a.m.	12:51 p.m.
City of San Diego	Elo-Rivera	☒	Whitburn	☐	9:07 a.m.	12:51 p.m.
County of San Diego	Montgomery Steppe	☒	Aguirre	☐	9:07 a.m.	12:51 p.m.
East County	Dillard	☒	Hall	☐	9:07 a.m.	12:51 p.m.
SANDAG Transportation Committee	Moreno	☒	Dillard	☐	9:10 a.m.	12:51 p.m.
South Bay	Fernandez	☒	Downey	☐	9:16 a.m.	12:51 p.m.
Vice Chair	Goble	☒	No Alternate	☐	9:10 a.m.	12:51 p.m.

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