SANTA BARBARA MTD

BOARD OF DIRECTORS REPORT

MEETING DATE: OCTOBER 20, 2020 **AGENDA ITEM: #8**

DEPARTMENT: MARKETING

TYPE: INFORMATIONAL ITEM

PREPARED BY: HILLARY BLACKERBY _____ *Signature*

REVIEWED BY: GENERAL MANAGER _____ *Signature*

SUBJECT: COMMUNITY SURVEY RESULTS & HEALTH & SAFETY COMMITMENTS CAMPAIGN

DISCUSSION:

Community Survey Results

When it became clear that the COVID-19 pandemic would continue into the summer of 2020 and beyond, MTD staff decided to conduct a survey of the public. The goal was to survey both bus riders and non-bus riders to gauge their reasons for riding (or not riding) MTD buses at that time, and what might make them feel more confident in taking the bus in the future.

The survey was open from June 29, 2020 to July 19, 2020, was available in English and Spanish, and was conducted entirely online in an effort to minimize person-to-person contact. The public was notified of the survey in the following ways: MTD social media channels (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter), press release, partner agency distribution lists, flyers with QR codes at bus stops, and a splash survey prompt on the MTD website.

MTD received a total of 935 survey responses, with 46 in Spanish and the rest in English. This marks the largest number of responses in Spanish for any of MTD's surveys in recent years. 388 respondents (41.5%) were taking MTD buses at the time of survey. The rest of the respondents (58.5%) were not taking the bus at that time for one reason or another. Some of those respondents were not taking it at the moment due to COVID-19 related reasons (working from home, job loss, health concerns), and others said they do not generally take the bus in normal times.

Over a third of those currently riding said they used MTD buses daily (35%), with another 31.8% stating they used the bus 2 or 3 times a week. Of the folks using the bus, 56.9% were using it to get to work, 50% were traveling on the bus to get groceries and/or visit the bank, and 40.7% were using it for medical appointments and/or pharmacy visits. 43% of individuals riding the bus identified as essential workers. The majority of these essential workers were in either grocery, food service, or health care professions. While it has long been suspected that MTD provides a vital service to people in our community, it is rare to see the system stripped down to those riders who work in critical industries that keep us fed and healthy.

Respondents not taking the bus at the time of survey were asked "when state and local stay-at-home orders are lifted, how soon will you feel comfortable riding MTD buses again?" The largest response was "I don't know" with 40.5%, 21.2% said they would feel comfortable when there was a COVID-19 vaccine, 14.8% said immediately, 7% said within 2 to 3 weeks, with the rest of the respondents feeling comfortable at two months, six months, or over a year. As a reminder, this survey was in the field at a time when parts of the economy had opened up, and a new spike in cases was taking place. Face coverings were mandatory on MTD buses starting on May 1st, but they weren't mandatory community wide until late July.

All respondents were asked when public health orders are lifted, what would make them more likely to ride MTD buses, and they were invited to check all that apply. 88.6% of respondents said enhanced cleaning and disinfecting of buses would make them more likely to ride. Other responses included limiting capacity on the bus to allow for physical distancing (57.9%), more frequent service (42.6%), amenities like WiFi (20.6%), and other (25%). Those selecting other were asked to describe what else would make them more likely to ride.

When asked to rate the importance of current and future practices on board, the following were rated as very important or important at the listed percentages: cleaning and disinfecting of buses (93%), requiring face coverings of all passengers and bus operators (90%), limiting the number of passengers allowed on board/physical distancing on the bus (85%), keeping riders informed of service changes (85%), more frequent bus service (69%), the ability to pay your fare directly with your smartphone or credit/debit card (62%), and onboard WiFi (35%).

All of this customer and community feedback has informed MTD's continued efforts to protect the health and safety of our riders and employees.

APTA Health and Safety Commitments Program

Santa Barbara MTD is a member of the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), a nonprofit professional international association representing all modes of public transportation, comprised of public and private sector members. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, APTA has provided a wealth of best practices, webinars, virtual meetings, and other resources for public transit agencies. The challenges of the pandemic for public transit spurred the creation of the APTA Health & Safety Commitments Program. This program is designed to help public transit agencies put in place their own, individualized policies and practices that transit users have told us they want and expect. The Program defines four core categories of responsibilities – for every transit agency and for their passengers – making this a true partnership for health and safety. The four core categories of the APTA program are:

- Following public health guidelines from official sources
- Protecting each other by requiring face coverings and other protection
- Keeping passengers informed and empowered to choose the safest times and routes to ride
- Putting health first by requiring riders and employees to avoid public transit if they have been exposed to COVID-19 or feel ill

Santa Barbara MTD signed the program pledge in late August, and Chief Safety Officer and Director of HR and Risk Mary Gregg has been managing these rigorous health and safety practices already implemented earlier in the spring.

As part of the program, APTA has provided a toolkit of materials for participating agencies to use to communicate that commitment to the public. The public component of MTD's campaign is set to launch in mid-October, complete with interior and exterior bus ads, videos demonstrating behind the scenes cleaning and disinfecting, social media posts, press releases, and a dedicated page on MTD's website to find the latest COVID-19 updates. The purpose of this campaign is to share what MTD is doing to make every ride safer, and what every rider can do to help.