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August 13, 2019

Ms. Rose Orcini Madruga, Foreperson
County of San Diego Grand Jury
550 W. C Street, Suite 860
San Diego, CA 92101-3513

Re: Response to the County of San Diego Grand Jury Report, "MTS and NCTD – Make Something Good Even Better"

Dear Ms. Madruga:

The North County Transit District (NCTD) is in receipt of the above-entitled Grand Jury Report dated May 23, 2019. NCTD has reviewed the report and has the following comments related to the Findings and Recommendations of the report.

BACKGROUND:

NCTD's mission is to build an integrated transit system that enables its customers to travel easily and efficiently throughout our growing region. NCTD believes this will be achieved by:

- Placing service to our customers first
- Ensuring the safety and security of our employees and customers
- Delivering high-quality transit services
- Developing and maintaining facilities that sustain and promote current and future transportation services
- Securing adequate revenue, protecting our assets, and getting the maximum return on the public investment
- Working in partnership with our communities and other stakeholders
- Encouraging innovation, creativity, and leadership

NCTD appreciates the Grand Jury's interest in supporting NCTD's mission and providing suggestions for improvement to its services.

RESPONSE TO FINDINGS:

In accordance with California Penal Code §933(c), following are NCTD's specific responses to the May 23, 2019 County of San Diego Grand Jury Report: "MTS and NCTD – Make Something Good Even Better":

Finding 01: The MTS and NCTD, working in conjunction with SANDAG, provide the County (its citizens and visitors) with satisfactory, balanced mass transportation services at a fair value.

Response: NCTD agrees with this finding. NCTD's mission is to deliver safe, convenient, and reliable user-friendly public transportation services. Our vision is to build an integrated transit system that enables our customers to travel easily and efficiently throughout the growing region. In FY 2018, NCTD's ridership was approximately 10.7 million across our five modes: BREEZE, COASTER, SPRINTER, FLEX, and LIFT.

Finding 02: The current Compass Card fare system has some confusing elements.

Response: NCTD agrees with this finding. The current fare system, provided by Cubic, has been in place since 2005. The Compass Card feature was added effective May 1, 2009. The system is functional but not reflective of current industry technology advancements. In 2018, MTS advanced the procurement of a new regional fare system and awarded a contract to INIT. NCTD and MTS are currently in process of advancing implementation of the new system, which is anticipated to go live in mid to late 2021.

Finding 03: Three key potential user groups – seniors, disabled patrons and foreign visitors – are not well served by the current fare machines, transit websites and signage.

Response: NCTD agrees partially with this finding. Relative to its website, NCTD disagrees and notes that as described in its response to Finding 07, the GoNCTD.com website was updated effective April 11, 2019 and provides a single responsive site, Google Translate functionality, and incorporation of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) for ADA Accessibility. (features). Relative to fare machines and transit signage, NCTD agrees they are need of improvement for the benefit of all customers. As to the fare machines, NCTD and MTS are currently in the process of advancing implementation a new system with INIT, which is anticipated to go live in mid to late 2021. As to signage at its transit centers, NCTD is currently undergoing a Wayfinding Study Project which is focused on creating uniform wayfinding signage at all NCTD-owned stations and facilities. At its April 19, 2018 meeting, the NCTD Board of Directors awarded an agreement to RSM Design (RSM) to develop a wayfinding master plan study. RSM began work on the project immediately and has made

significant progress thus far. The signage methodology, as selected by RSM and approved by NCTD, is based upon current industry standards and best practices, and the goal is to provide self-service transit information to customers in a simple, logical manner. This will include real-time information at rail stations. This study is approaching the final design phase; from there, funding will need to be identified to create and install signage with a systematic approach. An implementation timeline is still to be determined.

Finding 04: San Diego mass transit providers do not have multi-day passes that provide seamless travel region-wide.

Response: NCTD partially agrees with this finding. NCTD offers the COASTER pass which is the most comprehensive one allowing access to all NCTD and MTS services with exception of FLEX 372 which services Ramona/Escondido-Midday and MTS rural routes. SANDAG Board Policy No. 29, Regional Fare Policy, provides the regional framework for transit fares. All fare changes, including fare increases or changes in fare types, must be approved by the SANDAG Board of Directors and/or the Transportation Committee.

Finding 05: The tap readers generate frequent errors that suggest a valid card is not valid.

Response: NCTD agrees with this finding. The tap readers generate errors which can be due to machine malfunction or user error or may be due to the time it takes the system to identify that a fare card actually has a pass or value loaded on it. The current validators (tap readers) reflect the equipment which was initially installed when Compass Cards became effective over 10 years ago. As such, they do not reflect the most current technology. The new validators, which will be included with the new INIT fare system, will address this issue.

Finding 06: The current fare system is not instantaneous; time delays between online payment and posting to a Compass Card are often several days.

Response: NCTD agrees with this finding. Compass Card payments which are made online can take approximately 48-72 hours before they are reflected on the card itself. NCTD notes that payments for fares and passes made at ticket vending machines, transit stores, and on the Compass Cloud app are instantaneous. With the implementation of the new INIT fare system, the online delay issue will also be resolved.

Finding 07: The MTS and NCTD websites are aging and require updates.

Response: NCTD disagrees with this finding as it relates to the NCTD website. NCTD offers no comment on the MTS website. At the April 19, 2018 NCTD Board of Directors Meeting, a contract for redesign of the GoNCTD website was

awarded to Pavlov Advertising, LLC. Shortly after, extensive work was done to redesign the site and bring it current with industry best practices. This included development of a responsive site, which eliminated the prior need for separate Desktop, Mobile, English and Spanish websites, as well as incorporation of Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) for ADA Accessibility. NCTD made significant efforts to garner feedback from all user groups and to that end the new website was opened to the public in March 2019 for beta testing and feedback. A user survey was available to the public during the beta testing phase, and overall feedback indicated positive ratings. The website received many reviews and scored a very positive 4.35 out of 5 stars, including remarks praising the functional features, ease of access and navigation, and appealing design. Primary features of the new website include a custom scheduling feature programmed to provide an interactive solution for trip planning, a Google translate option that allows users to choose from more than 100 languages, and a clean, easy-to-use web interface with intuitive menus and design. A fully re-designed website was launched on April 11, 2019.

RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS:

Recommendation 19-15: Increase efforts to reduce confusion and user anxiety, particularly for new users, disabled patrons, and non-English speakers, both local residents as well as tourists, as noted in the report.

Response: Relative to NCTD, this recommendation will be implemented in the future. As noted above, NCTD's Wayfinding Study, in conjunction with the new INIT Fare System and simplification of the fare structure, will reduce user confusion and anxiety. With regard to wayfinding, the new design includes universal symbols throughout to assist non-English speakers, as well as designated signage in both English and Spanish as indicated in NCTD's Language Assistance Plan. Further, NCTD offers travel training to disabled users via its paratransit eligibility contractor.

Recommendation 19-16: Consider means to update the MTS and NCTD websites, ticket machines and apps to address the needs of tourists as well as residents. Offer information and trip planning advice in more languages and in as many media as necessary.

Response: This recommendation has been implemented in part relative to NCTD and will be implemented in part in the future. Regarding trip planning, NCTD's new website, which includes information and trip planning tools, can be viewed either on a desktop computer or a mobile device and can be viewed in a multitude of languages provided by Google Translate. Regarding Ticket Vending Machines and apps, the Ticket Vending Machines will be updated with the implementation of the new INIT Fare System, which, along with the changes to the fare structure, will result in a more simplified process. In addition, the new

fare system which is being implemented by MTS and NCTD, includes a new, fully-integrated fare-purchasing app.

Recommendation 19-17: Evaluate the possibility of introducing seamless, multi-day passes to anywhere in the county's public transportation.

Response: As relative to NCTD, this recommendation will not be implemented. Multi-day passes have had historically low usage and have not been supported by public demand. The current fare system allows for monetary value to be placed on a Compass Card (stored value) and allows the user to purchase single ride fares or day passes. The new fare system will have similar capabilities, but with even easier functionality. Additionally, Compass Cloud, NCTD and MTS' current fare ticketing app, allows users to purchase multiple region-wide day passes and use only when activated, thereby creating a multi-day pass effect. Finally, one user may possess all the passes on one device for their traveling party.

Recommendation 19-18: Consider updating both the MTS and NCTD websites, not only communicating new routes, fares, and details of using the new (2021) fare collecting system but also to simplify communication, reduce duplication of information, and make it easier for seniors, disabled patrons and tourists to use.

Response: As relative to NCTD, the recommendation to update the website has already been implemented effective April 11, 2019. Please refer to the response under Finding 07 above. Relative to the recommendation about communicating information on the new fare system, this will be implemented in the future, in accordance with the timeline for the new system.

Recommendation 19-19: Consider integrating or linking the two (MTS and NCTD) websites to have the same "touch and feel."

Response: As relative to NCTD, this recommendation will not be implemented. NCTD and MTS are distinct, separate entities which have different governing boards, staff, and general business practices, as well as transit services provided, thus a joint website is not practical. It is important to note that a customer visiting either NCTD's or MTS' website can complete trip planning on a county-wide basis. Additionally, the respective website for both agencies provide links each other's website.

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NCTD appreciates the time and efforts of the members of the Grand Jury. We believe our responses indicate our commitment to providing the best services to our customers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matt O. Tucker" with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Matthew O. Tucker
Executive Director

cc: Karen Landers, General Counsel, Metropolitan Transit System