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Santa Cruz METRO Announces Departure of CEO/General Manager Michael Tree

Santa Cruz, CA (Friday, January 19, 2024) – The Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO) thanks CEO/General Manager Michael Tree for his service and commitment to METRO amidst the announcement of Tree’s retirement. Tree joined METRO in April 2022 and, after almost two years of service, will be retiring from the agency on Feb. 16, due to unexpected personal reasons.

During his time at METRO, Tree has diligently worked with METRO Board and staff on Reimagine METRO, a comprehensive set of service improvements to bring riders faster, more frequent, and more reliable bus service. Additionally, Tree launched Youth Cruz Free, which enables all K-12 students to ride METRO free of charge; led the agency to receive numerous grant awards totaling to over \$148 Million; set record breaking standards in a zero-emissions fleet by purchasing 57 hydrogen fuel-cell electric buses (the largest single purchase of hydrogen buses, at the time, in North America); and incorporated affordable housing into METRO owned facilities, including the redevelopment of Pacific Station into a multi-use facility with 128 affordable housing units that is slated to start construction in February 2024, and initial planning for the Watsonville Transit Center redevelopment to include 65 units of affordable housing.

Tree along with staff, also launched METRO’s One Ride at a Time program, a rider loyalty program that donates to local environmental non-profit partners that includes buses wrapped with iconic images of the Monterey Bay. To date, the One Ride at a Time program, along with METRO’s Social Equity and Community Funding Policy, have generated over \$237,000 with \$42,000 of that funding thus far distributed to METRO’s non-profit partners to help protect our local environment along with eighteen (18) 40 foot buses and eight (8) articulated buses wrapped with local wildlife images ranging from sea otters, mountain lions, and surrounding natural landscapes.

"My decision to leave the agency and the Santa Cruz community comes with a heavy heart but my decision was made for solely personal reasons related to my aging parents," said Michael Tree, METRO CEO/General Manager. "The METRO Board and staff are fully committed to METRO’s vision of increasing ridership, growing our zero-emissions fleet, and incorporating affordable housing into METRO owned facilities, so I am leaving the agency in capable hands that will continue supporting the needs of Santa Cruz County."

"On behalf of the METRO Board, I want to thank Michael Tree for his numerous contributions and achievements for the agency," said Shebreh Kalantari-Johnson, METRO Board of Director Chair. "Michael brought visionary leadership and incredible energy to the role of CEO. The programs and services he initiated during his tenure go beyond providing world-class transportation to Santa Cruz County and rise to the level of true community building. The Board and the entire METRO team are committed to continuing to implement this vision."

Tree will be relocating to his hometown to be closer to family and join Golden Empire Transit District as its new CEO.

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About Us

Santa Cruz Metropolitan Transit District (METRO)

Established in 1968, METRO’S mission is to provide environmentally sustainable transportation to Santa Cruz County. METRO directly operates county-wide, fixed-route and Highway 17 commuter service, with connections to Santa Clara

County and Monterey Salinas Transit at our Watsonville Transit Center. The agency also operates ParaCruz paratransit service. Today METRO operates a fleet of 94 buses on 24 fixed routes and 32 paratransit vehicles.

Every ride on a METRO bus takes cars off the road, significantly reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and supports economic opportunity and quality of life in our community. Moving into the future, METRO strives to meet the following goals:

- Increase transit ridership to 7 million trips annually within the next five years
- Transition to a zero-emissions fleet with a mix of hydrogen and electric vehicles
- Increase affordable housing at METRO-owned transit centers to 175 units in the next 10 years.

For more information, visit [scmetro.org](https://www.scmetro.org).