

Master Planning for Climate Action Master Plan for Water

The Metropolitan Water District of Southern California finds itself at a historic crossroad. Metropolitan's Board of Directors, having completed a two-day retreat ending February 14, 2023, resolves to continue to build understanding and agreement about climate impacts, risks, vulnerabilities facing the region's water system and the communities it serves and work together to advance strategies for an equitable and resilient water future.

We will do so through an inclusive and iterative process, in close consultation with our member agencies and the many interested parties and affected communities. The Subcommittee on Long-Term Regional Planning & Business Modeling will provide a forum and organizing structure to ensure progress.

Goals for the coming months include:

- Align Metropolitan's planning efforts to reflect an integrated approach to water resources, finance, and climate resilience.
- Focus water planning on long-term regional needs, reflecting the responsibility of Metropolitan as a regional entity.
- Develop criteria for prioritizing investments for climate resilience.
- Develop business model options to strengthen Metropolitan's core mission and financial sustainability, which will enable necessary investment and operations to support climate resilience in the region's water supply.
- Prepare Metropolitan to complete a biennium budget for Fiscal Years 2024-2026 that reflects the priorities resulting from the Board's alignment of water, climate and financial planning.

Resilience

The Board affirms the following working definition of resilience, consistent with that of the State of California Governor's Office of Planning and Research:

Resilience is the capacity of any entity – an individual, a community, an organization, or a natural system – to prepare for disruptions, to recover from shocks and stresses, and to adapt and grow from a disruptive experience.

Next Steps

The Subcommittee on Long-Term Regional Planning & Business Modeling will provide a forum and organizing structure to ensure progress and is charged with developing a schedule for next steps, beginning as soon as their next meeting. While this Subcommittee is a public and transparent process, further public engagement is expected, including dialogue with and input from member agencies. The Board vice chairs will help contribute to the scope of discussion under their purview

In preparing future discussions and proposals, staff will work to support the Board, its vice chairs and the Subcommittee chair to prepare next steps and to consider retreat feedback, including the following. This is not an exhaustive or exclusive list, but rather one that highlights points raised during the retreat that held widespread interest:

Finance and Planning

- Resource planning must take a holistic approach that involves not only supply projections and considerations but also financial, risk, environmental, and community impact analyses.
- Affordability, cost impacts and the return on investments are critical to inform water resource and investment choices.
- The Needs Assessment of the Integrated Resources Plan provides an important tool for supply analyses and the development of resource options. It should be accessible to support member agency planning, be used to evaluate existing project commitments and prospective proposals and remain updated with existing and appropriately projected member agency supplies as well as emerging efficiency standards and regulatory mandates.
- Resource planning must assume a commitment to conservation as a core supply that sets a proactive demand management target.

Climate Action

- Climate resilient solutions must include better interconnections for the State Water Project Dependent Areas and approaches to protect other areas vulnerable due to single-source dependence.
- Metropolitan should treat local resources as regional assets and work with Member Agencies to develop new investment and partnership strategies to expand local resources.
- Groundwater and storage opportunities can be facilitated and maximized through greater integration as regional assets.
- A comprehensive Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessment will inform resource planning and investments and provide a tool for Metropolitan staff and Member Agencies to consider the cascading impacts of climate and pursue solutions that advance multiple objectives and benefits.
- The assumptions that create our planning scenarios should be dynamic—updatable and regularly updated—including with the latest climate science. This is part of creating an adaptive framework for decision making.

Strategic Communications and Engagement

- Engagement of member agencies and the broad set of interested parties will improve planning and identify potential partnerships.
- The collective strength of the region can be brought to bear when Metropolitan aligns member agencies along advocacy goals and targets.
- Joint communications strategies can reduce conflicting messages, promote greater understanding about the value of water and help distinguish the trends of climate from individual weather events.