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Above: Photos of MTS Chief Executive Officer Sharon Cooney

Sacramento, CA – Today, the California Transit Association announced the appointment of Sharon Cooney, CEO of San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), as 33rd Chair of the

Executive Committee. Cooney succeeds Karen King, CEO of Golden Empire Transit District in Bakersfield, California. The election took place during an Executive Committee meeting held on November 14 in conjunction with the Association's 58th Annual Fall Conference & Expo in Pasadena, CA.

A dedicated member of the Association's Executive Committee, Cooney previously served as Vice Chair of the Executive Committee during the 2021-2023 term. She also led the Association's Finance & Management Committee and Transit Operations Funding Subcommittee. The Transit Operations Funding Subcommittee steered the Association's recent statewide advocacy efforts that successfully secured funding in the State Budget to support agencies' most immediate operational needs and recovery from the pandemic.

"It's an honor to take the helm as Chair of the California Transit Association, building upon the tremendous milestones reached as an organization and industry in recent years under the leadership of Karen King," said Cooney. "This year was marked by a formidable effort led by the Association to save public transit from a devastating budget crisis, resulting in a \$5.1 billion lifeline from the State of California to recover the ridership agencies lost from the pandemic."

"California's public transit industry is taking necessary steps not just to recover, but chart a path forward that is more robust, sustainable and equitable than ever before," Cooney emphasized. "In addition to long-term funding solutions, the Association will focus on supporting agencies in the transition to zero-emission technologies; addressing passenger safety concerns and homelessness on transit; and enhancing workforce development efforts. While the work is expansive, we are keeping the needs of the riders, workers, families, and communities we serve at the core."

Cooney was named the first woman CEO in the history of MTS in 2020 after a 15-year career with the organization where she held many top-level positions, including the director of government affairs, director of planning, chief of staff and deputy chief executive officer. As CEO, Cooney oversees an agency that provides transit service in 10 cities with a footprint totaling more than 3,200 square miles. With over 2,800 employees and contractors, MTS operates 63 miles of double-tracked light rail and 100 fixed bus routes, paratransit services, taxicab administration and oversight of freight rail lines. In FY 2023, MTS had the second highest light rail ridership in the United States. Cooney was also integral to the success of two of San Diego's largest infrastructure projects ever accomplished, the Trolley Renewal Project (\$660 million) and the Mid-Coast Trolley Extension Project (\$2.1 billion).

“As we welcome incoming Chair Cooney, we extend our deepest thanks and gratitude to outgoing Chair Karen King for her steadfast leadership, guiding the Association to major victories amid unprecedented, post-pandemic times,” reflected Michael Pimentel, Executive Director of the Association. “King’s tenure is punctuated by historic achievements as an Association, such as the once-in-a generation, landmark \$1.2 trillion bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act we worked tirelessly to secure. At the state level, under King’s leadership the Association passed significant legislation to streamline sustainable transit projects, expand fare free programs, fast-track the industry’s transition to zero-emission technologies, and improve rider safety. King was also critical in guiding the Association and the broader California transit industry through the COVID-19 pandemic – both as Chair and Vice Chair.”

Cooney was elected alongside new Vice Chair, Erin Rogers, who is the CEO and General Manager of Omnitrans headquartered in San Bernadino Valley. A transit veteran, Rogers became the first woman appointed to the agency’s top leadership position in 2020. Erin first joined Omnitrans in 2017 as deputy general manager. She has nearly three decades of experience in the transit industry, including 16 years at the Orange County Transportation Authority where she served as assistant general manager for 10 years.

Serving a two-year term, Chair Cooney and Vice Chair Rogers lead a 25-member Executive Committee responsible for managing the Association. The California Transit Association is the leading advocacy organization and champion for public transit in California. The Association’s more than 220 member organizations include transit operators, commuter rail agencies, transit support groups, national and international transit suppliers, and government agencies. With a motivated and informed membership base, the Association actively engages state decision makers to shape transit-friendly policy, secure increased transit funding and promote the benefits of a balanced transportation system. The Association represents transit’s interests before the California State Legislature, the Governor, and regulatory agencies on the local, state, and federal levels.

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