

Metro

Los Angeles County
Metropolitan Transportation
Authority
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Los Angeles, CA



Board Report

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REGULAR BOARD MEETING DECEMBER 2, 2021

Motion by:

DIRECTORS BARGER, NAJARIAN, AND SOLIS

Improved Mobility through Strategic High Speed Rail Projects in L.A. County

3.3 million residents and 11.24 million jobs fall within the existing Metrolink Antelope Valley Line (AVL) corridor which serves as the only viable, fixed guideway transit alternative for the 700,000 plus people who reside in North Los Angeles County and the only fixed guideway alternative to one of the most heavily congested corridors in the greater LA region: the I-5 freeway. The vast majority of the corridor is also lined by SB 535 and AB 1550 designated communities.

North Los Angeles County, including the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valleys, continues to project as the area that will witness the county's most significant population growth in the future, as well as employment opportunities. The Antelope Valley, in particular, will continue to provide the most affordable housing development and housing opportunities in the county, and Metro has defined much of the area as an *Equity Focus Community*.

The existing 76-mile long AVL serves eleven cities and communities but is predominantly single track and suffers from additional constraints which limit the capacity, timeliness, efficiency of passenger rail service, and our ability to improve mobility, since it was built upon existing freight rail infrastructure from the early 1900s with a circuitous alignment, along a lengthy canyon setting that includes fully protected species, and dozens of at-grade rail crossings.

Despite those constraints, and the 2-hour plus trip time from Lancaster to Union Station, the AVL averaged approximately 7,000 daily boardings, pre-pandemic, and had experienced sustained month-over-month growth since 2015. A majority of riders choose to leave their car at home; but the AVL also serves the highest percentage of transit-dependent riders in the Metrolink system and includes a "train-to-plane" connection at Hollywood Burbank Airport.

The Metro Board of Directors has recognized the importance of improving the AVL over the past decade and most recently approved a number of capital projects that were fully funded through North LA County Measure M MSP and a TIRCP grant through the state. Completion of these projects alone project to increase daily ridership three-fold, to 22,800, while providing up to 30-minute bi-directional service, and improved reliability and safety. However, we believe that this is only a fraction of what can be achieved.

A significant portion of the proposed California High Speed Rail Project (CHSR) overlays the existing AVL, Orange County and San Bernardino Metrolink alignments and could provide a mechanism to transform these corridors through early, strategic, capital projects that would take millions of cars off our freeways, elevate the most vulnerable, expand our middle class, expedite delivery of key elements in the State Rail Plan, and help reach the state's climate goals. In early 2019, the Metro Board recognized this possibility when it unanimously approved a motion by Directors Barger, Najarian and Krekorian to explore opportunities to deliver early CHSR projects along the AVL. The resulting report back from Metro staff, Metrolink and the California High Speed Rail Authority laid a foundation from which to build a vision but recognized that funding would be a significant challenge.

With the state's record revenue surpluses, the recent passage of a \$1.2 trillion federal infrastructure bill, and the potential passage of the federal reconciliation bill with funding sources that do not compete with local transit priorities, Metro finds itself in a potential once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Yet, we do not have a coherent countywide plan to capitalize, should these sources materialize.

Furthermore, recent transportation developments in the private sector, through Brightline West and its efforts to connect Las Vegas with Los Angeles, and the anticipated federal approval of the High Desert Corridor rail project bring further urgency and opportunity to revisit and build a plan and advocacy framework from the groundwork laid by the May 2019 report back to the Metro Board.

SUBJECT: IMPROVED MOBILITY THROUGH STRATEGIC HIGH SPEED RAIL PROJECTS IN L.A. COUNTY

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE Motion by Directors Barger, Najarian, and Solis that the Board of Directors:

- A. Reaffirm the importance of the partnership with the California High Speed Rail Authority for the delivery of the Link Union Station project and urge continued dialogue for release of the \$423 million in state funding;
- B. Establish a new agency policy that prioritizes the early delivery of additional, strategic, California High Speed Rail (CHSR) capital projects in Los Angeles County rail corridors that currently serve and/or will one day serve regional and inter-city rail, consistent with the State Rail Plan, if and when new sources of state and federal funding become available, and so long as pursuit of those funding sources would not create competition with established Board transit priorities;
- C. Amend the Board's state legislative program to include advocacy and support for a new dedicated funding program for the early delivery of strategic CHSR capital projects in Los Angeles County that would help realize the goals of the State Rail Plan and Metrolink's SCORE program, facilitating improved efficiency, speed, frequency and safety for existing and future inter-city and regional rail service;

We further move that the CEO:

- D. Work with agencies who provided lists of projects in the May 2019 report back on the Board's Readiness for High-Speed Rail motion to update the status and estimated costs of those projects;
- E. Identify a strategic list of CHSR capital projects, including but not limited to the updates above, that would benefit regional and inter-city rail in L.A. County by realizing immediate and transformative efficiency, speed, frequency and safety improvements and that are consistent with the State Rail Plan and Metrolink's SCORE Program;
- F. Lead an advocacy effort with the L.A. County state legislative delegation and appropriate state and local agencies, to align with upcoming state budget deliberations, that includes:
1. Promotion of the strategic list of CHSR projects and the need for a new source of funds for these efforts, separate from Prop 1A, and not competitive with other statewide funding programs for transit;
 2. A state commitment to rapidly fund advanced engineering and design of the Palmdale-to-Burbank, Burbank-to-LAUS, and LAUS-to-Anaheim CHSR segments, and inclusion therein of options for early implementation of the strategic CHSR projects list identified in response to this motion; and,
- G. Report back to the Board in 60 days with a progress update.