

Metro



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Board Report

File #: 2022-0676, File Type: Motion / Motion Response

Agenda Number: 51.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING
SEPTEMBER 22, 2022

Motion by:

DIRECTORS DUPONT-WALKER, NAJARIAN, MITCHELL, SOLIS, AND BUTTS

Vermont Transit Corridor Motion

Vermont Avenue is a principal transit corridor in Southern California that will benefit immensely from Metro investments.

Vermont Avenue is the second-busiest transit corridor in Southern California after Wilshire Blvd. According to Metro ridership data, Vermont currently carries more transit trips than any of Metro's rail and BRT lines except the A Line (Blue) and B Line (Red).

Likewise, the neighborhoods along Vermont contain some of the most densely populated, diverse, and highest transit-dependent communities in the region, many of which have a legacy of severe historical underinvestment. Race and class have had a glaring involvement. Nine out of ten riders on lines 204 and 754 identify as black, indigenous, and people of color. Additionally, over 60% of these riders live below the poverty line and 84% do not have access to a car. With that makeup, intentional action supporting safe, reliable service along Vermont could represent a dramatic shift toward equity for these communities.

With this existing high ridership and high need, Vermont will benefit from new investment more than any other existing transit corridor in the Metro system. Metro buses on Vermont travel at just 10 miles per hour and have an on-time performance of about 70 percent, highlighting the need for improvements.

To address these needs, the Metro included the Vermont Transit Corridor in the Measure M Expenditure Plan. Following studies to identify technically feasible bus and rail alternatives, Metro recently completed an innovative Community-Based Partnership Program engagement effort. Across all engagement methods, feedback from the entire Vermont corridor showed clear support for short-, medium-, and long-term improvements.

Accordingly, Metro plans to advance the Vermont Transit Corridor through a three-pronged approach:

- Short-term: quick-build improvements, including new bus shelters, more bus service, and bus-only lanes
- Medium-term: a full BRT corridor project

- Long-term: a rail project to be delivered as funding becomes available

This smart approach balances tangible bus improvements with future plans for rail. Additionally, this approach also prevents the Board from being forced to select one mode at the conclusion of a single project development process.

Historically, Vermont was the second priority for rail transit investment after Wilshire. Rapid Transit along the Vermont Corridor has been part of Southern California transit master plans since the mid-1970s, including part of a proposed 1976 rail “Starter Line.” After Rapid Transit service north of Wilshire was realized in the 1990s, Metro continued to evaluate Vermont south. In the lead-up to Measure R and the 2009 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Metro found that rail on Vermont would have more boardings than any other then-unfunded rail corridor except Wilshire. Consequently, Metro included Vermont rail in the 2009 LRTP’s Strategic Unfunded project list. This high performance was further reinforced by the initial Vermont Transit Corridor studies in the 2010s.

The Board should act now to reaffirm this three-pronged strategy and take steps to ensure that rail remains a longer-term priority, even as Metro aggressively advances bus improvements.

SUBJECT: VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR MOTION

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE Motion by Directors Dupont-Walker, Najarian, Mitchell, Solis, and Butts that the Board direct the CEO to:

- Advance the Vermont Transit Corridor with a three-pronged strategy, completing immediate-term quick-build improvements as soon as is practicable, a medium-term BRT project opening for revenue service no later than FY27, and a longer-term rail transit project thereafter;
- Evaluate the medium-term BRT project for a federal Small Starts application;
- Of the \$425 million included for the Vermont Transit Corridor in the Measure M Expenditure Plan (line item 17; 2015\$), reserve no less than ten percent for the development of the long-term rail transit project. If it ever becomes necessary for Metro to recommend this funding for a shortfall on the Vermont BRT project, Metro will work with the subregion to identify replacement funds that ensure the rail transit project continues to meaningfully advance;
- Identify a strategy to make the Vermont rail project shovel-ready consistent with voter- and Board-adopted Measure M project sequencing or acceleration priorities (Measure M Project Evaluation Readiness Tool). Without affecting existing voter- and Board-adopted project sequencing or acceleration priorities (except as allowed by the Measure M decennial process), make the Vermont rail project a first priority for any future new capital funding;
- Explore new opportunities to optimize bus service offered by municipal operators on the Vermont corridor, including evaluation of overlapping and connecting lines and schedule coordination to allow for seamless timed transfers; and

- F. Include an extension south of 120th Street in Metro's forthcoming list of future strategic unfunded projects, building off of the recently-completed Vermont Transit Corridor South Bay Extension Feasibility Study.