



Board Report

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REGULAR BOARD MEETING
OCTOBER 24, 2019

**SUBJECT: NORTH SAN FERNANDO VALLEY BUS RAPID TRANSIT IMPROVEMENTS
PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY**

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION

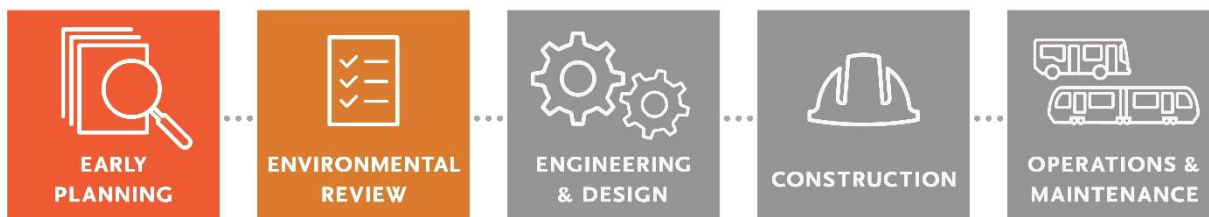
CONSIDER:

- A. RECEIVING AND FILING:
 1. Alternatives Analysis Report and the Proposed Project to be evaluated in the environmental review phase; and
 2. Summer 2019 Outreach Summary; and
- B. AUTHORIZING STAFF TO:
 1. Continue studying the Proposed Project in the environmental review phase while considering community input and the NextGen Bus Study; and
 2. Report back to the Board following additional study with an update on refinements to the Proposed Project and the environmental review.

ISSUE

This report provides an update on the North San Fernando Valley (SFV) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) project development process and the start of the environmental review phase. Figure 1 shows where we are in Metro’s Project Development Process- Start of Environmental Review phase.

Figure 1: Project Development Process - Start of Environmental Review phase



BACKGROUND

The North SFV BRT Improvements Project (Project) is a proposed new 18-mile BRT line that would enhance existing bus service and increase transit system connectivity. Metro operates a large and varied transit network in the San Fernando Valley and is advancing the planning and construction of multiple high-capacity transit improvements that will provide new, high-quality mobility options to further enhance communities and lives.

The Project has been identified in the Measure M Expenditure Plan, with a projected opening date between FY 2023-25 and \$180 million of funding.

In May 2018, the Board authorized initiating the planning and environmental review of the North SFV BRT project (#2018-0130). Staff initiated work on the AA Study in July 2018 to evaluate a range of possible BRT routes in the San Fernando Valley between Chatsworth, Sylmar/San Fernando and North Hollywood. The AA Study was completed in June 2019.

In June 2019, the Planning and Programming Committee received staff's presentation and public comment on the Alternatives Analysis (AA) Report and forwarded the item to the full Board without recommendation. The item was subsequently continued to a future Board meeting for consideration. During the postponement, staff conducted additional public outreach in the Summer of 2019 to ensure stakeholders had an opportunity to better understand the Project and offer feedback.

DISCUSSION

Alternatives Analysis Overview

The purpose of the Alternatives Analysis is to identify, evaluate, and screen or narrow down the number of transit alternatives that are to be studied as part of the subsequent environmental review phase. The AA Report can be found on the Metro website at <https://www.metro.net/nsfvbrt>. The AA Executive Summary is included as Attachment A.

Below is the AA timeline:

- July 2018: Alternatives Analysis began
- Fall 2018: Community meetings, outreach events, and agency meetings were conducted to introduce the project and solicit input on the proposed alternatives
- June 2019: Alternatives Analysis completed

The AA focused on alternatives for a premium east-west BRT service to link key activity centers, jobs, education, and essential services in the North San Fernando Valley to the regional transit system.

The study identified bus routes and stations that connect the places where a BRT line could be most successful, help the most riders, and do the best job of taking cars off the road. The AA included detailed planning, conceptual engineering, ridership forecasting, consideration of community and stakeholder input, and opportunities to support First/Last Mile improvements.

A key finding of the AA is that terminating in North Hollywood better meets the project purpose and need than terminating in Sylmar/San Fernando. This is because the future ESFV light rail line will provide more frequent and faster service to Sylmar/San Fernando than what the North SFV BRT line could provide. Furthermore, operating the BRT to North Hollywood allows the lines to complement each other and increases the overall accessibility of the transit network to more areas.

Based on the results of the analysis, the highest performing alternatives utilize Nordhoff Street and Roscoe Boulevard for the majority of east-west travel. The alternatives link activity centers along Nordhoff Street in the western portion of the study area, access more transit supportive land uses in the center portion of the alignment and use a portion of Roscoe Boulevard east of the I-405 Freeway to link up with concentrated activity centers in the east. All alternatives could use Laurel Canyon or Lankershim Boulevard to access North Hollywood and the Metro Red/Orange Line station.

The ridership is projected to be between 27,500 and 28,700 daily boardings in 2042. These ridership numbers are a distinguishing factor for assessing the relative performance of the options studied in the AA. It is important to note that analysis, results, and inputs will continue to be refined through the environmental process. Several design variations have been identified for further review during the environmental phase as illustrated on the Proposed Project Map (Attachment B).

Summer 2019 Outreach Summary

Staff conducted additional public outreach to ensure stakeholders had an opportunity to better understand the Project and offer feedback. A recap of outreach activities, brief summary of the public comments received, and next steps are provided below. Additional detail is provided in the Summer 2019 Outreach Summary (Attachment C).

Recap of Outreach Activities

Metro released a project video in July 2019 and used social media advertising to promote awareness of the project and attendance at the community meetings. Metro produced two versions of this video, in English and Spanish. The videos provide a project overview and information on the purpose of the project and were viewed 29,052 times following targeted messaging to users in the study area.

Metro held three community meetings in August 2019 in North Hollywood, Panorama City and Northridge. All of the meetings were conducted in an open-house format where participants could engage in one-on-one dialogue with project staff at different information stations, provide input by participating in an interactive map exercise and submit comment cards. This format supports Metro's goal of providing a safe and equitable environment for all participants and all viewpoints at our community meetings. Staff from the office of California Senator Robert Hertzberg also hosted information tables at the North Hollywood and Northridge meetings. Bilingual staff from the Senator's office also attended the Panorama City community meeting and engaged with meeting attendees.

More than 400 people attended the community meetings, with the largest turnout of over 300 attendees at the Northridge meeting on the California State University-Northridge (CSUN) campus. Approximately thirty-five people attended the North Hollywood meeting and approximately 35 people attended the Panorama City meeting.

In addition to meetings, the Metro team conducted presentations and outreach efforts at a variety of community fairs and events in the study area to continue to build project awareness, expand the stakeholder database and invite public input.

Approximately 4,400 comments have been received from June 2019 through September 23, 2019. The broad stakeholder participation in this outreach reflects the high level of interest in this project. People provided input in a variety of ways including website comments, emails, phone calls, Facebook/social media, the Source blog, at meetings/events, petitions, and letters.

Summary of Comments

A summary of the public comments that were received following completion of the AA study through September 23, 2019, organized by six key topic areas, is provided in the Summer 2019 Outreach Summary (Attachment C). To provide a high-level understanding of the comments that were received, an excerpt from the summary of comments received, organized by six key topic areas, follows:

- Routes and Stations - Comments were received on potential routes and stations. Some comments advocated for further consideration of a route along Roscoe Blvd west of the I-405 freeway. Some comments expressed that dedicated bus lanes are unnecessary on a particular route and advocated for careful study and consideration of additional transit improvement options. Other comments emphasized the importance of dedicated bus lanes on a particular route. Comments were received on the placement of station locations.
- Service Quality and Frequency - Comments received included questions about how existing service would be adjusted in relation to the BRT project. Some comments expressed a desire for increased service frequency and faster transit travel speeds. Other comments expressed skepticism that people would ride the bus in an auto-oriented area. There were also comments that highlighted concerns over high temperatures and a lack of shade at existing bus stops and inquiries about lighting and real-time arrival information screens.

- Traffic and Parking - Comments expressed concern that dedicated bus lanes for the project would result in additional traffic impacts and loss of on-street parking. There were also comments regarding increased parking by students in the neighborhoods surrounding CSUN. Some comments expressed support for reallocating space from car parking to transit use. Other comments expressed concern that that project would cause increased congestion and that drivers would utilize neighborhood streets as alternate travel routes.
- Land Use and Property Impacts - Comments received expressed concern about the project's potential impacts to property values, and the possibility of high-rise apartments abutting single-family homes. Some comments expressed a desire for more compact and dense development that would help with housing affordability.
- Public Safety - Comments expressed concern about perceived safety risks related to the project. Some comments expressed concern over the existing high travel speeds on major arterials. There were also comments that expressed a belief that dedicated bus lanes could not be used by emergency response vehicles, or a concern that the project would impede emergency response times.
- Outreach - Comments were received on outreach issues. Comments expressed concern that the timing and adequacy of outreach to affected stakeholders was insufficient. Some comments were complimentary of the information made available. Others needed help finding materials about the project online. There were also comments requesting additional outreach to students and transit riders.

Start of Environmental Review Phase

As the first step in the environmental review phase, staff will conduct additional study of the Proposed Project while considering community input and the NextGen Bus Study.

The additional study will develop further details on proposed routes, station locations, BRT infrastructure, street design, transit priority and other technology advancements to deliver high-performing transit. The study may include the development and evaluation of new and or refined alternatives. We will also refine our understanding of when and where various design options have

the potential to achieve equal or greater performance outcomes and positive impacts for people with the most need for transit. A key challenge for Metro and the City of Los Angeles is to design a project that meets the area's mobility needs by offering outstanding trip experiences while operating within existing right-of-way on local streets.

Since the AA was published, the Metro Board approved the NextGen Regional Bus Service Concept, including goals and objectives to guide the system redesign regionally and measures of success that are more customer-focused. The Board endorsed travel speed, frequency, and reliability as the highest priority for the system redesign and established a Technical Working Group in coordination with the City of Los Angeles. Staff will coordinate closely with the NextGen Bus Study and the City of Los Angeles to ensure the project complements the future, proposed transit network in the study area. Staff will leverage the analysis and public input available from the NextGen Bus Study to help inform refinements to the Proposed Project.

As identified in the AA, Panorama City and CSUN are key destinations in the SFV and have the potential to contribute significant ridership to any improved transit service. CSUN was the first university to join Metro's U-Pass program in Fall 2016 and has the second highest number of students in the nation receiving need-based federal assistance. Refinements to the Proposed Project and design decisions will continue to take into account the need to deliver superior connectivity and travel time reliability to these key destinations. The success of the North SFV BRT Project is further enhanced by both the future ESFV light rail line and the Metro Orange Line (MOL) improvements project. Project teams will continue to exchange information and work towards seamless transfers at the potential Valley transit hub in the Panorama City area and at connections with the MOL.

Metro acknowledges that there are issues to consider during the environmental review phase. One such issue involved strong community support behind Metro continuing to study a route option along Roscoe Blvd between the I-405 freeway and Reseda Blvd. Given the community feedback and the evolving NextGen Bus Study, the CEO has directed that staff include further evaluation of the Roscoe Blvd alternative identified in the AA Report (see Attachment D) as part of the environmental review phase. Additional route options using Roscoe Blvd may also be considered so long as a connection to CSUN is provided.

The additional study will generate further detail for decision makers and the public to understand the project better. Key details that the additional study will provide include but are not limited to:

- Detail on the types of BRT improvements that are proposed for various sections of the corridor
- Snapshot of transit performance in the San Fernando Valley
- Updated ridership forecasts
- Travel time estimates
- New operating scenarios
- How community input has been incorporated into the refined Project

Consistency with Measure M

This project will increase system connectivity in the North San Fernando Valley and the Metro transit

system, consistent with the Measure M Ordinance.

Consistency with Metro's Equity Platform Framework

In order to define and measure equity and evaluate scenarios in planning efforts currently underway, the Metro Board recently adopted a working definition of Equity Focus Communities (EFC), or those communities that are most heavily impacted by gaps in equity in Los Angeles County. The project will be using EFC, along with supplemental metrics as appropriate and directed, to actively lead and partner in addressing and overcoming disparities in access to opportunity.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

Approval of this item will not impact the safety of Metro's customers or employees because this project is at the study phase and no capital or operational impacts results from this Board action.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Funding of \$2.3 million is included in the FY20 budget in Cost Center 4360, Project 471403 (North SFV BRT Corridor) for planning and environmental studies and community outreach. Since this is a multiyear contract, the Cost Center Manager and Chief Planning Officer will be responsible for budgeting in future years.

Impact to Budget

The funding source for the North SFV BRT Corridor project is Measure M 35% Transit Construction. These funds are earmarked for the North SFV BRT project and are not eligible for Metro bus and rail capital and operating expenditures.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The future transit improvements will support the following goals outlined in Metro's Vision 2028 Strategic Plan:

- Provide high-quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling.

The project will address significant gaps in the high-capacity transit network to enable people to spend less time traveling. The project will best meet this goal by serving key destinations and improving travel times through transit priority improvements.

- Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity.

The project will expand transit access to key educational, employment and healthcare destinations and provide improved service to Metro's larger transit network for EFC.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

Staff considered not proceeding into the Environmental Review phase. Given the project was delayed four months following completion of the AA Report, community feedback received during the additional Summer 2019 Outreach and recent developments with the NextGen Bus Study, staff does

not recommend this action.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will begin the environmental review phase with further evaluation of the Proposed Project. Staff will report back to the Board following additional study with an update on refinements to the Proposed Project, community input received, and next steps.

Metro will keep the community informed on the progress of the study and upcoming decision points and will provide meaningful ways for the public to participate in the development of refinements to the Proposed Project.

Expanding community consensus is a key goal for staff during the environmental phase.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Alternatives Analysis Report Executive Summary (June 2019)

Attachment B - Proposed Project Map (AA Report)

Attachment C - Summer 2019 Outreach Summary

Attachment D - Roscoe Boulevard via Lindley Avenue Alternative (AA Report)

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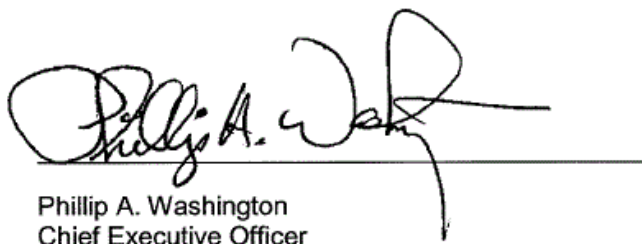
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