

**Board Report**

File #: 2020-0503, **File Type:** Project**Agenda Number:** 16.

**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
OCTOBER 14, 2020****SUBJECT: LOS ANGELES UNION STATION FORECOURT AND ESPLANADE
IMPROVEMENTS****ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION****RECOMMENDATION**

APPROVE the Addendum No. 2 to the Final Environmental Impact Report for the Los Angeles Union Station Forecourt and Esplanade Improvements Project.

ISSUE

The Metro Board of Directors (Board) certified the Los Angeles Union Station Forecourt and Esplanade Improvements (Project) Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) in March 2018 and Addendum No. 1 in July 2018. Since then, the Project team has substantially completed design, stakeholder engagement and interagency coordination with the City of Los Angeles (City). Addendum No. 2 (Attachment A) memorializes design changes that occurred since the FEIR and Addendum No. 1 and requires consideration under the California Environmental Policy Act (CEQA). The proposed design changes will not result in new or significant impacts than those previously documented.

BACKGROUND

The Project will reconfigure the public right-of-way in front of Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) to expand safe and accessible pedestrian and bike facilities on Alameda and Los Angeles Streets and create a civic plaza in front of the station. Staff has secured approximately \$18M in Caltrans Active Transportation Program (ATP) grant funds to design and implement the project improvements, apart from construction funds for the forecourt.

The Project elements cleared in the FEIR and Addendum No. 1 include:

- Alameda Esplanade: Roadway configuration on Alameda Street between Arcadia Street and Cesar E. Chavez Avenue to narrow the roadway and widen pedestrian and bicyclist facilities with a shared pedestrian/bicyclist multi-use path on the eastern sidewalk.
- Los Angeles Crossing: Consolidated raised crossing at Alameda and Los Angeles Streets, closure of the northern Los Angeles Street travel lane and the northern LAUS driveway, and addition of a two-way bike path.

- LAUS Forecourt: Repurpose the existing surface parking lot as a new civic plaza with sustainable features.
- Arcadia Street: Repurpose the northern travel lane as a dedicated El Pueblo Plaza tour bus parking zone during off-peak hours.

The Project received NEPA clearance as a Categorical Exclusion in June 2020 and utility and geotechnical investigations and archeological testing will be performed August through October 2020.

DISCUSSION

Most Project elements are located on the City public right-of-way; as such the Project is required to comply with City standards. The Addendum No. 2 to the FEIR documents and evaluates Project element changes that result in a larger project footprint from what was already captured and cleared in the Final EIR and Addendum No. 1. It was determined that the Project changes considered in the Addendum No. 2 do not result in new or significant impacts.

The design modifications evaluated included:

1. Alameda Esplanade Realignment

The certified Project removed two vehicle lanes and allocated the gained right-of-way equally to both sides of the sidewalk, with a shared multi-use path for pedestrians and bicyclists on the eastern sidewalk. The City and stakeholders raised concerns about a shared multi-use bicycle and pedestrian path that would not offer separation between modes and the potential conflicts that could arise. In addition, staff learned of significant utilities under the roadway on the west side of Alameda. As a result, the Project will still remove two vehicle lanes, but will shift all gained right of way to the eastern sidewalk to allow for fully separated bicycle and pedestrian paths, with mixing zones at the intersections. The Alameda Esplanade realignment was approved by Caltrans as an ATP project scope change.

2. Intersection and roadway modifications: The Project changes related to this item includes the following three revisions:

- **Lane Striping.** The Project now includes additional vehicle lane striping north of Cesar E. Chavez to Alpine and south of Arcadia to Aliso to allow for a smoother transition for vehicles traveling to and along Alameda Street, between Arcadia Street and Cesar E. Chavez Avenue. As such, the Project boundary map (Attachment B) has been updated to reflect this change.
- **Left-hand turn.** The FEIR included removal of a left-hand turn vehicle movement from eastbound Los Angeles Street onto northbound Alameda Street to improve vehicle movement and allow for the possibility of a longer pedestrian crossing phase. The City will maintain the left-hand turn movement to avoid conflicts and pedestrian safety issues that could arise from motorist confusion and/or disregard for the left-hand turn removal. Pedestrians and bicyclist movement over the raised crossing will not run

concurrently with vehicle movement to avoid conflict.

- **Alameda Southern Crosswalk.** The original Project proposed removal of the existing southern crosswalk that connects Father Serra Park to Union Station at Alameda and Los Angeles Streets to consolidate all pedestrian and bicyclist movement on the new raised crossing. Due to City and stakeholder feedback, the Project will maintain the southern crosswalk to ensure that the Project maximizes safe pedestrian crossings in the Project area. Per the City's direction, this crossing will also have a protected pedestrian movement (no right turn on red).

3. Streetlight update:

There are currently 10 historic streetlights on the eastside of Alameda Street. The Project will remove and replace these historic lights with replica streetlights to match existing historic lights.

4. Utility relocations:

Since the Addendum No. 1 was approved, staff has gathered more information related to utility relocations that will be required. The Addendum No. 2 provides the related environmental analysis and clearance for additional utility relocations.

5. Los Angeles Street ADA accessible pathway:

Los Angeles Street is very steep with a slope that exceeds Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards in some areas. In response to feedback from the City and stakeholders, the Los Angeles Street pedestrian path will include an ADA-accessible path of travel to serve users of all abilities and ages. Inclusion of the ADA path of travel on Los Angeles Street was approved by Caltrans as an ATP project scope change.

Additional Design Changes

In addition to the design changes noted above, two additional Project design changes were not analyzed in detail in the Addendum No. 2 because they result in a smaller footprint than what was cleared in the FEIR. As such, the changes do not pose a potential to result in new or more severe impacts under CEQA.

Addendum #2 does not propose to reduce the Project footprint as the Project is still under design review with the City and does not yet have final plan approval. Clearing a reduced footprint and scope in these areas would limit the Project's ability to refine design as the City review progresses. The two additional changes include:

- **Raised Crossing.** The Project includes a raised crossing on Alameda Street at the northern

end of the intersection with Los Angeles Street. The raised crossing is a central element of the Project that was originally proposed at 50' wide (38' for pedestrians and 12' for bicyclists) with 12' slopes on either side for a total width of 74'. Additionally, the raised crossing was originally proposed to be flush with the sidewalk at curb height (8" tall).

In April 2020, the City adopted a Supplemental Street Design Guide (Design Guide) that provides standards for raised crossings. Specifically, the parameters in the Design Guide establish a maximum width of 37' (25' for pedestrians and 12' feet for bicyclists) with 9' slopes on either side. Additionally, the height of the crossing was reduced to 3" to comply with the Design Guide. The height reduction will require ramps from the sidewalk down and up to the 3" raised crossing. The reduction in height accommodates the volume of heavy vehicles and emergency services on Alameda Street which serves as an arterial for bus service and as a truck and emergency response route. The reduction in width results from Design Guide guidance that raised crossings wider than 25' are likely to have diminished traffic-calming effectiveness.

- **Street trees.** The original project included new street trees on the western sidewalk with a double row of trees along Alameda Street. Per City standards, the Project cannot remove healthy existing trees on the west side of the street to accommodate new trees. On the eastern sidewalk, trees cannot be planted at the curb edge because of potential tree root impact to existing City storm drain (at a depth of 15'). Across the city, tree root intrusion into existing storm drains is a costly maintenance issue. Planting trees at the curb edge, including a double row of trees, would require that the Project encase the existing storm drain in concrete or to relocate the storm drains; both options are cost prohibitive. Therefore, the Project is planting a total of 17 trees on the eastern edge of the sidewalk, adjacent to the property line.

As previously noted, both the raised crossing and street tree design refinements reduce the project scope from what was previously cleared in the Final EIR and Addendum No. 1 and therefore do not pose any potential for new significant impacts under CEQA. The description of the current design regarding the raised crossing and street trees has been updated in Addendum No. 2 for clarity. The current design concept is included in Attachment C, Project Site Plan.

Stakeholder Engagement

The draft Addendum No. 2 was released for a 30-day public comment period between July 27 and August 26. E-blasts were sent July 27, August 3, August 11 and August 24 notifying stakeholders of the opportunity to comment on the Addendum No. 2 and of the August 13 public meeting that would cover the Addendum No. 2 and the upcoming utility and geotechnical investigations.

In addition, staff met with El Pueblo de Los Angeles management, El Pueblo Commission, Metropolitan Water District, First 5LA, Mozaic Apartments, LA Walks, Homeboy Industries, FilmLA and local elected offices. A virtual public meeting was held with 71 attendees on August 13 to provide a project update and brief stakeholders on the Addendum No. 2.

During the Draft Addendum No. 2 public comment period, a total of 28 comments were received and summarized (Attachments D1 & D2). With the exception of the left-hand turn movement, most public comments did not focus on the elements included in the Addendum. The overarching comments focused on the following four issues:

1. Reintroducing the left-turn movement from Los Angeles Street to northbound Alameda Street (in Addendum)

Several comments opposed the Project reintroducing the left-turn vehicle movement from eastbound Los Angeles Street to northbound Alameda. In addition, concerns were raised that reintroducing the left-turn vehicle movement would reduce the possibility of extending the duration beyond the minimum required time for the pedestrian/bicycle signal phase because the left turn would be taking away available time within the overall signal cycle to accommodate a dedicated left-turn phase for motorists.

As noted previously, motorists would have a dedicated left-turn phase to ensure that left turns do not conflict with pedestrians in the crossing and it is considered necessary to avoid motorist confusion and illegal left turns.

2. Raised crossing/pathway design from LAUS to El Pueblo (not analyzed in Addendum)

As previously noted, the proposed modifications to the raised crossing reduce the width and height. These design changes are opposed by many that provided comment. Stakeholders requested that the raised crossing maintain the original width and height to encourage slower vehicle speeds and to facilitate a more accessible path of travel by not requiring that pedestrians step down from the curb and instead, travel across the sidewalk to the raised crossing at the same grade.

As previously noted, in 2020 the City has developed a Design Guide that establishes standards for raised crossings and the revised width and height of the Project raised crossing complies with these standards.

3. Number of Trees (not in Addendum)

The Project currently proposes a total of 24 trees. Several comments included a request to increase the number of trees and more specifically, a double row on the eastside of Alameda Street, as was originally proposed. Concerns over a reduced tree canopy, the reduction in adequate shade cover, heat island impacts, and less comfortable and effective active transportation facility were raised.

As previously noted, the number and location of trees are due to compliance with City standards and the infeasibility of encasing or relocating the existing storm drain.

4. Design prioritizing pedestrians & bicyclists (not in Addendum)

Some provided feedback on the right-turn movement into LAUS from northbound Alameda Street be removed to allow for a longer bike path on Alameda Street.

The right-turn movement was part of the original FEIR approved Project and important to manage circulation in and out of Union Station since the Project will result in closing the northern driveways and shifting all vehicle access to the southern driveway. In addition, this intersection includes a right-turn arrow with no right turn on red to avoid pedestrian and bicyclist conflicts. Overall, the eastside of Alameda Street will be greatly improved as there will be a separated bicycle path, with mixing zones at the intersections. The original concept did not provide for any separation and a narrower sidewalk.

Overarching concerns over the design changes and compliance with the core Project objectives were raised. The Project will repurpose three vehicle lanes in the heart of downtown Los Angeles as new protected pedestrian and bicyclist facilities. While the four design changes that have been raised by stakeholders reduce scope in some areas, the Project will result in significantly safer and more accessible pedestrian and bicyclist facilities in the area.

Equity Platform

The Project is consistent with the following Equity Platform pillars:

- **Listen and Learn:** The Project is a result of deep stakeholder engagement. While there is opposition to four Project elements noted above, overall, the Project has been supported by stakeholders. In addition, staff has engaged stakeholders proactively and transparently throughout the process.
- **Focus and Deliver:** The Project is part of a larger active transportation program in and around Los Angeles Union Station that will create expanded pedestrian and bicyclist facilities. Over the last few years, staff has secured grant funding, environmental clearance and design to deliver this important transformative project.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

The Project will create safer connections for Metro transit patrons, including transit connections as well as connections to the surrounding neighborhood destinations and job centers.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The cost of preparing the Addendum is included in the FY21 budget. The recommended action will not change the Project cost or require a funding request. The funding for this year's project activity is Caltran's ATP grant and general fund. The general fund is eligible for Metro's bus and rail operation and capital project.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The recommendation supports:

- Strategic Plan Goal #1: The Project provides a high-quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling by expanding access for people who walk, bike or roll in and around LAUS. The Project adds bike paths, expands pedestrian access and builds an ADA accessible pathway to increase the connections for all users from LAUS to El Pueblo; and
- Strategic Plan Goal #2: The Project delivers outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system by increasing active transportation options for all users.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board may consider not approving the Addendum No. 2 to the FEIR. This is not recommended. The revisions, additions, and clarifications included in this Addendum No. 2 will ensure that the Project's design complies with City of Los Angeles requirements and that the Project can advance design and be implemented to meet Project grant deadlines.

NEXT STEPS

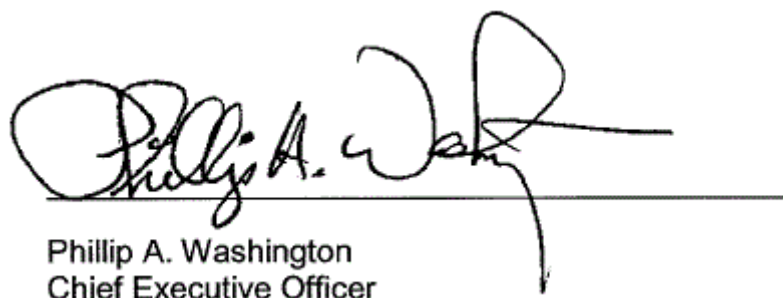
Upon Board approval, staff will continue to engage stakeholders and will coordinate with the City of Los Angeles to finalize design and receive final approvals and permits to construct the Project. The Project is funded by two Caltrans ATP Grants with a project deadline of completing final design by the end of the year to secure the approximately \$15M in construction allocation funding.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - FEIR Addendum No. 2
Attachment B - Project Map
Attachment C - Project Site Plan
Attachment D1 - Public Comments Summary
Attachment D2 - Public Comment Letters

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