



Board Report

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PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE FEBRUARY 17, 2021

SUBJECT: METRO G LINE (ORANGE) SEPULVEDA STATION FIRST / LAST MILE PLAN AND BUS RAPID TRANSIT IMPROVEMENTS

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION

CONSIDER:

- A. ADOPTING the G Line (Orange) Sepulveda Station First/Last Mile Plan (Attachment A);
- B. AUTHORIZING the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to modify the scope of work for the Metro G Line (Orange) Bus Rapid Transit Improvements project (Project) to include bikeway improvements in lieu of the grade-separated bicycle/pedestrian overcrossing bridge at Van Nuys and crossing improvements for the existing bikeway in lieu of the grade-separated bicycle/pedestrian overcrossing bridge at Sepulveda; and
- C. AUTHORIZING the CEO or his designee to negotiate a grant agreement scope change with the California Transportation Commission (CTC) to ensure state grant funding for the Project is maintained.

ISSUE

Staff developed the G Line (Orange) Sepulveda Station First/Last Mile Plan (FLM Plan) (Attachment A) as directed by Board Motion 14.1 (May 2016). The FLM Plan identifies walking and biking improvements within the half-mile and up to 3-mile radius of the station. Improvements in the FLM Plan are prioritized based on connectivity, safety, and equity, among other factors described further in this report. An FLM plan for the Van Nuys Station was completed previously and adopted by the Metro Board of Directors in December 2020 as part of the East San Fernando Valley (ESFV) First/Last Mile Plan.

FLM planning allows Metro to highlight access and safety needs and catalyze investment in station areas. This FLM planning effort to date has coalesced specific implementation opportunities including:

- A Measure M Metro Active Transport (MAT) Program grant to the City of Los Angeles for the

Sepulveda Station area was Board-approved in January 2021. The project was selected because of a very high need for active transportation infrastructure and known safety concerns in the area.

- Integration of FLM Plan-identified improvements for the Van Nuys and Sepulveda Stations into the delivery within the footprint of the Metro G Line (Orange) Bus Rapid Transit Improvements Project (Project), subject to on-going design work and feasibility review.

The Board of Directors approved the scope of the Project in 2018, however, the completed FLM Plan and additional analysis detailed in this report allowed staff to re-evaluate the bicycle/pedestrian bridges in the Project scope and recommend their removal. As such, in addition to the recommendation to adopt the FLM Plan, staff is recommending authorizing the CEO to modify the Project scope of work and negotiate a grant agreement scope change with the CTC to ensure state grant funding for the Project is maintained.

BACKGROUND

Board Motion 14.1 (May 2016) directed staff to undertake FLM planning for future Metro transit capital projects. The FLM Plan was completed following the Metro FLM methodology detailed in the 2014 First/Last Mile Strategic Plan.

At its July 2018 meeting, the Board approved the description for the Project to include the following:

- Up to 35 railroad-style gates at intersections along the G Line
- Two grade-separated structures and aerial stations for the busway at Van Nuys and Sepulveda
- Two new, grade-separated bicycle/pedestrian bridges adjacent to the busway grade separations. The bicycle/pedestrian bridges would be in addition to the existing Class I at-grade bicycle path facility, which would remain.

The Project is one of the early Measure M transit projects, with a construction groundbreaking date of Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 and a planned opening date of FY2025. In July 2018, the Metro Board approved the Project description and the statutory exemption of the Project from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Groundbreaking event for the project was held on October 12, 2018.

The Project purpose is to improve bus speeds, capacity and safety of the Metro G Line (Orange). The proposal to elevate the bicycle/pedestrian path was originally intended to improve first/last mile connectivity by providing safer and faster active transportation crossings at Sepulveda and Van Nuys Boulevards; however, after further analysis (described below), it was determined that elevating the path reduced access to the stations and nearby destinations for path users.

DISCUSSION

FLM Plan: Process and Coordination

The FLM Plan was developed starting with analysis of existing conditions for walking and bicycling modes collected through walk audits. The FLM Plan was developed to ensure close integration of the

proposed FLM projects and the Sepulveda Station design. Key findings of existing conditions and walk audits are described in the FLM Plan (Attachment A, see “Walk Audit Summary”).

A key component of developing an FLM plan is robust input from the community. The community engagement goals for the FLM Plan were to: 1) inform the community about Metro’s FLM program; 2) facilitate community participation and gather community knowledge to form FLM project ideas; and 3) collect community input from the transit riders and underserved communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to pandemic-related restrictions, the project team piloted an all-virtual community engagement process, which included an interactive, online survey. The project team also deployed a targeted outreach of the survey to reach the key audience (Attachment A, see “Community Engagement Summary”).

Because FLM projects are typically located in city-controlled right-of-way, coordination with the local jurisdiction on project types and location is another critical component of the FLM process. The project team coordinated with the City of Los Angeles including multiple city departments and elected offices to develop the Plan and review the projects in the FLM Plan. Staff from multiple city departments also participated in the walk audits. See Attachment A, “Local Jurisdiction Coordination Summary”, for more detail.

The FLM Plan includes three sections that represent the core planning products:

- Pathway Maps with Projects
- Project Lists & Scoring Matrices
- Rough Order of Magnitude (ROM) Cost Estimation

The FLM Plan also includes documents that summarize the process and support the documents above:

- Walk Audit Summary
- Community Engagement Summary
- Cost Assumption Summary
- Project Scoring Methodology Summary
- Local Jurisdiction Coordination Summary

Additional FLM technical materials are still in-development as part of ongoing coordination between Planning and Program Management.

Unique Considerations for G Line Sepulveda FLM Plan

FLM Plans propose a vision for a safe, connected, comfortable network of walking and biking improvements to address transit riders’ need to access stations. For this FLM Plan, unique investment opportunities were identified including the Board’s approval of the MAT Program Cycle 1 funding recommendations, which included an award to the City of Los Angeles for FLM improvements for the Sepulveda Station. Staff will work closely with the City of LA to define scope elements that advance the FLM Plan and Metro’s FLM program goals to improve connections to the station.

Additionally, through close coordination among Metro departments, some FLM Plan-identified improvements for the Van Nuys and Sepulveda Stations are incorporated into the delivery within the

footprint of the Project to address transit riders' access needs as well as the needs of cyclists on the MOL Bike Path. Specifically, this work will include:

- Development of bike facilities allowing users of the bike path to bypass the G Line/East San Fernando Valley rail transfer station at Van Nuys,
- Improvements to bike path crossing of Sepulveda Boulevard, and
- Other to be determined comfort, safety and signage improvements.

Reconsideration of Project Scope Element

The unique circumstances mentioned above and the FLM planning process for the Van Nuys and Sepulveda Stations led staff to reconsider the inclusion of the bicycle/ pedestrian bridges at Sepulveda and Van Nuys stations as part of the Project scope approved by the Board.

Staff undertook a detailed analysis of the design and sought input from Project stakeholders. Ultimately, the staff recommendation to delete the bicycle/pedestrian bridges is due to the findings from the FLM Plan, additional analysis, and stakeholder concerns. In summary, the analysis and stakeholder concerns are:

- A top priority of FLM is ensuring access between a station and nearby destinations. The bicycle/pedestrian bridges focused on through access, which impeded direct and convenient access from the bike path to the station and local destinations.
- The bicycle/pedestrian bridges require cycling up a 5% slope for approximately 900 feet. Seniors, children and less experienced cyclists, in particular, those on Metro Bikeshare and similarly heavy bicycles may have difficulty on this slope, so the bicycle/pedestrian bridges are not accessible for all ages and abilities. Alternative on-street options are flat and therefore easy for anyone to ride.
- The bicycle/pedestrian bridges are isolated with no "eyes on the bikeway" compared with on-street options which are visible to motorists, pedestrians and people at adjacent businesses. Reduced visibility for law enforcement from below the bicycle/pedestrian bridge to observe suspicious or criminal activity is a safety concern. Emergency access is more difficult on the bicycle/pedestrian bridges because not all emergency vehicles may be able to drive on it, compared with on-street options, which can be accessed from the adjacent travel lane. Safety concerns in the area have proliferated along with the economic downturn associated with the pandemic.
- An additional route would be required to access the ESFV Van Nuys Station, compared with the on-street options, which provide both through travel and access to the ESFV platform on the same route.
- Acquisition of all or a portion of multiple properties would be required to accommodate the bicycle/pedestrian bridges.

Additionally, the design analysis determined that the existing Class 1 bikeway can be maintained and improved with an additional gap-filler providing comparable levels of active transportation connectivity without bicycle/pedestrian bridges. These Class I or Class IV facilities would accommodate connections to the community, G Line Van Nuys station, and ESFV Van Nuys station, and are included as Attachment C. This proposed alternative is subject to further feasibility analysis to be conducted during design along with coordination with community stakeholders and the City of Los Angeles.

CTC funding guidelines regarding scope changes require an analysis of project benefits before and after the potential elimination of the elevated bikeway. To ensure a net zero or positive change in benefits results from the scope change, Metro staff may propose including alternative bicycle or pedestrian safety and station access improvements to the CTC. Staff proposes to look to the FLM Plan for identification and analysis of project benefits.

Equity Platform

The following pillars from the Equity Platform were addressed:

- Define and Measure: The development of the FLM Plan pathway network and project ideas for this Plan were informed by analysis of existing conditions collected through walk audits.
- Listen and Learn: The development of the FLM Plan pathway network and project ideas for this Plan were informed by community input collected through an interactive, online survey. The methodology deployed to score and prioritize projects included input received from the community through the community engagement survey.
- Listen and Learn: The recommendation for removal of the grade separated bicycle/pedestrian structures was informed through engagement with safety and security personnel, First/Last mile subject matter experts, and active transportation activists within the elected community.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

The recommended action to adopt the FLM Plan has no direct safety impact. The FLM Plan, along with all FLM planning activities, focuses on identifying projects that address safety issues for people walking, biking or rolling to the Sepulveda Station.

Staff did not identify any detrimental safety impacts to Metro patrons or employees related to the recommendation to eliminate the bicycle/pedestrian bridges. However, if the Board rejects the recommendation, inclusion of the bicycle/pedestrian bridges may have detrimental safety impacts to Metro patrons, as outlined above.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Adoption of the FLM Plan would have no financial impact to the agency.

Measure M provides \$286 million and a state grant from the SB-1 Local Partnership Program (LPP) provides \$75 million for the Metro G Line (Orange) BRT Improvements project, for a total of \$361 million in eligible, capital-specific revenues available to the Project. The availability of the \$75 million state grant award is contingent on receiving approval from the CTC for the proposed scope change. Rough order of magnitude estimates of total project costs conducted during the preliminary engineering phase indicate a forecasted range of total project costs between \$393 and \$476 million. However, the elimination of the bicycle grade separation proposed as part of this action will result in a decrease of approximately \$20 million, net of the costs for any substitute projects off this estimated total. As engineering progresses and we move closer towards project delivery, staff will continue to identify and incorporate overall project savings wherever available.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The recommended action to adopt the FLM Plan furthers Strategic Plan Goal #2: Outstanding trip experiences for all. Projects in the Plan will improve customers' experiences accessing the future stations by walking, biking or other rolling modes.

The recommended action to authorize the CEO to eliminate the grade separated bicycle/pedestrian bridges from the Project scope furthers Strategic Plan Goal #2: Outstanding trip experiences for all. Improved safety and security, in addition to more accessible connections to the facilities and community will enhance the experience of transit users.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could decide not to adopt the FLM Plan, which is not recommended for two reasons:

- 1) Previous Board action (FLM Policy, 2016) directed that FLM projects be incorporated into transit corridor project delivery; and
- 2) Inclusion of potential FLM improvements in an adopted plan better positions the projects for grant funding opportunities.

The Board could also decide not to approve staff's recommendations to authorize the CEO to eliminate the bicycle/pedestrian bridges from the Project scope. This is not recommended as this would result in safety/security, right of way, cost and maintenance impacts, as well as potential impacts to the schedule.

There are other options the Board could direct staff to advance, such as:

1. Direct staff to study an underground bikeway. This is not recommended due to a significant storm drain conflict, significantly higher costs of cut-and-cover work, and the similar safety reasons associated with the aerial bikeway mentioned above.
2. Direct staff to improve the existing bikeway. Crossing gate installation and arterial crossing safety improvements are planned for the existing bike path and included in the grant application. The FLM Plan has identified higher priority opportunities for additional improvements such as wayfinding and other on-street safety and station access improvements, thus additional improvements to the existing bikeway are not recommended.

NEXT STEPS

For the MAT Program award to the City of LA in January 2021 for FLM improvements in the Sepulveda Station area, Metro and City staff will coordinate on detailed project elements and develop a funding agreement. Staff is also developing the FLM Guidelines and will provide updates to the Board to the extent the FLM Guidelines are applicable to the FLM Plan.

Should the Board approve staff's recommendations, staff will commence negotiations with the CTC immediately to secure approval of the scope change and then complete Project preliminary engineering and begin preparation of solicitation and bidding documents for a spring/summer 2021

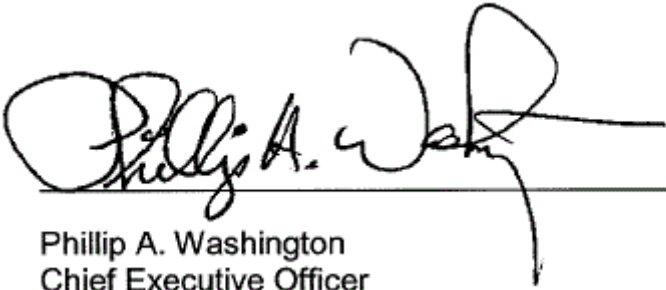
release. Project costs will be evaluated and managed throughout this process, and staff will endeavor to lower forecasted project costs as much as practical. In addition, future estimates will be informed as the interface between the Project and the proposed East San Fernando Valley LRT and proposed Sepulveda Transit Corridor projects are developed. A life of project (LOP) budget for the Project will be established upon receipt of bids/proposals from the contracting community. Public outreach along the Project corridor will be ongoing throughout this process.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A - G Line Sepulveda Station FLM Plan
- Attachment B - Metro G Line (Orange) BRT Improvements Project Map
- Attachment C - G Line Preferred Alternative

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