

**Board Report**

File #: 2021-0136, **File Type:** Contract**Agenda Number:** 16.

**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
MAY 19, 2021****SUBJECT: VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR PLANNING AND ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY****ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS****RECOMMENDATION**

AUTHORIZE the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to:

- A. AWARD AND EXECUTE a 48-month, firm fixed price Contract No. AE68471000 to Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc. for the Vermont Transit Corridor Environmental Review and Conceptual Engineering pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) guidelines in the amount of \$33,066,291 (inclusive of two optional tasks: 1) National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Environmental Document in the amount of \$4,367,917, and 2) Opportunities and Capacity for Use of Value Capture in the amount of \$341,503), subject to resolution of protest(s), if any; and
- B. APPROVE Contract Modification Authority in the amount of \$8,266,573 and authorize the CEO to execute individual Contract Modifications within the Board approved Contract Modification Authority.

ISSUE

The Vermont Transit Corridor is a Measure M project with a projected opening date range of Fiscal Years (FY) 2028 to FY 2030. Currently, there is \$425 million allocated for this project. In order to advance the project in accordance with the Measure M schedule, a Proposed Project/Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) needs to be identified and environmentally cleared.

The 48-month period is for the environmental review needed to complete a Draft and Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) pursuant to CEQA and conceptual engineering, including two optional tasks to conduct either the federal environmental review, pursuant to NEPA, and/or Value Capture. Either or both options may be authorized at the discretion of Metro.

Board approval of the Contract is needed in order to proceed with the environmental review of the project.

Vermont Avenue is the second busiest transit corridor in Los Angeles County with nearly 71,000 daily boardings (pre-Covid) from Metro Local Line 204 and Metro Rapid Line 754, and including the B, D, E, and C rail lines (Red, Purple, Expo, and Green), that serve the corridor. Between Hollywood

Boulevard and 120th Street, 100% of Vermont is contained within Metro Equity-Focus Communities. To improve mobility and equity for this primary transit corridor, Metro is delivering the Vermont Transit Corridor Project.

BACKGROUND

History

The study area for the Vermont Transit Corridor extends approximately 12 miles from Hollywood Boulevard in the north to 120th Street in the south (Attachment C).

In February 2017, Metro completed the Vermont Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Technical Study, which evaluated the feasibility of implementing BRT, including bus lanes and other key BRT features. The study identified two promising BRT concepts that were developed with the goal of increasing bus speeds, reducing passenger travel times, accommodating higher ridership and improving the customer experience.

At the March 23, 2017 Board meeting, staff presented the findings and recommendations from the Vermont BRT Technical Study (Item #9, Legistar File 2016-0835). At that same meeting, the Board approved a motion directing staff to proceed with the Vermont BRT project as a near-term transit improvement, while also initiating a study looking at rail, specifically focusing on connecting the Metro Wilshire/ Vermont B (Red) Line Station to the Exposition/Vermont E (Expo) Line Station as a first phase.

In July 2017, staff returned to the Board with an approach for augmenting the BRT Technical Study with an additional scope of work to conduct a rail conversion/feasibility study. The purpose of the rail conversion/feasibility study was to re-evaluate the initial BRT concepts to ensure that their design would not preclude a future conversion to rail and to evaluate and compare multiple rail modes and/or alternatives, including an extension of the Metro B Line along Vermont Avenue.

In April 2019, staff presented the findings and recommendations from the Vermont Transit Corridor - Rail Conversion/Feasibility Study (Item #17, Legistar File #2019-0205). Overall, the study found that: BRT continues to be feasible in the Vermont Corridor; BRT does not preclude conversion to rail transit in the future; BRT has the capacity to serve ridership demand at least until 2042; rail transit would maximize the mobility benefits along the corridor and in the region; and three rail alternatives were identified and determined feasible for future implementation.

Additionally, the Board approved a motion (Attachment D) directing staff to advance three BRT alternatives and the three rail concepts identified in the study into environmental review. The inclusion of rail alternatives in the environmental study provides an opportunity to deliver rail transit sooner should additional funding materialize. The Measure M ordinance includes the future potential conversion to rail on the Vermont Corridor after FY 2067.

The Board motion also directed staff to look at the feasibility of extending the Vermont Transit Corridor approximately ten miles south from 120th Street to the South Bay J Line (Silver) Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) transitway station. This study (South Bay Extension Feasibility Study) is currently underway as a separate contract procured through the Planning Bench. This study, in

coordination with the Vermont Transit Corridor Planning and Environmental Study, will assess the feasibility of extending the BRT and rail alternatives under environmental review to the South Bay J Line (Silver) PCH transitway station.

Alternatives for Environmental Review

The purpose of the project is to improve north-south transit service along the Vermont corridor through enhanced connectivity to local and regional transit services, increased capacity, and improved on-time performance. The feasibility studies previously completed for the project identified six alternatives for further review during the environmental phase.

The Vermont Transit Corridor Environmental Study will evaluate three BRT alternatives, as well as three rail alternatives (Attachment E). Each BRT alternative will extend south from Hollywood Boulevard to 120th Street, near the Metro C (Green) Line Vermont/Athens Station, and include: 1) an end-to-end side-running BRT; 2) a combination side- and center-running BRT; and 3) an end-to-end center-running BRT.

The three rail alternatives include: 1) a center-running Light Rail Transit (LRT) option, primarily at-grade, from Wilshire Boulevard south to 120th Street; 2) a fully grade-separated Heavy Rail Transit (HRT) option connecting directly to the existing Metro B (Red) Line, near Vermont Avenue and 3rd Street, south to 120th Street; and 3) a stand-alone, fully grade-separated HRT option that would extend from the Metro B/D (Red/Purple) Lines Wilshire/Vermont Station to 120th Street.

Key issues to address as the project advances include engaging the diverse communities throughout the corridor to discuss the tradeoffs of the different modes considered, creating an equitable mobility solution for the Vermont corridor, and developing a community-supported Proposed Project/LPA.

Planned Outreach Efforts

Public and stakeholder engagement throughout the planning and environmental process will provide valuable feedback that will inform the evaluation of alternatives and the selection of the Proposed Project/LPA by the Metro Board. A series of meetings, including an initial set of public scoping and public hearings, will be conducted as part of the process. Individual briefings with key stakeholders and elected officials will also be conducted. All outreach activities will be managed through a separate contract using the Board-approved On-call Communications Bench. The selected planning and environmental firm will work collaboratively with the outreach contractor throughout the study period.

Additionally, as part of the outreach program, we will follow a similar strategy used for the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 project in engaging Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to strengthen our understanding of the community's concerns and to implement effective outreach methods and tools that lead to meaningful input from the community.

Consistency with Metro's Equity Platform Framework

The Vermont Transit Corridor is consistent with the Metro Board-adopted Equity Platform policy framework adopted in February 2018 and the working definition of Equity Focus Communities (EFCs) adopted in June 2019. The Project will provide new benefits of enhanced mobility and improved regional access for transit-dependent and minority and/or low-income populations within the study

area.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

Approval of this item will not impact the safety of Metro's customers or employees.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The FY22 Preliminary Budget includes \$3,425,560 in Cost Center 4240 (Mobility Corridors Team 4), Project 471402 (Vermont Transit Corridor Project). Since this is a multi-year contract, the Cost Center Manager and Chief Planning Officer will be responsible for budgeting in future years for the balance of the remaining project budget.

Impact to Budget

The funding source for the Vermont Transit Corridor project is Measure M 35% Transit Construction. As these funds are earmarked for the Vermont Transit Corridor project, they are not eligible for Metro bus and rail capital and operating expenditures.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The project will support the goals of the strategic plan by enhancing communities and lives through improved mobility and access to opportunities through the addition of a new high-quality mobility option, closing a gap in the transit network that provides outstanding trip experiences and enhances communities and lives through improved mobility and access to opportunity.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could consider environmentally clearing the Proposed Project/LPA for the corridor using in-house resources. This option is not recommended as there are insufficient in-house resources to conduct a study of this magnitude placing the Measure M schedule at risk.

NEXT STEPS


Upon Board approval, staff will execute Contract No. AE68471000 with Jacobs Engineering Group, Inc. to initiate work on the planning, environmental and conceptual engineering work needed for the Vermont Transit Corridor Project. Staff will also continue work on the South Bay Extension Feasibility Study in coordination with the environmental study.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Procurement Summary
Attachment B - DEOD Summary
Attachment C - Vermont Transit Corridor Map
Attachment D - Board Motion (April 17, 2019)
Attachment E - Alternatives for Environmental Review

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