



## Board Report

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**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE  
AUGUST 17, 2022  
EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE  
AUGUST 18, 2022**

**SUBJECT: HIGH DESERT CORRIDOR JOINT POWERS AGENCY**

**ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION**

**RECOMMENDATION**

APPROVE Metro participation in the Joint Powers Agreement creating the High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Agency.

**ISSUE**

On March 1, 2022, San Bernardino County voted to withdraw its membership in the High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Authority (HDC JPA), resulting in the HDC JPA being dissolved effective June 30, 2022. A new High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Agency (Agency) comprised of new membership has been created to replace the HDC JPA to continue the planning for the future High Desert Corridor Rail Project. Metro, as a major partner in the planning and funding for the project, is being requested to join the new Agency.

**BACKGROUND**

In 2006, Los Angeles and San Bernardino Counties entered a Joint Powers Agreement creating the HDC JPA. Representatives from the counties of Los Angeles and San Bernardino; the cities of Palmdale, Lancaster, Adelanto, Victorville; and the Town of Apple Valley were appointed by the counties to serve on the HDC JPA Board of Directors. Metro was not a JPA member but was considered a potential candidate to join an expanded HDC JPA after the passage of Measure R in 2008, which included \$33 million for the development of an environmental document for the corridor.

The HDC JPA, a project-specific Joint Powers Authority, was formed to develop transportation options between the Antelope Valley in Los Angeles County and the Victor Valley in San Bernardino County. The HDC JPA initially considered a new freeway/expressway/tollway connecting SR-14 to I-15, but expanded the scope to include rail, bicycle lanes, and other improvements, ultimately becoming the High Desert Multi-Purpose Corridor (HDMC). In 2016, the HDMC received CEQA clearance, and it was determined that the Locally Preferred Alternative would be a multi-modal corridor with a highway and a high-speed rail line in the median connecting the two valleys. At the

time, Metro's role was to fund the CEQA study.

In December 2020, due to litigation and funding issues, Caltrans eliminated the highway portion of the HDMC, but allowed for the possibility of a highway later.

### HDC Rail Project

Upon elimination of the highway component of the HDMC, the HDC Rail Project moved forward. The HDC Rail Project would link the Metrolink/California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) station in Palmdale with an anticipated high-speed rail station in Apple Valley, which would connect to the planned Brightline West, a privately-funded high-speed rail line to Las Vegas.

The HDC Rail Project will service major employment centers and regional destinations, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and provide a passenger rail alternative to the congested I-15 corridor between Southern California and Las Vegas.

Travel time on the 54-mile HDC Rail Project from Palmdale to Apple Valley will be 30 minutes, at speeds traveling up to 180 miles per hour. Travel time on the 190-mile Brightline West corridor from Apple Valley to Las Vegas will be 95 minutes, at speeds traveling up to 180 miles per hour.

The HDC Rail Project is estimated to initially carry 3.1 million riders annually and grow to 14 million riders annually by 2050 based upon the 2015 ridership modeling study and connectivity to the future CHSRA service from Los Angeles to Northern California.

The HDC Rail Project is consistent with CHSRA, Brightline West, the California State Rail Plan, and the Metrolink commuter rail network. The Metro Measure M Expenditure Plan and the Metro Long-Range Transportation Plan have committed \$170 million for the HDC, with funds for engineering and right-of-way acquisition. Additionally, \$1.8 billion in future Measure M funds has been committed in 2063 - 2067 for HDC Rail Project construction.

### Metro Service Development Plan

In August 2020, the Metro Board programmed \$5,000,000 in Measure M HDMC funds for Metro to lead a High Desert Corridor Intercity Rail Corridor Service Development Plan (SDP) effort [File #2020-0046]. Starting in early 2021, Metro has been working with key stakeholders to complete detailed ridership and revenue forecasts, conduct operations modeling, Palmdale Transportation Center station planning, conceptual engineering, and financial analysis to advance the HDC Rail Project to the 15% design level. The SDP is expected to be completed in summer 2022.

### CEQA/NEPA Environmental Update

Concurrent with the SDP, environmental work for the HDC Rail Project has continued. In April 2021, Metro programmed \$400,000 in Proposition C 25% funds to the HDC JPA for additional NEPA work for the HDC Rail Project to address changes to the rail alignment, station location and other related infrastructure changes. In 2021 the HDC JPA requested that the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) act as the lead agency for NEPA compliance and that the FRA issue a Record of Decision

(ROD) for the HDC Rail Project and revalidate the results of the previous 2016 CEQA environmental approvals. In 2022 the FRA agreed to become the NEPA lead agency for the HDC Rail Project. The FRA also requested that the NEPA environmental document closely align with the SDP, requiring additional engineering analysis. An ROD is expected in late 2022/early 2023.

Metro Board Action in April 2022

In April 2022, the Metro Board programmed \$1,236,500 in FY 2022-23 Measure M HDMC funds to the HDC JPA to complete the CEQA and NEPA environmental documents for the HDC Rail Project and other related activities related to the HDC JPA governance, including JPA management, planning and administrative coordination, for FY 2022-23.

**DISCUSSION**

On March 1, 2022, San Bernardino County voted to withdraw its membership in the HDC JPA effective June 30, 2022. Since the HDC JPA consists of only two members, Los Angeles County and San Bernardino County, the withdrawal of San Bernardino County dissolved the HDC JPA as of June 30, 2022.

The new Agency will replace the HDC JPA and complete the federal and state environmental review process, pursue grant funding and facilitate the planning, design, construction, financing, operations, and maintenance of the HDC Rail Project, which is subject to funding availability. Metro was not a member of the original Joint Powers Authority. Metro's participation in the new Agency is timely and appropriate now that the HDMC has evolved into the development of the HDC Rail Project, which has linkages with the LA County regional rail network; Metro is currently leading the development of the SDP; and Metro is funding the completion of the CEQA/NEPA document.

The agreement for this new Agency (Attachment A) eliminates San Bernardino County as a member and adds Metro plus the cities of Palmdale, Lancaster, Adelanto, and Victorville as direct members of the Agency Board of Directors. Each member agency will appoint a representative to the Agency's Board of Directors, with each Director receiving one vote. Metro will be represented on the new Agency by the Metro Board North County/San Fernando Valley Sector appointee, currently Chair Ara Najarian. The six voting members and their dates of approval to join the new Agency is as follows:

<b>High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Agency Member</b>	<b>Governing Board Action</b>
Los Angeles County	June 28, 2022
Metro	August 25, 2022
City of Palmdale	July 20, 2022
City of Lancaster	June 14, 2022
City of Adelanto	June 8, 2022
City of Victorville	July 19, 2022

The County Counsel of Los Angeles County will serve as the Agency's legal adviser. The Auditor-Controller of Los Angeles County will serve as the Agency's auditor. The Treasurer of Los Angeles

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County will serve as the Agency's Treasurer. An annual budget will be established after the new Agency meets, likely to occur in fall 2022.

### **DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT**

The HDC Rail Project will reduce automobile trips along the SR-138/SR-18 corridor and the I-15 freeway between Southern California and Las Vegas. This project will reduce vehicle accidents and improve safety by moving some people in automobiles along the I-15 corridor to a high-speed rail train, among the safest transportation modes. The HDC Rail Project will be designed to the latest safety standards established by the FRA and other regulatory agencies.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

The previous Metro Board action in April 2022 programmed funds to complete the HDC Rail Project environmental work and fund the management and administration of the new Agency for FY 2022-23. Future year Agency budgets will be established annually by the Agency Board thereafter. Measure M HDMC funds, currently \$166 million, are a potential source of funds for Metro's portion of the Agency operations, dues, etc.

### **EQUITY PLATFORM**

The HDC Rail Project will improve mobility for residents in the North Los Angeles County by providing a high-quality, environmentally friendly, safe, and efficient transportation option to the communities to access jobs, health care, education, other services, and economic opportunities offered at major urban and employment centers in Los Angeles and Las Vegas.

The cities of Adelanto and Victorville are designated as high poverty areas. The multi-modal Palmdale High Speed Rail station will be designed to meet the latest Americans with Disability Act requirements along with commuter rail, bus transit, Access Services, ride share and active transportation needs.

The entire project area falls within the low-income communities and households as defined by AB 1550. A significant portion also falls within the disadvantaged and low-income communities as defined by SB 535. In addition, residents within the HDC project area consist of between 61% and 77% in minority populations, with the highest percentage of minority populations in the City of Palmdale. Many of the minority populations include people with limited English proficiency.

The new Agency will enable the environmental process to continue, leading to the ROD and further engineering, outreach, and eventual construction of the HDC, subject to funding availability.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

Metro membership in the new Agency supports Vision 2028 Strategic Plan goals 1, 4 and 5, as follows:

- Goal 1: Invest in a world-class transit system that is reliable, convenient, and attractive to more users for more trips;
- Goal 4: Drive mobility agendas, discussions, and policies at the state, regional and national

levels;

- Goal 5: Exercise good public policy judgement and sound fiscal stewardship.

### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The Board could choose not to participate as a member of the new Agency. This alternative is not recommended as Metro is a major partner in the funding and planning for the HDC, which is funded through the Measures R and M Expenditure Plans. This includes working closely with the new Agency to complete the environmental CEQA/NEPA process and leading the current SDP effort.

Given Metro's large role in funding for the HDC, it is appropriate that Metro participates as a voting member in the new Agency. The recommendation is also consistent with Metro's overall role and responsibility to provide public transportation mobility opportunities throughout Los Angeles County and its creation of a multimodal, integrated planning function that seeks to integrate all modes of transportation in a comprehensive, holistic approach.

### **NEXT STEPS**

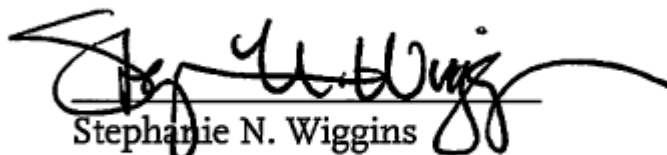
Subject to Board approval of the staff recommendation, the new Agency will convene for its first Board meeting in the fall of 2022. The environmental ROD is anticipated from the FRA in late 2022/early 2023. Staff will work with the new Agency, stakeholders and potential funding partners to advance the HDC Rail Project forward.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Joint Powers Agreement Creating the High Desert Corridor Joint Powers Agency

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