



Board Report

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PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
APRIL 17, 2024

**SUBJECT: SOUTHEAST GATEWAY LINE (FORMERLY WEST SANTA ANA BRANCH) -
PROJECT APPROVAL AND CERTIFICATION OF FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT
REPORT**

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION

CONSIDER:

- A. APPROVING the board-identified Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) as the Southeast Gateway Line (formerly West Santa Ana Branch) Light Rail Transit (LRT) Project (Project), which is a 14.5- miles LRT line with nine (9) stations and includes a new C Line infill station at the I-105 Freeway. The Project extends from its northern LPA terminus at the Slauson/A Line Station located in the City of Los Angeles/Florence-Firestone unincorporated area of Los Angeles (LA) County to its southern terminus at the Pioneer Station located in the City of Artesia and includes a new C Line infill station at the I-105 Freeway. Approval of the Project also provides for the inclusion of five (5) parking facilities, ancillary facilities and a Maintenance and Storage Facility (MSF) in the City of Bellflower;
- B. CERTIFYING in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) the Final Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which includes the design option that would close 186th Street but keep 187th Street open in the City of Artesia.
- C. ADOPTING, in accordance with CEQA, the:
 - 1. Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations, and
 - 2. Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP); and
- D. AUTHORIZING the Chief Executive Officer to file a Notice of Determination with the Los Angeles County Clerk and the State of California Clearinghouse.

ISSUE

On March 29, 2024, the combined Final Environmental Impact Study/Environmental Impact Report

(Final EIS/R) for the Project was released for a 30-day public review period. The Final EIS/R has completed all necessary steps to be considered for Certification by the Board in accordance with CEQA. The Executive Summary is included in Attachment A. The Final EIR Certification also includes approval of the MMRP (Attachment B) and the Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations (Attachment C). The Project is a Measure R and Measure M project that is contained in the 2009 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) 2016-2040 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS).

BACKGROUND

In January 2022, the Board selected the Project, a 14.5 miles LRT line with nine (9) stations from a northern LPA terminus at the Slauson/A Line Station located in the City of Los Angeles/Florence-Firestone unincorporated area of LA County to a southern terminus at the Pioneer Station located in the City of Artesia and a new C Line infill station at the I-105 Freeway.

This Project would connect the ten cities and communities of Artesia, Cerritos, Bellflower, Paramount, Downey, South Gate, Cudahy, Bell, Huntington Park, Vernon, unincorporated Florence-Firestone, and downtown Los Angeles. The project would also connect this area to Metro's emerging rail network, including the C Line to LAX, the A-Line to LA Union Station, Pasadena, and Azusa through the Regional Connector. The Project will provide alternatives to driving and create more access to regional opportunities. Approval of the Project's environmental document also includes five parking facilities and a Maintenance and Storage Facility (MSF) in the City of Bellflower.

The Board also selected Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) as the northern terminus for the full corridor project. Staff is conducting a separate study to evaluate options for connecting from Slauson/A Line to Union Station.

The Project will serve an area that is home to 1.4 million residents and an industrial employment hub with approximately 618,500 jobs. Population and jobs are projected to grow to 1.6 million and 746,000, respectively, by 2042. Population and employment densities in areas around the Project are five times higher than the LA County average. There is a high concentration of minority communities residing in the Project study area, including a significant concentration of minority residents comprising 65 percent of the total study area population, with Hispanic/Latino groups alone accounting for 51 percent of the total population. In addition, 44 percent of study area residents live below the poverty level, which is higher than the county average of 33 percent.

The Project will provide residents with premium transit service to access employment, health, and educational opportunities, which otherwise would be difficult to reach. This project will also address greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by reducing an anticipated 34 million vehicle miles traveled per year, the equivalent of 3.9 million gallons of gasoline, once in operation. The construction and operation of this project will create approximately 37,000 to 46,000 jobs and generate approximately \$5 billion per year in economic activity for the region.

Additionally, Metro launched a renaming campaign in August 2023, including community input on a

new name that would represent the character, culture, and experience of the people who live, work, and play in the cities this new line will serve. The Southeast Gateway Line was selected as the project name. For consistency with the remainder of the environmental documents, the Final EIS/R continues to refer to the project as the West Santa Ana Branch.

Since initiating the Project, staff has conducted extensive outreach efforts to reach and hear from corridor communities and has continued to engage project stakeholders through a variety of forums, platforms, languages, and access methods, including special outreach efforts to people of color, low-income, and limited English proficiency populations, and persons with disabilities. This engagement has directly influenced project development. Metro staff will continue to inform communities as a part of completing the Final EIS/R.

Metro released the Final EIS/R for the Project on March 29, 2024, for a 30-day public review period.

The Executive Summary (Attachment A) provides a detailed description of the Project. The Final EIS/R can be accessed via the project website [metro.net/sql](https://www.metro.net/sql) [<https://www.metro.net/projects/southeastgateway/>](https://www.metro.net/projects/southeastgateway/). The Final EIS/R was also published in the Federal Register ([<https://www.federalregister.gov/>](https://www.federalregister.gov/)) on March 29, 2024.

DISCUSSION

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

Metro, as the CEQA lead agency and proponent for the Project, has, in coordination with the cities of Artesia, Bell, Bellflower, Cerritos, Cudahy, Downey, Huntington Park, Paramount, Los Angeles, South Gate, Vernon, as well as portions of unincorporated Los Angeles County, completed an environmental impact report (EIR) for the proposed Project. If the Metro Board certifies the EIR and approves the proposed Project, thereby completing the CEQA environmental clearance, the Project will be eligible to commence right-of-way acquisition, utility relocation, and other construction activities.

CEQA requires that Metro balance, as applicable, the economic, social, technological, and other benefits of the Project against its unavoidable impacts when considering project approval and certification. CEQA Guidelines Section 15091(a) states that no public agency shall approve or carry out a project which identifies one or more significant environmental effects unless the public agency makes written findings for each of the identified significant effects, accompanied by a brief explanation of the rationale for each finding.

Section 21081.6 (Assembly Bill 3180) of the California Public Resources Code requires the Lead Agency, for each project that is subject to CEQA, monitor performance of the mitigation measures included in the environmental document to ensure that mitigation does, in fact, take place after a project is approved. Therefore, a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) has been prepared to ensure compliance with the adopted mitigation measures. The purpose of the MMRP is to ensure that the mitigation measures identified in the Final EIS/R that mitigate the potentially significant environmental effects of the Project are properly carried out. Metro is responsible for assuring full compliance with the provisions of the MMRP (Attachment B).

Prior to approving the proposed Project, the Board must find that notwithstanding the disclosure of these significant and unavoidable impacts, there are specific overriding reasons for approving this Project and that these reasons serve to override and outweigh the Project's significant unavoidable effects. CEQA requires that support be provided, in writing, of the specific reasons for approving a project when significant impacts cannot be avoided or substantially lessened. These findings are included in the Project's Statement of Overriding Considerations (Attachment C).

Prior to the selection of the Project's LPA, Metro released the Draft EIS/R for a 60-day public review and comment period, which transpired between July and September 2021. Prior to releasing the Draft EIS/R, Metro conducted numerous outreach efforts to notify the public about the project, the public review period, and how to comment on the Project. Two virtual Stakeholder Working Group (SWG) meetings (one focused on downtown Los Angeles communities and one focused on communities located south of the I-10 freeway) were held in April 2021 to inform stakeholders along the corridor about the upcoming release of the Draft EIS/R. Metro also coordinated with cities and stakeholders in the run-up to the release of the Draft EIS/R to inform the public about the Project and the public review period. These efforts included distributing bilingual street banners to corridor cities, ads on corridor buses, Metro social media announcements, quadrilingual project eblast distributed to over 4,500 email database contacts, bilingual SMS (texts) distributed to over 450 cell phones, and door-to-door canvassing and printed materials distribution to over 2,800 properties at targeted locations along the project corridor. Additionally, briefings were held prior to the release of the Draft EIS/R:

- Eco-Rapid Board - July 14, 2021
- WSAB Cities Manager TAC - July 15, 2021
- Paramount City Council - July 20, 2021
- Little Tokyo Community Council - July 21, 2021
- LTCC Board Meeting - July 27, 2021
- Metro Board Staff Briefing - July 27, 2021
- Congresswoman Roybal-Allard Staff - July 28, 2021

Since the Board's identification of the LPA in January 2022, staff has been working with third parties, including various cities, Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR), the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach (Ports), and other agencies to respond and resolve the Draft EIS/R comments. A confirmed final project definition/design for the Final EIS/R and Advanced Conceptual Engineering (ACE) Plans were completed in April 2023. Of note, new design comments were received from UPRR and the Ports in June 2022, six months after the LPA selection.

Staff held 180+ meetings with corridor cities, UPRR, the Ports, CPUC, Caltrans, USACE, and other key stakeholders. Comments received - both during the formal commenting period as well as afterward - cover a wide range of topics, including additional traffic analysis and mitigation, parking capacity, noise/vibration analysis and mitigation, vertical profile, and other issues. Staff completed various studies to respond to comments and reflect design refinements including, but not limited to:

- San Pedro Subdivision aerial assessment
- CPUC and city road closures/openings assessments
- Updated noise analysis methodology, project measures, and mitigation
- Multiple visual simulations at various locations
- Parking effects in Huntington Park, Bell, South Gate, Cudahy, Paramount, Bellflower,

Cerritos, and Artesia

Responses to all comments received during the Project's 60-day Public Review and Comment period were drafted and are contained in Appendix D of the Final EIS/R.

A confirmed final project definition/design for the Final EIS/R and Advanced Conceptual Engineering (ACE) Plans were completed in April 2023. Five in-person and virtual community meetings were held in June 2023 in the cities of Paramount, Bell, and Artesia to inform the public of the project refinements. In addition, the project team attended 10 local community events to provide information.

National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA)

Metro has coordinated with the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the lead agency for the NEPA clearance, including the Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision (ROD). The NEPA clearance is necessary to ensure the environmental document is inclusive of all information required to meet federal environmental guidelines and to allow the Project to be eligible for federal funding. Metro may seek financial assistance from FTA for the Project to carry out the Project's engineering and construction.

If FTA provides financial assistance for the final design and construction of the Project, FTA will require that Metro design and construct the Project as presented in the Final EIS/R and the ROD. Although no new federal funds have been identified yet for the Project, by working with the FTA to complete the NEPA portion of the environmental document, the Project should be positioned to compete for Federal funding opportunities that become available.

Community Outreach

For consistency with earlier environmental documents, the Final EIS/R continues to refer to the project as the West Santa Ana Branch. The Final EIS/R can be accessed via the project website ([metro.net/sql <https://www.metro.net/projects/southeastgateway/>](https://www.metro.net/projects/southeastgateway/)). The Final EIR is also published on the Federal Register website ([<https://www.federalregister.gov/>](https://www.federalregister.gov/))

A digital copy of the Final EIS/R has been mailed to agencies, impacted property owners, and Draft EIS/R commentators. The printed copies of the Final EIS/R have been made available at the following library locations along the project corridor:

- Artesia Library, 18801 Elaine Ave, Artesia, CA 90701
- Arts District Business Improvement District, 1801 E 7th St, Los Angeles, CA 90021
- Clifton M. Brakensiek Library, 9945 Flower St, Bellflower, CA 90706
- Gateway Cities Council of Governments, 16401 Paramount Blvd, Paramount, CA 90723
- Hollydale Library, 12000 Garfield Ave, South Gate, CA 90280
- Huntington Park Library, 6518 Miles Ave, Huntington Park, CA 90255
- Little Tokyo Branch Library, 203 S Los Angeles St, Los Angeles, CA 90012
- Los Angeles Central Library, 630 W 5th St, Los Angeles, CA 90071
- Metro Dorothy Peyton Library, 15th Floor, 1 Gateway Plaza Los Angeles, CA 90012
- Paramount Park Community Center, 14400 Paramount Blvd, Paramount, CA 90723
- South Park Business Improvement District, 1150-B S Hope St, Los Angeles, CA 90015

Metro also issued social media announcements, newspaper ads, shared bilingual project eblasts to over 4,500 email database contacts and SMS (texts) to 450 cell phones as well as distributed 55,000 printed notices, including door-to-door to over 48,000 properties along the corridor, a mailed notice to over 5,000 stakeholders, and over 1,000 fliers at community events.

Project Cost

As presented at the September 2022 meeting, since entering the FTA New Starts program and Project Development phase, Metro staff had re-evaluated the forecasted Project cost presented in the 2021 Draft EIS/R. The re-evaluation was necessary to re-consider several potential future cost drivers, including unknown/unidentified future risks given the current (early) level of design completion, additional contingency factors aligning with anticipated FTA oversight procedures to maintain eligibility for federal New Starts funding programs, and escalation of cost estimates to year (s) of expenditure based on the project delivery schedule. Additionally, the cost was further updated to address design refinements resulting from comments received since the Draft EIS/R release. This resulted in a forecasted cost of \$7.167B (2023\$), which was (and remains) within the range presented to the Board previously in 2021.

Staff will continue to identify opportunities to control the project costs, including working with local stakeholders to:

- Streamline the permitting process with cities
- Exercise franchise agreements, and
- Identify cost-savings associated with scaling down the MSF facility (i.e., special trackwork to serve the LPA segment).

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

Recommended actions will not affect the safety of Metro customers and/or employees because this Project is in the planning phase and no construction or operational safety impacts result from this Board Action.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

With the Board's approval of the Project and certification of the Final EIR, Metro will file a Notice of Determination (NOD) with the State Clearinghouse to complete the CEQA process. It is anticipated that FTA staff will issue a Record of Decision in Q3 2024 which will conclude the environmental document and as such, additional budget is not required at this time.

Approval of the Project and certification of the Final EIR will allow staff to continue advancing the design, start the right-of-way acquisition and relocation process, and advance utility relocation work.

The Project has capital funding programmed in the Metro financial forecast. The funding includes a fixed allocation of Measure R and Measure M funds, as well as state grant funds that have been awarded to the Project.

EQUITY PLATFORM

Board certification of the Project is consistent with the goals and objectives outlined in the Metro Equity Platform Framework that identified that the Project traverses through Equity Focus Communities (EFCs) in Southeast Los Angeles County, where access to premium transit service is limited. The Project is also comprised largely of Environmental Justice (EJ) communities, which are defined from the demographic and socioeconomic data of the U.S. Census. Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) are (65%) of the total study area population, and Hispanic/Latino groups alone account for 51 percent of the study area population. In addition, 44 percent of study area residents live below the poverty level, compared with the county average of 33 percent.

Overall, this Project will benefit communities through the addition of a new high-quality reliable transit service that will increase mobility and connectivity for the historically underserved communities in the corridor.

The Project helps to address mobility disparities and provide residents with increased access to employment, health, and education opportunities, which otherwise would be difficult to reach by transit.

Since initiating the Project, staff has conducted extensive outreach efforts to corridor communities, and has continued to engage project stakeholders through a variety of forums, platforms, languages, and access methods, including special outreach efforts to people of color, low-income, and limited English proficiency populations, and persons with disabilities. The Final EIS/R project refinements have been directly influenced by this engagement, as discussed above.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The Project supports the following strategic plan goals identified in Vision 2028:

- Goal 1: Provide high-quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling;
- Goal 3: Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity and;
- Goal 5: Provide responsive, accountable, and trustworthy governance within the Metro organization.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could defer or not approve the Project, not certify the Final EIR, and/or not adopt the Findings and Statement of Overriding Considerations or the MMRP. However, this action is not recommended as it would jeopardize the Project schedule and delay progress toward revenue operations by 2035. The current schedule also has right-of-way acquisitions commencing after the Record of Decision and a Construction Manager/General Contractor (CMGC) contract for pre-construction activities being awarded in 2024. Delaying the Project would delay these efforts and likely add cost.

NEXT STEPS

Upon Board approval, Project staff will file the Notice of Determination (NOD) for the Project with the Los Angeles County Clerk and State of California Clearinghouse and will work with the FTA to ensure the timely issuance of a Record of Decision.

Staff will continue to make progress on the Slauson/A Line to LAUS segment by working with downtown stakeholders to explore possibilities for a cost-effective alignment.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Executive Summary

Attachment B - MMRP

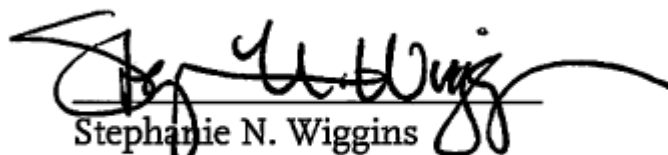
Attachment C - Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations

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