



**Board Report**

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**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE  
JULY 18, 2018**

**SUBJECT: ORANGE LINE BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT)  
IMPROVEMENTS**

**ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**RECOMMENDATION**

CONSIDER:

A. APPROVING:

1. A conceptual project description (the Project) including:
  - a. Gating at up to 35 at-grade crossings between the North Hollywood and Chatsworth Stations;
  - b. Grade separation and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) aerial station at Van Nuys Boulevard, with closure of Tyrone Avenue;
  - c. Grade separation and BRT aerial station at Sepulveda Boulevard; and
  - d. Grade separated Class I bicycle/pedestrian overcrossings at Van Nuys and Sepulveda Boulevards, while maintaining an at-grade, Class I bicycle path facility with signalization across these streets.
2. A determination that the Project is Statutorily Exempt, pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines Section 15275 (a); and

B. AUTHORIZING the Chief Executive Officer to file a CEQA Notice of Exemption (NOE) for the Project with the Los Angeles County Clerk.

**ISSUE**

In October 2017, the Board approved the findings and recommendations resulting from the Technical Study and a concept for improving Metro Orange Line (MOL) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) in accordance with Measure M (Legistar File 2017-0413). In February 2018, the Board Received and Filed a status

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update (Legistar File 2017-0742) for the MOL BRT Project. The report described progress on the initial design direction and determined that the Project could be found statutorily exempt, pursuant to CEQA. Various configurations of aerial stations including connectivity with ESFV and Sepulveda Pass projects have been evaluated, preliminary cost estimates updated and an approach to funding the project has been initiated. As a result, an updated project description has been developed. Board action on the updated project description is required for environmental clearance and to define the preliminary engineering work to be carried out in the next project phase. Board authorization to file the NOE is needed to implement this project and remain on schedule, per Measure M.

## **BACKGROUND**

The MOL BRT 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. Measure M also identifies funding for future conversion from BRT to Light Rail Transit (LRT) in FY2051. The addition of grade separations and gate systems would be consistent with the ultimate conversion of the MOL corridor to LRT, but does not commit the Board to doing so at this time, as this Project has independent utility because it improves the operation and capacity of MOL BRT, in accordance with Measure M. Additionally, the Project was also recently awarded an SB-1 Local Partnership Program Grant which provides a portion of funding for the BRT improvements in FY2019.

Since February 2018, further conceptual design, development and analysis of the Project have occurred, along with discussions with the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT). The purpose of this effort has been to confirm that the assumptions and methods developed to address traffic impacts due to the gates are in accordance with LADOT requirements. The MOL BRT Improvements project includes proposed aerial busway stations and bicycle/pedestrian grade separations at Van Nuys and Sepulveda Boulevards. The Project also includes proposed railroad-type gating at all at-grade crossings along the line, which extends approximately 18 miles from the North Hollywood Metro Red Line station to Chatsworth (Attachment A).

The conceptual designs developed for Van Nuys and Sepulveda Boulevards aerial grade separated stations allow for potential future connections between the MOL and the planned East San Fernando Valley (ESFV) and Sepulveda Transit Corridor projects. The ESFV transit project will further analyze the connectivity options and the construction schedules between the MOL and ESFV during the ESFV Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) phase. Ongoing coordination between the Sepulveda Transit Corridor feasibility study and MOL will be informed by the Sepulveda Transit Corridor feasibility study process, while MOL will be designed to accommodate a potential connection at one of the two proposed MOL aerial stations. Additionally, first/last mile design principles will continue to be applied to the Project as it transitions from conceptual to preliminary engineering.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Project Description**

The updated Project description proposes grade separated structures that would elevate the busway, bike path, and associated stations at Van Nuys and Sepulveda Boulevards. The aerial structure will

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require the closure of Tyrone Avenue. The Project also includes railroad-type gate systems at up to MOL crossings. Gating will improve safety, allowing an increase in the speeds of buses along the corridor to reduce travel times. However, it is important to note that changes in bus operations such as operating at increased headways and in two-vehicle platoons would need to be further evaluated and approved by Metro Operations in order to minimize the frequency of gate activation and delays to cross traffic without reducing overall passenger capacity on the MOL. Previously, a single aerial grade separation spanning Van Nuys Boulevard to Sepulveda Boulevard was proposed, but a more cost-effective and efficient design now includes separate aerial structures at each of these two arterial street crossings. Otherwise the project and cost refinement reflects the conceptual design development.

The following is the updated project description for the MOL Improvements project:

- Up to 35 at-grade crossings along the busway between the North Hollywood and Chatsworth Stations would receive four quadrant safety gates of the type used for LRT;
- Standalone aerial, grade separated busway and station structures at Van Nuys and Sepulveda Boulevards, which will be designed to accommodate the potential conversion to light rail transit (LRT);
- One minor street, Tyrone Avenue, would be closed to accommodate the busway grade separation structure;
- The Class I bike path adjacent to the span of the busway grade separation structures would be grade separated over Van Nuys and Sepulveda Boulevards; and
- An at-grade, Class 1 bicycle facility with signalization will be maintained at Van Nuys and Sepulveda Boulevards for local access.

While improving safety and reducing travel times for the MOL, the gate systems will increase vehicle delays and travel times for cross traffic. Staff is exploring operating buses at longer headways with two-vehicle platoons to enhance person carrying capacity while minimizing the frequency of gate activation and delays to cross-traffic without reducing overall passenger capacity on the MOL. Close coordination with LADOT will be required prior to implementation of gate systems along the MOL corridor, as LADOT would have design review and approval authority. The tradeoff of improved MOL BRT service and longer cross-traffic delay is consistent with principles included in Metro Vision 2028, Metro's Equity Platform Framework, the City of Los Angeles' Mobility 2035 General Plan Element and California Senate Bill 743 - Transportation Impacts (Steinberg, 2013).

### CEQA Determination

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) provides for Statutory Exemptions for certain activities and specified actions. According to CEQA Guidelines Section 15275 (a) "A project for the institution or increase of passenger or commuter service on high-occupancy vehicle lanes already in use, including the modernization of existing stations and parking facilities" may be considered statutorily exempt from the analysis required under CEQA (Attachment B). The proposed project improvements would meet the criteria in CEQA Guidelines Section 15272 (a), based on the following:

- The existing MOL BRT line is a "passenger or commuter service" because it is a public, passenger bus conveyance;

- The Project would increase passenger service because travel times would be improved over the No Build condition and passenger capacity would be enhanced due to substantial user benefits, measured in terms of “benefit hours,” that would be achieved in both the peak and off-peak periods, with the faster travel times resulting in greater ridership;
- Buses are considered high occupancy vehicles (HOVs), are allowed to use HOV lanes and therefore, the MOL BRT is an HOV facility;
- The Project improvements would occur within and/or adjacent to the existing MOL BRT facility right-of-way;
- The Project would increase passenger service on the MOL by improving BRT operations reducing travel times and improving safety by avoiding vehicle/BRT conflicts; and
- The Project has independent utility and logical termini because the Technical Study and subsequent study demonstrates that the Project improves MOL BRT operational and ridership performance; and
- This project is consistent with the intent of the legislature in establishing this Statutory Exemption to facilitate “passenger and commuter services” improvements to HOV lanes already in use.

Given the above, the proposed Project meets the definition of a statutorily exempt project described in CEQA Guidelines Section 15275(a) (Public Resources Code Section 21080(b)(11)) and is consistent with the intent of the legislature to facilitate “passenger and commuter services” improvements to HOV lanes already in use. Notwithstanding the project is statutorily exempt, Metro is committed to implementing measures, including design standards and best management practices, to reduce or eliminate potential new impacts, at its sole discretion.

### Community Outreach

During the environmental analysis, a tour of the gating system along the Metro Expo Line with key stakeholders in the San Fernando Valley was conducted. Community open houses were conducted on June 19th and 25th, 2018 as part of an on-going public outreach to ensure customers and stakeholders are informed of the project progress and have the opportunity to provide input. At these meetings, there was general support from the community for MOL improvements. Comments received include concerns pertaining to safety and security on buses and at stations, along with traffic impacts due to proposed gating at crossings. More than 190 people attended at least one of these meetings and the online webcast, including representatives from several elected officials and staff from the offices of several Metro Board of Directors.

Valuable input from more than 400 current riders was received through in-person surveys at MOL stations. Primary concerns by riders include bus overcrowding and frequency of the MOL. Other riders mentioned that service should be more frequent during peak times to accommodate more riders. A few stakeholders also commented on the safety and security on the line and that Metro should provide more security presence on stops further down the line (from the North Hollywood station). Metro will continue public outreach efforts along the corridor.

### **DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT**

This Board action will not have any adverse safety impacts on Metro’s employees and patrons. The

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Board is approving a project description and authorizing filing a Notice of Exemption; no operational changes or construction will result from this Board action.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Measure M provides \$286 million and the recently awarded grant from the SB-1 Local Partnership Program (LPP) provides \$75 million for MOL improvements, for a total of \$361 million in eligible, capital-specific revenues to the Project. A preliminary rough order of magnitude (ROM) cost estimate of the recommended Project, based on conceptual engineering, ranges from \$320 to \$393 million (YOE). A refined cost estimate will be determined after completion of the preliminary engineering (PE) phase.

Potential, additional sources of funding include a surplus of remaining Measure R funds on the MOL Canoga project. That project was funded from state and C25 money and completed in 2013. Per the Measure R Ordinance, any savings on a project goes back to the sub-region for another project. The Canoga extension funds require concurrence of the San Fernando Valley Council of Governments to be applied to this Project. Advancing Measure M project funds scheduled for FY 2051 for Orange Line light rail conversion to cover some costs of gating (which is in the FY 2051 project scope) might also be considered.

Should this funding source ultimately be considered for the Project when the LOP is established, staff will describe the considerations involved in using these revenue sources. If the Project is determined to have to be consistent with currently available resources, scope adjustments would be recommended to the Board, with priority being assigned to any safety-related investments and those advancing operational improvements to BRT in the corridor.

### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The Board could decide not to approve staff's recommendations. This is not recommended as this would impact the Project's environmental clearance schedule and Measure M construction groundbreaking date. The Board may also direct staff to advance other options. These options are identified below, along with staff's reasoning for why these options are not recommended.

1. Direct staff to eliminate the safety gating Project feature - this is not recommended because gating provides the most substantial safety and therefore travel time improvements, resulting in an increase in ridership.
2. Direct staff to advance additional grade separations - this is not recommended because the grade separations have a high cost relative to the benefits in improving MOL BRT or effect on cross traffic vehicle delay, while other intersections do not have the potential opportunity for systemwide transit connections that Van Nuys and Sepulveda Boulevards stations provide.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Should the Board approve of staff's recommendation, preliminary engineering will be initiated. When preliminary engineering is completed, project costs will be known with much greater precision,

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informed also by how MOL could connect with ESFV and potential Sepulveda Transit Corridor options. Staff will return to the Board following completion of preliminary engineering and the parallel study of the additional grade separations to study (Board Motion 2017-0729) to establish and request approval of the Life-of-Project (LOP) budget to commence construction phase activities and will indicate if the costs and revenues and related scope dictate that the Project be phased. Public outreach along the corridor will be ongoing.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Metro Orange Line BRT Improvements Project Map

Attachment B - Statutory Exemption Notice of Exemption

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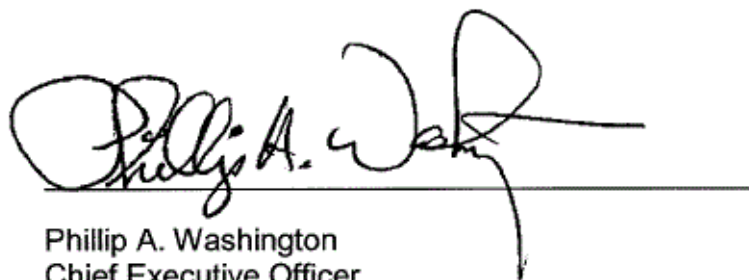
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