



## Board Report

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**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE  
OCTOBER 20, 2021**

**SUBJECT: LINK UNION STATION (LINK US) PROJECT**

**ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**RECOMMENDATION**

CONSIDER:

- A. APPROVING Addendum No.1 to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR); and
- B. ADOPTING a Revised Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) (Attachment A).

**ISSUE**

On July 1, 2020, new CEQA Guidelines have been implemented statewide pursuant to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 743, which requires assessment of transportation impacts using a Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) analysis approach. An updated transportation analysis for the Link US Project was prepared using the VMT analysis approach with applicable revisions to the Mitigation Monitoring Report Program (MMRP). Staff is requesting approval of Addendum No. 1 to the CEQA FEIR with a new VMT analysis along with design modifications to the FEIR Project resulting in no new impacts and no significant impacts other than those previously documented in the Link US Project FEIR, which was certified by the Metro Board of Directors in June 2019.

**BACKGROUND**

The Link US Project will transform how the commuter and intercity rail operates in Southern California with run-through capability at Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) providing one-seat rides from San Luis Obispo to San Diego, increasing commuter and intercity rail services, and accommodating future high-speed rail service.

The Link US Project is planned to be implemented in two phases:

- Phase A would include constructing the full viaduct structure over the US-101 freeway that accommodates up to nine (9) new run-through tracks, track, signal, and communication work in the throat area, run through platform, quiet zone ready improvements at Main Street grade crossing and active transportation improvements.

- Phase B would include raising of the rail yard up to 15 feet for the run-through track viaduct structure, new platforms, a new expanded passageway with retail and passenger amenities, escalators and elevators to all platforms, optimization of the throat with a new lead track and opportunity for a world-class transit station.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Metro Board of Directors certified the Link US FEIR in June 2019 with a transportation analysis based on a level of service (LOS) approach. Since then, new CEQA Guidelines were adopted pursuant to the requirements of Senate Bill (SB) 743 which was signed into law in 2013. SB 743 changed how lead agencies are required to evaluate transportation impacts under CEQA with the goal of better measuring the actual transportation-related environmental impacts of any given project. Traffic impacts are now measured in California pursuant to the requirements of SB 743 to better promote the state's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and traffic-related air pollution, promoting the development of a multi-modal transportation system and providing clean, efficient access to destinations. The new CEQA guidelines call for the use of a broader measure called Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), which measures the total amount of driving over a given area. On July 1, 2020, new CEQA Guidelines requiring a VMT Analysis in CEQA documents became mandatory statewide. California SB 743 was designed for projects such as the Link US Project which is centered on increasing regional rail capacity by up to 60 percent for LAUS, the largest multi-modal transit and rail terminal in Southern California.

Pursuant to the requirements of SB 743, staff replaced the LOS-based transportation analysis included in the Link US Project FEIR with a new VMT-based transportation analysis. This new transportation analysis was completed based on the current City of Los Angeles Transportation Assessment Guidelines (TAG) which was also updated to account for the SB 743 and the new CEQA requirements.

Staff recommends the approval of Addendum No.1 to the FEIR, available for viewing and download via <https://www.dropbox.com/s/7vtjqtymgb9gy0/Link-US-CEQA-Addendum-No.1.pdf?dl=0> <<https://gcc02.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dropbox.com%2Fs%2F7vtjqtymgb9gy0%2FLink-US-CEQA-Addendum-No.1.pdf%3Fdl%3D0&data=04%7C01%7CChioM%40metro.net%7C7b56a45519da4f1fd50508d9882708ba%7C%7C%7C637690523500031786%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWljiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzliLCJBTiI6IjEkaWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C1000&sdata=sZcZuLD6yOn8N3XapNVwm%2F4JGfvc0nwDMq9kPHxUVgU%3D&reserved=0>>, which includes:

- an updated transportation analysis using VMT analysis approach completed based on the new SB 743 CEQA requirements and the applicable revision to one mitigation measure under the topic of Transportation and Traffic;
- revisions to four (4) other mitigation measures included in the previously approved MMRP; and,
- minor design modifications to the FEIR Project.

## **Updated Transportation Analysis**

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A new CEQA transportation analysis with VMT analysis was prepared based on LADOT's updated TAG that includes new guidelines and methodology requirements based on a VMT analysis approach. The updated transportation analysis concluded the following:

1. Project improvements are consistent with the City of Los Angeles' adopted plans, programs, ordinances, and policies that focus on the on the safety and performance of the transportation system, including transit, roadways, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities (LADOTs updated TAG Threshold T-1);
2. The proposed Project would not cause any substantial VMT impacts associated with the land use development (retail/office/commercial space) proposed at LAUS (LADOTs updated TAG Threshold T-2.1);
3. The proposed Project would not substantially induce additional automobile travel (LADOTs updated TAG Threshold T-2.2);
4. The proposed Project would not substantially increase hazards due to a geometric design feature or incompatible use (LADOTs updated TAG Threshold T-3).

Based on the updated CEQA transportation analysis results summarized above, no new significant impacts beyond those previously identified in the Final EIR would occur. The updated transportation analysis was coordinated with and reviewed by staff at City of Los Angeles Planning Department, LADOT and Caltrans.

In addition, pursuant to SB 743 and Public Resources Code section 21099(b)(2), unsatisfactory LOS causing delay is no longer considered a significant impact under CEQA. Therefore, Mitigation Measure TR-2, "Install Traffic Signal: Metro shall install a new traffic signal at the intersection of Center Street and Commercial Street," in the approved MMRP dated June 2019 is no longer required and has been removed in the revised MMRP (Attachment A). Implementation of a traffic signal at the stop-controlled intersection of Center Street and Commercial Street could also result in higher vehicle speeds on Center Street and would not be consistent with the current efforts by City of Los Angeles and Metro to encourage walking and biking on Center Street as part of a larger plan to improve active transportation connections between LAUS and the surrounding communities.

### Revised MMRP

A Revised Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) (Attachment A) was included in Addendum No.1 to include the removal of Mitigation Measure TR-2, as well as required corrections and clarifications to four (4) other mitigation measures: HIST-1a, HIST-1c, HIST-4, HWQ-1. In addition, refinements to the implementation provisions of Mitigation Measures HIST-1d, HIST-2, and HIST-3 are also required to establish Metro as the enforcement agency during the compliance monitoring and reporting phase.

### Design Refinements to FEIR Project

Per the Link US FEIR, Platforms 2 and 3 at LAUS and their associated vertical circulation elements (VCEs) including elevators, escalators and stairs would need to be raised and modified after the completion of the Link US Project in the future (after year 2033) to accommodate High-Speed Rail (HSR) trains. This is due to different floor heights between Metrolink/Amtrak trains and future HSR trains (15-inches versus 51-inches from floor to top of rail elevations) and level-boarding

requirements for future HSR operations.

Through continued coordination with CHSRA, Southern California Regional Rail Authority (SCRRA) and California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA), Metro has refined the design approach for Platforms 2 and 3 and the adjacent tracks to allow for those platforms to be constructed to their ultimate planned elevation, so that Platforms 2 and 3 would be 36-inches or 3 feet higher than Platforms 4, 5, 6 and 7. The approach would require future lowering of the electrified tracks (Tracks 3, 4, 5, and 6) serving Platforms 2 and 3 to meet the level boarding requirements and constructing additional retaining walls in the station platform area. This approach will result in cost savings and reduced impacts to train operations and service interruptions since Platforms 2 and 3 and the associated VCEs would do not need to be modified in the future for HSR operations.

### Addendum No. 1

Staff is recommending approval of Addendum No.1 to the FEIR focused on the updated transportation analysis, changes to the FEIR MMRP and minor design refinements as with changes to the following applicable environmental topics addressed in the FEIR:

- Land Use and Planning
- Transportation and Traffic
- Aesthetics
- Air Quality and Global Climate Change
- Cultural Resources

Addendum No. 1 concludes that the updated transportation analysis, changes to the FEIR MMRP and minor design refinements will not result in any new significant impacts, or a substantial increase in the severity of impacts previously considered and addressed in the FEIR.

### **DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT**

The Link US project is being planned and designed in accordance with Metro and SCCRA standards, CHSRA, state and federal requirements. Approval of the Link US project will improve safety since the improvements will upgrade LAUS platforms and passageway to meet current fire and life safety standards, improve accessibility and circulation, and improve rail safety with modern signal equipment.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Approval of the Addendum No.1 to the FEIR and the revised MMRP would have no financial impact to the agency.

### Impact to Budget

There is no impact to the FY22 budget. The sources of funds secured to date for the Link US Project includes the State's TIRCP grant funds, High-Speed Rail funds, and previously approved and programmed Measure R 3% Commuter Rail funds.

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## **EQUITY PLATFORM**

Addendum No.1 to the Link US FEIR, which includes a new Vehicles Miles Traveled (VMT) analysis pursuant to SB 743, helps promote the state's goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and traffic-related air pollution, promoting the development of a multi-modal transportation system and providing clean, efficient access to destinations for all users of the transportation system, all of which align with the goals and objectives of the Link US Project.

The Link US Project will improve equity outcomes by:

1. Foster livable and healthy communities by increasing access to transit and reducing reliance on automobiles, resulting in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions and other harmful air pollutants. In addition, the Link US run-through tracks will reduce the times that Metrolink and Amtrak trains idle at LAUS, resulting in fewer emissions from Diesel locomotives. To communicate the expected outcomes and benefits of the Link US Project to the populations with limited English proficiency (LEP), project fact sheets, frequently asked questions (FAQs) and the Executive Summary of the FEIR were provided in other languages including Spanish, Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean.
2. Improve access to opportunities by providing multi-modal transit options and increasing connectivity for transit-dependent populations. The Link US Project will enable more frequent Metrolink and Amtrak services and accommodate future high-speed rail services, all of which expand access to jobs and services from other parts of the Southern California region and beyond for LA County residents.
3. Improve quality of life for low-income residents including those at the William Mead Homes, the first affordable housing project in the City of Los Angeles constructed in the 1950s and located within the Metro Equity Focused Areas, by:
  - a. A new sound wall that will be designed to reduce noise from both existing train operations and future increase in train operations; and,
  - b. Quiet-zone ready safety improvements at the railroad crossing on N. Main Street. A quiet-zone would significantly reduce the train horn noise in the area.
4. Improve accessibility and user experience for passengers at LAUS by:
  - a. Replacing all ramps between the passageway and the train platforms with ADA-compliant elevators and modern escalators;
  - b. Including additional transit amenities including restrooms, waiting areas, retail, etc.;
  - c. Improving wayfinding to allow more seamless transfer of transportation services by including new static and modern dynamic signage installations within the Project limits to be designed in English and Spanish and other accommodations to assist those with hearing and/or visual impairments.

Since the majority of the Census Tracts within the project study area contains minority and low-income populations and are located within Metro Equity Focus Communities accommodations were provided during and after the EIR process, including door-to-door canvassing to notify residents and business tenants about the various ways to provide input and to encourage participation, virtual meetings with simultaneous translation for Spanish, and multiple options for submitting comments via project website, postal mail, and/or telephone hotline.

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

The Link US project supports Strategic Goal 1: Provide high-quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling. The proposed run-through tracks would increase regional and intercity rail capacity and reduce train idling at Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS), enable one-seat rides from Santa Barbara County to San Diego County through LAUS, and accommodate a new high-quality transportation option such as HSR in Southern California.

The project also supports Strategic Goal 2: Deliver outstanding trip experiences for all transportation system users. The proposed new passenger concourse and the new outdoor plaza (West Plaza) would improve customer experience and satisfaction by enhancing transit and retail amenities at LAUS, and improving access to train platforms with new escalators and elevators.

Lastly, the project supports Strategic Goal 4: Transform LA County through regional collaboration and national leadership. The project requires close collaboration with many local, regional, State and Federal partners including City of Los Angeles, SCRRA, LOSSAN Authority, Caltrans, CHSRA, CalSTA, FRA and Amtrak.

### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The Board may elect not to approve the Addendum No.1 to the Link US Project FEIR and the revised MMRP. This is not recommended because the transportation analysis in the FEIR does not include a VMT analysis required in all CEQA documents statewide effective July 1, 2020 pursuant to SB 743.

### **NEXT STEPS**

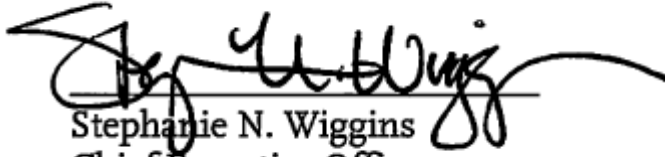
Approval of this action would allow the Link US project to be updated to the new CEQA standards. Staff will return to the Board for approval of the CM/GC preconstruction services and Final Design contract modification in early Spring.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment A - Revised MMRP

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