



Board Report

File #: 2021-0693, File Type: Project

Agenda Number: 8.

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
APRIL 20, 2022

SUBJECT: NORTH HOLLYWOOD TO PASADENA BUS RAPID TRANSIT CORRIDOR
PROJECT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION

CONSIDER:

- A. APPROVING the North Hollywood to Pasadena Bus Rapid Transit Corridor Project (a new, 19-mile long, at-grade bus rapid transit line with twenty-two (22) stations);
- B. CERTIFYING, in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR);
- C. ADOPTING, in accordance with CEQA, the:
 - 1. Findings of Fact, and
 - 2. Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program; 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

The North Hollywood to Pasadena Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Corridor Project (Proposed Project) would build a high-quality BRT line connecting the San Fernando and San Gabriel valleys, traveling east-west between the North Hollywood Metro B/G Line (Red/Orange) Station, the Memorial Park L Line (Gold) Station, and Pasadena City College (PCC). The Proposed Project is funded through Measure M and SB-1 funds with an anticipated opening date of 2024. It aims to meet the priorities set out in 'Metros Vision 2028 strategic plan <http://media.metro.net/about_us/vision-2028/report_metro_vision_2028_plan_2018.pdf> to offer high-quality mobility options and outstanding trip experiences while enhancing the quality of life of the communities it serves.

Metro is the CEQA Lead Agency and has completed the steps required for the Final EIR to be

considered for certification by the Board. The Executive Summary of the Final EIR is included as Attachment A. Certification of the Final EIR also includes approval of the Findings of Fact (Attachment B) and the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (Attachment C).

BACKGROUND

The Proposed Project is a 19-mile BRT corridor with 22 stations. The study area serves as a key regional connection between the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys and traverses the communities of North Hollywood, Burbank, Glendale, Eagle Rock, and Pasadena (Attachment D). Each community has dense residential populations and many cultural, entertainment, shopping, and employment areas throughout, including the NoHo Arts District, Burbank Media District, Glendale Galleria, Americana at Brand, Eagle Rock Plaza, and Old Pasadena.

Of the 700,000 daily trips in the study area, the majority of trips are destined to locations within the corridor, and only a third of these trips currently travel through the entire corridor from one end to the other. In addition, the overwhelming mode share is single occupant auto trips, as transit currently accounts for only 2% of trips despite the presence of Metro rail connections at both ends of the corridor. The key challenge for the corridor is to design a premium transit service that captures more of the travel market by offering competitive travel times, improved service reliability, better transit access and enhanced passenger comfort and convenience. Regional connectivity is also a key element of the Proposed Project, especially given that this is among the region's largest commuter sheds without a premium transit service and serves several Equity Focus Communities (EFCs).

[Metro Line 501 currently connects North Hollywood and Pasadena primarily via the SR-134 but has struggled to attract riders \(approximately 1,500 daily boardings pre-COVID\) in large part because it bypasses several major destinations along the corridor. The Proposed Project will offer a premium transit service connecting to these destinations with an estimated end-to-end travel time of approximately 70 minutes. This compares with an existing travel time of approximately 2 hours using a combination of existing bus lines such as 180, 92, 155, and 224. Additionally, the Proposed Project will greatly enhance service reliability by separating buses from the fluctuating traffic congestion, resulting in more consistent run times. The Proposed Project will also maintain its faster travel times and reliability even as traffic congestion continues to worsen over time. Further, the BRT will also include additional features that will enhance the customer experience. As a result, the Proposed Project is anticipated to attract approximately 30,000 daily riders when it opens](#)

In May 2021, the Metro Board approved staff's recommendation to adopt a refined version of the Proposed Project presented in the Draft EIR, which included refinements in Burbank and Glendale and two separate design options for Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock. Staff was also instructed to conduct additional stakeholder outreach and to continue coordinating with the corridor cities, particularly Burbank and Los Angeles (Eagle Rock), prior to completing the Final EIR. As a result of these additional efforts, staff worked with stakeholders to develop further refinements to the Proposed Project in Burbank and Eagle Rock. Details on the recommended refinements are provided in the discussion section below.

DISCUSSION

California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA)

As the CEQA Lead Agency and proponent for the Proposed Project, Metro has completed an EIR in

coordination with the cities of Los Angeles, Burbank, Glendale, and Pasadena. The EIR assessed the Proposed Project in addition to a No Project Alternative and an Improved Existing Bus Service Alternative. If the Metro Board certifies the Final EIR and approves the Proposed Project, thereby completing the CEQA environmental clearance, the Proposed Project will advance into pre-construction and construction activities.

Section 21086.6 of the California Public Resources Code requires that public agencies approving a project with an EIR adopt a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP). The purpose of the MMRP is to ensure that the measures identified in the Final EIR that mitigate the potentially significant environmental effects of the Proposed Project are implemented. Metro is responsible for assuring full compliance with the provisions of the MMRP. A full description of the mitigation measures is included in the MMRP.

Prior to Board approval of the refined Proposed Project in May 2021, Metro released the Draft EIR for a 64-day public review and comment period beginning on October 26, 2020 and ending on December 28, 2020. Metro also hosted two virtual Public Hearings. To increase public participation during restrictions on public gatherings and to prevent public health risks posed by COVID-19, the two hearings were held virtually via the Zoom online communication platform. During these two-hour meetings, staff presented information about the Proposed Project and allotted time for public members to provide both verbal and written comments.

An online virtual platform visited by 800 stakeholders was also available during the entire 64-day public review period to give the public as much opportunity to comment. The virtual platform allowed the public to view all meeting materials, including the meeting presentation, read more about the Proposed Project, access the Draft EIR, and leave written comments. Other means for the public to leave comments included a special hotline phone number, email, website, and via U.S. mail.

During the 64-day public comment period, nearly 450 comments were received through mail, email, voicemail, the website, and the two virtual public hearings. Approximately 280 of those comments were specific to Eagle Rock, including comments on a new community-developed proposal supported by many community members. The main comments received during the Draft EIR public review period are summarized as follows:

- Majority of comments supported and/or were not opposed to the Proposed Project;
- Most comments related to the different design options, particularly in Eagle Rock;
- Majority of Eagle Rock comments supported the Proposed Project with an overall preference for the new service to operate along Colorado Boulevard;
- There was significant support in Eagle Rock for the community-developed concept, which proposed reducing the number of general traffic lanes in order to accommodate the new dedicated bus lanes;
- Eagle Rock community emphasized the importance of consistency with the City of Los Angeles's Mobility Plan 2035; and
- Strong support for retaining existing bike infrastructure or introducing new bike infrastructure throughout the corridor, especially on Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock.

Responses to all comments received during the 64-day public review and comment period are contained in Chapter 4 of the Final EIR. Written responses were provided to all commenting agencies in accordance with CEQA Guidelines Section 15088(b).

Public Outreach

In response to the comments received on the Draft EIR, staff made several refinements to the Proposed Project, which were presented to and approved by the Board in May 2021. Following Board action, staff started work on the Final EIR and began an extensive community outreach effort. The primary purpose of the outreach was to present and gather feedback on additional refinements in Burbank and Eagle Rock made in the months following the May 2021 Board meeting. These outreach efforts, conducted throughout 2021 and into early 2022, are described in detail in the Outreach Summary (Attachment E), and are summarized as follows:

- **Virtual community meetings** held on September 23, 2021, for the Eagle Rock community and October 7, 2021, for the Burbank community.
- **Transit Application/Rider Intercept Surveys** were conducted in September and October 2021 via Metro's Transit Application and in-person at key bus stops with high ridership along Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock, Olive Avenue in Burbank, and the B/G Line (Red/Orange) station in North Hollywood.
- **Door to door outreach to businesses** on Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock and Olive Avenue in Burbank was conducted in November and December 2021.

In addition, Metro received a significant number of comments through the Project's email address and phone number during Fall 2021. Most of these comments were related to the design options in Eagle Rock and emphasized the need to preserve median space, minimize parking loss and reduce traffic impacts. City of Los Angeles Council District 14 (CD14) in Eagle Rock also conducted an in-person open house in October 2021. Metro staff attended the meeting to help explain the Proposed Project and answer questions.

Proposed Project

The Proposed Project described within the Final EIR is the result of further coordination with the cities and extensive community input, including recent refinements in Burbank and Eagle Rock. Staff's proposed refinements seek to strike a balance between many of the key elements from the community-developed proposal submitted during the Draft EIR public comment period and the many concerns and/or issues raised by the community of Eagle Rock as a whole. It also addresses the concerns raised in the City of Burbank. Conceptual renderings of the Proposed Project are contained in Attachment F.

The capital cost of the Proposed Project is currently estimated to be in the range of \$263 million to \$386 million, including contingencies and escalation. The estimated costs are based on a conceptual level of project design and will be further refined as design and engineering advances. The annual operating and maintenance cost is estimated to be approximately \$18.5 million. The attached Executive Summary to the Final EIR provides a detailed description of the proposed project.

The Proposed Project would generally include dedicated bus lanes on surface streets with adequate street width but will operate in general purpose traffic lanes on the freeway segments and in the City of Pasadena. Dedicated bus lanes are one of the most crucial components of BRT. In combination

with other BRT attributes such as transit signal priority, limited stops, all-door boarding, and enhanced stations, Bus lanes significantly improve bus speeds and service reliability by allowing for more consistent travel times and enhancing the customer experience. The implementation of these attributes ensures the BRT meets the project goals and objectives and maintains its high performance over time even as traffic congestion worsens.

The goals and objectives for the project are summarized as follows:

- Advance a premium transit service that is more competitive with private auto travel
- Improve accessibility for disadvantaged communities
- Improve transit access to major activity and employment centers
- Enhance connectivity to Metro and other regional transit services
- Provide improved passenger comfort and convenience
- Support community plans and transit-oriented community goals

A description of the Proposed Project by segment is provided below.

North Hollywood

The route would operate eastbound from the North Hollywood station between Chandler Boulevard and Vineland Avenue in a side-running bus lane and westbound, sharing the general traffic lane. The route would then operate on Vineland Avenue between Chandler Boulevard and the SR-134 freeway interchange (primarily in center-running bus lanes, transitioning to or from a general-purpose traffic lane near the SR-134 freeway). Lastly, the route would continue east via the SR-134 freeway to Pass Avenue. Proposed stations would be located at North Hollywood Station, which offers connections to the Metro B Line (Red) and G Line (Orange), and on Vineland Avenue at Hesby Street in the North Hollywood Arts District.

Burbank

The route would operate on the SR-134 freeway between Lankershim Boulevard and Olive Avenue. Eastbound service would be provided via Pass Avenue and westbound service would be provided along Hollywood Way to access the SR-134 freeway at Alameda Avenue. The route would then operate along Alameda Avenue and Buena Vista Street to/from Olive Avenue in a combination of curb and side-running bus lanes.

During the Draft EIR public review and comment period and during on-going coordination with the City, concerns were raised regarding the implementation of curb-running dedicated bus lanes on Olive Avenue, particularly between Buena Vista Street and Victory Boulevard. The City's primary concerns centered around the potential elimination of on-street parking and the narrowing of sidewalks needed to accommodate the bus lanes.

In response to the concerns, an additional side-running design option for Olive Avenue was introduced. This option converts one traffic lane in each direction to bus lanes between Buena Vista Street and Lake Street. Under this option, the existing parking and sidewalk widths would remain unchanged and have no significant effects on traffic. For these reasons and based on additional feedback received, the original curb-running option between Buena Vista Street and Lake Street was removed from further consideration and the side-running option was evaluated in the Final EIR.

Lastly, the route would then operate in general traffic over the Olive Ave bridge before transitioning to/from curbside bus lanes in Downtown Burbank. Along Glenoaks Boulevard between Olive Avenue and Alameda Avenue the Project includes a combination of general-purpose traffic lanes and center-running bus lanes.

Proposed stations in Burbank would be located on Olive Avenue at Riverside Drive, Alameda Avenue at Naomi Street to serve the Burbank Media District, Olive Avenue at Verdugo Avenue, Olive Avenue at Lake Street to serve the Burbank - Downtown Metrolink Station, and Olive Avenue at San Fernando Boulevard to serve Downtown Burbank.

Glendale

The route would operate via Glenoaks Boulevard in center-running bus lanes between Alameda Avenue and Central Avenue. Proposed stations along Glenoaks Boulevard would be at Alameda Avenue, Western Avenue, Grandview Avenue, and Pacific Avenue. The route would continue on Central Avenue between Glenoaks Boulevard and Broadway (combination of general-purpose traffic lanes and side-running bus lanes) and continue along Broadway between Central Avenue and Colorado Boulevard (combination of curbside and side-running bus lanes). Proposed stations would be located along Central Avenue at Lexington Drive in Downtown Glendale, Broadway at Brand Boulevard (near the Americana and the Glendale Galleria), Broadway at Glendale Avenue and Broadway at Verdugo Road.

Eagle Rock

In May 2021, the Board approved two median/center-running design options for Colorado Boulevard east of Eagle Rock Boulevard to the SR-134 at Linda Rosa Avenue. One option reduced the number of traffic lanes to one in each direction (based on the community-developed proposal) and the second option maintained two existing traffic lanes in each direction (based on the original Route Option F1 in the Draft EIR). Both design options were advanced through further design and evaluated at an equal level of detail in the Final EIR. Proposed stations would be located along Colorado Boulevard at Eagle Rock Plaza, Eagle Rock Boulevard, and Townsend Avenue.

Additional refinements to the Proposed Project were also incorporated into the Final EIR. These further refinements were a result of continued coordination with the City of Los Angeles and aimed to better accommodate the City's planned curbside extensions as part of an Active Transportation Program; landscaped median space; parking preservation; enhanced bicycle lane infrastructure; traffic and pedestrian circulation; and additional traffic safety features. Based on further coordination with the City of Los Angeles and additional feedback from the community, staff recommends incorporating the design option of converting one travel lane in each direction to BRT lanes.

Pasadena

The bus would operate via the SR-134 freeway between Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock and Fair Oaks Avenue in Pasadena before taking Walnut Street to Raymond Avenue. The route would then operate north/south on Raymond Avenue between Walnut Street and Colorado Boulevard and east/west along Colorado Boulevard between Raymond Avenue and Hill Avenue. All segments would operate in general-purpose traffic lanes. Proposed stations would be located on Raymond Avenue at

Holly Street to serve the Memorial Park L Line (Gold) Station and Old Pasadena, as well as on Colorado Boulevard at Los Robles Avenue serving the Paseo Colorado and Playhouse District, at Lake Avenue to serve the South Lake Avenue neighborhood, and on Hill Avenue at Pasadena City College (PCC).

Proposed Project Benefits

As discussed above, the EIR also assessed a No Project Alternative. The No Project Alternative is required by CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6 (e)(2) and assumes that the Proposed Project would not be implemented by Metro. The No Project Alternative allows decision-makers to compare the impacts of approving the Proposed Project with the impacts of not approving the Proposed Project.

While the No Project Alternative results in no new potential environmental impacts, not implementing the Proposed Project would eliminate its associated benefits. These include improved transportation access and connectivity to jobs, education, medical facilities, and the regional transit network. Other additional benefits include reduced regional vehicle miles traveled (VMT), improved air quality, and opportunities for Transit-Oriented Communities. The No Project Alternative also fails to serve the Equity Focus Communities (EFCs) along the Project corridor.

Final EIR

The Proposed Project included in the FEIR was analyzed under all CEQA resources for both construction (temporary) and operation phases and was determined to have no significant and unavoidable impacts. There was a total of 16 potentially significant impacts related mostly to construction; however, these are temporary and can be reduced to less than significant with mitigations. If the Metro Board certifies the EIR and approves the Proposed Project, thereby completing the CEQA environmental clearance process, the Proposed Project will be eligible to commence construction activities. The full Final EIR is available online via the Metro website and can be accessed directly at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/sh/s4loxkf0hqpvf7/AABc2Fb3EIYcqVosm7dKC2Ca?dl=0>.

Public Release of Final EIR

The Final EIR was released on March 25, 2022, 34 days in advance of this Board meeting to allow the public sufficient time to review. The Project team developed a robust notification strategy to maximize awareness of the final planning phase of the Project, including electronic notification to the project stakeholder database with links to access the Final EIR electronically on the website. Requests for hardcopies can be submitted via email at RMC@metro.net or via the records request portal at <https://records.metro.net/>.

Filing of Notice of Determination

A Notice of Determination (NOD) is a notice filed with the County Clerk's Office and State Clearinghouse following Proposed Project approval, describing the Project and identifying any expected environmental impacts. Staff will be filing the NOD for the Proposed Project with the Los Angeles County Clerk and the State of California Clearinghouse following Board approval.

EQUITY PLATFORM

This Board action will approve the Proposed Project, certify the FEIR, and advance the Project to the

next design and construction activities phase.

The Proposed Project area includes several Equity Focus Communities (EFCs). The Proposed Project would provide the benefits of enhanced mobility and improved regional access for transit riders within the study area. The Proposed Project would also provide multiple access points for people living in EFCs along the corridor that would allow them to connect with the greater regional transportation network and key destinations. These access points include 10 planned stations located in EFCs. Improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities are also planned as part of the Proposed Project, including the upgraded bike lanes on Colorado Boulevard in Eagle Rock which were added to the Proposed Project in response to feedback received from the community. Additionally, any potential impacts to existing facilities within these communities would be addressed by a set of proposed mitigations during both construction and operation of the Proposed Project to ensure safe and easily navigable options. Such mitigation measures would include, for example, wayfinding signage, lighting, and access to pedestrian safety amenities (such as handrails, fences, and alternative walkways) during construction and coordinating with the cities and communities along the corridor to resolve potential bicycle conflicts and identify network enhancements that integrate bicycle and BRT facilities.

The outreach strategy for the Proposed Project was designed to engage with historically marginalized groups through the use of multilingual outreach materials (English, Spanish, Armenian, Tagalog), live-translation during meetings, accessible meeting times and locations, regular updates via a mailing list, and transit-intercept surveys to reach current riders who were otherwise unable to attend meetings. The Proposed Project team provided robust stakeholder engagement and focused outreach activities to better engage transit riders and EFCs to inform the environmental review and the ultimate recommendations going before the Board.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The recommendations in this report support the following goals outlined in the Metro Vision 2028 Strategic Plan:

- Strategic Goal #1: Provide high-quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling;
- Strategic Goal #2: Deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system; and
- Strategic Goal #3: Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

Recommended actions will not have any impact on the safety of Metro customers and/or employees because this Proposed Project is in the planning phase and no capital or operational impacts result from this Board action.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Approval and adoption of the Proposed Project would have no financial impact to the agency.

Impact to Budget

With Board approval of the Proposed Project and certification of the Final EIR, the CEQA process will be complete. Approval of the Proposed Project will allow the Proposed Project to move forward with on-going pre-construction and construction activities. The Proposed Project has capital funding programmed into the Metro financial forecast based on the cost estimate prepared for the Measure M Expenditure Plan of approximately \$267 million with an additional \$50 million in SB1 funds, for a total of \$317 million. These funds are within the midrange of the current capital cost estimates but below the high end of the range. As these funds are earmarked for the Proposed Project, they are not eligible for Metro bus and rail capital and operating expenditures.

The current FY 2022 budget includes \$2,039,643 in Cost Center 4240, Project 471401 (North Hollywood to Pasadena BRT Corridor). Since this is a multiyear contract, the Cost Center Manager and Chief Planning Officer will be responsible for budgeting in future years for the balance of the remaining Proposed Project budget.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could defer or not approve the Proposed Project, certify the Final EIR, or adopt the Findings of Fact and MMRP. However, this action is not recommended as it would jeopardize the Proposed Project schedule. Delaying the Proposed Project would delay these efforts and could add cost.

NEXT STEPS

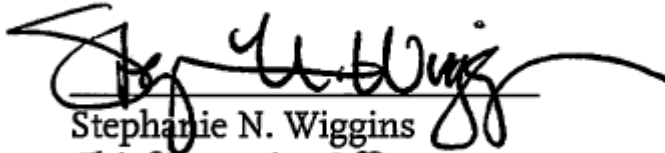
Upon Board approval, staff will file the Notice of Determination for the Proposed Project with the Los Angeles County Clerk and State of California Clearinghouse. Following on-going Preliminary Engineering of the Project, it can then advance into Final Design and Construction. Metro staff will continue to coordinate with local jurisdictions on the implementation and necessary approvals of the Proposed Project.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A - Executive Summary of Final EIR
- Attachment B - Findings of Fact
- Attachment C - Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program
- Attachment D - Map of Proposed Project
- Attachment E - Outreach Summary
- Attachment F - Conceptual Renderings of Proposed Project

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