



Board Report

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Agenda Number: 9.

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE JANUARY 19, 2022

SUBJECT: WEST SANTA ANA BRANCH TRANSIT CORRIDOR PROJECT

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION

CONSIDER:

- A. APPROVING the Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) as the terminus for the 19.3-mile West Santa Ana Branch (WSAB) Project; and
- B. APPROVING the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) as Slauson/A Line (Blue) to Pioneer Station with the Maintenance and Storage Facility located in the City of Bellflower; and
- C. ACCELERATING the Slauson/A Line to LAUS segment before Measure M Expenditure Plan FY 41-43 by:
 - Identifying a cost-effective alignment route in lieu of the all-grade separated configuration currently assumed for the Slauson/A Line (Blue) to Union Station segment;
 - Reengaging the community to best define a project, including alignment profile, station locations, and design, that meets the changing mobility needs of Little Tokyo, Arts District, LAUS and surrounding area residents, employees, and businesses;
 - Preparing a separate environmental document for this segment; and
- D. IDENTIFYING interim bus connections to connect Slauson/A Line to Union Station, as part of the Slauson/A Line to LAUS Segment study.

ISSUE

Metro is the lead agency for the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) EIR clearance, and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is the lead agency for the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) EIS clearance. The Draft EIS/R is a combined document satisfying the NEPA and CEQA requirements. Board action on the selection of an LPA is needed to prepare the Final EIS/EIR to avoid schedule delays. The Measure M Ordinance identified a "FY28-30" segment, an approximately 6-mile segment for \$1 billion with the opening date of 2028 to 2030, and a "FY41-43" segment for

approximately \$3 billion (in 2015 dollars) with an opening date of 2041 to 2043. This 6-mile first segment delineation was included in the Measure M Expenditure plan presented to the Board in March 2016.

The Draft EIS/EIR project cost estimates for the alternatives, based on 15% level of design, are higher than the prior estimate in the Measure M Ordinance and Long-Range Transportation Plan. The entire project's cost from the southern terminus to downtown Los Angeles increased from \$4.0 billion to \$8.567 billion (not including Little Tokyo Station), in current dollars.

Board approval of the **LAUS as project terminus** for the 19.3-mile WSAB Project, represents the commitment of this Project as an important project to address regional mobility, equity, and environmental and economic benefits for the Gateway Cities.

With Board approval of the **Slauson/A Line to Pioneer 14.8-mile segment as the LPA**, Metro staff will proceed with completing a Final EIS/R by early 2023 for this segment, allowing for groundbreaking in 2023 and delivery of this 14.8-mile segment by **FY33-35**.

In parallel, staff will conduct the study to identify a cost-effective alignment route in lieu of the all-grade separated configuration currently assumed for the **Slauson/A Line (Blue) to Union Station 4.5-mile segment**. This study will be concurrent to conducting the Final EIS/R for the Slauson/A Line to Pioneer segment. This will provide an opportunity to lower the project capital cost, make it competitive for New Starts, and reengage the community to best define a project, including station design and locations, that meets the changing mobility needs of Little Tokyo, Arts District, LAUS and surrounding area residents, employees, and businesses. This will provide an opportunity to address several comments received from the Little Tokyo community related to the Little Tokyo station location and design. This is intended to accelerate opening the Slauson/A Line to LAUS segment sooner than the Measure M Expenditure Plan in FY41-43.

BACKGROUND

The Project is a proposed light rail transit (LRT) line along a 19-mile corridor from southeast Los Angeles County to downtown Los Angeles serving the cities and communities of Artesia, Cerritos, Bellflower, Paramount, Downey, South Gate, Cudahy, Bell, Huntington Park, Vernon, unincorporated Florence-Graham community and downtown Los Angeles. This rail corridor is anticipated to serve commuters in a high travel demand corridor by providing relief to the limited transportation systems currently available to these communities. Population and employment densities in areas around the project are five times higher than the LA County average. This rail corridor seeks to increase access to opportunities and resources for transit riders in a high-travel demand corridor that is populated by a majority minority community - with many individuals and families who live below the poverty line (44%) and many households (18%) who do not own a car. In addition, the Project is expected to provide a direct connection to the Metro C Line (Green), Metro A Line (Blue), and the LA County regional transit network.

Any project development can be broken down into five milestones - feasibility, environmental, design, construction, and post-construction. The WSAB is in the Draft EIS/R stage. In order to advance to the next major milestone, the Final EIS/R needs to be approved by the FTA. To complete the Final

EIS/R, selection of the LPA is a key step. With this approval, staff will proceed with completing the Final EIS/EIR and seeking the ROD on this first segment of the project from FTA. The Record of Decision (ROD) for a project is issued on a project with a known timeline and with local funding commitment.

The FTA published the Notice of Intent (NOI) pursuant to NEPA in the Federal Register on July 26, 2017, and Metro first issued a Notice of Preparation (NOP) pursuant to CEQA on May 25, 2017, informing the public of the intent to prepare a combined Draft EIS/EIR for the Project and notifying interested agencies and parties of public scoping meetings. The Draft EIS/EIR was released for public review on July 30, 2021, for public review and comment for 45-days which was then extended to a 60-day public review period through September 28, 2021, to provide additional time for public to respond. A summary of the Draft EIS/EIR findings is included below, along with the staff recommendation for the LPA.

DISCUSSION

I. Alternatives Evaluated in the Draft EIS/EIR

A detailed description of each of the alternatives is provided in the Executive Summary to the Draft EIS/EIR (Attachment A). The full Draft EIS/EIR is available on the Project website at:

<https://www.metro.net/projects/west-santa-ana/>. In addition to a No-Build Alternative, four Build Alternatives, two design options, and two site options for a maintenance and storage facility (MSF) are evaluated in the Draft EIS/EIR (Attachment B). Table 1 includes a detailed listing of the project components for each alternative:

- Alternative 1: Los Angeles Union Station to Pioneer Station
 - Design Option 1: Los Angeles Union Station - Metropolitan Water District (MWD)
 - Design Option 2: Addition of Little Tokyo Station
- Alternative 2: 7th St/Metro Center to Pioneer Station
- Alternative 3: Slauson/A Line (Blue) to Pioneer Station
- Alternative 4: I-105/C Line (Green) to Pioneer Station
- Paramount MSF site option
- Bellflower MSF site option

Table 1: Summary of Build Alternatives Project Components

Project Components Alternatives	Build Alternatives			
	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4s
Alignment length	19.3 miles	19.3 miles	14.8 miles	6.6 miles
Length of underground, at-grade, and aerial	2.3 miles underground; 12.3 miles at-grade; 4.7 miles aerial ¹	2.3 miles underground; 12.3 miles at-grade; 4.7 miles aerial ¹	12.2 miles at-grade; 2.6 miles aerial ¹	5.6 miles at-grade; 1.0 mile aerial ¹
Station configurations	11 2 underground; 6 at-grade; 3 aerial ³	12 3 underground; 6 at-grade; 3 aerial	9 6 at-grade; 3 aerial	4 3 at-grade; 1 aerial
Parking facilities	5 (up to approximately 2,795 spaces)	5 (up to approximately 2,795 spaces)	5 (up to approximately 2,795 spaces)	4 (up to approximately 2,180 spaces)
At-grade crossings	31	31	31	11
Elevated street crossings	25	25	15	7
Capital cost (2020\$) with MSF ⁴ , ^{5, 6}	\$8.5 billion – \$8.8 billion	\$9.2 billion – \$9.5 billion	\$4.9 billion – \$5.1 billion	\$2.3 billion – \$2.6 billion
Annual O&M cost ⁴ (2020\$)	\$87 million	\$101 million	\$67 million	\$41 million

Source: Prepared on behalf of Metro in 2021

Notes: ¹ Alignment configuration measurements count retained fill embankments as at-grade.

² The light rail tracks crossing beneath freeway structures.

³ Under Design Option 2 - Add Little Tokyo Station, an additional underground station and TPSS site would be added under Alternative 1.

⁴ 2020\$ refers to dollar values assumed in Fiscal Year 2020.

⁵ Costs range from the low end (with the Bellflower MSF site option) to the high end (with the Paramount MSF site option).

⁶ The capital cost estimates will be further refined as the project advances through the project development process and more detailed engineering is undertaken.

MSF = maintenance and storage facility; O&M = operation and maintenance; TPSS = traction power substation

The Paramount MSF site option is a 22-acre rectangular site located in the City of Paramount. The MSF site currently includes the Paramount Swap Meet, Paramount Drive-in Theatre and its associated parking and industrial properties. Vehicular access to the proposed site is currently provided from All American City Way. At full capacity, the MSF would be designed to store up to 80 light rail vehicles (LRVs) and provide over 200 parking spaces for MSF staff and required lead tracks, resulting in additional property and traffic impacts.

The Bellflower MSF site option is a 21-acre site located in the City of Bellflower. The city-owned site is currently developed with a recreational commercial business (the Hollywood Sports Paintball and Airsoft Park and Bellflower BMX). Vehicular access to the proposed site is currently provided from Somerset Boulevard. At full capacity, the MSF site option would be designed to store up to 80 LRVs and provide over 200 parking spaces. The MSF site is adjacent to the project alignment, and tracks

would be constructed within the Metro-owned Pacific Electric Right-of-Way (PEROW). Table 2 shows a comparison of the Paramount and Bellflower MSF options:

Table 2: MSF Site Option Comparison

Considerations	MSF Site Options	
	Paramount MSF Site	Bellflower MSF Site
MSF site size	22 acres	21 acres
LRV capacity	Up to 80 LRVs	Up to 80 LRVs
Capital cost	\$681 million	\$458 million
Number of acquisitions needed (excluding lead track)	4 parcels	2 parcels
Number of displaced businesses	5 existing businesses	2 existing businesses
Acquisitions of residential property (including lead track)	Yes (8 additional parcels)	No

Source: Metro 2021x

Note: LRV = light rail vehicles; MSF = maintenance and storage facility

The updated project cost for the alternatives in downtown are in the range of \$470 to \$490 million a mile (Table 3), significantly higher than the southern segment since the downtown segment (approx. 4 miles) is primarily underground making it more expensive as compared to a primarily at-grade alignment with aerial grade separations in the south.

Table 3: Updated Project Cost for the Alternatives (in current dollars)

	Bellflower MSF	Paramount MSF	Cost/mile
Alt 1: Union Station to Pioneer (including Little Tokyo Station) (19.3 miles)	\$9.1 B	\$9.3 B	\$470-480 M/mile
Alt 2: 7 th St/Metro Center to Pioneer (19.3 miles)	\$9.3 B	\$9.5 B	\$480-490 M/mile
Alt 3: Slauson/A Line to Pioneer (14.8 miles)	\$4.9 B	\$5.1 B	\$330-345 M/mile
Alt 4: I-105/C Line to Pioneer (6.6 miles)	\$2.3 B	\$2.6 B	\$350-390 M/mile

II. Public Outreach

The Draft EIS/EIR was released for for public review and comment for 45-days which was then extended to a 60-day public review period through September 28, 2021 to provide additional time for public to respond. Noticing of its release was done in accordance with CEQA and NEPA regulations and included two rounds of notices to announce details of the release of the Draft EIS/EIR as well as to provide information on the Public Hearings and comment methods. Public notification was made through direct mail (approximately 60,000 stakeholders), door-to-door drop-offs (approximately 50,000 properties), legal notices, social media posts and ads, E-blasts, SMS text messages (over 450 numbers), press releases, notices on the project website, information booths at local events, pop

-up at Metro rail stations, and other methods. The Notice of Availability was distributed to 261 agencies via USB drives which included an electronic copy of the Draft environmental document.

During the 60-day public review period, Metro hosted four Virtual Public Hearings, four Virtual Community Information Sessions and over 19 pop-up booths for in-person engagement at locations throughout the Project corridor. In addition, Metro held approximately 20 briefings to key stakeholders, elected officials, corridor cities, and other agencies. In total, approximately 452 formal comments were received during the public review period. Comments were received via various methods, including oral comments at the Public Hearings, online submissions, project email submissions and in-person at the pop-up events. A majority of the comments (199) were submitted via the online SmartComment Form. Comments were also received from approximately 20 public agencies, four elected officials, 13 businesses, and 16 Community Based Organizations (CBOs). Table 4 below depicts the numbers of formal comments received and the sources of comment submission.

Table 4: Formal Comments on the Draft EIS/EIR

Formal Comment Count on the Draft EIS/EIR	
SOURCE	QTY
Virtual Public Hearings (oral)	53
SmartComment Form	199
Project Email	159
Pop Up Events	10
Post Mail	31
TOTAL OFFICIAL COMMENT SUBMISSIONS	452
Helpline Inquiries (unofficial)	29

Approximately 193 submissions received expressed a preference between alternatives. Of these submissions, 45% supported Alternative 1: Union Station; 30% supported Alternative 2: 7th Street/Metro Center; and 28% were in favor of either alternative to achieve a connection to downtown. Of the 33 submissions from agencies, cities and other stakeholders that expressed a preference between alternatives, approximately 67% supported Alternative 1. Fourteen (14) of the submissions opposed to Alternative 1 are related to Little Tokyo. One of the submissions opposed to Alternative 1 attached a survey of residents of the Savoy and Mura buildings. When asked about Alternative 1, 102 participants indicated that they were strongly opposed. Thirty-six (36) participants provided additional comments within the survey expressing opposition to Alternative 1 and/or Design Option 2. Some of these survey participants also may have submitted comments through the public comment website. When asked about Alternatives 2, 3, and 4, collectively, 92 participants expressed support.

III. LPA Selection

Metro released a Draft EIS/EIR for the WSAB Project in July 2021. The Draft EIS/EIR included cost estimates for the alternatives based on 15% level of design that are higher than the prior estimate in the Measure M Ordinance and Long-Range Transportation Plan. The entire project's cost from the southern terminus to downtown Los Angeles increased from \$4.0 billion to \$8.567 billion. Because of the increase in cost, there is a significant funding gap.

Staff Recommendation A requests the **Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS)** as the terminus for the 19.3-mile WSAB Transit Corridor.

As outlined in the WSAB Funding Plan (received and filed by the Board on December 2, 2021), the proposed funding strategy would address the financial shortfall with a more aggressive federal New Starts grant strategy. The funding plan includes approximately \$3.15 billion of additional New Starts for the first Slauson/A Line to Pioneer segment of the project (segment 1) and \$850 million more in state funds to complete this first segment. The estimated construction schedule delivers the Project by **FY33-35** in advance of the Measure M Ordinance that delineates delivery of the Pioneer to C (Green) Line/I-105 by FY 28-31 but includes delivery of C (Green) Line/I-105 to Downtown Segment by FY 41-43.

Therefore, it is recommended that **Slauson/A Line (Blue) to Pioneer Station segment** be selected as the LPA with the Maintenance and Storage Facility located in the City of Bellflower. This is consistent with FTA's preference to issue a Record of Decision (ROD) for a project **with a known timeline and with local funding commitment**. To environmentally clear the Project to Slauson/A Line at this time would allow the Project to complete the ROD within the Measure M Expenditure Plan timeline. With this approval, staff will proceed with completing the Final EIS/EIR and seeking the ROD on this first segment of the project. This timely ROD fits within the 2-year New Starts/ Project Development window and will help start construction on the project sooner for this first segment. This proposed Board action allows for completion of the project from Slauson/A Line (Blue) to Pioneer Station, a much larger initial segment of 14.8-miles compared to a 6-mile segment, by FY33-35, in advance of the Measure M Ordinance FY41 date schedule for the second segment.

To ensure the Metro Board and Measure M commitment to connect the Project to downtown Los Angeles, staff is seeking Metro Board's approval on **selecting LAUS as the project terminus**.

The underground portion from Slauson to LAUS segment is currently estimated to cost \$4.2 billion alone (in current dollars) including the Little Tokyo Station. This segment of 4.5 miles represents 23% of the total 19.3 miles but is 46% of the total cost.

To help deliver the Slauson/A Line to LAUS segment sooner than the Measure M Expenditure Plan in FY41-43, staff is seeking approval from the Metro Board to conduct additional study to identify a cost-effective alignment route in lieu of the all-grade separated configuration currently assumed for the Slauson/A Line (Blue) to Union Station segment, concurrent to conducting the Final EIS/R for the first segment. This will provide an opportunity to lower the project capital cost, make it competitive for New Starts, and reengage the community to best define a project, including station design and locations, that meets the changing mobility needs of Little Tokyo, Arts District, LAUS and surrounding area residents, employees, and businesses and especially, address comments received from the Little Tokyo community related to the Little Tokyo station location and design. After completion of this study, staff will prepare a separate environmental document for the Slauson/A Line (Blue) to Union Station segment, to get the project ready for construction, and to seek additional funding sources and open it prior to the Measure M opening date in FY41-43. Staff will work on addressing interim bus connections from the Slauson/A Line to LAUS as part of the downtown study.

Also, in developing a funding strategy for this segment, staff proposes to work with the Board to identify and seek new funding sources, such as pension fund investments, explore trade-offs such as utilizing highway funds, continue exploring the feasibility and potential benefits of public private partnerships, including a project development agreement for Slauson/A Line to LAUS segment, and other ways to align available funding with Metro's priorities.

Based on major considerations for an MSF site that include potential environmental impacts, stakeholder support and cost, staff is recommending the Bellflower MSF site. Overall, the Bellflower MSF site would require fewer acquisitions, displace fewer businesses, and have lower capital cost (approximately \$458 million) compared to the Paramount MSF site (approximately \$681 million). Therefore, the **Bellflower MSF site option** is the preferred site. Staff will continue to work with City of Bellflower staff to accommodate a future city open space on the parcel where the MSF would be located, with this future open space to be designed, environmentally cleared, and maintained by the City.

Staff will be hosting a series of briefings for key board staff and board members, Gateway COG Transportation Committee, Eco-Rapid Transit JPA Board, WSAB City Managers Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), and Gateway Cities City Managers Steering Committee to provide an update on the LPA Board action. In addition, staff will host a briefing(s) for state and federal elected officials.

Staff in coordination with project corridor cities will be live-streaming the board meeting at key locations along the project corridor to enable the public to visit an in-person location that is most convenient to provide comments. A few key locations include:

- **Artesia:** Albert O. Little Community Center (18750 Clarkdale Ave, Artesia, CA 90701)
- **Cerritos:** Cerritos Center for the Performing Arts (18000 Park Plaza Dr Cerritos, CA 90703)
- **South Gate:** City Hall, Council Chambers (8650 California Ave, South Gate, CA 90280)
- **Huntington Park:** City Hall (6550 Miles Av, Huntington Park, CA 90255)
- **Downtown LA:** Para Los Ninos Charter Elementary School (1617 E. 7th St, Los Angeles, CA 90021)
- **Downtown LA:** Japanese American National Museum (100 Central Ave, Los Angeles, CA 90012)

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

Approval of the Draft EIS/EIR and selection of an LPA will not impact the safety of Metro's customers or employees.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The FY21-22 budget contains \$4,487,319 in Cost Center 4370 (Mobility Corridors), Project 460201 (WSAB Corridor Administration) for professional services. Since this is a multi-year contract, the Cost Center Manager and Chief Planning Officer will be responsible for budgeting in future years.

Impact to Budget

The funding for this project is in the Measures R and M Expenditure Plans. As these funds are earmarked for the WSAB Transit Corridor project, they are not eligible for Metro bus and rail capital and operating expenditures.

EQUITY ASSESSMENT

This Project will benefit communities with the addition of a new high quality, reliable transit service which will increase mobility and connectivity for the historically underserved and transit-dependent communities in the corridor. The WSAB Transit Corridor is comprised largely by Environmental Justice (EJ) communities and Equity Focus Communities (EFC). In 2017 (the first year of environmental analysis), people of color comprised 65 percent of the total Study Area population, with Hispanic/Latino groups alone accounting for 51 percent of the total population. In addition, 47 percent of Study Area residents live below the poverty level, which is higher than the county average of 33 percent. Attachments C and D depict the minority and low-income populations along the WSAB Corridor. Within the Study Area, approximately 19 percent of households do not have access to their own car compared to approximately 9 percent of households in LA County as a whole. This indicates that a significant number of households in the Study Area depend on transit as their primary mode of transportation.

Metro is pursuing TOC Corridor Baseline Assessments to support corridor communities in identifying strategies to equitably leverage the positive benefits on the transit investment while also preparing for potential unintended consequences around issues like gentrification and displacement. Other efforts to support corridor communities include the TOC Grant Writing Assistance Program that supports cities in securing grants around affordable housing and community stabilization and the TOC Technical Assistance Program that supports cities around Affordable Housing and Community Stabilization. As part of a related effort, Metro conducted the WSAB Transit Oriented Development Strategic Implementation Plan (TODSIP) (May 2019) to help cities along the corridor conduct planning studies in preparation of the proposed project.

Since initiating the Project study, staff has conducted extensive outreach efforts for corridor communities, and has continued to engage project stakeholders through a variety of forums and platforms, including special outreach efforts to reach out to people of color, low income, limited English proficiency populations, and persons with disabilities. For example, trilingual (English/Spanish/Japanese) meeting notices, and multilingual project fact sheets, eblasts, and newspaper advertisements were developed. As well, information booths and pop-up tables were also staffed by multilingual staff at local community events, popular destinations, and back-to-school-night events along the project corridor. Staff remains committed to continued extensive engagement and outreach efforts with corridor communities during the development of the Final EIS/EIR. Metro staff will also reengage corridor communities during any additional environmental study to deliver the downtown segment sooner, as directed by the Board. Special outreach efforts will continue to be made to reach out to people of color, low income, limited English proficiency populations, and persons with disabilities.

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 decide to not select an LPA at this time. This is not recommended as it would result in further delays to the Project, making it difficult to meet the Measure M Expenditure Plan schedule. Alternately, the Board could decide to make additional alignment changes or request to add stations or grade-separations or select another Alternative as the Project's LPA. All these will result in project schedule delays, as it will require redesign, reevaluation of environmental analysis which has the potential to delay the Final EIS/R completion. Depending on the environmental impacts associated with these new elements a recirculation of the document might be required, therefore, further delaying the Final EIS/R completion. In addition, these new project elements will increase project cost. However, this is not recommended as the Draft EIS/EIR identified Slauson/A Line to Pioneer Station as the preferred alternative in consideration of the benefits, costs, environmental impacts, and financial capacity.

NEXT STEPS

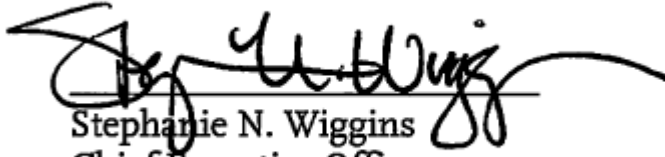
After selection of an LPA, staff will update its request to FTA to enter into project development and initiate work on the Project's Final EIS/EIR. Staff anticipates returning to the Board in March 2022 for Contract Modification for the Final EIS/R and the downtown study. In the meantime, work staff will continue coordination with key agencies and stakeholders to get further clarifications on the Draft EIS/R comments [and funding advocacy](#). Staff anticipates Metro Board Certification of the EIR, along with consideration of project delivery method (P3 or other method) in Fall of 2022, and then approaching the FTA to obtain a Record of Decision (ROD) in spring 2023.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A - WSAB Draft EIS/EIR Executive Summary
- Attachment B - WSAB Build Alternatives Map
- Attachment C - Percent Minority Population
- Attachment D - Percent Low-income Population

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