

**Board Report**

File #: 2023-0026, **File Type:** Motion / Motion Response**Agenda Number:** 9.

**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
APRIL 19, 2023****SUBJECT: RAIL TO RIVER ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION CORRIDOR - SEGMENT B****ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE****RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE the update on funding for the Rail to River Active Transportation Corridor - Segment B Project.

ISSUE

At the October 2022 Board Meeting, the Board approved a Motion 10.1 by Directors Dutra and Hahn (Attachment A) directing staff to consider and include the State's "Reconnecting Communities/Highway to Boulevards Program" and the federal "Reconnecting Communities" and "Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Program", as possible funding sources for the Rail to River Active Transportation Corridor - Segment B Project. Staff was also directed to return to the Board in April 2023 with more details on these programs, including eligible uses of the funds, the agency responsible for managing the funds, the next funding cycle and grant application due dates, evaluation criteria, and examples of local projects that have been funded through these programs.

BACKGROUND

The Rail to River Segment B Project is the eastern segment of the longer Rail to Rail/River Active Transportation Corridor. The western segment, Segment A, is currently in construction and includes approximately six (6) miles of active transportation facilities connecting the new Metro K (Crenshaw) Line Fairview Heights Station to the Metro A (Blue) Line Slauson Station. Segment B extends the corridor four (4) miles east from the Metro A Line to the Los Angeles River, traversing a small segment of unincorporated Los Angeles County and the cities of Huntington Park, Maywood, and Bell (Attachment B), for a total of ten (10) miles of active transportation infrastructure.

In August 2022, the Board received the Rail to River Segment B Supplemental Alternatives Analysis (SAA) Study findings and approved the staff's recommendation to maintain Randolph Street as the preferred alignment, including a strategy for both near-term and long-term active transportation improvements, particularly in the western part of the corridor (roughly between Holmes Avenue and State Street) that will eventually share right-of-way (ROW) with the future West Santa Ana Branch (WSAB) (Legistar File #2022-0129). At that same time, the Board directed staff to return in October 2022 with a funding plan to further develop Rail to River Segment B, including environmental

clearance, design, and construction.

At October 19, 2022, Planning and Programming Committee meeting, staff informed the Board that it would be difficult to determine a funding plan until the project design and cost estimates were further developed in coordination with the cities and other related and funded projects on Randolph Street. Therefore, staff was advancing Segment B into the next phase of environmental review, including design work in support of potential future grant applications. This advanced work would better define the project and assist with determining grant funding needs and eligibility (Legistar File #2022-0626).

At that same meeting, staff also provided a list of potential funding sources that Segment B could potentially seek later in coordination and cooperation with the cities (Attachment C). The Board then approved a motion (Attachment A) directing staff to return in April 2023 with more details on the following three new grant programs: Reconnecting Communities/Highway to Boulevards Program, Reconnecting Communities Program; and the Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Program.

DISCUSSION

Below is a brief description and summary of the three new grant programs that could potentially serve as additional funding sources for Segment B.

Reconnecting Communities/Highway to Boulevards Program (RC: H2B)

The RC:H2B program is a competitive grant program administered by Caltrans for planning or implementing the conversion or transformation of underutilized state highways into multimodal corridors that serve residents of underserved communities historically divided by transportation infrastructure. Funding will be made available to support both Planning and Capital Construction Grants, with 100% of the program funds to be awarded to projects that benefit underserved communities. A total of \$149 million in Fiscal Year (FY) 2022/23 funding has been made available for the program.

Metro and/or the jurisdictions along the Segment B corridor are eligible to apply for the RC:H2B Planning Grants. However, only facility owners may serve as the recipient of the Capital Construction Grants. Eligible planning activities are aligned with the federal Reconnecting Communities Pilot (RCP) program described below and include community engagement, planning or feasibility studies, environmental review, project plans and design documents, and other planning activities eligible under the federal RCP program. Examples of eligible capital activities include detailed design, permitting, right of way (ROW) certification, construction activities, etc.

Since the draft guidelines for the RC:H2B first cycle of funding are still in development, there are currently no examples of local projects funded by this program. Below is the projected timeline for the first cycle of funding for the RC:H2B Program. More information on this program can be found at <https://dot.ca.gov/programs/local-assistance/fed-and-state-programs/rc-h2b>.

Draft Milestone Schedule*	Date
Call for Projects	Late Spring/Early Summer 2023
Application Workshops	Summer 2023

Project Application Deadline	Late Summer/Early Fall 2023
Project Award Notification	Late 2023/Early 2024
Funding Available	Early 2025 to Mid-2026

*Schedule subject to change

Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program (RCP)

Administered by the United States Department of Transportation (USDOT), the RCP is a competitive grant program that funds efforts dedicated to reconnecting communities previously cut off from economic opportunities by transportation infrastructure. Funding will be available for both Planning and Capital Construction Grants, with approximately \$250 million available for planning activities and approximately \$750 million available for capital construction activities over a period of five years.

Eligible planning activities include public engagement, planning and feasibility studies, environmental review, and other transportation planning activities. Eligible construction activities include certain preconstruction design activities and environmental studies, permitting activities, and the removal, retrofit, mitigation, or replacement of an existing eligible facility with a new facility that restores community connectivity. Metro and/or the Segment B corridor cities are eligible to apply for the Planning Grants. However, Metro must submit a joint application with the facility owner(s) to be eligible for the Capital Construction grants. Local jurisdictions are eligible to apply for the Capital Construction Grants as facility owners.

Applications for the first funding cycle were due on October 13, 2022, with Metro submitting one application for the I-710 Humphreys Avenue Crossing Project. Awards for Cycle 1 were released on February 28, 2023. Two projects in LA County received funds as part of this first round of funding: \$30 million to the City of Long Beach for the Shoreline Drive Gateway Project and \$2 million to the City of Pasadena for the SR-710 Northern Stub Re-envisioning Project. To date, no information has been released on a future Cycle 2. Further information on the RCP can be found at <https://www.transportation.gov/grants/reconnecting-communities>.

Neighborhood Access and Equity Grants Act (Federal funding)

The Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant Act is a competitive grant program administered by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) for restoring community connectivity by removing, replacing, or retrofitting highways and freeways or other transportation facilities that create barriers to community connectivity and for planning and capacity building to increase community involvement in transportation planning and related activities. This program prioritizes grants that fund projects in economically disadvantaged communities or meet certain other criteria.

There is still limited information available on this new grant funding program, and additional information is needed to determine whether this project will be eligible. Evaluation criteria, application timeline, and other specifics have not yet been released, though the federal government has indicated that the funding notice will be released in Spring 2023. General Information on this grant can be found at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5267>.

EQUITY PLATFORM

The Rail to River Segment B project is anticipated to benefit marginalized communities by investing

in and advancing active transportation improvements in historically underserved, low-income communities of color, resulting in improved active transportation options for regional connectivity and improved access to jobs, education, health, and other recreational activities. Based on the 2019 Equity Focus Community (EFC) criteria and thresholds, which was the latest information available at the time of the SAA, the majority (85%) of the project area qualifies as an EFC. As Segment B moves forward into the next phase of design and environmental review, the new 2022 EFC criteria and thresholds will be applied, although the findings are expected to be very similar. The surrounding study areas are represented by 98% communities of color, compared to 73.5% for Los Angeles County. The low-income population (those earning an annual income of less than \$41,500) within the study area is 28.3%, compared to 17% for Los Angeles County. Given these demographics, the Segment B corridor represents a strong need for investment in active transportation infrastructure and can leverage this need to help obtain grant funding.

Additionally, due to all of the outreach efforts conducted to date, the key stakeholders and communities along the corridor have consistently expressed their preference for active transportation improvements along Randolph Street. Various outreach efforts were undertaken during the SAA to elevate community voice, including multiple bilingual surveys, community pop-up events, six community meetings, as well as numerous technical briefings and Community Advisory Committee meetings. Overall, more than 1,000 stakeholders (agencies, organizations, and community members) provided input during the SAA.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The Rail to River Segment B project will achieve bike and pedestrian improvements, connect to transit, and grow and expand transportation in South LA and Southeast LA County. 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: Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity; and
- Strategic Goal #3: Provide responsive, accountable, and trustworthy governance within the Metro organization.

NEXT STEPS

Metro staff will continue advancing Segment B into the next phase of environmental review, which includes project development work that can support potential future grant applications. Staff is currently seeking technical assistance in support of this work and anticipates awarding a contract for these services in late Summer 2023. Staff will continue to monitor all potential funding opportunities and grant application deadlines. Metro has a program to provide technical grant writing assistance to small cities as well. As project development activities advance, Metro staff will support local jurisdictions in submitting grant applications as appropriate to meet grant program criteria and schedule.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - October 2022 Board Motion

Attachment B - Map of Segment B

Attachment C - List of Segment B Potential Funding Sources

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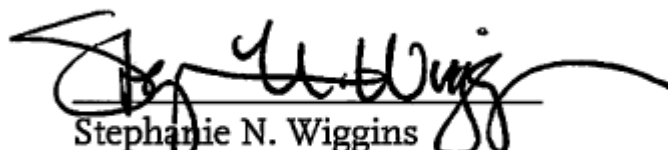
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