



Board Report

File #: 2017-0742, **File Type:** Project

Agenda Number: 19.

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE FEBRUARY 14, 2018

SUBJECT: ORANGE LINE BUS RAPID TRANSIT IMPROVEMENTS

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE update on the status of the environmental clearance, grade separations, railroad type quad gating, and community outreach for the Metro Orange Line (MOL) Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Improvements.

ISSUE

At the October 26, 2017 meeting, the Board adopted Motion 15.1 (Attachment A) to include additional grade separations as viable alternatives in the environmental analysis for the Orange Line Bus Rapid Transit MOL BRT corridor; and requirement to coordinate with the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) on more detailed traffic analysis regarding impacts of the staff's recommended project on local streets. This report provides an update on the staff's approach to advancing the grade separation/gating scope which is in line with the Board's motion and proceeding forward with a statutory exemption.

BACKGROUND

The basis for staff's approach to advance the grade separation/gating scope emerged from the Orange Line BRT Improvements Technical Study that was presented to the Planning and Programming Committee in October 2017:

- Implement Measure M projects on schedule and identify approaches to accelerate delivery when possible; and
- Do so in a manner consistent with available resources without disrupting committed funding and schedules of other Measure M projects.

The MOL BRT is notable in that it is fully funded with Measure M dollars and has a ground breaking date of FY 2019. With no "other funds" indicated in the Measure M Ordinance, it is clear that the project is expected to be delivered at cost and with equivalent dedicated Measure M funds.

It was clear from the technical analysis (presented in October 2017) that an on-time delivery within the ordained budget could not accommodate a project that heavily emphasized grade separations as the principal solution to implementing the project description in Measure M: MOL BRT improvements with critical grade separation(s) implemented early through Operation Shovel Ready.

More importantly, the technical analysis did indicate a project scope that could, within the budget, deliver a project that achieved key BRT safety and performance objectives within Measure M-driven parameters of schedule adherence and available resources: the recommended project scope combining grade separation from Sepulveda to Van Nuys and gating the cross street traffic. Further, that combined project scope achieved superior performance objectives than other alternatives studied in the technical analysis, including constructing the grade separations indicated in the motion.

The staff's recommendation was to advance the grade separation/gating scope and to evaluate the applicable environmental determination, ranging from a statutory exemption to an environmental impact report.

DISCUSSION

The Board's directive to "carry the seven potential stand-alone grade separations identified in the consultant report forward into the environmental process for further consideration **as project alternatives**" (emphasis added) presents some notable trade-offs in terms of schedule delay and potential cost increases in the event the final project is an environmentally cleared alternative that exceeds the available funding currently identified.

Considering these trade-offs, and in keeping with the commitment and expectation to deliver projects on-schedule and within budget, staff will pursue a complementary parallel analysis, aligned with the prior recommended grade separation/gating project scope, to evaluate a "not to preclude" design strategy that would explicitly accommodate implementation of additional grade separations to the MOL BRT corridor in the future, should additional funding be realized.

This approach honors the Board's overall commitment to Measure M's timely implementation, while allowing continued exploration of enhancements consistent with Motion 15.1's spirit of flexibility.

Environmental Review

Staff initiated the public engagement, environmental review, engineering support, and coordination with LADOT on the recommended project: grade separation from Sepulveda to Van Nuys and gating at-grade crossings. Based on existing conditions, community input, and analysis of the project schedule impact, staff determined that this project is statutorily exempt (SE) under California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Section 21080(b)(11) of the Public Resources Code. Staff has initiated preliminary design for the grade separation between Van Nuys and Sepulveda, and gating other intersections of the MOL, as well as studying the project effects to noise, traffic, visual, construction, and operations, in order to minimize the impacts of the project.

Additionally, staff is designing and analyzing an elevated bike path between Van Nuys and Sepulveda Boulevards. This was part of the recommended project in order to provide bike commuters a more direct connection to the stations as compared to the existing, adjacent Class 1 bike path, encourage more bicycle use, and further enhance safety for bicyclists and pedestrians. There are two design

options being considered including an elevated continuous bikeway structure adjacent to the proposed elevated busway structure from Sepulveda to Van Nuys, or elevated bikeway structures only at Sepulveda and Van Nuys Boulevards. The at-grade bike path would remain under both design options. Staff will continue to develop the design of the bike path grade separation and evaluate its potential benefits and impacts.

Community Outreach

In late November/early December, staff conducted the initial round of community outreach for the Metro Orange Line Improvements Project. This robust effort included three open house meetings in North Hollywood, Canoga Park and Van Nuys, an innovative online webinar intended to reach diverse audiences and in-person surveys at our busiest Orange Line stations.

More than 100 people attended at least one of these meetings, including representatives from the offices of L.A. Councilmember and Metro Board Director Paul Krekorian, L.A. Councilmember Nury Martinez, L.A. Councilmember Bob Blumenfield, L.A. Councilmember Mitchell Englander, Congressman Tony Cardenas, and California Senator Bob Hertzberg. We also received valuable input from more than 600 current riders through our in-person surveys at the Orange Line stations.

Metro staff is now reviewing all the comments received from the surveys and community meetings and advancing the project through the environmental review and design work. Attachment B contains a summary of the comments received and survey results.

Metro will continue to build awareness and understanding of the proposed project with key San Fernando Valley stakeholders by making project presentations as well as facilitating tours of the gating system along the Metro Expo Line in the first half of 2018. Staff will also engage current riders through outreach at stops and stations and through attendance and participation in large community events, with a continued focus on reaching Spanish-speaking Valley residents. The Project website, e-blasts and Metro's social media channels, will be used to keep the community updated on the Project. Following completion of the next phases of technical work, Metro expects to hold another round of community meetings in summer 2018.

Coordination with LADOT

As early as January 2017, staff began preliminary feasibility discussions about using railroad gate mechanisms on the MOL with City staff (LADOT) on the recommended grade separation/gating project scope. Recognizing that the recommended gating concept is common on all Metro rail facilities in the City of Los Angeles, and also a unique and non-traditional application for improving MOL safety, efficiency, and potentially improving overall traffic delays for motorists, staff is working cooperatively with City staff on two main fronts. Staff is coordinating with the City in implementing a pilot installation of railroad gates at a non-public traffic signal controlled signalized intersection on the MOL to test and verify the reliable activation and proper operation of gates for BRT application, both during normal operations as well as during failure modes. This particular intersection was selected because it will not impact traffic flow on public streets and will not cause undue delays for motorists, while at the same time will provide a realistic environment for Metro and City staff to thoroughly test various simulations and operation of the gates. Staff is currently advancing this pilot work by preparing design drawings and submitting them to the City for review and concurrence after which staff will procure a contractor and start the installation of pilot gates by summer 2018.

Staff is working with the City on a second parallel phase to develop a comprehensive traffic impact analysis of adding gates at busway crossings with city streets. Through a series of ongoing meetings and coordination, staff has incorporated feedback received from LADOT into the documents that have been submitted thus far. The documents include gating concepts showing physical improvements needed to support the gates (e.g., medians, lane closures, right turn channelization, etc.) for each intersection where gates are being proposed. Gating concepts will be used as a basis for traffic signal phasing and impact analysis. Staff has also prepared and shared with City a concept of operations document, a detailed technical gate feasibility assessment, and the assumptions and methodologies that will be used to conduct a comprehensive detailed traffic impact analysis.

This traffic impact analysis, which will include development of a model design concept and simulations to verify the anticipated traffic impacts due to gating, will also be shared with the City for their review and feedback. In fact the City will be engaged at every step of the process in terms of gathering data to populate the traffic model, documenting the calibration and validation of the model to replicate existing traffic operations, verifying the proposed gate operation and traffic signal phasing sequence for each crossing, and identifying ultimate scenarios to evaluate the potential impacts to traffic from gate operations. The traffic impact analysis has been initiated and is expected to be completed by late spring 2018, with LADOT being engaged throughout the evaluation of analysis results, to ensure the proposed gating system achieves the stated project goals while creating minimal additional delays for Valley vehicle traffic.

In conjunction with the development of the traffic impact analysis, Metro and City staff will continue coordination efforts to develop preliminary designs of gating at selected intersections to identify and resolve engineering challenges in order to improve safety, efficiency, and traffic impacts along the alignment.

Based on the traffic impact analysis and input from the City, Metro will initiate preliminary engineering designs for each intersection where gates are being proposed. The design plans will incorporate necessary treatments to maintain the current parallel bike path that is on the MOL alignment. In addition, staff will incorporate the findings from the pilot gate project into the design plans. Based on the preliminary engineering designs acceptable to the City, staff will develop cost estimates for implementing the gates and evaluate the cost implications on the project's current budget.

Due to the tight project schedule that must be adhered to in order to meet the commitments made to voters in Los Angeles County, Metro and City staffs are working in lock-step to meet the deadlines established by Measure M, and look forward to ongoing proactive cooperation between both parties to ensure the MOL improvements are delivered on time and within budget.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue with preliminary design for the grade separation between Van Nuys and Sepulveda, traffic analysis based on gating other intersections of the MOL, as well as studying the project's potential effects to the environment and surrounding community in order to minimize impacts. Coordination with LADOT to evaluate impacts of gating on traffic in the MOL corridor will continue as described herein. Staff will document the analysis findings and determination for the SE and will update the Board in summer 2018. Attachment C contains the Project Schedule.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Board Motion 15.1 dated October 26, 2017

Attachment B - 2017 MOL Community Outreach

Attachment C - MOL Project Schedule

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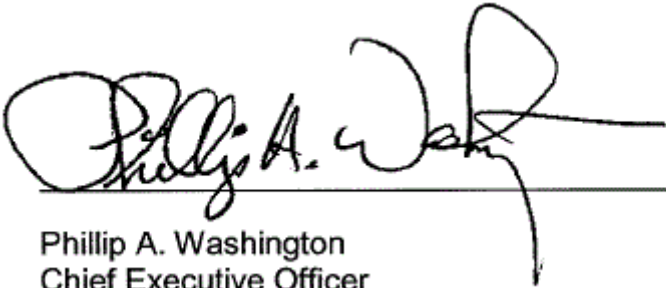
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