



Board Report

File #: 2017-0743, File Type: Project

Agenda Number: 20.

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE FEBRUARY 14, 2018

**SUBJECT: LOS ANGELES UNION STATION FORECOURT AND
ESPLANADE IMPROVEMENTS**

ACTION: CERTIFY FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT AND RELATED ACTIONS

RECOMMENDATION

CONSIDER:

- A. CERTIFYING the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR);
- B. AUTHORIZING the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to file a Notice of Determination with the Los Angeles County Clerk and State of California Clearinghouse;
- C. ADOPTING the:
 - 1. Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and
 - 2. Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP); and
- D. APPROVING Alternative 3 as the Preferred Alternative.

ISSUE

The Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) Forecourt and Esplanade Improvements (Project) include pedestrian and bicyclist improvements on Alameda Street, Los Angeles Street and the Union Station Forecourt that were identified in the Union Station Master Plan Implementation Program that was presented to the Metro Board in October 2014. After considerable internal and external stakeholder outreach and technical study, staff is recommending that the Board: adopt and certify the Final EIR with **Alternative 3** as the Preferred Alternative; adopt the Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations and the MMRP; and authorize the CEO to file a Notice of Determination (Attachment A). The Project, alternatives, and the environmental process are described in the Statement of Overriding Considerations. The Final EIR, Findings of Fact/Statement of Overriding Considerations, and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program are available at <https://www.metro.net/about/union-station/la-union-station-forecourt-and-esplanade/>.

DISCUSSION

The project will reconfigure the public right-of-way in front of Union Station and the LAUS forecourt to expand pedestrian and bike facilities on Alameda and Los Angeles Street and create a civic plaza in front of the station (Attachment B, Project Map). Staff has secured approximately \$18M in grant and matching funds (Attachment D, Funding Table) to design and implement all of the Project improvements with the exception of the forecourt, for which staff is actively seeking funds.

The Los Angeles Union Station (LAUS) Forecourt and Esplanade Improvements (Project) elements described in the Draft EIR include:

- Alameda Esplanade: Roadway configuration on Alameda Street between Arcadia Street and Cesar E. Chavez Avenue to narrow the roadway and widen pedestrian and bicyclist facilities.
- Los Angeles Crossing: Consolidated raised intersectional crossing at Alameda and Los Angeles Street, closure of a portion of Los Angeles Street north of the raised median (while maintaining two-way travel on Los Angeles Street in the portion south of the median) and closure of the northern LAUS driveway and re-incorporation of the unidirectional existing buffered bike lane.
- LAUS Forecourt: Repurposing the existing surface parking lot as a new civic plaza with sustainable features.
- Arcadia Street: Repurposing the northern travel lane as a dedicated El Pueblo tour bus parking zone.

Project Goals and Purpose and Need

LAUS is the core of Metro's public transportation system and is at the center of several historic and culturally significant communities in Downtown Los Angeles. The Project will improve passenger safety, create a great place, and improve connectivity for those travelling to and from LAUS.

Alameda Street, within the project boundaries, has a high incidence of severe and fatal collisions. It is among the 386 corridors that represent 6% of Los Angeles' street miles wherein 65% of all deaths and severe injuries involving people walking and biking occur. Between 2012 and 2016, there were two fatalities at the intersection of Alameda Street and Los Angeles. Improving pedestrian safety is thus a core objective of the project.

The Project was informed by the following objectives that were developed through the master planning and Connect US Action Plan processes:

1. Protect and enhance LAUS as a national historic resource by advancing clear sight lines and view sheds to the station.
2. Prioritize connectivity, convenience, and safety for the most vulnerable users (pedestrians, bicyclists, transit patrons and community stakeholders) to safely navigate to and from the project site.
3. Advance desirable and accessible public space at the LAUS forecourt that creates a visually porous and permeable connection between Union Station and the surrounding historic and

cultural communities.

4. Facilitate alternatives to driving by providing infrastructure that enables more walking and bicycling.
5. Enhance the safety and quality of pedestrian and bicycle connections between the station and El Pueblo Historic Monument, Father Serra Park, Olvera Street, and nearby businesses and neighborhoods.
6. Advance sustainability by providing for reduced consumptive water use in a cost-effective manner and improve multimodal facilities that encourage active transportation and reduction in vehicle miles traveled.
7. Advance comprehensive planning for LAUS that leverages it as the major regional transportation hub, a destination, and one of the city's foremost landmarks.

Environmental Analysis

The Project was analyzed through an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Additionally, Metro has secured Active Transportation Program grant funds that include federal monies. The use of federal funds triggers the requirement for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The California Department of Transportation, acting on behalf of the Federal Highway Administration will serve as the Federal Lead Agency. Consistent with the provisions of 23 Code of Federal Regulations §771.117(a)(c)(2), it is anticipated that a Categorical Exclusion will be used to demonstrate compliance with NEPA.

The EIR Notice of Preparation was published on December 22, 2016 (with a 30-day public comment period) and the Notice of Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) was published on August 11, 2017 (with a 45-day public comment period). The Project was analyzed under all CEQA issue areas and was found to have no impacts or less than significant impacts in 14 issue areas, less than significant impacts with mitigation measures in 3 issue areas (Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, and Hazards/Hazardous Materials), and significant and unavoidable impacts under Transportation and Traffic due to an increase in motor vehicle delay at selected intersections during AM and PM peak hour travel.

Mitigation Measures

The Final EIR includes a total of nine mitigation measures for the Biological Resources issue area (one mitigation), Cultural Resources issue area (four mitigations), and the Hazards and Hazardous Materials issue area (four mitigations). Metro is the Responsible Agency in implementing and monitoring the mitigation measures. A full description of the mitigation measures is included in the MMRP.

Significant and Unavoidable Impacts: Transportation and Traffic

The State of California adopted Senate Bill 743 (SB743) in 2013 which changes how transportation impacts are measured by moving from measuring vehicle delay measured at intersections and along roadway segments using a metric known as level of service (LOS) to instead measuring projects by the reduction of vehicle miles travelled. The CEQA Guidelines have not yet been updated to reflect this change, therefore, because the impact measure is specific to level of service, the Project results

in significant and unavoidable impacts. If the CEQA Guidelines had been updated to incorporate SB743, very likely as it relates to transportation and traffic, there would be no significant transportation and traffic impacts.

Under current CEQA guidelines (without SB743 implementation), the Project will result in significant and unavoidable impacts in the Transportation and Traffic issue area.

The Project results in significant and avoidable impacts because it increases motor vehicle delays at select study intersections during AM and PM peak hour travel. The Draft EIR Project resulted in 17 significant study intersection impacts which translate to a significant impact under CEQA. Typical mitigation measures for vehicular delay call for roadway widening, which would directly conflict with the project objectives. Therefore, no feasible mitigation measures were identified.

Alternatives

CEQA requires that an EIR describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project or to the location of the project that could feasibly avoid or lessen any significant environmental impacts while substantially attaining the basic objectives of the project. An EIR should also evaluate the comparative merits of the alternatives. This section describes potential alternatives to the proposed project that have been carried forward for analysis in comparison to the potential environmental impacts associated with the proposed project.

Three alternatives were evaluated:

- Alternative 1 “no project” alternative (required by CEQA) will leave the current conditions in place;
- Alternative 2 “full closure” would fully close Los Angeles Street between the El Pueblo crosswalk/101 Freeway and Alameda Street and restrict tour bus parking on Arcadia Street to off-peak hours (all other project components would remain); and
- Recommended Preferred Alternative 3 “modified left-turn”, would be similar to the project on Los Angeles Street, but would restrict left hand turns from eastbound Los Angeles Street onto northbound Alameda Street, restrict Arcadia Street tour bus parking to off-peak hours, and incorporate a two-way bicycle path in the expanded El Pueblo plaza; all other project components would remain.

All three alternatives performed better than the Project, but still do not reduce impacts to less than significant level. Alternative 2 resulted in 9 significant study intersection impacts. Alternative 3 resulted in 11 significant study intersection impacts.

Outreach

The Project was a component of the Union Station Master Plan and the Connect US Action Plan; both efforts included extensive stakeholder engagement. In addition, staff led a robust outreach program during the preparation of the EIR. The Scoping public comment period lasted forty-five days from August 11 to September 25, 2017. During this period, several briefings and meetings took place with local community groups, community members, elected officials, public agencies, and other stakeholders. Similar briefings were held upon the release of the Draft EIR and in advance of Metro's public workshop at Metro Headquarters on September 13, 2017 with 30 members of the public

present. In total, over 80 briefings were held with public and private stakeholders; Attachment C includes a summary of the stakeholder engagement during the environmental process.

During the Draft EIR public comment period, a total of ~~36~~ 35 written comments were received and six commenters spoke during the September 13 public workshop. Broadly, the comments focused on the following topics:

- Cultural and Archeological Resources
- Traffic
- Improved bicycle safety and connections
- Homelessness
- Accessibility Needs
- Coordination with other public projects
- Construction Impacts
- Local Business Support

Responses were prepared for all comments received; they are outlined in Chapter 8 of the FEIR.

Of note, the two most prevalent public comments focused on the El Pueblo Merchants' concerns over construction impacts and public requests for improved active transportation connections to existing facilities.

In response, Metro has committed to continued coordination with the Merchants during design and construction including:

- As feasible, Metro will work with the Merchants to avoid construction during the most significant El Pueblo events.
- Signage will be put in place during construction to note that El Pueblo is open and operational.
- In advance of construction, Metro will work with the Merchants to develop a targeted marketing plan for online digital ads that includes a calendar of major El Pueblo events, marketing these events, and ensuring targeted audiences, including tourists and regional communities, are reached.

Several individuals submitted comments requesting a two-way bicycle facility on Los Angeles Street. Staff accepted this recommendation in the FEIR and submitted an ATP 'scope change' request to Caltrans for consideration and approval of a two-way bicycle path in the expanded El Pueblo plaza area adjacent to the west side of Los Angeles Street, as this particular improvement is funded by an ATP Cycle 3 grant. This improvement will further advance core Project goals of multimodalism, safety and improved connections from Union Station to surrounding communities.

Other stakeholders comments focused on design considerations and will be addressed with stakeholders during the design process, which will be initiated in Spring 2018 (assuming the Board certifies the FEIR). These include:

- Design considerations for special-needs users;
- Incorporation of additional historic features such as notation of the original boundaries of old Chinatown;

- Further design considerations for separating bicyclists and pedestrians on Alameda Esplanade;
- Wayfinding, and any signalization needed for new two-way bike path within the extended El Pueblo Plaza on Los Angeles Street.

FEIR Recommendations

Staff recommends that the Board certify the FEIR with **Alternative 3** (modified left-hand turn) as the Preferred Alternative. Alternative 3 (modified left-hand turn) performed better than the Draft EIR Project and while it performed slightly less than Alternative 2 (full closure), it still results in the desired project benefits, aligns with the project objectives, and was overwhelmingly the desired alternative from the general public.

Statement of Overriding Considerations and Findings of Fact

CEQA Guidelines Section 15091 (a) states that if the specific economic, legal, social, technological or other benefits of the project outweigh the unavoidable adverse effects, those effects may be considered acceptable. The Board must find that notwithstanding the disclosure of these significant and unavoidable impacts, there are specific overriding reasons for approving the Project and that these reasons serve to override and outweigh the Project's significant unavoidable effects. CEQA requires Metro to support, in writing, the specific reasons for considering a project acceptable when significant impacts cannot be unavoids or substantially lessened. The findings are described below and in the necessary Statement of Overriding Considerations.

While the Preferred Alternative will result in significant and unavoidable impacts as a result of delays to motor vehicle movement, the Preferred Alternative results in social and community, economic, sustainability and public health benefits. The benefits are described below and in greater detail in the Statement of Overriding Considerations.

- *Social and community enhancements.* The Preferred Alternative improves connections to surrounding communities, commercial areas, civic institutions, and employment centers and provides dedicated paths of travel for pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles and reduces conflicts (collisions and injury to people and damage to property).
- *Economic benefits.* The Preferred Alternative creates safe connections and path of travel between LAUS and surrounding businesses and employment centers that have the potential to increase overall activity at LAUS and surrounding areas, as well as short-term economic benefits during construction with the creation of construction jobs.
- *Sustainability benefits.* The Preferred Alternative design will advance sustainability through a reduction in heat island impacts, protection of surface water through the use of Best Management Practices and reduction in VMT and promotion of active transportation and increase transit ridership.
- *Public health benefits.* The Preferred Alternative will improve connections between LAUS and surrounding areas and will make it easier and safer to walk and bike as an alternative mode of travel, which have documented public health benefits.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

As previously noted, Alameda Street, within the project boundaries, is identified in the Vision Zero HIN. Certification of the FEIR and the resulting design and project implementation, will greatly improve customer and employee safety while travelling to and from Los Angeles Union Station. The proposed improvements will reduce pedestrian crossing distances on Alameda Street and Los Angeles Street, slow vehicular speed, and provide visual cues to motorists through the widened sidewalks and expanded and raised crossing.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Funding for the environmental services was included in the FY18 budget in Project 405557, Task 04.02 and will be fully expended at the end of this fiscal year. The Board approved the Project Architectural and Engineering contract in November 2017 funded in Project 405557, Task 04.03 (additional sub-tasks shall be created to track expenditures for each grant source). The architectural and engineering contract is funded by approximately 60% State Active Transportation Planning (ATP) Grant Program and 40% Metro local match. As this is a multi-year project, the cost center manager and Chief Planning Officer will be responsible for budgeting each fiscal year.

Impact to Budget

The current funding for the project is General Fund and ATP grant funds. General Fund revenues are eligible for bus/rail operating and capital expenses.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could delay action to certify the FEIR, adopt the Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations, as well as the MMRP. Deferral of these actions is not recommended as they would delay the Project schedule including advancing design, stakeholder engagement, coordinating with various City of Los Angeles departments, and meeting the stringent terms of the ATP grant program.

The Board could decide to support the Draft EIR Project and reject the staff recommendation to advance **Alternative 3** as the Preferred Alternative. This is not recommended. The Project and Alternative 3 are very similar in overall design; they simply operate differently with the restricted left-hand turn on Alameda from Los Angeles Street and with the restrictions on Arcadia Street for tour bus parking during peak hour. An additional six study intersections are impacted with the Draft EIR Project over Alternative 3.

The Board could decide to select Alternative 1, “no project.” This is not recommended as it would result in existing conditions and would be contrary to the overall vision for LAUS that has been led by the Board and supported by the public, and would conflict with the Project goals and objectives. Additionally, Metro has secured State grant funding to advance this project.

The Board could select Alternative 2, ‘full closure’. This is not recommended as local businesses and

stakeholders from the El Pueblo campus are strongly opposed to Alternative 2. Proceeding with **Alternative 3** allows for a balanced approach that allows for the attainment of the project goals and benefits and does not preclude the City from pursuing a full closure in the future.

NEXT STEPS

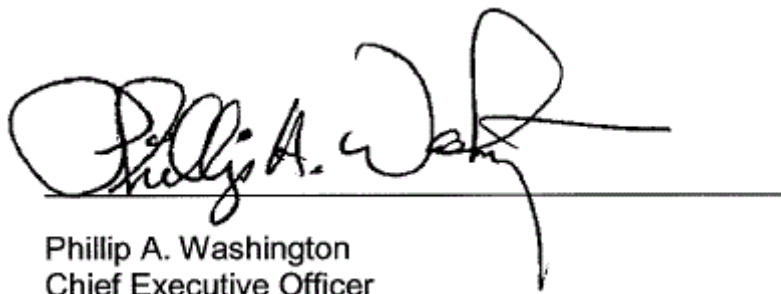
Upon Board certification of the FEIR, staff will kick-off a robust stakeholder engagement effort to advance project design.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A - Notice of Determination
- Attachment B - Project Map
- Attachment C - Summary of Outreach
- Attachment D - Funding Table

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