

**Board Report**

File #: 2020-0027, **File Type:** Informational Report**Agenda Number:** 8.

**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
FEBRUARY 19, 2020****SUBJECT: EASTSIDE TRANSIT CORRIDOR PHASE 2****ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS****RECOMMENDATION**

CONSIDER:

- a. Proceeding with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) only for the project's environmental process;
- b. Withdrawing the SR 60 and Combined Alternatives from further consideration in the environmental study;
- c. Preparing a feasibility study independent from the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 project to evaluate other options that better serve the needs of the San Gabriel Valley; and
- d. Approving the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Title VI Service Equity Analysis.

ISSUE

Measure M allocates \$6 billion to the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 project (Project) to be programmed in two cycles. Cycle 1 identifies \$3 billion for one alignment with a 2029 groundbreaking date and an opening date of 2035. Cycle 2 identifies \$3 billion with a 2053 groundbreaking date and an opening date of 2057. The Project is currently in the environmental review process pursuant to the CEQA and National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) with three build alternatives under study to support the adoption of a Locally Preferred Alternative. These three alternatives (SR 60, Washington, and Combined Alternatives as described in this report) were approved for study by the Board in May 2017 (Legistar #2017-0154). This Project is one of the four pillar projects identified by the Board for acceleration efforts to be completed in time for the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles (Motion 32.4, #2019-0108).

The recommendations in this Board Report would facilitate efforts for project acceleration. Discontinuing NEPA analysis would streamline the environmental study by not requiring federal reviews. The current environmental schedule includes NEPA and CEQA clearances of the three project alternatives as well as a no-build Alternative. Final environmental clearance is anticipated in 2023 and construction by 2029, placing the Project at risk of not meeting 2028 acceleration goals. Pillar projects must begin construction no later than the calendar year 2023 to be completed and

enter into revenue service by 2028 (Legistar file 2019-0434).

The SR 60 and Combined Alternative face significant environmental and engineering challenges and are less consistent with adopted Metro policies than the Washington Alternative. These issues and constraints are documented in the attached SR 60 and Combined Alternatives Issues and Constraints Report (Attachment A). Narrowing the project alternatives, in this case, selecting the Washington alternative as the proposed project for continuing environmental review would shorten the project schedule by narrowing and focusing environmental and engineering work currently in progress. The selection of an alternative requires a Title VI service equity analysis which has been completed for this project. Results of the analysis are included in the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Title VI Service Equity Analysis (Attachment B).

BACKGROUND

The Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 has been studied extensively and has evolved since its inception. These studies have included:

- In 2007 an Alternatives Analysis (AA) Study for the Project was initiated, wherein 47 alternatives were evaluated.
- In January 2009, the Metro Board approved the AA Study and identified two build alternatives to be carried forward.
- In 2010 the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) was initiated. The Draft EIS/EIR analyzed two build alternatives, SR 60 and Washington Boulevard, in addition to the No-Build and Transportation Systems Management (TSM) Alternatives. The Draft EIS/EIR was released for public review in August, 2014.
- In November 2014, the Board directed staff to carry out additional technical work to address concerns raised by Caltrans, United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and United States Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) about the SR 60 Alternative. The technical work also included identifying a new north-south alignment to connect to the Washington Boulevard Alternative.
- At the May 2017 meeting, the Board received the findings of the Post Draft EIS/EIR Technical Study and approved an updated project definition.

Based on these actions the following project alternatives were carried forward and are included in the current study:

SR 60 Alternative

Generally, follows the southern edge of the SR 60 Freeway primarily in an aerial configuration from Atlantic Station, the current Metro Gold Line terminus at Pomona Boulevard and Atlantic Boulevard, and continues to Peck Road in the city of South El Monte. A 1.5-mile segment shifts to the north side of the freeway, between Greenwood Avenue and Paramount Boulevard to address technical issues regarding the proximity to the Operating Industries, Inc. (OII) Superfund site and avoid disturbance of contaminated materials. Proposed stations along this route that are being considered include: Garfield Avenue station serving Montebello and Monterrey Park, The Shops at Montebello station in Montebello, Santa Anita Avenue station in South El Monte, and Peck Road station in South El Monte.

Washington Alternative

Travels south along Atlantic Boulevard in an underground segment between the current Metro Gold Line terminus station at Pomona Boulevard/Atlantic Boulevard and the Citadel Outlets in Commerce. The route then proceeds east along Washington Boulevard via aerial and at-grade (street level) configurations ending at Lambert Road in the city of Whittier. Proposed stations along this route that are being considered include: redesigned Atlantic Boulevard station, Atlantic/Whittier Boulevard station in East Los Angeles, Commerce/Citadel station in Commerce Greenwood Avenue station in Montebello, Rosemead Boulevard station in Pico Rivera, Norwalk Boulevard station serving unincorporated Los Nietos, Whittier, and Santa Fe Springs, and Lambert Road station in Whittier.

Combined Alternative Explores the potential build out and operation of both the SR 60 and Washington Alternatives as described above. The Combined Alternative would allow service from South El Monte and Whittier to downtown Los Angeles and the regional transit network. The alternative would require infrastructure and operational elements that would not otherwise be required if only one of the alternatives was operated as a “stand-alone” line. Trains would alternate between continuing west past Atlantic Boulevard Station and providing a one-seat ride between South El Monte and Whittier in a “C” configuration via a wye junction (i.e., three-way junction). Specifically, the Combined Alternative would include a wye junction in the East Los Angeles area near the Via Campo neighborhood that would connect the SR 60 and Washington Alternatives, allowing alternating train movements between both lines.

In October 2018, the Board authorized the award of professional services contracts (Legistar file 2018-0303) to restart the environmental studies and clear the Project under CEQA and NEPA and to complete Advanced Conceptual Engineering design. As part of the reinitiated environmental review planning process, additional focused technical analysis was done to address concerns raised by Cooperating Agencies for the SR 60 and Combined Alternatives. The constraints and challenges within or along the freeway corridor have become more evident with further technical analysis, additional engineering design, and coordination with future improvements for the SR 60 Freeway. The Combined Alternative compounds these technical challenges by requiring the addition of an underground wye junction at Pomona/Atlantic where the existing Gold Line ends.

Recent Metro Board adopted policies to address emerging transportation priorities, including equity, Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC), First/Last Mile (FLM) planning, and parking policies which were not in place when the project was first introduced. An analysis of TOC- and FLM-related factors relevant to assessing the SR 60 and Washington Alternatives was completed as part of the current planning process. The Washington Alternative shows greater potential compared to the SR 60 Alternative as it relates to TOC and FLM.

DISCUSSION

CEQA Only Environmental Clearance (Discontinuing NEPA)

The Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 is one of the four pillar projects which introduces acceleration goals to the Measure M Program. The Project is primarily funded by Measures M and R and other

state and local sources. Federal funding allocation for this Project is not a significant component of the project's funding plan.

Currently, \$40.4 million out of the \$3 billion Cycle 1 project funding plan are federal. The designated federal funds could be reallocated to other projects with commensurate state and local funding reprogrammed for Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2. In the future, should additional federal funding for the project become available, staff would have the ability to reinitiate NEPA analysis. Pursuing environmental clearance only through CEQA could streamline the environmental analysis and advance acceleration efforts to support the pillar project goals. Federal reviews would no longer be required and FTA could prioritize reviews of other Metro priority projects.

Summary of Technical Issues and Constraints of the SR 60 Alternative

From the onset, the SR 60 Alternative posed environmental and engineering challenges associated with running parallel to the SR 60 Freeway and adjacent to sensitive land uses and environmental resources. These concerns have been analyzed and reevaluated through several studies beginning with the 2014 Draft EIS/EIR Report, the 2017 Post Draft EIS/EIR Technical Study, and additional focused analyses that were initiated in 2019.

Longstanding environmental and engineering challenges raised by Cooperating Agencies and utility providers are detailed in Attachment A. A summary of critical constraints and challenges that have intensified since the 2014 Draft EIS/EIR and the 2017 Post Draft EIS/EIR Technical Study that impede the Project implementation efforts and inability to meet acceleration schedule are described below.

Future Improvements of the SR 60 Freeway

The SR 60 Alternative runs primarily within the existing Caltrans right-of-way (ROW) and must be closely coordinated with major improvements that are planned for the SR 60 Freeway including Caltrans' planned future widening which would bring existing general-purpose lanes up to Caltrans' current standards and add HOV lanes. These planned improvements pose major constraints for the SR 60 Alternative which have become more apparent as engineering and environmental studies have advanced.

Adverse issues associated with the SR 60 Alternative include:

- In meetings in 2019, Caltrans underscored that the SR 60 Alternative would impact Caltrans' ability to widen the freeway in the future. The widening of the SR 60 Freeway would result in shifting the SR 60 Alternative aerial guideway out of the Caltrans ROW in most cases.
- Based on Caltrans' planned criteria for the freeway, an approximate 93-foot buffer was agreed upon as sufficient space to accommodate future improvements. The 93-foot buffer is conceptual and would require Caltrans approval upon submittal of Advanced Conceptual Engineering drawings.
- This alignment shift, if implemented along the full alignment, would further impact adjacent residential and environmentally sensitive areas beyond what was identified in the 2014 Draft EIS/EIR. The impacts would occur particularly to single-family and

multifamily residences, Whittier Narrows Recreation Area and South El Monte High School.

- The SR 60/ I-605 Interchange Improvements project is currently in the environmental clearance phase. This project, managed by Metro's Highways Program in coordination with Caltrans, has led to modifications to the terminus station at Peck Road to accommodate the freeway widening and new ramp configurations. This design places the guideway approximately within 5 feet of the residential condominiums adjacent to the freeway ramp.

Issues related to the required rail transit guideway as it crosses the freeway have raised additional issues:

- The SR 60 Alternative transitions to the north side of the freeway between Greenwood Avenue and Paramount Boulevard to circumvent the OII Superfund site and avoid disturbance of contaminated materials. Caltrans raised concerns about the 2014 design that proposed the placement of bridge column supports in the median of the SR 60 Freeway.
- To address these comments, a focused technical analysis of alternative bridge options and alignments to cross the freeway was undertaken. It was concluded that a clear-span option (i.e., avoiding a column in the median of the freeway) is feasible to address Caltrans' concerns. However, the curve radius for the alignment across these bridge spans would reduce operating speeds from 55 mph to 25 to 30 mph for the Project. The proposed clear-span bridges do not meet the desired operating speeds for light rail. The Metro Rail Design Criteria (MRDC) establishes maximum operating speed of 65 MPH for exclusive and semi-exclusive alignments and states that mainline alignments should be designed for the established maximum operating speed.

Caltrans-Required Lateral Encroachment Permit

Historically, Caltrans has communicated that a Lateral Encroachment Permit would be required for the areas of the guideway that are proposed to be within Caltrans' ROW (partially or fully). This is an added constraint and risk to the Project because of potential delays to obtain such permit. These types of proposed lateral encroachment permits are not conventional within the Caltrans permitting process, which would require extensive reviews to ensure State compliance.

Constrained Maintenance Storage Facility (MSF)

An MSF and potential initial operating segment would need to be identified for each Alternative to serve rail operational functions and demands. Metro Operations' regional needs are being met through this Project based on the Fleet Management Plan. The plan establishes a need for an MSF site, approximately 20 acres in size, that can accommodate storage capacity for 100 to 120 light rail vehicles (LRV) and required operational elements. Issues associated with identifying a Maintenance & Storage Facility have included:

- Identifying an MSF site along the SR 60 Freeway is limited primarily due to the surrounding land uses, including the SR 60 Freeway, the OII Superfund site, the Whittier Narrows Flood Control Basin, and residential and recreational areas.
- The proposed SR 60 MSF is a small site, approximately 15.5 acres in size, with a storage capacity of approximately 70 LRVs. This is less than what would be required for

the SR 60 Alternative, which would require close to 100 to 120 LRVs, and less than required for the Combined Alternative to serve Metro's overall system needs.

- The non-revenue lead tracks would extend beyond the proposed terminus, Peck Road station, in an aerial configuration approximately half-mile. The lead tracks would cross over the San Gabriel River and the San Gabriel River Trail/Bike Path in an aerial configuration.
- The elevated structure would conflict with Southern California Edison (SCE) overhead transmission lines, which would have insufficient vertical clearance. Also, an easement from SCE would be required, including through the middle of the MSF facility.

Summary of Technical Issues and Constraints of the SR 60 Alternative

The Combined Alternative introduces the inclusion of wye junction. The wye junction's proposed location is in unincorporated East Los Angeles County at the intersection of Atlantic Boulevard/3rd Street/Pomona Boulevard in the Via Campo neighborhood. Additional property acquisitions would be required along Pomona Boulevard from La Verne Avenue to Sadler Avenue.

- The approximately 2/3-mile stretch would require the acquisition of the whole first row of mostly commercial properties along the south side of 3rd Street/Pomona Blvd for the construction of the wye junction as part of the Combined Alternative.
- As a stand-alone element, incorporating the Combined Alternative would add approximately \$1.3-1.7 billion to the project capital cost for the wye junction, which is not commensurate with the forecasted number of riders it would serve.

The Washington Alternative does have its challenges, however not as complex relative to the SR 60 and Combined Alternatives. The focused technical analysis for the Washington Alternative included the evaluation of the underground section, design variations at Rosemead and 605 freeway, and the bridge crossings. These challenges are being resolved within the project's predetermined timeline for environmental clearance.

Inconsistencies with Metro Adopted Policies

In June 2018, Metro's TOC Policy was adopted to promote places (such as corridors and neighborhoods) that, by design, allow people to drive less and access transit more. TOCs promote more walkable, bikeable, and sustainable neighborhoods adjacent to transit. The TOC Policy sets the direction to guide Metro decision-making for projects and to assist local jurisdictions in maximizing the potential of transit investments in their communities.

A TOC and FLM Assessment Report is being prepared which establishes TOC and FLM criteria. TOC criteria relate to an evaluation of adjacent land uses, population and employment densities. FLM criteria analyzed bicycle facilities, block sizes, and active transportation elements. In addition to TOC and FLM analysis, the Assessment Report reviews Environment and Equity criteria to assess physical barriers in the surrounding station area environment and the extent to which TOCs are served. Initial findings from the TOC and FLM assessment work indicates that the SR 60 Alternative lacks potential as it correlates to all three criteria: TOC, FLM, and Environment and Equity. This is due to the spatial nature of proposed station areas along the alignment.

The SR 60 Alternative is challenged and constrained because the guideway runs parallel to the freeway. Stations are adjacent to the freeway which lacks direct connections to residential communities within the half-mile station area. Some stations along the SR 60 Alternative are situated in large commercial shopping malls, parking lots and recreational zones near freeway on/off-ramps. Connections to existing residential neighborhoods are hindered by the quality of the public realm, a discontinuous and suburban street network, large block sizes, numerous freeway on/off ramps, and freeway underpasses.

Given the lack of proximity to residential communities and the lack of direct connections within the half-mile station area, the SR 60 Alternative is less supportive of the adopted equity goals, serving fewer low-income and transit-dependent populations. Land uses surrounding these stations are also less transit-supportive than those along the Washington Alternative. Preliminary results of the TOC and FLM Assessment Report are summarized in Attachment A.

The Washington Alternative exhibited better compatibility with Metro's adopted policies. Proposed stations along the Washington Alternative demonstrated greater TOC compatibility. The stations are planned in areas with a connected street network making it easier to walk, bike, and ride transit. Station areas either have existing transit-supportive land use patterns or have the potential for future planning efforts. This is mainly because the stations along this alignment are located close to existing residential neighborhoods and commercial corridors. In general, the Washington Alternative stations are situated in areas with a higher presence of residential land uses, serving more economically disadvantaged communities who would benefit from improved transit access consistent with Metro's Equity Platform.

Public Scoping Meetings

Through the reinitiated environmental review process, a 45-day scoping period was held from May 31 to July 15, 2019. Public scoping meetings were held in June 2019 in the cities of Whittier, South El Monte, Commerce, Montebello, Pico Rivera, and unincorporated Los Angeles County in the East Los Angeles community.

Approximately 300 comments were received during the scoping period. Approximately two-thirds of the comments referenced the build alternatives. Over one-third of the comments referenced the SR 60 Alternative, which received the lowest amount of support from the public. An organized community group-Justice and Equality for the Eastside Coalition-obtained over 400 signatures from residents of the Via Campo neighborhood opposed to the current proposed construction of an at-grade and aerial portion of the SR 60 Alternative. They were concerned with the negative health and quality of life impacts. In general, there was some support for all three project alternatives. The major themes expressed by stakeholders in their comments included:

- Opposition to at-grade alignment on SR 60 Alternative from South Atlantic Boulevard to Findlay Avenue;
- General support for Washington Alternative from communities, business groups and employers along the alignment; and
- Concerns raised over environmental justice and equal consideration for undergrounding in

lower-income areas of the county.

Alternative Solution with the Withdrawal of the SR 60 and Combined Alternatives

The Eastside Transit Corridor studies to date recognize the mobility challenges that exist along the SR 60 Freeway corridor and within the San Gabriel Valley and the need to connect to Metro's regional transit network. The route has been analyzed and reevaluated through several studies since 2007. Stakeholders and communities along the corridor have shown a vested commitment to the project. If the Board approves the withdrawal of the SR 60 and Combined Alternative from the Project's environmental study, the staff recommendation is that Metro should continue to work with the corridor cities, key stakeholders and the communities to prepare a feasibility study that would identify short and long term solutions to evaluate options to serve the mobility needs in the San Gabriel Valley and along the SR 60 Freeway. The short- and long-term plan will include financial review of the Measure R and M commitments. The anticipated duration of the feasibility study would take approximately 18 months to complete. The development of the scope of work for technical services and outreach would commence immediately upon Board approval. Metro staff will report back in six months on the progress of the feasibility study.

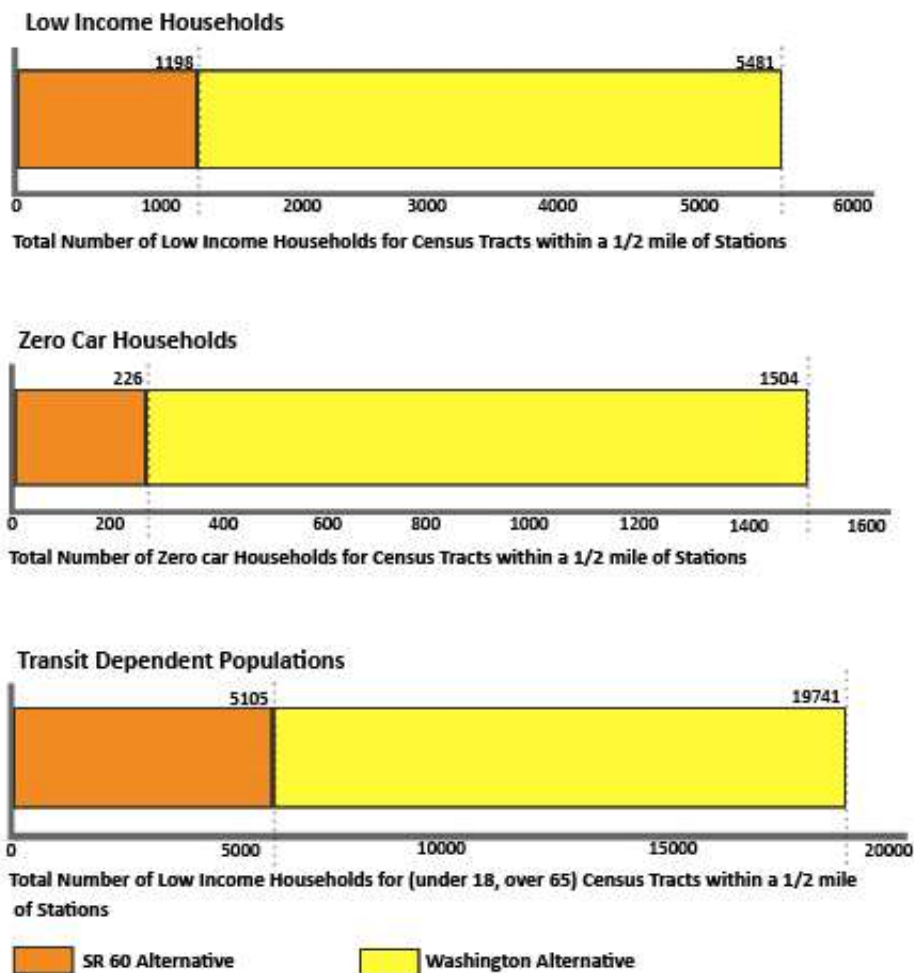
Equity Platform

The Project is aimed at providing a more reliable and high-quality transit alternative to the communities of the eastern Los Angeles County that will help to solve the mobility challenges in the Project area and meet the mobility needs of the area's residents and businesses. In the further development of the Equity Platform, the Draft 2020 LRTP includes frameworks that help address the first two Equity Platform pillars (Define and Measure and Listen and Learn).

The equity-focused community (EFC) definition identifies two demographic factors that have historically been determinants of disinvestment and disenfranchisement: household income and race/ethnicity. Households with low vehicle ownership also present an opportunity to target new mobility investments in neighborhoods with a higher propensity to take advantage of them. Together these three factors represent the locations where strategic transportation investments can have the greatest impact on reducing disparities in access to opportunity. The 2017 baseline year demographic data was used to understand communities' social, demographic, and geographic information.

The communities along the SR 60 Alternative, when compared to the county average, have lower densities, fewer communities with non-English speaking population, and fewer communities living below the federal poverty level. Full EFC mapping analysis and framework are described in Attachment A.

The TOC and FLM analysis also evaluated low-income households, zero-car households, and transit-dependent population data within a half-mile of the station areas for the SR 60 and Washington Alternatives. The SR 60 Alternative stations serve substantially fewer low-income, transit-dependent, and zero-car households. The chart below compares the low-income and transit-dependent population data for the SR 60 and Washington Alternatives.



Title VI Service Equity Analysis Findings

Title VI Service Equity Analysis is required to support the identification of a Locally Preferred Alternative for a potential new transit service as part of the proposed Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project. The analysis was conducted pursuant to Metro’s Title VI thresholds and FTA’s Circular 4702.1B, which require that the service change be analyzed to determine whether the proposed service will have a disproportionate burden or disparate impact on minority and low-income populations relative to the non-low-income and minority populations.

The analysis utilized income and ethnicity demographic data to assess the characteristics of each alternative’s service area and evaluate if the low-income and minority populations would be affected by the proposed Project. Based on the percentage analysis conducted, it was found that there was no disproportionate burden as it relates to low-income populations along the alternatives. The percentage of minority populations along the new transit service were higher than Metro’s service area as a whole. Since the new transit service would be considered a benefit to the corridor cities, providing an additional transportation option and increased accessibility, the analysis determined that the minority populations along the corridor cities would benefit from the project. In summary, this Title

VI Service Equity Analysis concludes that each alternative would prove beneficial and would not impose a disproportionate burden or disparate impact. The analysis and results are detailed in Attachment B.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

These actions will not have any impact on safety of our customers and/or employees because this Project is at the study phase and no capital or operational impacts result from this Board action.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The FY20 budget does not include funding for the proposed feasibility study. Should the Board approve the recommended action, staff would work to identify funding sources from Cost Center 4310 and fund a new project in FY20 in the anticipated amount of \$250,000 for professional services. Since this is a multi-year program, the Cost Center Manager and Chief Planning Officer will be responsible for budgeting in future years.

Impact to Budget

Along with discontinuing NEPA, federal funds will be removed from this project. The new funding sources will be local admin funds, which are not eligible for bus and/or rail operating and capital expenses.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The Project supports the goals outlined in the Metro Vision 2028 Strategic Plan. More specifically, the Project supports Goal #3 - *Enhance Communities through Mobility and Enhanced Access to Opportunity*, as it will connect communities to the regional Metro rail network, which will expand access to jobs, major activity centers, including educational and medical institutions, and recreational opportunities within the project area and across the Los Angeles region.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could decide not to withdraw from the NEPA process. This is not recommended because it extends the Project's environmental schedule with an anticipated final environmental clearance in 2023 placing the Project at risk of not meeting acceleration goals. Allocated federal funds for this Project are marginal and could be reallocated with state and local funding.

The Board could decide not to approve the recommended withdrawal of the SR 60 and Combined Alternatives to be carried forward into the environmental study. These alternatives are not recommended, as this would impact the Project's environmental clearance schedule and would not consider the updated technical findings. The narrowing of the alternatives will ensure the Project remains on schedule and will also support the Project's acceleration goals.

Washington Alternative is a viable option with less constraints in contrast to the SR 60 Alternative. Cooperating Agencies had less concerns regarding the Washington Alternative. More importantly, it avoids conflicts with Caltrans ROW and federally protected resources, and avoids major utility

conflicts that are more prominent along the SR 60 Alternative.

NEXT STEPS

Upon Board approval, staff will notify FTA of the decision to discontinue the NEPA environmental study and will continue to advance the environmental study pursuant to CEQA. The environmental study will evaluate the adopted project alternative, MSF options, and initial operating segments. An update to the Board is anticipated in summer/fall 2020.

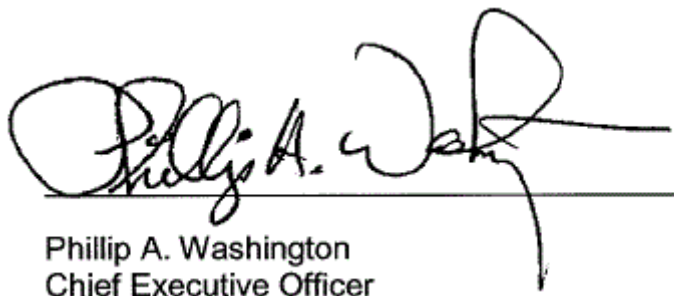
Upon Board approval of the feasibility study, a scope of work will be developed immediately for technical work and community engagement, and Metro staff will report back in six months on the progress of the feasibility study.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - SR 60 and Combined Alternatives Issues and Constraints Report
Attachment B - Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Title IV Service Equity Analysis

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