

**Board Report**

File #: 2021-0502, **File Type:** Motion / Motion Response**Agenda Number:** 42.

**REGULAR BOARD MEETING
JULY 22, 2021****Motion by:****DIRECTORS GARCETTI, SOLIS, DUPONT-WALKER, HAHN, AND SANDOVAL**

Memorial to the 1871 Anti-Chinese Massacre

Metro must be able to reflect on and deepen understanding of Los Angeles' past if it is to succeed in orienting Los Angeles County towards a more prosperous, equitable, and sustainable future.

In November 2019, the City of Los Angeles convened the Civic Memory Working Group, a collection of 40 local leaders, scholars, and activists charged with engaging more honestly and productively with Los Angeles' past. In April 2021, the Working Group released *Past Due*, a landmark report with 18 key recommendations to better mark Los Angeles' history. One key recommendation is to develop temporary and permanent commemorations to mark the 150th anniversary of the 1871 Anti-Chinese Massacre, which took place near the Old Plaza. This effort will be led by a newly-established 1871 Steering Committee.

On October 24, 1871, 18 Chinese people were murdered in what is considered the largest mass lynching in United States history. Eugene Moy, former President of the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, describes the massacre in the Civic Memory Working Group's *Past Due* report:

On the afternoon of October 24, 1871, a shootout between two groups of Chinese residents just south of the plaza drew the attention of the small Los Angeles police force. Officer Jesus Bilderrain was wounded in the crossfire. A local rancher and former saloon owner, Robert Thompson, attempted to intervene, even though he was told to stay away. He shot into a Chinese store in which there was an active shooting scene, got hit by return fire, and died an hour later. In the two hours that followed, an angry mob killed a total of 18 Chinese people who were pulled from the Chinese quarter and shot, beaten, or hanged. One of the victims was Dr. Tong; one was a teenage boy. Other victims included cooks, a storekeeper, and a laundryman. None were involved in the earlier shooting.

With Union Station's location adjacent to the site of the massacre, Metro should fully support and participate in the 1871 Steering Committee.

Metro should also recognize the significance of Union Station in the history of anti-Chinese racism in

Southern California. In 1926, both the construction and site of Union Station were put to vote. Voters overwhelmingly approved the construction of the station, but the selection of the site on Alameda Street passed with just 51.1 percent. A significant factor in the location approved by voters was that Union Station would eliminate Old Chinatown, razing its structures and displacing its residents. At the time, the *Los Angeles Times* called for the approval of the Old Chinatown site, stating that Union Station would “spell the passing of Chinatown and its rookeries into the dim history of early Los Angeles,” and that the station would “forever do away with Chinatown and its environs.” Following the construction of Union Station, all but one of Old Chinatown’s remaining buildings were then demolished for the construction of the US-101 freeway.

As the current owner of Union Station, Metro has a duty and obligation to help make amends for the grave injustices brought upon the Chinese community in Los Angeles. This is especially pertinent given the unprecedented 107% spike in hate crimes against Asian-Americans in California during 2020. Metro has already taken important steps in response to this spike through a public awareness campaign on buses and trains encouraging all Angelenos to “Stop Asian Hate” and through rider resources to combat hate crimes at metro.net/bekind.

Union Station is currently undergoing a transformation that will help to strengthen and advance its vital role as a regional transportation hub. One component of this transformation is the Forecourt and Esplanade Improvements project. The project will improve pedestrian and bicycle access to and from the station’s entrance and is currently on track to meet stringent state Active Transportation Program grant deadlines to complete design in the fall and begin construction in 2022. While it is no longer practical to incorporate a memorial into the grant’s scope, Metro should find other ways of facilitating and supporting a memorial to the 1871 massacre. Additionally, existing markers commemorating Old Chinatown that are within the Metropolitan Water District’s footprint will have reduced public access due to security-related improvements (Board File 2021-0285).

As Union Station begins its transformation, it is important that this change is supplemented by an acknowledgement of the location’s history. Now more than ever, deliberate action is needed to demonstrate that a better, more just future cannot fully be achieved without a remembrance and reconciliation of the past.

SUBJECT: MEMORIAL TO THE 1871 ANTI-CHINESE MASSACRE

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE Motion by Directors Garcetti, Solis, Dupont-Walker, Hahn, and Sandoval that the Board adopt as policy full support for temporary and permanent commemorations to the 1871 Anti-Chinese Massacre.

WE FURTHER MOVE that the Board direct the CEO to:

- A. Designate Metro representatives to participate in and advise the Civic Memory Group’s 1871 Steering Committee in its efforts to commemorate the 1871 Anti-Chinese Massacre;
- B. Begin identifying Metro-owned land at or near Union Station that may be used as a potential memorial site;

- C. Collaborate and work with the City of Los Angeles Civic Memory Working Group and the 1871 Steering Committee to implement a memorial, should the steering committee identify Metro-owned land as a potential location for a temporary and/or permanent memorial;
- D. Develop recommendations related to a permanent marker of the history of Old Chinatown to be placed on Metro property at Union Station;
- E. Recommend strategies and consider additional opportunities to mark important historical events and historical locations throughout the Metro system, on Metro property, or otherwise related to Metro and its predecessors and the racial history of the region; and
- F. Report to the Board within 90 days on all the above.