



Board Report

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PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE

MAY 18, 2022

SUBJECT: I-710 SOUTH CORRIDOR PROJECT**ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS****RECOMMENDATION**

CONSIDER:

- A. Alternative 1, the “No Build” alternative, as the new Locally Preferred Alternative for the I-710 South Corridor Project Final Environmental Document; and
- B. RECEIVING AND FILING overview of 710 Task Force and development of the I-710 South Corridor Investment Plan in place of the previous I-710 South Corridor Project.

ISSUE

Staff has worked with Caltrans through a lengthy process to develop the I-710 South Corridor Project, resulting in three final project alternatives that were considered by the Metro Board for the I-710 South Corridor Project: Alternative 1 (the “No Build” alternative) and “Build” Alternatives 5C and 7. At the March 2018 meeting, the Board approved Alternative 5C as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the project to advance in the environmental process. Three years later, EPA decided to require a hotspot analysis for the for LPA 5C due to their concerns over air quality conformity for the project. This delay rendered the data supporting Alternative 5C-and the entire environmental document -stale and in need of re-validation. Even if the EPA decided to support the environmental document and determine the project met air quality conformity standards in May 2021, staff would have had to re-validate most of the traffic, safety, and air quality data contained in the document before any component of the project-including the EAP projects-could progress. The process to re-validate that environmental data to allow any of the component projects to proceed would take at least 18 months to complete.

At the May 2021 meeting the Board decided to suspend further work on the environmental clearance of the I-710 South Corridor Project LPA due to environmental, community impact and displacement concerns raised by local communities, Caltrans, and the EPA. The Board also directed staff to pursue an alternative path to developing a better program of projects for the I-710 South Corridor by re-engaging impacted communities and stakeholders to develop a more multimodal, equitable and

sustainable approach to addressing the transportation and community challenges created by the heavy movement of people and goods through the I-710 South Corridor.

In response to this direction, Metro and Caltrans initiated the I-710 South Corridor Task Force (710 Task Force¹) in September 2021, comprising members of local communities, community-based organizations and advocates, transportation agencies, the Ports of LA and Long Beach, goods movement industry, labor, business, academic, and regulatory partners. Given the progress of the task force engagement, the validity of the existing 710 S. alternative 5C LPA designation requires reconsideration.

BACKGROUND

Following years of project development, community outreach and technical analysis, staff presented three alternatives to the Board at its March 1, 2018, meeting and recommended the Board select Alternative 5C as the LPA for the I-710 South Corridor Project Recirculated Draft Environmental Impact Report/Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (RDEIR/DEIS) (File #2017-0849, Attachment B). The three alternatives presented were as follows:

- **Alternative 1:** The “No Build” alternative, which served as the baseline against which every alternative developed was evaluated. The “No Build” alternative is required by CEQA and NEPA and it reflects a future scenario where the proposed project is not built.
- **Alternative 5C:** A “Build” alternative which featured widening I-710 to 5 mixed flow lanes in each direction; improvements at I-710 interchanges with I-405, State Route (SR) 91 and I-5 and local interchange between Ocean Boulevard and SR 60; truck by-pass lanes. This alternative also included programmatic elements for the corridor comprising a Near Zero/Zero Emission Truck Technology Deployment Program, Community Health Benefits Grant Program, Congestion Relief Program and a Transit Enhancements Program.
- **Alternative 7:** A “Build” alternative which featured two dedicated lanes in each direction for clean technology trucks from Ocean Boulevard in Long Beach to the intermodal railroad yards in Commerce/Vernon, plus improvements at I-710 interchanges with I-405, State Route (SR) 91 and I-5 and local interchange between Ocean Boulevard and SR 60. This alternative also included programmatic elements for the corridor comprising a Near Zero/Zero Emission Truck Technology Deployment Program (NZ to ZE Truck Program), Community Health Benefits Grant Program, Congestion Relief Program and a Transit Enhancements Program.

The Board approved staff’s recommendation to select Alternative 5C as the LPA and directed staff to work with Caltrans to finalize the project’s environmental document.

The Board’s actions were responsive to 1) concerns that Alternative 5C would not meet desired outcomes for air quality, equity, mobility, and sustainability; 2) a public lack of support from regulatory agencies on the project-level air quality conformity determination for Alternative 5C; and 3) a changing policy landscape at the state and federal level under which freeway widening projects,

especially through communities with environmental justice concerns, are not supported.

In response to the Board's direction, Metro and Caltrans staff conceived the creation of a 710 Task Force, initiated in September 2021, to re-engage impacted communities in a new process more aligned with current Board, state, and federal priorities and designed to bring community representatives and advocates to the table as partners in developing the future multimodal, sustainable and equitable vision and investment plan for improving the I-710 South Corridor.

Regarding the close out of the suspended I-710 South Corridor Project EIR/EIS, Caltrans is the lead agency responsible for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Under CEQA, Caltrans will certify the I-710 South Corridor Project with the requirements of CEQA for a No Project determination. Under NEPA assignment, Caltrans, as lead agency, will document and explain its decision regarding the selected Preferred No Build Alternative.

DISCUSSION

Considerations

Metro staff and Caltrans District 7 support the approval of the No Build alternative as the LPA, for the following reasons:

- The two build alternatives (5C and 7) found in the suspended environmental document face insurmountable policy issues and regulatory barriers - as currently constituted, the I-710 South Corridor Project will not meet federal air quality conformity requirements and, consequently, will not receive a ROD.
- The Board has suspended all further work to advance Alternative 5C.
- The Board has provided direction to receive a new set of recommendations from the 710 Task Force in place of Alternative 5C
- The displacement of people and businesses in disadvantaged, minority communities through widening the I-710 South freeway as part of Alternative 5C runs contrary to current Board, state, and federal sentiment.

Findings

Selecting the No Build alternative would be responsive to the Board's concerns related to community, property, equity, and environmental/air quality impacts. This determination also allows Caltrans and Metro to focus on:

- Bringing proper closure to the now-suspended I-710 South Corridor Project environmental process and opening the opportunity for the 710 Task Force to develop the I-710 South Corridor Investment Plan (710 IP) in its place.
- Working with community leaders to develop a more robust and inclusive community engagement strategy and Task Force infrastructure to support public input into the development of the 710 IP.
- Generating more sustainable, equitable, and multimodal transportation projects and

programs to move people and goods through the corridor and improve the quality of life for impacted members of corridor communities.

- Reducing Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT), greenhouse gases and diesel particulate matter in the corridor as a result of the implementation of the 710 IP.

Status of Early Action Program Candidate Projects

As described in the Background section, after the Board action to adopt Alternative 5C as the LPA, staff identified a draft set of EAP candidate projects that were components of and tied to the entire scope of Alternative 5C. These projects were never formally adopted, nor were they fully considered by the GCCOG due to ongoing concerns raised by EPA over the air quality conformity determination for the environmental document EIR/EIS. The EAP candidate projects were never considered to be projects independent of, or severable from, Alternative 5C.

The now-suspended environmental document would have environmentally cleared the EAP candidate projects as an initial stage, not phase, of the full Alternative 5C buildout. By selecting the “No Build” option, all previously considered EAP candidate projects are nullified as is the remainder of the Alternative 5C scope, including freeway widening.

Any future projects recommended by the 710 Task Force for Board consideration-including any proposed improvements to the freeway-will need to be evaluated through a new environmental process which will take a minimum of 24 months, depending on the scope of the project or projects. Some of the engineering design work performed as part of the EIR/EIS could still be salvaged as a foundation for the new environmental process if those freeway operational improvements originally identified in Alternative 5C are considered and re-approved through the 710 Task Force process.

Moving forward with new environmental documentation for any improvements proposed by the 710 Task Force process should the Board approve the 710 IP is the only feasible path forward to funding and implementing new improvements to the I-710 South Corridor.

Other I-710 South Corridor-related Projects and Funding Opportunities

Other projects related to the I-710 South Corridor, but separate from Alternative 5C, are still viable for advancement. These projects currently being led by the I-710 South Corridor cities as well as the “early action” soundwalls and Integrated Corridor Management projects led by Metro will not be affected by the ‘No Build’ decision as they each have separate environmental documents and approvals and have demonstrated independent utility.

Additionally, 710 Task Force member organizations are concurrently developing projects for implementation that will likely provide benefits to the I-710 South Corridor. Examples of these projects include:

- On-dock rail expansion at the Ports of Los Angeles (POLA) and Long Beach (POLB), designed to shift the movement of containers through the region from truck to train.
- Development of a joint Goods Movement Training Campus by POLA and POLB that will provide workforce development skills and training in zero-emission port equipment operations.
- Incentive funding opportunities for ZE truck deployment as a result of the clean truck fund rate implemented by POLA and POLB in April 2022.
- A micro-mobility transit service pilot program sponsored by the Southeast Los Angeles Collaborative and the METTRANS Transportation Consortium.
- Local Active Transportation and First / Last Mile projects developed by jurisdictions in the corridor.

Furthermore, the GCCOG is nearing completion of its Ad Hoc Committee process that will provide a comprehensive report on GCCOG recommendations for the I-710 Task Force to evaluate as part of the 710 IP. Staff will work with the GCCOG to provide the opportunity to present this final report at the June 2022 710 Task Force meeting and work with the GCCOG to integrate these recommendations into the final 710 IP in alignment with the Vision and Goals set forth by the Task Force.

Staff intends to engage Task Force members and the GCCOG to identify near-term projects that will be seeking discretionary grant funding in upcoming federal and state cycles of grant programs funded through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Legislation (BIL), Senate Bill 1 (SB 1) and other opportunities. Staff will report back on this effort at the June Board meeting.

Overview of 710 Task Force: Development of the I-710 South Corridor Investment Plan

The 710 Task Force is currently finalizing its Vision and Goals for the I-710 South Corridor and will seek a consensus vote at the June 2022 meeting. With this milestone decision, the Task Force will then be working to generate multimodal strategies responsive to advancing the vision and goals, a program of projects to implement the multimodal strategies, and a strategic Investment Plan that identifies local, regional and state funding opportunities-and legislative/policy initiatives-so that Metro and Caltrans can leverage the \$1.09 billion in Measure R and M funding LA County voters earmarked and entrusted would help fund an I-710 South Corridor program of projects aligned with Board, regional, state and federal policies to improve regional mobility, air quality, public health, access to opportunity and the quality of life for residents in impacted corridor communities.

The target date for the 710 IP report to be delivered to the Board is in early 2023, but staff anticipates near term funding opportunities as contemplated above or as part of the Zero-Emission Truck Working Group will advance before the final report is delivered to the Board. More information on the status of the 710 Task Force will be presented at the June Board meeting.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

Approval of the new LPA will not impact the safety of Metro's customers or employees.

EQUITY PLATFORM

This action supports Metro's effort to center equity in all future decision-making, budget allocation, and community engagement activities for the Project(s) along the I-710 South Corridor. Through the 710 Task Force process, staff is currently working with stakeholders, including residents most impacted by potential projects along the corridor who will serve on the new Community Leadership Committee, to collaboratively develop an investment plan to implement priority multimodal projects and programs. The 710 Task Force process is key to achieving equitable outcomes for the I-710 South Corridor communities and users.

Program elements proposed and vetted by stakeholders will be considered and may be advanced in support of equitable outcomes. Transparent communication with the stakeholders and the public will help build consensus and trust moving forward and hopefully strengthen the communities' support for future improvements. Without this action and subsequent timely planning and investment to address the current corridor conditions, the I-710 South Corridor users and corridor communities will continue to experience pollution, congestion, unsafe traffic conditions, spillage of freeway traffic onto local neighborhoods, and other negative impacts of the anticipated escalating traffic demand in the corridor.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

Metro staff collaboration with local, regional, state, and federal agencies, as well as the local communities to develop an innovation and investment strategic plan to implement the prioritized projects for the I-710 South Corridor and a long-term vision to improve I-710 is consistent with the following goals of the Metro Vision 2028 Strategic Plan:

Goal 1: Provide high-quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling.

Goal 4: Transform LA County through regional collaboration by partnering with the GCCOG, Caltrans, impacted communities, and regional stakeholders to identify the needed improvements and take the lead in developing and implementing the Projects.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could decide to not approve No Build as the LPA at this time. This is not recommended as it would create uncertainty amongst corridor stakeholders regarding the final disposition of Alternative 5C and, in turn, make it more difficult for Metro and Caltrans staff to build community trust, a critical element in the ultimate success of the 710 Task Force effort.

NEXT STEPS

Staff will work with Caltrans, the CEQA/NEPA lead agency, to complete the necessary documentation and coordination with regional, state, and federal agencies to finalize the No Build determination.

Metro and Caltrans will also continue to lead the 710 Task Force to develop a collective vision and goals for the corridor, generate multimodal strategies to address these goals, identify projects that

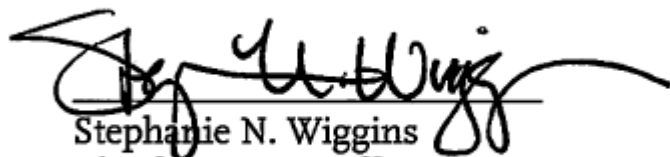
advance the multimodal strategies, and create an I-710 South Corridor Investment Plan to implement the prioritized projects.

The 710 Task Force outcomes will be presented to the Board in early 2023, with updates provided periodically during this process. Staff will seek Board adoption of an I-710 South Corridor Investment Plan at that time.

Staff will return in June with an update on the progress of the 710 Task Force, including a process for incorporating recommendations for near and long-term strategies, projects and programs into the development of the I-710 South Investment Plan, and a request for additional funds to support the Task Force efforts.

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