



Board Report

File #: 2022-0578, File Type: Project

Agenda Number: 16.

**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE  
NOVEMBER 16, 2022**

**SUBJECT: NORTH SAN FERNANDO VALLEY TRANSIT CORRIDOR**

**ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS**

**RECOMMENDATION**

CONSIDER:

A. RECEIVING AND FILING:

1. The North San Fernando Valley (NSFV) Transit Corridor environmental study findings per Senate Bill 288 Statutory Exemption requirements; and
2. The outreach summary report for community meetings and stakeholder briefings conducted throughout spring to fall 2022;

B. APPROVING the Proposed Measure M NSFV Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Network Improvements Project for implementation;

C. APPROVING the finding that the Proposed Project is statutorily exempt from CEQA under Sections 21080.19 and 21080.25(b); and

D. AUTHORIZING the Chief Executive Officer to file a CEQA Notice of Exemption (NOE) for the Project with the Los Angeles County Clerk.

**ISSUE**

The Measure M Expenditure Plan has the NSFV BRT Improvements Project scheduled to begin operations between FY2023 and 2025. To meet the Measure M schedule for implementation, a Proposed Project for the corridor needs to be identified and environmentally cleared.

**BACKGROUND**

The North San Fernando Valley (NSFV) BRT Improvements Project is a Measure M project with an allocation of \$180 million in Measure M funds. The goal of the project, as stated in the Measure M

ordinance, is to increase east-west connectivity throughout the North San Fernando Valley and the Metro Transit System.

Metro originally planned this project as a new single line Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system extending from North Hollywood to Chatsworth. The Metro Board approved to initiate a technical study preceding environmental review for this project in March 2017. This technical study, the NSFV BRT Improvements Environmental Framework Report, was completed in September 2017, which established a study area and preliminary BRT concepts for further study.

In May 2018, an Alternatives Analysis (AA) was conducted as part of the Planning and Environmental Study for the North SFV BRT Corridor. Work on the AA included identifying initial BRT concepts, conducting stakeholder briefings and public participation meetings to solicit input, and further developing the alignment options for the project. The AA was completed and received by Planning & Programming Committee in June 2019. It identified a recommended project with design variations for environmental review. The item was forwarded by the Committee to a future Board meeting for consideration and directed staff to conduct additional public outreach in summer 2019.

In October 2019, the Metro Board received the Alternatives Analysis (AA) Study Report (Legistar File #: 2019-0525) and approved additional consideration of the Proposed Project. The Board directed staff to include further evaluation of the Roscoe Blvd alternative as part of the environmental review phase. The Board also noted that additional route options using Roscoe Blvd could also be considered on condition that they provided a connection to California State University, Northridge (CSUN). Additionally, the Board directed staff to coordinate with the agency's NextGen Bus Study on the core goals of enhancing existing bus service, increasing system connectivity in the SFV, and meeting the growing demand for transit in underserved communities.

Since that time, Metro staff has advanced the analysis and screening of the proposed NSFV BRT routes, and ongoing coordination with the NextGen Bus Plan led to the identification of a new project alternative focused on applying BRT network improvements to existing transit lines in the SFV to meet the Measure M goal.

## **DISCUSSION**

Since October 2019, staff has conducted further evaluation of the Proposed Project, including refinements as the project moved towards a different level of environmental review with the new Senate Bill 288 (SB 288), signed into law in September 2020.

In October 2020, the Board approved the NextGen Bus Plan, which included new service plans in SFV. The NextGen Bus Plan was implemented by the end of 2021. Coordination of the Proposed Project with the NextGen Bus Plan led to the concept of incorporating key BRT features to the NextGen Bus Plan key transit lines in the SFV rather than creating a single new BRT project. This project approach is referred to as the NSFV BRT Network Improvements project and is outlined in more detail below.

### **Project Description**

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The North San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor Project, as designed in the NSFV BRT Network Improvements Project (Attachment A), is a proposed enhanced bus network that would increase connectivity and provide high-quality bus service and transit infrastructure in North San Fernando Valley communities from Northridge in the northwestern SFV to North Hollywood. The primary corridors to be improved through the BRT Network Improvements include Roscoe Boulevard, Nordhoff Street, and Lankershim Boulevard, with additional improvements planned for Reseda Boulevard, Sherman Way, Vanowen Street and Victory Boulevard.

The BRT Network Improvements is the result of input from extensive community and stakeholder outreach and Metro Board direction following prior studies and completion of an Alternatives Analysis for a single-line BRT project.

The BRT Network Improvements include the following project elements based on key BRT attributes to be funded through Measure M:

**BRT Style Service and amenity improvements:**

- Improved service frequency daytime weekdays every 10 minutes for the Roscoe Boulevard Line 152 and Nordhoff Street Line 166 (funded through Metro Annual Operating Budget by rearranging service levels on various SFV lines, not Measure M funded)
- New bus shelters at nearly 400 locations throughout the SFV
- Significant bus stop amenities, including larger shelters, more seating, new real time and wayfinding information, and better lighting at five connection points
- New zero emission electric buses for Lines 152 (Roscoe BI), 162 (Sherman Way), 166 (Nordhoff St) and 240 (Ventura BI/Reseda BI)

**BRT Style Bus Speed and Reliability Improvements:**

- New peak hour only (7-10am, 3-7pm) bus lanes on 11 miles of Roscoe Boulevard between the SR-170 freeway and Topanga Canyon Boulevard
- Transit Signal Priority added for up to seven SFV bus lines (Lines 152 (Roscoe BI), 162 (Sherman Way), 164 (Victory BI), 165 (Vanowen St), 166 (Nordhoff St), 224 (Lankershim BI/San Fernando Rd), and 240 (Ventura BI/Reseda BI)
- New bus stop design (bus bulbs) to avoid delays for buses merging in and out of traffic proposed at over 80 stops
- All-door boarding on all bus lines in the San Fernando Valley

The design elements, including the proposed bus lanes and bus bulbs are not expected to cause adverse traffic changes. Traffic analysis was conducted along Roscoe Boulevard where peak-hour bus lanes are being proposed. The analysis showed minimal increases in automobile travel time. Locations where bus bulbs are proposed should see little to no change in traffic operations.

Based on technical analysis and prior community feedback, the BRT Network Improvements is recommended for implementation. The project elements are based on a quick-build approach that can be rolled out quickly within the Measure M budget for the project, with minimal construction impacts. This approach is capable of delivering as much new ridership to the Metro transit network as

a single new BRT line but spreads the benefits much more widely.

### Environmental Analysis and Findings

SB 288 provides a new California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) statutory exemption (SE) for transit prioritization projects which may include transit signal priority, conversion of general-purpose lanes to peak-hour bus-only lanes, and bus stop enhancements on existing public rights-of-way (ROW).

Metro has identified that the proposed project qualifies for exemption under SB 288. Since the BRT Network Improvements project is valued at over \$100 million, preparation of a business case and racial equity analysis and conducting public outreach meetings are required to file for an SE under SB 288.

A project business case was completed to provide the rationale for why the BRT Network Improvements is the best option for investment in the San Fernando Valley as compared to the single BRT line. The business case evaluated the project through four cases to understand the project benefits, feasibility, and costs and impacts of the investment. Specifically, the strategic case demonstrated how the project aligns with Metro's long-range goals. The economic case assessed the project's benefits and costs to individuals and society as a whole. The financial case analyzed the impacts of the investment including the project's capital and resource requirements. The delivery and operations case provided evidence on the feasibility and constructability of the project. The results of the analysis determined that the BRT Network Improvements would achieve more of Metro's strategic goals and maximize Measure M funds by providing improvements to multiple corridors throughout the NSFV and reaching a larger demographic in a shorter timeframe. Therefore, the BRT Network Improvements was determined to be the best option for future investment under all four cases.

A racial equity analysis was completed for the project which analyzed the racial equity impacts of the project and identified communities who would benefit and be burdened by the project. The analysis identified that the project would be implemented in areas that include large populations that identify as Hispanic/Latino, Asian, and Black or African American. Communities of color and low-income communities are also the majority of transit riders, and transit-dependent riders, in the NSFV service area. Metro has identified the NSFV area as an Equity-Focus Community (EFC), based on the recently updated EFC designations. Therefore, these communities will benefit from and be affected by implementation of the project.

Overall, the project is intended to:

- Address equity gaps to communities dependent on transit for day-to-day life
- Provide reliable high-quality bus services; and
- Provide improved connections to the NSFV service area

The project business case and racial equity analyses reports can be found on the Metro website at: [North San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor - LA Metro <https://www.metro.net/projects/north-sfv-brt/>](https://www.metro.net/projects/north-sfv-brt/)

### CEQA Determination

The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Public Resources Code Section 21000, et sec.) (Senate Bill [SB] 288 Exemption - added January 1, 2021) establishes statutory exemptions (SE) from its provisions for certain types of projects. Projects that qualify for a statutory exemption are not subject to the requirement to prepare a CEQA document or other project-specific environmental analysis.

The project improvements fall within the exemptions described in Section 21080.25(b) as noted (Attachment B):

- New peak-period bus lanes in segments of Roscoe Boulevard where parking is already restricted-built within the existing public ROW (Section 21080.25(b)(5)).
- An increase in weekday daytime service headway from 15 to 10 minutes for the Roscoe Boulevard and Nordhoff Street corridors-bus lines 152 and 166, respectively (Section 21080.25(b)(5)).
- The installation of transit signal priority on seven NSFV corridors (Section 21080.25(b)(3)).
- The implementation of all-door boarding across the NSFV (Section 21080.25(b)(5)).
- The addition of bus bulbs at key high-usage bus stops - proposed at over 80 locations across the NSFV on corridors such as Lankershim Boulevard, Nordhoff Street, and Reseda Boulevard where bus lanes are not being considered-to reduce bus stop delay and increase space available for bus stop amenities (Section 21080.25(b)(5)).
- The addition of a bus shelter at approximately 400 high-ridership stops on multiple corridors (Section 21080.25(b)(5)).
- The enhancement of bus stops at five key transfer locations in the NSFV, with features such as higher-capacity shelters and static and real-time information signs. Proposed locations are CSUN Transit Center, Reseda/Roscoe, Nordhoff/Lindley, Roscoe/Van Nuys, and Nordhoff/Van Nuys (Section 21080.25(b)(2) and (5)).
- The accelerated implementation of new electric buses on multiple NSFV corridors through the funding of new buses and charging infrastructure (Section 21080.25(b)(5) and (6)).

Given the above, the proposed project meets the definition of a statutorily exempt project and is consistent with the intent of SB288 to accelerate sustainable transportation projects by providing an exemption from CEQA for a targeted set of sustainable transit projects, “active transportation” (walking and biking) projects and projects that expand sustainable mobility.

While the proposed project qualifies for an SE, it does not exempt the project from complying with other laws, such as the California Endangered Species Act. Metro is committed to introducing “Good Neighbor” measures to reduce the impacts of construction, but these measures would not be related to CEQA.

### Consistency with Measure M

The BRT Network Improvements will increase system connectivity in the North San Fernando Valley and the Metro Transit System, consistent with the Measure M Ordinance. In addition, the Measure M ordinance identifies this transit capital project as “North San Fernando Valley BRT Improvements”

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with a groundbreaking date of FY2019 and an opening date of FY2023-25. The Ordinance does not specify a route for BRT improvements in the North SFV; rather, it includes a footnote (“s”) which state that, “This project will increase system connectivity in the North San Fernando Valley and the Metro Transit System.” The Proposed Project applies BRT attributes such as dedicated bus lanes, transit signal priority, bus bulbs, and all door boarding to existing transit lines to provide a faster, more frequent, and more reliable transit network for the NSFV. The project also addresses customer experience attributes through the purchase of 75 new battery electric buses and approximately 400 new bus shelters plus additional passenger amenities at five key transfer locations. These benefits are larger and more widely spread than those of a single new BRT line.

### Stakeholder and Community Outreach

In Summer and Fall 2022, stakeholder and community engagement activities were conducted to gather feedback on the new BRT Network Improvements (Attachment C). Briefings were conducted with elected officials/staff and key stakeholders to provide an overview of the project and the new option, as well as answer questions and gather feedback. Stakeholder roundtable meetings and presentations were conducted with neighborhood councils, community-based organizations, businesses and business groups, and CSUN groups and organizations. Door-to-door outreach to businesses took place along Roscoe, Lankershim, and Reseda to further inform business owners and employees in the project area about the updated project and gather feedback on the BRT Network Improvements. Information on the project and community meetings was distributed via e-blasts, door-to-door flyer distributions, car cards on Metro buses, a post on The Source, and through Metro’s social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter). Two separate mailings were conducted in multiple languages (English, Spanish, and Armenian) to residential and commercial properties (including both owners and tenants) within equity-focused communities in the project area. A dial-in hotline was also provided to ensure those with limited internet availability can be involved. Outreach materials such as the online StoryMap and flyers were also available in all three languages. A total of 96,000 flyers were distributed along the project corridors leading up to the community meetings.

Outreach to existing transit riders was conducted via transit rider intercept interviews at key bus stops with high ridership along Roscoe, Nordhoff, Reseda, and the North Hollywood B Line (Red)/G Line (Orange) station. A questionnaire was also distributed to transit riders within the project area via the Transit App. The questionnaire, available from June 1, 2022 to June 14, 2022, targeted the geographic area within the North Valley and was sent to approximately 12,011 unique devices. A total of 506 completed questionnaires were received (391 in English and 115 in Spanish).

Three community meetings were held (one virtually and two in-person) to provide an update on the project and introduce the BRT Network Improvements to the broader public. The first community meeting was held virtually on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, and project background information and key details regarding the new option was presented, followed by a facilitated question and answer session. The remaining two community meetings were held on Saturday, June 18, 2022, at Panorama High School in Panorama City and Tuesday, June 21, 2022 at the Orchard Conference Center on the CSUN campus in Northridge. These two meetings were conducted in an open house setting with meeting boards and a formal presentation, followed by a facilitated question and answer session. All meetings included Spanish and Armenian interpretation, and materials were made

available in those languages.

As part of the SB 288 statutory exemption process, a virtual community meeting was held on Thursday, September 29, 2022, to present the project business case and racial equity analysis, and to respond to questions and comments received. The same notification process used for the June community meetings was used to publicize this meeting. An overview of the project and the BRT Network Improvements was included in the formal presentation, which was followed by a facilitated question and answer session.

Metro staff coordinated closely with CSUN leadership throughout this process and worked to ensure that students within the project area were aware of project updates and the new BRT Network Improvements and had opportunities to provide feedback. Outreach efforts to CSUN students included staffing a booth at an Associated Students Welcome Week event on Tuesday, August 30, 2022, and distributing a CSUN Transit Questionnaire to understand which elements of the BRT Network Improvements they deemed most important. The questionnaire was provided in both English and Spanish, with a total of 136 questionnaires completed (all were completed in English). Metro staff presented project information at the CSUN Associated Students Leadership in-person meeting on Monday, October 3, 2022, and members of the outreach team will staff an information booth at the CSUN Bikefest event to be held on Sunday, October 23, 2022, to distribute project information and gather feedback.

Questions and comments received throughout this process included: concerns about bus lanes on Nordhoff and the impacts they would have on the surrounding area; whether the new option meets the initial goals of BRT and serves the needs of transit riders; support for increasing service hours and frequency of buses, as well as other project elements; connections to other destinations and transit lines including Metrolink, as well as future Metro projects in the area; and concerns about safety on buses and at bus stops.

### **EQUITY PLATFORM**

The adoption of the BRT Network Improvements approach will allow for increased mobility options, better connections, and improved transit service to benefit Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC), lower income, and Equity Focus Communities across the project area in the North San Fernando Valley. The project may result in slight increases in general vehicle traffic but will improve transit customer experience and access to faster, more frequent, and reliable, high-quality transit service. Continued equity-oriented outreach will ensure such tradeoffs are considered by the community; and the ultimate project design will be reflective of and based on community feedback.

Additionally, throughout the project planning and development, community meetings and communications have been targeted to low-income communities along the project corridor, many of which rely on existing bus lines to be improved by this project.

### **DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT**

Approval of this item will not impact the safety of Metro's customers or employees as implementation of the proposed project will enhance safety with bus lanes and bus bulbs, typically reducing problems

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with traffic weaving in and out of curb lanes, while bus bulbs typically enhance pedestrian safety through larger space and narrowed crossing distance at key intersections.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Funding of \$2.3 million is included in the FY23 budget in Cost Center 4360, Project 471403 (North SFV BRT Corridor) for planning and environmental studies and community outreach. Since this is a multiyear project, the Cost Center Manager and Chief Operations Officer will be responsible for budgeting in future years.

The Adoption of the NSFV BRT Network Improvements as the Proposed Project is based on a project scope matched to the available Measure M dollars allocated for the project (\$180 Million).

#### **Impact to Budget**

The funding source for the North San Fernando Valley BRT Corridor project is Measure M 35% Transit Construction. These funds are earmarked for the North San Fernando Valley BRT project and are not eligible for Metro bus and rail operating expenditures.

The bus service frequency improvements would be within Metro's annual allocation of 7 million revenue service hours (as defined in the NextGen Bus Plan) with increased operating speeds from proposed bus lanes, transit signal priority and bus bulbs, as well as adjusted service levels on various lines to accommodate the increased service levels proposed for two bus lines as part of the Proposed Project.

Based on the above plan, the Proposed Project is considered fully funded.

### **IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS**

The Project proposes transit improvements that support the following goals outlined in Metro's Vision 2028 Strategic Plan:

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

Improved service frequency daytime weekdays every 10 minutes for the Roscoe Line 152 and Nordhoff Line 166 will provide faster, more frequent and reliable bus service and better connections to the regional transit network.

- Deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system. Planned enhanced stations and amenities will offer protection from the elements and improve trip experiences for Metro customers.
- Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity.
- Serve key destinations and improve travel times through transit priority improvements and enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity.
- Expand transit access to key educational, employment and healthcare destinations and provide improved service to Metro's larger transit network for EFC.

The proposed project will provide improvements including peak hour bus lanes, transit signal priority,



bus bulbs, new bus shelters, new zero emission buses, improved service frequency, together resulting in a more comfortable, faster, more frequent, and reliability, bus service experience.

### **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

The Board may decide not to approve the proposed BRT Network Improvements. This is not recommended as this project is included and funded in Measure M. Delaying the approval of the proposed project and environmental clearance would jeopardize the ability to meet the Measure M schedule.

### **NEXT STEPS**

Following approval, staff would begin project implementation activities such as preparing to launch peak period dedicated bus lanes, and higher frequency service on Roscoe Boulevard and preparing partner agreement with City of LA to roll out new bus shelters. Advanced planning for new bus bulbs, signal priority, as well as battery electric buses, associated charging infrastructure, and all door boarding equipment would also quickly commence. These activities will lead to final roll out of the NSFV BRT Network Improvements by Winter 2025.

### **ATTACHMENTS**

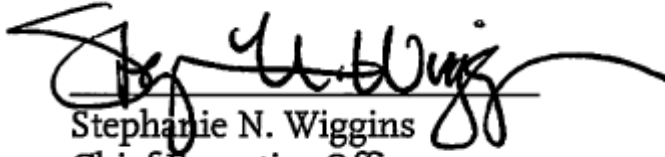
Attachment A - NSFV BRT Network Improvements Project Map

Attachment B - CEQA Statutory Exemption Notice of Exemption

Attachment C - Spring-Fall 2022 Outreach Summary

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