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April 18, 2007

Mr. Roger Snoble  
Chief Executive Officer  
LACMTA  
1 Gateway Plaza  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Proposition A Rail System Status Report

Dear Roger:

This summer it will be 25 years since Proposition A was validated by the California Supreme Court. Not many people from that time are still around and fewer still remember the specific requirements of the "Proposition A Rail System." I decided to review MTA's progress in implementing this system and, frankly, much more of the system has been placed into service – one way or the other – than I had expected. I wrote the attached report as both a review of the Proposition A requirements and an assessment of how much of it has been implemented.

I think this review would be beneficial to the MTA for several reasons. First, it reminds policymakers just how far Los Angeles has come in implementing the system the voters asked for in 1980. This is something the MTA can be quite proud of. Second, it reminds proponents of rail projects that Prop A money may be off-limits for certain projects. For example, Prop A funds may not be tapped for an extension of the Gold Line east of Pasadena, although Proposition C and other funds can be used for such a purpose. Third, it reminds the MTA to make sure Prop A obligations are still being advanced. The recent re-involvement of the MTA in the Green Line extension to LAX is such a positive step.

However you decide to use this information is up to you. I offer it only as a helpful reminder of an anniversary of which you might not be aware.

Sincerely,



Richard Stanger

## What Is The Status of The Proposition A Rail System?

### A. Introduction:

July, 2007 will mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the validation of Proposition A by the California Supreme Court. This is a good time to review progress in implementing the Proposition A rail system that proposition required.

In November, 1980, voters in Los Angeles County approved Proposition A. It provided a ½-cent sales tax for public transit throughout the county. After an initial three-year period, its revenues were to be disbursed in three parts: 25% returned to local jurisdictions, calculated on a population basis, for transit projects generally of their choosing; 35% for construction and operation of a rail “System”; the remaining 40% was to be used by the Commission<sup>1</sup> for “public transit purposes” and has in practice been used for operations.

The “System” or “Rail Rapid Transit System” was defined as meaning “all land and other improvements and equipment necessary to provide an operable, exclusive right-of-way, or guideway, for rail transit.” The language of the Proposition went on to say that “in carrying out this policy, the Commission shall use the following guidelines:

1. Emphasis shall be placed on the use of funds for construction of the system.
2. Use of existing rights-of-way will be emphasized.
3. The System will be constructed and operated in substantial conformity with the map attached hereto as Exhibit “A”. The areas proposed to be served are, at least, the following:
  - San Fernando Valley
  - West Los Angeles
  - South Central Los Angeles/Long Beach
  - SouthBay/Harbor
  - Century Freeway Corridor
  - Santa Ana Freeway Corridor
  - San Gabriel Valley”

Exhibit “A” is a map showing Proposition’s generalized corridors and is attached – unfortunately as a degraded copy of a copy. By the summer of 1982, when the California Supreme Court ruled on the validity of Proposition A, efforts were already underway to build rail lines in two corridors: the Downtown Los Angeles-to-North Hollywood rapid transit (subway) line and the Downtown Los Angeles-to-Long Beach (light rail) line.

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<sup>1</sup> The Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC) was the public agency charged with allocating the Prop A sales tax. In 1992 the LACTC and the Southern California Rapid Transit District, the largest transit operator within Los Angeles County, merged to become the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).



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## B. The Rail Transit Implementation Strategy Process:

Along with initiating work on two rail corridors, the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission undertook a Rail Transit Implementation Strategy in 1983 to understand how it might implement the rest of the rest of the Proposition A rail rapid transit system. The objective of the Strategy was to: 1) agree on the top six high-priority corridors, 2) designate within those corridors the most promising “representative” alignment for rail, 3) select the rail mode to be used making sure the combined system was well-connected and capable of carrying the expected passenger loads, and 4) evaluate the financial ability of LACTC to build the system. The LACTC interpreted the Proposition A map to be composed of the following corridors (in addition to the Downtown-to-N. Hollywood corridor and the Downtown-to-Long Beach corridor):

**Table 1: Proposition A Corridors in the Rail Transit Implementation Strategy Process**

<b>Named Corridor</b>	<b>General Description</b>
Century Freeway Corridor	east/west across the central Los Angeles basin
El Monte Corridor	downtown L.A. to El Monte following I-10
Glendale Corridor	downtown L.A. to Glendale following L.A. River
Route 2 Corridor <sup>2</sup>	downtown L.A. to Glendale following Glendale Blvd.
Harbor Corridor	downtown L.A. to San Pedro following I-110
Pasadena Corridor	downtown L.A. to downtown Pasadena
San Fernando (E/W) Corridor	N. Hollywood to Warner Center following Chandler ROW
San Fernando (N/S) Corridor	Sylmar to West L.A. generally following I-405
Santa Ana Corridor	downtown L.A. to Fullerton following I-5
South Bay/Long Beach Corridor	West L.A. (N/S) Corridor to Long Beach
West Los Angeles (N/S) Corridor <sup>3</sup>	West L.A. to Torrance following I-405
Wilshire West Corridor	Mid-Wilshire to West L.A. following Wilshire B.
Exposition Corridor <sup>4</sup>	downtown L.A. to West L.A. following Exposition B.

<sup>2</sup> The Glendale Corridor (River) and the Route 2 Corridor (Glendale Blvd.) were interpreted to be two competing sub-corridors of Exhibit A’s Glendale Corridor.

<sup>3</sup> The West Los Angeles (N/S) Corridor does not refer to the West Los Angeles *City* area, but to the entire *County* area between Santa Monica and Torrance

<sup>4</sup> The Wilshire West Corridor and the Exposition Corridor were interpreted to be two competing sub-corridors of Exhibit A’s West L.A. (E/W) Corridor.

**1. Selecting the High-Priority Corridors.** In selecting the six high-priority corridors, the LACTC evaluated the following factors based on the Southern California Association of Government's Regional Transportation Plan.

- Support of Development of Centers. Both the City and County of Los Angeles had at that time a land use policy aimed at the development of regional and sub-regional centers. The more of these centers a rail corridor connected the higher it rated.
- Relieve Capacity Deficiencies. The Southern California Association of Government's (SCAG) Regional Line Haul Study estimated future volume-to-capacity ratios for the region's highway system. The higher the V/C ratio, the higher the rail corridor ranked.
- Promote Balance Sub-regions. It was SCAG's stated policy to encourage trips within sub-regions so that fewer long-distance commuting trips would be required. To get at a handle on this factor LACTC combined two things. The first was the density of mixed uses derived from an analysis of the County Assessor's database, and the percentage of transit dependants within the corridor. The more of both, the stronger would be the number of trips within the sub-region, and the higher the corridor rated.

In the spring of 1984, the LACTC adopted the following as the next six high-priority rail corridors.

- Century Freeway Corridor
- West Los Angeles (Wilshire Blvd.) Corridor
- Santa Ana Corridor
- San Fernando Valley (E/W) Corridor
- West Los Angeles (N/S) Corridor
- Pasadena Corridor

**2. Selecting Representative Routes.** The second step in the Implementation Strategy was to home in on a possible, or "representative," route the potential rail line would take. This was especially important for the Century Freeway Corridor because Caltrans had just obtained a Consent Decree to build the freeway itself. The Court required at least a busway in the middle of the freeway, but favored a rail line instead. Because the language of Proposition A encouraged the use of existing rights-of-way, the alignments studied were mainly existing freeway rights-of-way, existing railroad rights-of-way or past railroad rights-of-way now converted to wide city streets. These were selected in consultation with local officials, old studies, and transportation-oriented community groups. Twenty-six such rights-of-way in the 6 corridors were selected for further evaluation.

They were evaluated based on the following four criteria. Cost estimates were prepared for each route based on conceptual-level designs. Ridership estimates were made using SCAG's transportation models. Land uses along the alignment were mapped and calculations were made of the percent residential, commercial and industrial uses.

Finally, the same community groups noted above were used to assess acceptability. The results of this work are shown in Table 2 below.

**Table 2: Representative Routes and Modes of High-Priority Corridors**

Step 1 - High-Priority Corridors	Step 2 - Representative Route	Step 3 - Mode
Downtown L.A. to N. Hollywood	Wilshire Blvd. to Fairfax, north to N. Hollywood	Heavy Rail
Downtown L.A. to Long Beach	SP Right-of-Way	Light Rail
Century Freeway	Median of Freeway	Light Rail
San Fernando Valley (E/W)	SP Burbank Branch	Light Rail
Pasadena	Lincoln Heights, Huntington Dr.	Light Rail
Santa Ana	East L.A. to I-5	Rapid Transit
West Los Angeles (E/W)	Wilshire Blvd. west from Fairfax	Rapid Transit
West Los Angeles (N/S)	Lincoln Blvd – ATSF ROW	Light Rail

**3. Selecting the Mode.** The third step in the Implementation Strategy was to evaluate the above network of lines as a system to determine: a) if the modes selected were able to handle the projected ridership, b) how the lines would interconnect to maximize transferring convenience, and c) where the maintenance facilities should be located. Each alignment was added in turn to the base system of the Red Line and Blue Line to see what its potential ridership would be. This helped determine whether the line should be light rail or heavy rail. (The LACTC did not consider commuter rail until 1989.) All lines were then evaluated together to make sure they were capable to handle the projected ridership given interconnected lines. The lines were also interconnected to allow passenger convenience and operational flexibility. (For example, as a result of this work it was decided to connect the Blue Line directly into the Red Line's 7<sup>th</sup> & Flower Station and put it in tunnel to make transferring much easier. This tunnel was also seen as the first phase of a north-south connection through Chinatown then to Pasadena.)

By late 1984, the LACTC had decided that the high-priority routes and modes to be pursued. By then, as well, the LACTC had approved light rail within the median of the Century Freeway. Environmental clearance work began on the San Fernando (E/W) Route, the Pasadena Route, and the El Segundo and airport segments of the West Los Angeles (N/S) Route.

**4. Evaluating the Financial Capacity.** The fourth step in the process was to assess the financial ability of the LACTC to implement the high-priority rail system. It was never

completed, however, because of on-going uncertainties about the funding needs of the (now) Red Line. Nevertheless, the following guidelines were proposed:

- The LACTC could build up to 100 miles of light rail and rapid transit by 2000.
- To lessen debt servicing, it is best if progress is made continually and not in bursts of extensive construction.
- To lessen the effects of escalation, it is better to build the high-cost sections early (especially the downtown light rail tunnel) and in an incremental fashion.
- Incremental extensions of the rapid transit (heavy rail) line to the east and west should be pursued as fast as federal funding permits.

### **C. Proposition C:**

This evaluation focuses on the progress made on the Proposition A rail rapid transit system. The passage of Proposition C in November of 1990 supplemented the local funding available for a rail system and is therefore worth reviewing.

Proposition C is a second ½-cent sales tax measure for transit passed by the Los Angeles County voters, but with a different disbursement formula for its revenues. Forty percent of its funding was to be used to improve and expand rail and bus transit services county-wide (but specifically not for the Downtown to North Hollywood Line); five percent was to be used to improve and expand rail and bus security; ten percent was to be used for commuter rail and for transit centers and park & ride lots; twenty percent was to be returned to local jurisdictions on a per capita basis for their own transit purposes; and the final twenty-five percent was to be used to provide transit-related improvements to freeways and State highways.

Proposition C funds have advanced some of the Proposition A rail projects, and have funded the on-going operation and capital improvements of the 5-county Metrolink commuter rail program within Los Angeles County.

### **D. The Role of Metrolink.**

Until 1989, commuter rail in Southern California was not considered an option for several reasons. First, the LACTC and its staff were solely focused on rapid transit and light rail technology. In the early 1980's the only new rail systems being considered anywhere in the United States were those two modes. Moreover, to implement commuter rail, access to many miles of privately-held railroad rights-of-way was needed, and that had been impossible. Commuter rail also would require the involvement of other Southern California counties and they had neither the money nor the inclination.

In 1989, however, the conditions for commuter rail changed significantly. First, the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe Railroads started aggressively selling hundreds of miles of their underused rights-of-way. Secondly, voters in Riverside (1988) and then

San Bernardino (1989), Los Angeles (1990), and Orange Counties (1990) approved sales tax measures a portion of which were for commuter rail. Several Statewide bond measures for rail improvements were also passed in 1990. Finally, a plan for a region-wide commuter rail system was developed and adopted by the county transportation commissions, which then worked together to implement the system. The first three lines started operating in late 1992.

Relevant to this discussion, some of the commuter rail lines served Proposition A rail corridors, and some Proposition A rail funds were used to purchase their rights-of-way. The discussion which follows points out these “overlaps” between the Proposition A corridors and the Metrolink lines.

### **E. Progress in Meeting Proposition A Rail Requirements:**

How has the Proposition A rapid rail transit system progressed? What follows is a brief summary of the progress to-date by corridor starting with the eight designated high-priority corridors.

#### **Progress Within the Original Eight High-Priority Corridors:**

**Downtown L.A. to Long Beach.** Completed. (22 miles) In June, 1990, the Blue Line to Long Beach opened as initially conceived.

**Downtown L.A. to North Hollywood.** Completed. (16 miles) The Red Line subway was opened to North Hollywood in 2002. It got there in increments, and not along the alignment initially proposed. A fire along the Fairfax alignment led to a federal ban on subway construction in this area and a shift of the alignment to Vermont Avenue. The first section from Union Station to Alvarado St. opened in December, 1992. The second section, from Alvarado to Western and from Vermont to Hollywood/Vine opened in June, 1999 followed by Hollywood/Highland in 2000.

**Century Freeway Corridor.** Completed. (18 miles) The Green Line opened in June, 1996. Because the Century rail line and the West Los Angeles (N/S) Corridor line intersect, and because to be useful the rail line needed to serve the (then) large El Segundo Employment Area, the environmental clearance of an extension of this line was completed in 1988 and made part of the project. (see West Los Angeles (N/S) Corridor below.)

**Pasadena Corridor.** Completed. (13.5 miles) The Gold Line opened in 2002. It did not, however, use the initial alignment in two ways. It was to have grown from a northward tunnel extension of the Blue Line under Flower Street, through Chinatown, then northeast toward Pasadena. The tunnel was to have been a central connecting segment of the Long Beach, Pasadena, Glendale, and (possible) Exposition light rail lines. The decision to start a separate line at Union Station was made in 1990. The

selected alignment also made use of the better ATSF right-of-way purchased in 1992 rather than the Lincoln Heights-Huntington Drive alignment initially identified.

**San Fernando Valley (E/W) Corridor. Completed.** (14.5 miles of busway, 36 miles of commuter rail) After 15 years of having a light rail project opposed within this corridor, the MTA approved in 2001 a busway on the SP Burbank Branch purchased by the MTA in 1990. The Orange Line Busway opened in October 2005. The busway, however, does not truly conform to the requirements of Proposition A. Metrolink's Ventura Line, opened in 1992, also cuts east-west across the upper San Fernando Valley on an alignment that was once studied as a light rail line serving the Proposition A Corridor. The San Fernando Valley (E/W) Corridor can certainly be said to have met the Proposition A obligation with both the Orange Line Busway and the Ventura Line.

**Santa Ana Corridor. Partial Progress.** To handle the passenger demand estimated for this corridor, the rail project was to have been an eastward extension of the Red Line through East Los Angeles turning south at Atlantic Blvd., then continuing to at least Norwalk. In the mid-1990's, however, the community of East Los Angeles, fearing the costly Red Line would never be built, opted instead for a light rail alternative connected directly to the Gold Line. The light rail line is expected to open in 2009. It will serve only the northern quarter of the Santa Ana Corridor. The Metrolink Orange Line was started in 1994 and does begin to serve long-distance commuters within the Santa Ana Corridor. It must still have major capacity enhancements before it can be considered to fully satisfy the needs of this important corridor, and the two line should eventually have a common station.

**West Los Angeles (E/W) Corridor. Small Segment Completed.** (1 mile as part of Red Line) The Western Avenue "stub" can be thought of as the initial segment of a rail line serving this corridor. There are no definite plans yet to extend the line, although Congress this year lifted the federal ban on tunnel construction through the mid-Wilshire methane area. In 2005, the MTA approved building the light rail Exposition Line to Venice Blvd. and eventually to Santa Monica.

**West Los Angeles (N/S) Corridor. Small Segment Completed.** (1.5 miles as part of Green Line) The extension of the Green Line into the El Segundo employment area was the initial rail segment within this corridor. The plan was to expand incrementally north and south from the Green Line; the three-way connection is in place to support this expansion. However, there has been no further work on this line. To the north, a possible new location of the LAX terminal complex has been debated for the last 15 years and is still not located. However, the MTA owns some key properties needed to connect the Green Line to the Lot C Transit Terminal. To the south, the extension of the line has not had any support.

### **Progress Within the Other Five Proposition A Rail Corridors:**

In addition to these eight high-priority corridors, progress has been made to several other corridors as a result of both the arrival of the Metrolink system in the 1992-1994 period and other major capital projects.

**El Monte Corridor. Substantially Completed.** (11 miles of commuter rail) The San Bernardino Metrolink commuter rail line to Claremont was inaugurated in 1992, and was extended to San Bernardino six months later. Although it has only two stops within the 11-mile Proposition A corridor, the line has become a major east-west rail connector for the San Gabriel Valley carrying 12,000 daily commuters. The rail line needs additional improvements – more passing track for closer headways, all-day service, and a station at County Hospital. Coupled with the El Monte Busway, the El Monte Corridor can be said to have met its Proposition A obligation.

**Glendale Corridor. Partially Completed.** Here again Metrolink has provided a sound level of service for part of the corridor. There are now over 100 trains a day between Union Station and Burbank. However, Glendale's business area is still several miles away. To fulfill its Proposition A obligations, it should have an urban rail connection to downtown Los Angeles.

**Harbor Corridor. No Progress.** This corridor has never been studied as a rail corridor. Even in the mid-1980's the Blue Line was construed as also serving the Harbor Corridor. The completion of the Harbor Freeway Busway in the early 1990's provided bus rapid transit service within this corridor.

**San Fernando Valley (N/S) Corridor. No Progress.** This corridor extends from the West Los Angeles (E/W) Corridor to Sylmar in northern San Fernando Valley. Until this corridor can connect to the Purple Line or to the West Los Angeles (N/S) Corridor, its usefulness is very questionable.

**South Bay/Long Beach Corridor. No Progress.** This corridor connects the West Los Angeles (N/S) Corridor line to the Blue Line east-west across the southern Los Angeles Basin. In 1992, the MTA purchased to AT&SF right-of-way that might well serve as part of its alignment. Until the West Los Angeles (N/S) light rail line is extended into Torrance, however, this line is of limited value.

### **F. Summary and Conclusion:**

In the 25 years since Proposition A was passed its associated obligations may have faded from memory. Nevertheless, Los Angeles has done a great deal toward building its Proposition A rail system. Helped by the Metrolink commuter rail system – which was not even conceived of when Proposition A passed – and by two busway projects, seven of the 13 Proposition A rail corridors have met the requirements of Proposition A. An additional two are partially served. Only four corridors have substantially no rail service

to-date, and their reasons for not having any are understandable. In addition to the Proposition A corridors, two other corridors within Los Angeles County have some level of rail services: the Route 60 corridor through Metrolink's Riverside Line, the Santa Clarita and Antelope Valley corridor with its own Metrolink services.

**Table 3: Summary of Progress Made Toward Meeting the Mandated Proposition A Rail Transit System**

<b>Named Corridor</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Progress</b>
Long Beach/ Harbor	<b>Completed</b>	Blue Line Completed (1990)
Dwntwn-N. Hollywood	<b>Completed</b>	Red Line Completed (2002)
Century Freeway	<b>Completed</b>	Green Line Completed (1996)
El Monte	<b>Completed</b>	El Monte Busway, Metrolink (1992)
Pasadena	<b>Completed</b>	Gold Line Completed (2002)
San Fernando (E/W)	<b>Completed</b>	Metrolink (1992), Orange Busway (2005)
Harbor	<b>Substantially Satisfied</b>	Blue Line (1990), Harbor Busway (1998)
Santa Ana	<b>Partially Satisfied</b>	Metrolink (1994), Gold Line extension under construction.
Glendale	<b>Partially Satisfied</b>	Metrolink (1992)
Wilshire West	<b>Started Only</b>	1-Mile Segment (1998), Expo Line under construction
West Los Angeles (N/S)	<b>Started Only</b>	1.5-Mile El Segundo Segment (1996)
San Fernando (N/S)	<b>No Progress</b>	None
South Bay/Long Beach	<b>No Progress</b>	None

In the last 25 years, the MTA has built 55 miles of light rail lines and a 17-mile rapid transit line in direct support of the Proposition A rail system. It has also built the 14.5-mile Orange Line Busway (where opposition made the building of light rail impossible) and the 12-mile Harbor Busway (Caltrans). In addition, it has implemented 199 miles of commuter rail lines in Los Angeles County through the Southern California Regional Rail Authority (Metrolink). Twelve miles of light rail service are now under construction. Nine of the thirteen Proposition A corridors have some rail service.

The projects and corridors in Table 3 are not the only corridors within which a rail line is to be built or should be built. They are only those serving the designated Proposition A rail corridors within which rail lines must be built.

## **G. Suggested Future Steps**

One can argue that completion of rail lines within these corridors should be the priority for spending Proposition A rail capital dollars. Toward this end, I would suggest that the MTA consider the following:

- Update its rail implementation strategy in order to establish cost-effective and understandable priorities. At this point MTA's rail planning seems haphazard and not focused on achieving either the completion of the Proposition A system or the most useful additions to the network already in place.
- Evaluate the best long-term location of light rail maintenance facilities so that each line does not build its own mini-facility as is becoming the case now.
- Emphasize the rail and bus system as an inter-connected network of heavy rail, light rail, busway/rapid bus, and commuter rail services. To the maximum extent achievable, these transit lines should interconnect conveniently to optimize passenger usefulness and operator cost-effectiveness.

**Prepared by: Richard Stanger  
April 2007**