



**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
AUGUST 18, 2004**

**OPERATIONS COMMITTEE
AUGUST 19, 2004**

**SUBJECT: WILSHIRE PEAK-PERIOD DEDICATED TRANSIT LANE
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT**

**ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPLEMENT THE
DEMONSTRATION WILSHIRE PEAK PERIOD DEDICATED
TRANSIT LANE AS A PERMANENT IMPROVEMENT**

RECOMMENDATION

- A. Receive and file the Wilshire Boulevard Peak Period Dedicated Transit Lane Demonstration Evaluation Report as summarized in Attachment A;
- B. Direct the Chief Executive Officer to work with the Los Angeles Department of Transportation to obtain approvals from the Los Angeles City Council to maintain the transit lane as a permanent improvement;
- C. Direct the Chief Executive Officer to evaluate Metro Rapid Corridors that have potential for dedicated peak period transit lanes and report back with recommendations.

ISSUE

On March 8, 2004 the Wilshire Boulevard Peak Period Dedicated Transit Lane was opened as a 6-month demonstration project in West Los Angeles. The bus lane has been implemented by Metro in cooperation with the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) and Santa Monica Big Blue Bus to test the effectiveness of bus lanes on major arterial streets like Wilshire Boulevard.

Results of the evaluation report are encouraging, as the project has achieved average travel time savings of up to 6% in the AM peak and up to 14% in the PM peak. More importantly, the regularity of the run times has improved by up to 27% during the most congested periods. Some local merchants have complained that parking restrictions have hurt their

businesses. Staff has continued to work with these affected merchants to minimize the impacts of these changes.

Based on the results of the evaluation period, a decision is now required by the Los Angeles City Council to either cancel the demonstration project or extend the operation of the bus lane as a permanent improvement. LADOT has requested that Metro make a recommendation to the City of Los Angeles prior to consideration by the City Council.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The Wilshire Boulevard Peak-Period Dedicated Transit Lane Demonstration Project was developed as a part of the Wilshire Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project. The Metro Board of Directors certified a Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for that project and has included the project in the Long Range and Short Range Transportation Plans.

Permanent operation of dedicated transit lanes will positively support Metro Rapid and Metro Local Bus operations and Metro's strategic plan to ensure safer, faster, more efficient and more reliable transit service.

OPTIONS

The Metro Board may choose to direct that the demonstration project be modified, extended or terminated. Staff is not recommending these options as the results of the test period have been positive and a permanent implementation of the lane is recommended. The Metro Board may also not direct staff to look at the potential for peak hour bus only lanes on other Metro Rapid corridors. This is not recommended since this could be a low cost method to achieve travel time savings and increased ridership.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Adoption of the recommended action will not have any immediate impact on MTA's FY05 budget, and this report does not authorize any new expenditure of funds. The cost to implement the demonstration project was approximately \$161,000. A grant from the State of California Traffic Congestion Relief Program (TCRP) for the Wilshire BRT Project was used to implement the project. The following is a breakdown of the costs for the demonstration period:

	Cost (\$)
Construction Plans	16,000
Fabrication and Installation	56,000
LADOT staff	29,000
Enforcement	60,000
Total (*Does not include study costs)	161,000

If the City of Los Angeles determines that the Wilshire Boulevard Transit Lanes should be removed, additional charges of approximately \$85,000 would be required from Metro to remove the signage and striping for the project and restore Wilshire Boulevard to its former condition in the project area.

In the longer term, the findings from the Evaluation Study may show a potential cost savings to the Metro's current operating resources especially if more segments are added along Wilshire Boulevard and other Metro Bus corridors. This would result in additional travel time savings to our riders.

DISCUSSION

In August 2002, the Metro Board certified the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Wilshire BRT Project. One of the conditions of approval for the project was that Metro work with affected local jurisdictions and gain their approval prior to the implementation of any type of dedicated transit lanes. In order to obtain this support, Metro staff worked during the past year and a half with the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) to get approval for a short segment of a bus-only lane on Wilshire Boulevard to demonstrate its feasibility.

On November 18, 2003 the Los Angeles City Council approved a motion (CF#03-2337) authorizing the LADOT to implement the peak period demonstration project. Metro staff worked with LADOT to form a multi-agency 'Implementation Team' to coordinate work and evaluation of the demonstration project. This team included staff from various functions within Metro (Planning, Operations, Third Party/Construction, Service Planning, Community Relations, and Communications), along with staff from LADOT, Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), Los Angeles County Sheriff Department (LASD), Santa Monica Big Blue Bus, and Korve Engineering representing the consultant team.

LADOT commenced the fabrication and installation of signing and striping for the demonstration project in January 2004. On Monday, March 8, 2004 the peak-period dedicated transit lanes opened for service (the lanes are used by Metro Rapid, Metro Local, and Santa Monica Big Blue Bus). Data gathering began in February 2004, with additional data gathering continuing throughout the demonstration period.

The Demonstration Project includes the following elements:

- Peak-period parking restrictions along Wilshire Boulevard in the test area.
- Installation of exclusive peak-period bus lane striping and signing.
- Exclusive curbside bus lane operation during the AM Peak (7:00 to 9:00 AM) and the PM Peak (4:00 to 7:00 PM).
- Supplemental Traffic and Parking Enforcement in the first four weeks of the project to establish the lane and compliance.

This segment along Wilshire Boulevard was chosen because:

- Implementation of a peak-period bus only lane operation required minimal elimination of through travel lanes since this was one of the few remaining segments of Wilshire Boulevard where peak-period parking was still permitted.
- Parking utilization studies showed that sufficient side street parking capacity existed to accommodate any loss of peak-period Wilshire Boulevard on-street parking.
- Significant peak-period congestion exists during the AM and PM peak period, which reduced transit service quality of both Metro and Municipal transit operations.

Community Outreach

Prior to and during the implementation of the demonstration project, Metro staff conducted an outreach program targeted to the affected businesses, residents, and transit patrons along the demonstration route, which included:

- Initial personal contact with each business and residential project along the demonstration route and follow-up letters;
- Establishment of a telephone hotline, with follow-up calls and visits to affected parties;
- Businesses were provided with signs to post in windows and brochures to inform customers of parking changes.
- Informational notices were placed on automobile windshields in the week prior to start-up informing motorists of the coming parking changes.
- A follow-up survey of businesses conducted mid-way through the demonstration period;
- Presentations at various public forums including the Brentwood Community Council, Traffic Committee of the West Los Angeles Citizens Police Advisory Board, the Metro Westside/Central Governance Council and the West Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce Wilshire Merchants Meeting;
- Transitional marketing assistance was offered to affected businesses;
- On-board passenger survey of riders specifically related to the bus lane operation.

The outreach effort identified approximately 160 merchants and other stakeholders in the demonstration project area. Metro staff met or contacted representatives of each of these parties and attempted to identify the type of business, inform them about the project, elicit their initial thoughts, and identify any other important information.

At this time, the West Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce has maintained a position of opposition to the project based on the restrictions to parking meter usage in front of Wilshire Boulevard businesses. Metro staff and the local Council Office have identified between 10-15 merchants (6% to 9% of the affected businesses) who have continued to express opposition based on loss of business. Since outreach efforts began in January 2004, Metro staff has consistently offered to work with these businesses to identify and provide appropriate assistance (e.g., advertising, improved signage, etc.) to help merchants and their

customers transition to the new conditions. To date, all offers of assistance have been declined.

Evaluation Report Findings

The Wilshire Peak Period Transit Lane Evaluation Report was structured to measure the positive and negative effects to bus operations, parking utilization and mixed flow traffic. The before and after data sources included traffic counts, bus travel time data from LADOT's Transit Signal Priority System, parking surveys and on-board passengers surveys. The analysis of the data shows the following results:

- Bus Operations Improvements- Even though the demonstration project is less than one mile in length, significant improvements in running time and service reliability were identified in comparisons of "same month" before and after data from April 2003 vs. April 2004.

Metro Rapid Travel Time Summary Comparison of Peak Period Transit Lane Operation (2004) With Prior Mixed-Flow Operation (2003)					
Direction & Time Period		Hour	Year	Average Travel Time	
				Minutes	Improvement
East Bound	AM	7-9	2003	4.2	2%
			2004	4.1	
	PM	4-7	2003	5.3	9%
			2004	4.8	
West Bound	AM	7-9	2003	3.6	6%
			2004	3.4	
	PM	4-7	2003	4.4	14%
			2004	3.8	

- Time Savings: The analysis of AM and PM peak periods of operation and eastbound and westbound directions indicated that average Metro Rapid travel times consistently improved for all periods and directions which represents operating benefits for Metro and Santa Monica Big Blue Bus.
- Reliability Improvements: Reliability was evaluated by identifying the range of travel times for the middle 90% of buses (excluding the slowest and fastest 5%). Prior to the bus lane, travel times were quite variable, with some buses traversing the one-mile segment in as little as 4 minutes and other buses requiring up to 12 minutes during certain periods of the rush hour. After opening service reliability has improved by 13-16% in the AM and by 12-27% in the PM peak periods. These findings show that the Metro Rapid service was more reliable as the dedicated lanes provided the buffer from the variable traffic conditions.

- Bus Operators Satisfaction -Bus drivers generally followed up with positive comments by expressing the desire to see bus only lanes elsewhere along the route and elsewhere on the system.
- Safer Operations- One of the biggest delays and potential causes of accidents for buses occurs from waiting to reenter traffic after making a passenger stop. Often the delay to reenter traffic exceeded the time needed for passengers to board and alight the bus. The bus lane eliminated this delay in most cases and the potential traffic safety hazard of buses reentering the flow of traffic.
- Local Bus Benefits – As local buses make more stops compared to Metro Rapid buses, locals obtain an even greater benefit from the transit lane, due to less merging into and out of traffic lanes at bus stops;
- Parking Availability- Based upon the surveys, available parking on side streets was not saturated by cars displaced from Wilshire Boulevard (partly due to extensive off-street parking in the area). As a consequence, the impact to the cross street parking availability has been marginal.
- Impact on Automobile Traffic- The very limited comparison of “before” and “after” travel time data results does not lead to a conclusive determination as to the affect of the demonstration project on mixed-flow automobile traffic. No impact to automobile traffic has been observed due to the bus lane.

In general, the project provides one additional travel lane that was not available to traffic before. Therefore, by moving the buses out of the two mixed-flow lanes, automobile traffic can operate more effectively and not to share those lanes with buses. In addition, cars making right turns can use the bus lane and therefore do not cause as much back up at intersections as before the demonstration project. There may also be a benefit to automobile traffic from not having to make room for buses pulling away from bus stops and from not having to wait behind automobiles attempting to parallel park or pull out of parking spaces.

NEXT STEPS

If directed to do so by the Board, staff will work with LADOT to obtain City Council approval to make the Wilshire Transit Lane a permanent improvement. Possible additional segments of peak-period dedicated transit lanes will be considered along other Metro Rapid segments and brought to the Board for consideration, as appropriate.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Summary of Wilshire Peak Period Transit Lane Demonstration Project

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Attachment A
Summary of Evaluation Report
Wilshire Peak Period Dedicated Transit Lane
(To be provided under separate cover)

