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REVISED
PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
SEPTEMBER 14, 2005

SUBJECT: REGIONAL CONNECTOR THROUGH THE CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT OF LOS ANGELES

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

Receive and File update on the study of the Regional Connector through the Central Business District of Los Angeles (CBD).

ISSUE

At the July 21, 2005 Board meeting the Metro Chair requested a report on the potential ridership benefits, costs and implementation timeframes of the Metro Light Rail Regional Connector (Regional Connector). As far back as Metro's 1992 Long Range Transportation Plan, there have been discussions of the future need for a light rail connector in downtown Los Angeles. More recently, Metro's 2003 Short Range Transportation Plan notes the need to explore the feasibility of a Downtown Light Rail connector that connects the Metro Gold Line, Metro Blue Line and Exposition Light rail lines through downtown Los Angeles.

In early 2004, Metro staff initiated a technical feasibility assessment for a potential regional connector. This study focused on conceptual methods to provide a regional connector and to alleviate potential operational constraints at the 7th Street/Metro Center Station. The study analyzed low to moderate cost alternatives including partial "at-grade" and "street running" alignments. Since the study was limited to how additional capacity could be attained and how a connection could be made, no specific alignment was recommended. Instead, multiple opportunities were reviewed, each with advantages and disadvantages. The study focused on sixteen conceptual options including combinations of at-grade, partial sub-surface and partial aerial alignments. Based on Metro's historic subway costs added to the lack of available funding for a new subway, a fully underground alignment was not considered as practical in the alternatives. Metro has previously studied subway alternatives for this station and through the CBD. **In this previous study, alignments that utilized Alameda Street to Washington Boulevard at-grade and in aerial configurations were also considered.** This Board Report utilizes the information from the 2004 study to respond to the Chairs' request for information.

DISCUSSION

Ridership Benefits

Metro does not currently have ridership estimates for a regional connector. Updated modeling of the conceptual Regional Connector is anticipated to be completed in October as part of the ongoing Long Range Plan update.

The Metro Expo and Blue rail lines come within approximately one and one half miles of the Metro Pasadena Gold Line/East Los Angeles Extension in the CBD. Previous reviews of a conceptual connection between the light rail lines in 1993 concluded that connecting several of the lines would significantly increase the utilization of all rail lines and improve regional mobility.

A second system benefit would be that the regional connector would alleviate an operational constraint at the 7th Street/Metro Center Station (Flower Street). The current configuration of the Metro Center Station requires that all light rail trains entering this station be "turned back" for the return trip to either the Metro Blue or the future Expo lines. The amount of time to "turn" a light rail train from the north bound track to the south bound side constrains the frequency (headway) of trains using this station.

One of the alternatives to alleviate this constraint is to take the light rail trains "through" the station instead of turning them back. Taking the trains through the station eliminates the time required to change from one track to the other and allows a free flow of trains through the station, thus increasing the capacity of the station and the rail system. In addition to alleviating the operations constraint, there are clear regional mobility benefits, including increased ridership on both Metro Rail and the Bus System from the development of a continuous cross regional connector through the CBD. A continuous regional system limits the need for transfers and also operates as a local circulator.

Costs

Parsons/Brinkerhoff prepared rough-order-of-magnitude cost estimates for each of the alternatives based on a review of Metro's actual costs for similar components of the rail system. Costs were in 2004 dollars and ranged from approximately $120 million to $250 million. These numbers do not include escalation costs which will increase the cost depending on the year of construction. The differences in costs largely relate to the amount of grade separations, minimization of traffic impacts, operational speeds and directness of the routes. An at-grade operation with a higher level of traffic impacts was obviously a less expensive alternative, while the higher speed with greater mitigation of traffic impacts was more expensive. All alternatives have some level of impact on traffic operations.

Implementation

The estimated time to construct a regional connector similar to the alternatives within this study range from five to eight years if funding is provided. This would require identifying planning and design funds, potential construction funds, preparing an EIR/EIS, securing agreements for at-grade operations and station locations, bidding the project and constructing. One of the main issues regarding implementing the regional connector would be to obtain concurrence from the City of Los Angeles to accept running much or some of the line with the existing street right-of –way.

Assuming funding was available, the following is an approximate schedule:

PROCESS	
Procurement of EIR/EIS consultant/alternatives study	4-6 months
Completing EIR/EIS	12-18 months
The majority of preliminary engineering can be completed during the EIR/EIS performance period	
Development of bid documents, procurement for construction and award	12 months
Construction	38-60 months

NEXT STEPS

Staff will consider the Regional Connector in the Long Range Transportation Plan update process along with other proposed projects and priorities.

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