

PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

320 W 4th Street, Suite 500
Los Angeles, CA 90013



April 29, 2024

ENV 2021080001
West Santa Ana Branch Transit Corridor Project
Los Angeles County

Meghna Khanna, Project Manager
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority
One Gateway Plaza, MS 99-22-7
Los Angeles, CA 90012
sgl@metro.net

Governor's Office of Planning & Research

Apr 29 2024

STATE CLEARINGHOUSE

SUBJECT: SCH# 2017061007; West Santa Ana Branch Transit Corridor Project - Final Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report

Dear Ms. Khanna,

Thank you for providing us with a copy of your Final Environmental Impact Statement/Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIS/FEIR) for the West Santa Ana Branch Transit Corridor Project (Project). The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC or Commission) staff provided comments to the project's DEIS/DEIR on September 23, 2021. In that letter we recommended that "Metro further evaluate additional grade separations and/or elimination and consolidation of proposed at-grade crossing locations. Commission staff will not support at-grade designs at crossing locations where significant and adverse impacts cannot be mitigated." The FEIS/FEIR proposes no additional grade separations, and Commission staff remain concerned about the safety of several crossings that are proposed to be at-grade.

Commission staff recommends that the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) Board of Directors reconsider certifying the FEIS/FEIR and reiterates its request for further evaluation of grade separation or elimination of 11 proposed at-grade crossing locations where the FEIS/FEIR determined that 12 roadway intersections would experience significant and adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated by the Project. The table below lists the 11 crossing locations and 12 impacted roadway intersections.

Intersections Where Significant & Adverse Impacts Remain			
Intersection Name	Crossing Name	Existing CPUC/DOT Crossing No. (UPRR)	City
Randolph St/Alameda St (West)	Alameda St-West	001BBJ-487.50/761584V	Huntington Park
*Randolph St/Alameda St (East)	Alameda St-east	001BBJ-487.50/761584V	Huntington Park
Randolph St/Albany St	Albany St	001BBJ-487.78/761586J	Huntington Park
Randolph St/Santa Fe Ave	Santa Fe Ave	001BBJ-487.91/761587R	Huntington Park
Randolph St/Rugby Ave	Rugby Ave	001BBJ-488.12/761589E	Huntington Park
Randolph St/Pacific Blvd	Pacific Blvd	001BBJ-488.20/761590Y	Huntington Park
Randolph St/Seville Ave	Seville Ave	001BBJ-488.35/761592M	Huntington Park

Randolph St/Miles Ave	Miles Ave	001BBJ-488.55/761593U	Huntington Park
Randolph St/State St	State St	001BBJ-488.93/761596P	Huntington Park
Gage Ave/California Ave	Gage Ave	003A-5.30/810949L	Huntington Park & Bell
Gage Ave/Salt Lake Ave (West)			
Florence Ave/California Ave (West)	Florence Ave	003A-5.90/810951M	Huntington Park & Bell
Florence Ave/California Ave (East)			

* Although the FEIS/FEIR did not identify this intersection as remaining significantly impacted, Commission staff has significant safety concerns with a proposed at-grade crossing design.

The proposed alignment along the existing median of the Randolph Street/Union Pacific Railroad La Habra Subdivision freight rail corridor in the City of Huntington Park modifies 10 at-grade crossings at 10 roadway intersections by adding 2 light rail transit (LRT) tracks adjacent to an existing freight track. Eight of the 12 proposed at-grade crossing locations where significant and adverse impacts cannot be mitigated are along the Randolph Street alignment. The prospect of adding two additional LRT tracks to the existing single-track freight crossings on the railroad corridor along Randolph Street has significant safety implications to the safe, efficient movement of vehicular traffic.

As part of our mission to reduce the hazards associated with at-grade crossings, the Commission's policy is to reduce the number of at-grade crossings on rail corridors. Commission staff coordinated extensively with the LACMTA Project team to address safety concerns at proposed crossing locations identified in the FEIS/FEIR. Commission staff indicated significant safety concerns with at-grade crossings proposed at the following locations:

Alameda West and Alameda East Crossings in City of Huntington Park:

Randolf Street in the vicinity of the Alameda West and Alameda East Crossings currently experiences heavy truck traffic. Commission staff's field observations, with and without the LACMTA Project team present, identified several large semi-truck trailers negotiating turns at the intersections of Alameda West and Randolph Street and Alameda East and Randolph Street with difficulty. The Project's proposed modifications of these intersections result in more narrow and restrictive vehicle lanes that inhibit large truck turning movements. Preliminary designs presented to Commission staff and City of Huntington Park proposed ineffective modifications as mitigation measures for the safety impacts caused by introduction of 2 LRT tracks at these locations. To the west of these crossings, the alignment proposes an aerial grade separated configuration as it transitions off the LACMTA A-Line where it then is proposed to transition to an at-grade alignment less than ¼ mile west of Alameda Street West. The aerial configuration can easily be continued east past both the Alameda West and Alameda East intersections before transitioning to an at-grade alignment. The FEIS/FEIR should be modified to evaluate and clear the potential grade separation of these two crossings.

In addition, the remaining 8 impacted intersections along Randolph Street should be further evaluated for grade separation and/or elimination since the FEIS/FEIR lists them as locations with significant and adverse impacts that cannot be mitigated by the Project.

Gage Avenue Crossing in Cities of Huntington Park and Bell:

The Gage Avenue crossing is bracketed by the intersection with Salt Lake Ave immediately adjacent to the west and the intersection with California Avenue to the east. The FEIS/FEIR states that the Project “is projected to result in adverse effects on these intersections during both [am/pm] peak periods.” It continues by stating that multiple mitigation measures were considered, but many would require right-of-way acquisition and result in secondary impacts in order to add additional vehicle lanes. Significantly, the FEIS/FEIR does not evaluate grade separation of the crossing as a potential mitigation to the adverse impacts that the at-grade design creates. The proposed Project alignment is an aerial grade separated configuration to the north of Gage Avenue as it transitions off the Randolph Street/La Habra Subdivision alignment that then transitions to an at-grade configuration approximately 1/8 mile north of Gage Avenue. The aerial configuration can easily be continued south past the Gage Avenue crossing before transitioning to an at-grade configuration. This change would effectively eliminate the adverse effects on the two intersections. The FEIS/FEIR should be modified to evaluate and clear the potential grade separation of this location.

Florence Avenue Crossing in City of Huntington Park:

The Florence Avenue crossing is bracketed by the intersection with California Avenue (West) immediately to the west and the intersection with California Avenue (East) immediately to the east. The FEIS/FEIR states that after detailed evaluation, “no feasible mitigation was developed” for the Florence Avenue and California Avenue (West) intersection, and “one feasible mitigation option was identified” for the Florence Avenue and California Avenue (East) intersection. However, impacts would remain after implementation of the one feasible mitigation. The FEIS/FEIR further concludes that “adding additional lanes or lane extensions will not provide substantial reduction in vehicle delay without acquiring right-of-way. Therefore, these impacts will be unmitigable, and an adverse effect will remain.” Once again, the FEIS/FEIR does not evaluate grade separation of the crossing as a potential mitigation to the adverse impacts that the at-grade design creates.

This crossing is also adjacent to the proposed Florence/Salt Lake Station that would also need to be constructed as an elevated station if the crossing is grade separated, providing an additional safety benefit. Current LACMTA operations at ground level stations impact adjacent crossings and intersections whenever trains are delayed at station platforms. This causes extended gate down times at adjacent crossings and interferes with programmed traffic signal timing at adjacent intersections which will add to vehicle delay. Constructing the Florence/Salt Lake Station as an elevated station will eliminate any adverse impacts to the adjacent crossing and two intersections. The FEIS/FEIR should be modified to evaluate and clear the potential grade separation of this location.

Although the LACMTA Board will be certifying the overall project, the CPUC has not specifically authorized any of the proposed at-grade crossings. It is evident that much work is still ahead if LACMTA hopes to successfully address Commission staff’s safety concerns and obtain Commission approval for project construction. **Commission staff will not support at-grade designs for locations where safety concerns are not effectively mitigated.**

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (213) 576-1313 or matthew.bond@cpuc.ca.gov. Contact our lead staff on this project: Noel Takahara at (213) 576-7106 or noel.takahara@cpuc.ca.gov for transit safety certification matters and Jose Pereyra at (213) 576-7083 or jose.pereyra@cpuc.ca.gov for crossing matters.

Meghna Khanna, Project Manager
West Santa Ana Branch Transit Corridor Project
April 29, 2024
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Matthew Bond". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matthew Bond, PE
Program and Project Supervisor
Rail Crossings and Engineering Branch
Rail Safety Division

cc:
State Clearinghouse