

Board OKs Environmental Review

MTA to Seek Federal, State Funds for Bus, Rail Projects in Transportation Corridors



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Editor's Note: This is the second in a series of articles by James de la Loza on Transportation Corridor issues.

(April 17) With the recent approval by the MTA Board of Directors to go forward with environmental review for six bus and rail transit projects for the Eastside, Mid-City, Westside and San Fernando Valley, the next step for the MTA is to secure state and federal funds.

These projects are closer to becoming reality after Governor Gray Davis unveiled his \$5.2 billion state transportation funding package. The MTA will receive \$737 million to use for light rail or exclusive bus lanes in the Eastside, Mid-City and the San Fernando Valley Transit Corridors.

Finding solutions to traffic problems

The approval by the MTA Board goes in the right direction to find solutions to transportation and traffic problems that Angelinos face every day.

The draft environmental clearance process will be completed within 9 to 12 months. It will address environmental impacts such as traffic, ridership, construction, air quality, jobs, business, parking and, of course, the cost of the work within the impacted communities.

Each of the transit corridors faces different challenges to their alternatives: In the Mid-City/Westside Corridor the focus will be on two routes. One route involves light rail or an exclusive Bus Rapid Transit busway along the Exposition right-of-way. This 15.6-mile route would have 15 stations. The cost for the light rail would be \$661 million and \$260 million for Bus Rapid Transit. This transit service would start at the Metro Rail 7th/Metro Center and extend through Culver City to Santa Mónica.

Five-station segment

In this option, also under consideration is a five-mile, five-station segment from 7th/Metro Center to Venice/Robertson Boulevard. The cost for light rail would be \$442 million and \$131 million for bus.

A proposed Bus Rapid Transit line along Wilshire would be an exclusive 14-mile bus lane with 13 stations beginning at Wilshire and Vermont and ending in Santa Mónica. The estimated cost is \$241 million.

In the San Fernando Valley, the alternative is a 14-mile busway with 12 stations along the Burbank/Chandler railroad right-of-way from the North Hollywood Metro Red Line station to Warner Center. The estimated cost is \$291 million.

Two Eastside options

For the Eastside, there are two options: A light-rail alternative and Bus Rapid Transit along the same route. Both options include a 1.7-mile tunnel below the streets of Boyle Heights. The tunnel would be necessary to avoid the loss of parking spaces and traffic congestion in the narrow streets of the community.

The cost of the seven-mile, eight-station light-rail project is estimated at \$590 million. Each station would be approximately one mile apart, beginning at Union Station and ending at Atlantic and Beverly Boulevards. The communities affected will be Boyle Heights and East Los Angeles.

The MTA Planning Department and its consultants will be conducting the next phase of the study. Upon completion of the draft environmental impact statement/report, the MTA Board of Directors will review the report findings and may select the locally preferred alternative.

Focus on obtaining funds

With the environmental phase in progress, the MTA is focusing its efforts on obtaining the funds needed to complete transit improvements in all three corridors at the same time. The MTA also will continue with its public outreach to community leaders to ensure their participation in this vital process.

The MTA is fully committed to constructing and completing the three transit corridors at the same time. However, the beginning of such projects depends on

the availability of funds and the completion of the studies, which could take two years. This would be followed by two to six years of construction before the public can enjoy the benefits of these new services.

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