



MTA Releases Draft Environmental Report for Eastside Light-Rail Project

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By ED SCANNELL

(March 6) The MTA has released the draft environmental study of a six-mile light-rail extension that would serve one of the most densely populated and heavily transit dependent areas in Los Angeles County.

Release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for the Eastside Light-Rail Transit Project will be followed by a 45-day comment period. The MTA will hold three public hearings to receive community input on the study.

The light-rail project would serve as an extension of the Pasadena Blue Line. It would operate from Union Station to Atlantic Boulevard along 1st Street, then transition to 3rd Street via Indiana Street and proceed east along 3rd Street/Beverly Boulevard to Atlantic Boulevard.

The extension would include nine stations and operate at street level, with the exception of a 1.7-mile tunnel segment through Boyle Heights, which was necessitated by the narrowness of streets along this portion of the alignment.

Several features make the Eastside an excellent candidate.

The 40-square-mile Eastside is a densely populated area with a current population of 403,000. That figure is expected to grow 25 percent by the year 2020 and, during the same period, the number of jobs is expected to climb by 30 percent.

In addition, many Eastside residents are transit dependent. More than 19 percent of workers use the bus system to get to work as compared to 6.8 percent for Los Angeles County as a whole. In some Eastside neighborhoods, as many as 50 percent of commuter trips occur on public transit.

If the light rail extension receives final environmental approval later this year, construction could begin in mid-2003. The extension could begin operations in mid-2007.

In addition to Union Station, stations would be located at 1st St./Alameda St. (Little Tokyo), 1st St./Utah St., 1st St./Boyle St., 1st St./Soto St., 1st St./Lorena St., 3rd St./Rowan Ave., 3rd St./Mednick Ave., and Beverly Blvd./Atlantic Blvd.

The extension would be linked with the 13.7-mile Pasadena Blue Line at Union Station. The Pasadena Blue Line is expected to begin operations in mid-2003.

The initial work on the Eastside line was suspended.

In January 1998, the MTA suspended work on the Eastside extension of the Metro Red Line subway prior to groundbreaking. The suspended project would have consisted of

four stations east of Union Station.

Following a study of potential transit alternatives for the corridor, the MTA Board in June, 2000, selected the Light-Rail Transit alternative as the preferred mode of choice for the Eastside community.

The Federal Government had committed to fund \$495 million, or approximately 50 percent, of the cost of the subway extension. The MTA studied the light rail alternative with the intent of improving transit mobility while retaining federal funding eligibility.

Following the recommendation of Gov. Gray Davis, the state legislature earmarked state surplus funds to fully fund the Eastside alternative. The projected cost of the Eastside Light-Rail Transit Project is approximately \$760 million.

Determining residents' concerns and educating the community.

The MTA has been meeting with residents and other community stakeholders since June, 1999, to solicit input on the Eastside project. Three public hearings will be held during the 45-day comment period, which began, Friday, March 2, to receive input on the draft EIS/EIR.

To ensure a thorough understanding of the draft EIS/EIR, the MTA will distribute 10,000 executive summaries of the report along the project alignment. Some 61,000 households will be notified by letter about where they can read one of the 1,500 copies of the draft EIS/EIR to be distributed.

Copies of the report will be distributed to various governmental agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Postal Service branches, the Sierra Club, the Boys and Girls Club, libraries, public service agencies and service organizations along the alignment.

Next steps in the process.

At the conclusion of the Draft Environmental Phase, the MTA board of Directors will consider adopting a "Locally Preferred Alternative" (LPA), the federal government's term for the transit improvement preferred over other available alternatives.

The MTA is nearing the start of preliminary engineering on the project, which will incorporate mitigation measures, design features and safety features identified during the environmental phase and received during the comment period.

Following Board certification and approval by the Federal Transit Administration, the project would be ready for final design and construction.

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