



Illustrative view of Bus Rapid Transit concept.

MTA Releases Draft Environmental Study on Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Projects

By ED SCANNELL

(4/6/01)The MTA has released a draft environmental study of three transit alternatives aimed at moving people faster and more efficiently through LA's Mid-City and Westside, two areas of the city that are expected to experience substantial growth in population over the next two decades.

Release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIS/EIR) for the Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Studies begins a comment period that will extend through June 15, 2001, during which the MTA will hold public hearings on the report and accept written comments.

Three transit alternatives are evaluated in the Draft EIS/EIR:

- [Wilshire Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit \(BRT\):](#)
- [Wilshire BRT plus Exposition BRT;](#) and
- [Wilshire BRT plus Exposition Light-Rail Transit.](#)

Here's a description of each alternative:

Wilshire Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) - This alternative is a 13.2-mile exclusive bus lane, which would run along Wilshire Boulevard from the Wilshire/Western Metro Red Line station to downtown Santa Monica.

BRT buses would build on the success of the Metro Rapid Bus System whose distinctive red and white buses operate on the Wilshire/Whittier and Ventura Boulevard corridors.

Unlike the Metro Rapid System, however, BRT buses would operate in dedicated bus lanes, not mixed flow lanes, resulting in even greater time savings.

An average trip on local bus service operating on Wilshire Boulevard takes up to 70 minutes. Average travel time on the Wilshire BRT

over the same distance would be 48 to 50 minutes.

The BRT would operate during peak periods only, or on a 24-hours-per-day basis, and buses would operate either in the curb lane or center lane of Wilshire Boulevard. The BRT also would feature enhanced stations with improved lighting, ticket vending and security features.

Off-street parking

Existing landscaped medians could be preserved and expanded into areas where they presently do not exist. Parking facilities would be provided off-street to replace any on-street parking that would be displaced.

Long distance automobile travel on Wilshire Boulevard would be discouraged and rerouted to other parallel arterial streets in favor of a transit system that would carry four to five times the number of passengers on Wilshire Boulevard in the same traffic lane.

Traffic signal improvements at more than 500 intersections throughout the Westside would be implemented as part of the project to ease the flow of traffic diverted from Wilshire Boulevard.

The MTA Board has identified the Wilshire Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit alternative as having priority over the Exposition right-of-way alternatives. The estimated cost of the project is between \$354 million and \$363 million.

Wilshire Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit plus Exposition Bus Rapid Transit - This alternative is a combination of both the Wilshire BRT project and the Exposition BRT project. The combined is 29.9 miles, with 13.2 miles on the Wilshire BRT and 16.7 miles on the Exposition BRT.

A total of 34 stations would be provided on both routes, with 14 on Wilshire BRT and 20 on Exposition BRT.

The Exposition BRT project would operate on a route primarily along the Exposition right-of-way from downtown Los Angeles to downtown Santa Monica with a detour off the right-of-way at Venice and Robertson Boulevards in the Cheviot Hills segment.

The BRT then would follow Venice Boulevard west and Sepulveda Boulevard north before rejoining the right-of-way. The supplemental cost of the Exposition BRT is \$291 million.

Also under consideration is a combined alternative which would feature a shorter 8.8-mile Exposition BRT project which would extend from downtown Los Angeles only to the Venice/Washington Station in Culver City.

West of the Venice/Washington Station, buses would operate in mixed traffic conditions, instead of operating in a dedicated busway. The supplemental cost of this truncated Exposition BRT alternative would be \$129 million.

Wilshire Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit/Exposition Right-of-Way Light-Rail Transit - In addition to the Wilshire BRT project, this alternative includes an Exposition light-rail transit project. The combined project length is 30.5 miles, with 13.2 miles on the Wilshire

BRT and 17.3 miles on the Exposition light-rail line.

A total of 31 stations would be provided on both routes, with 14 on Wilshire BRT and 17 on Exposition light-rail line.

The Exposition light-rail project would operate along the MTA-owned Exposition railroad right-of-way from downtown Los Angeles to Santa Monica. The line would start at the 7th St./Metro Center Metro Blue Line station at 7th/Flower in downtown Los Angeles and proceed south along the existing Metro Blue Line tracks to Washington Boulevard.

At Washington Boulevard the line would branch off, proceeding south to the Exposition right-of-way near USC/Exposition Park. At that point, trains would operate along the Exposition right-of-way, with the exception of the section between Venice/Robertson and Sepulveda Boulevard where the line would detour off the right-of-way as in the Exposition right-of-way BRT alternative.

The estimated supplemental cost of the Exposition LRT is \$555 million.

Light-rail project

Also under consideration is a combined alternative with a shorter 9.8-mile Exposition light-rail project extending from downtown Los Angeles only as far as the Venice/Washington Station in Culver City.

Light-rail trains would terminate approximately midway between downtown Los Angeles and Santa Monica and feeder bus service would operate in mixed traffic conditions west of Venice/Washington Station. The supplemental cost of this truncated Exposition LRT alternative would be \$253 million.

The Exposition right-of-way was purchased by the MTA in 1990 and currently is not in use. As a result, neither the BRT nor the LRT alternative would displace any traffic lanes.

No bus line operates continuous service parallel to the Exposition right-of-way, however, Santa Monica Big Blue Bus Line #10 currently takes between 60 and 75 minutes to complete the trip from downtown Santa Monica to downtown Los Angeles via the Santa Monica Freeway.

The estimated run time for the BRT option from 7th/Flower to downtown Santa Monica on the Exposition right-of-way would be 39 to 47 minutes, depending on the number of stations an individual bus serves. The estimated run time for the light rail option would be 42 minutes.

Short tunnel segment

A short tunnel segment is being considered for both the Exposition BRT and Exposition light-rail options on the eastern part of the alignment near USC/Exposition Park from Figueroa Street to Vermont Avenue. The net additional cost for this 0.6-mile subway would range from \$120 million to \$150 million.

The Westside of Los Angeles has the highest population and employment density in the Southern California region, as well as the highest proportion of transit ridership, features which make the area

ideal for fixed guideway transit solutions.

The area has a population of 1.5 million persons and that figure is expected to grow by 300,000 over the next 20 years. The number of jobs is projected to increase by over 200,000.

In addition, no significant expansion of existing freeway and street networks is planned to accommodate this growth. As a result, improvements in public transit represent the best means to meet future growth demands.

In January, 1998, the MTA suspended work on the Metro Red Line subway extension to the Mid-City area due to funding shortfalls. The federal government had committed to fund \$245 million, or approximately 50 percent, of the cost of the project.

Adoption of an above-ground transit project could utilize these suspended subway monies. In addition, the Governor's Transportation Initiative has committed \$258 million in state funds for the Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor.

The Draft EIS/EIR released Friday represents the latest phase in the Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Studies. The studies were initiated to examine potential alternatives to the subway extension and to preserve the federal funding. An EIS/EIR is required to obtain state and federal funding to design and construct a project.

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