

Board Oks Wilshire BRT, Exposition LRT for Mid-City/Westside

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(June 29, 2001) - The MTA Board of Directors today adopted a bus rapid transit project and a light rail project as the combined Locally Preferred Alternative for LA's Mid-City and Westside, two areas of the city that are expected to experience substantial growth over the next two decades.



Click on image to view map of planned routes

The Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) designation is the federal government's term for the transit improvement preferred over others. It is required before federal funding can be made available for construction.

The Board adopted Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) as the alternative for the Wilshire Boulevard Corridor and Light-Rail Transit (LRT) as the alternative for the Exposition Corridor.

Wilshire Boulevard Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

The Wilshire Boulevard BRT will run 13.2 miles along Wilshire Boulevard from the Metro Red Line Wilshire/Western station to downtown Santa Monica. It would be implemented in a phased plan with the following provisions:



Artist's rendering of Bus Rapid Transit station on Wilshire Boulevard.

Peak-hour service would operate in dedicated transit lanes in the initial phase, following the successful demonstration of service in mixed-flow traffic and with the concurrence of the affected city and county jurisdictions.

The MTA would implement 24-hour dedicated transit lanes at a future date only with the approval of the affected cities and in coordination with communities.

BRT buses would build on the success of the Metro Rapid Bus program, whose distinctive red and white buses have been operating on the Wilshire/Whittier and Ventura Boulevard corridors since June 2000.

The initial phase of the Wilshire Boulevard BRT would cost \$212 million. It would replace the current 40-foot Metro Rapid buses with 45-foot or 60-foot buses. It would have enhanced bus stations, improved signal priority, fare vending machines at stations and a peak-period curb lane, subject to approval by each municipal jurisdiction.

Construction is expected to begin in 2003, with operation in 2005.

The ultimate Wilshire BRT alternative calls for the reconstruction of median-adjacent or 24-hour lanes, if approved by each municipal jurisdiction, and the possible introduction of 75-foot double-articulated buses.

In just seven months of service, Metro Rapid has cut the travel time of commuters by as much as 25 percent and increased bus ridership by 32.6 percent on the Wilshire/Whittier corridor and by 26.4 percent on the Ventura Boulevard corridor.

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 46 minutes.

Thursday's Board action regarding the Wilshire BRT project included one amendment to the staff proposal. The Board directed that additional sites be considered for a new downtown bus maintenance and storage facility.

Exposition Light-Rail Transit (LRT)

The 9.1-mile Exposition Light-Rail Transit (LRT) project would operate on the MTA-owned Exposition right-of-way from downtown Los Angeles to Venice/Robertson in Culver City. The system would include 10 stations. The cost of the project is estimated at \$309 million.



Artist's rendering of Light Rail Transit along Exposition corridor.

Unless new funding is found, construction of the Exposition LRT is slated to begin in 2008, with operation in 2014.

The line would start at 7th and Metro and proceed south along the existing Metro Blue Line tracks to Washington Boulevard. At Washington Boulevard the line would branch off, proceeding south on Hill Street to join the Exposition right-of-way near USC/Exposition Park.

The line then would proceed west on the Exposition right-of-way to its terminus at Venice/Washington. Feeder bus service would operate in mixed traffic west of the station.

The MTA Board adopted the Exposition Light Rail Transit project subject to the following conditions:

- A minimum operable segment would be identified from downtown Los Angeles to Exposition Park with priority given to implementing this first segment.
- The Exposition project will not take the place of the Wilshire, Eastside or San Fernando Valley transit corridor projects as a funding priority.
- The Exposition project will be separated from Wilshire Boulevard BRT as a stand-alone project for purposes of final environmental clearance.

The need for supplemental mitigation, including a possible tunnel segment at USC/Exposition Park, will be assessed following an expanded community outreach program and considered for inclusion in the preliminary engineering/final environmental impact statement/report at the time the Board approves the preliminary engineering contract.

In addition to the conditions listed above, Thursday's Board action included three amendments to the staff proposal regarding the Exposition corridor.

The first amendment calls on the MTA to "establish the vision and intent to construct light rail to Santa Monica and actively work to accelerate the flow of federal, state and local funds to complete this project as soon as possible without compromising other funding sources for MTA adopted projects."

The Board also directed that further study be conducted to evaluate grade separation along the Exposition line and that the MTA move forward with a planned bikeway at the earliest possible date.

The Exposition right-of-way was purchased by the MTA in 1990 and currently is not in use. As a result, the LRT alternative would not displace any traffic lanes.

No bus line parallels Exposition

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 Exposition light rail option from downtown Los Angeles to Venice/Robertson is 28 minutes. Frequent, connecting bus service would be provided on Venice Boulevard and other streets to connect to other Westside destinations.

A short tunnel segment is being considered for the Exposition LRT 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 is estimated to be \$120 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 that make the area ideal for fixed guideway transit solutions.

Population expected to grow

The area currently 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 lack of funding. 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 use these suspended subway funds. In addition, the Governor's Transportation Initiative has committed \$258 million in state funds for the Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor.

Today's MTA Board action follows the April 2001 release of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIS/EIR) for the Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Studies, which 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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