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MTA Board Adopts Report on Proposed \$5.5 Billion Overhaul of Congestion-Plagued I-710 Freeway

Authority Staff to Prepare Scope of Work, Funding Plan for Environmental Phase

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By ED SCANNELL

(January 27, 2005) Following months of meetings between stakeholders, elected officials, environmental and industry groups, representatives of the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, and residents living along an 18-mile stretch of the I-710 Freeway from Long Beach to East Los Angeles, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board today adopted the Draft Final Report on the I-710 Major Corridor Study. The report outlines a \$5.5 billion Locally Preferred Strategy aimed at overhauling the heavily congested artery and parallel arterials to accommodate future growth and improve safety and air quality.

The Board also authorized preparation of a scope of work for a future environmental analysis of the project and preparation of a funding plan for the environmental work that would include commitments from multiple funding partners. The scope of work would also include an assessment of impacts to the I-710/SR 60 interchange and an evaluation of alternative project delivery methods. Preparation of the scope of work would employ guidance from community advisory committees along the I-710.

The environmental phase would examine design alternatives and evaluate the benefits and impacts of widening the 50-year old freeway to 14 lanes from the existing six to 10 lanes and adding a four-lane truck facility as outlined in the study's Locally Preferred Strategy.

"All of Southern California's freeways are riddled with congestion, but the huge daily volume of commercial truck traffic and vehicle traffic on the 710, and the freeway's role as a driver of the local, state and national economies, demand we design a fix," said Frank Roberts, Lancaster Mayor and Metro Chair. "Today's action is a significant milestone as we move to expand the capacity of the 710, and the alternative we'll examine in the environmental phase has strong support from the communities along this vital artery."

"A recently completed project study report on the I-5 in North Los Angeles County validates the need for a truck lane on that corridor," Roberts added.

Today's action by the Board caps off a nine month effort by community advisory committees, a technical advisory committee and

the I-710 Oversight Policy Committee to develop a solution that meets the requirements of sound highway construction as well as the desires of residents along the I-710 for a project that would address health concerns, as well as congestion, with a minimal need to acquire properties.

As part of today's action the Board also directed Metro CEO Roger Snoble to form a multi-jurisdictional partnership to identify air quality improvement strategies prior to conducting an environmental study.

The funding plan that staff will develop would need to include commitments from multiple funding partners in addition to Metro such as the Gateway Cities Council of Governments, Caltrans, Southern California Association of Governments, and Ports of Long Beach/Los Angeles, as well as from federal funding and other sources.

Locally Preferred Strategy

On November 18, 2004, the I-710 Oversight Policy Committee approved the I-710 Major Corridor Study's Locally Preferred Strategy, which includes: (1) 10 general purpose lanes; (2) four exclusive truck lanes, two in each direction, between the inter-modal rail yards in Vernon/Commerce and Ocean Boulevard in Long Beach; (3) Transportation System Management/Transportation Design Management (TSM/TDM) improvements, including additional ramp metering, truck emission reduction programs, extended port gate hours, landscaping, etc.; (4) interchange and arterial highway improvements within the corridor; (5) construction of truck inspection facilities to be integrated into the overall design concept; and (6) incorporation of a mini-study of the I-710/I-5 interchange.

The Locally Preferred Strategy includes a hybrid of previously examined design alternatives. The hybrid would increase the I-710's capacity while reducing the number of anticipated residential property acquisitions to five and commercial structures to 61 (excluding the area covered by the forthcoming mini-study of the I-710/I-5 interchange), which would require several design exceptions. The Federal Highway Administration and Caltrans have agreed to work cooperatively to resolve those exceptions.

The recommendations in the Locally Preferred Strategy were culled from numerous meetings involving environmental and industry groups, health experts, representatives from Metro, Caltrans, County of Los Angeles, Gateway Cities Council of Governments, Port of Long Beach, Port of Los Angeles, and residents and elected officials from the 14 corridor cities and two unincorporated areas.

The corridor cities include Long Beach, Carson, Paramount, Compton, Lynwood, Bell, Bell Gardens, Maywood, South Gate, Huntington Park, Downey, Vernon, Cudahy, and the City of Commerce.

The Oversight Policy Committee also recommended that the Gateway Cities Council of Governments return with suggested steps for developing and implementing a corridor-level air quality action plan and to pursue other quality of life improvements for the corridor.

"We as policy makers have to find a way of looking at public works projects and making them work for the community," said Gloria Molina, L.A. County Supervisor and Metro Board Member. "We need to acknowledge that there are serious environmental issues such as air quality that need to be addressed before we can expect that our

communities can support projects like the I-710."

Funding

The anticipated cost of an I-710 EIS/EIR (Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report) is estimated at approximately \$25 to \$30 million dollars and the document would take three to four years to complete.

A separate but complementary study, the Multi-County Goods Movement Action Plan, will be conducted to address region-wide goods movement transportation needs including the potential impacts of goods movement via freeway corridors beyond the I-710.

The I-710 Major Corridor Study assumes that the cost of building the Locally Preferred Strategy would not be exclusively funded using the existing local transportation revenue sources; funding will have to come from a variety of federal, state and new, dedicated sources of revenue. The study also recognizes the economic goods movement benefits of the Ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles, as well as their contribution to worsening congestion, health and air quality.

The Draft Final Report concludes that federal funding including federal earmarks and funds from the goods movement industry (e.g., container fees and/or truck tolls) must each have a role in the development of the Locally Preferred Strategy. For example, the study suggests that the imposition of container fees could produce up to \$1.4 billion in capital funding for improvements on I-710.

Study history

In October 2000, the MTA Board authorized a comprehensive study of transportation alternatives and improvements for the I-710. The study considered a no-build alternative, Transportation System Management/Transportation Demand Management alternative, and three build alternatives. One of the build alternatives, Alternative E, called for the acquisition of 519 residential properties and 259 commercial structures.

In May 2003, in response to public and community concerns during the evaluation phase regarding the large amount of property acquisitions, the Board approved a motion to develop a hybrid alternative using elements from the three build alternatives that would not require the acquisition of homes and businesses.

In order to ensure greater community participation and develop consensus, the Board directed staff to form community advisory committees. Subsequently, the I-710 Oversight Policy Committee acted to create Tier I, or "grass roots," committees were formed in the seven cities in which the I-710 is located (Bell Gardens, Carson, Commerce, Compton East Los Angeles, Lynwood and South Gate). The committees identified design options that minimized right-of-way acquisitions for their respective cities.

The City of Long Beach developed its own public involvement and engineering process to reach consensus on a freeway design within its city limits, and its design concept was integrated with the work of the remainder of the corridor.

A Tier II, or corridor-wide committee, was formed with representatives from each of the 14 corridor cities, the City of Long Beach and two unincorporated areas, and 15 representatives from academia, business,

environmental, labor and institutional interests.

The Tier II report included recommendations to address a wide range of subjects including health, jobs and economic development, safety, noise, congestion and mobility, community enhancements, design concepts and environmental justice. The report also noted that major infrastructure improvements must be conditioned on improving air quality.

The I-710 Technical Advisory Committee submitted recommendations to the Oversight Policy Committee including that the Locally Preferred Strategy substantially reduce the need for property acquisitions, use a portion of a parallel utility right-of-way, require some design exceptions from Caltrans and the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), improve safety by separating trucks from autos, and reduce emissions by improving truck operating speeds.

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