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Panel of Experts Issues Final Report on Wilshire Tunneling

- Says tunneling and operation of subway past Wilshire/Western can be done safely
- Mayor Villaraigosa says Board will ask for lifting of federal tunneling ban on Wilshire

(Dec. 15, 2005) The panel of experts examining the safety of tunneling along the Wilshire Corridor has submitted its final report, concluding that it is possible to both safely tunnel and safely operate a subway beyond Wilshire/Western.

The American Public Transportation Association's (APTA) Peer Review panel unanimously agreed that the work could be done safely "by following proper procedures and using appropriate technologies...."

In announcing the review panel's report at Thursday's Board meeting, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa said, "The Board will be asking Congressman Waxman to now remove the federal prohibition on a subway. Clearly, without federal assistance, a subway would not be possible and, yes, we have to balance the need for a subway down Wilshire Boulevard with the fact that we have to maintain our bus system."

"My hope is that it's going to begin a conversation within the city and in this region about what we're prepared to do to support public transit," he added, "and not just the building of new rail lines and busways, but also improving our bus system and, very importantly, providing the operational dollars...."

Panel's recommendations

The tunnel panel's recommendations for future tunneling on Wilshire include the use a "slurry shield tunneling machine" that minimizes gas leakage and workers' contact with excavated soil.

It also recommended tunnel liners to prevent gas leakage, locating stations to minimize exposure to tar sands and high gas concentrations, marking the location of abandoned oil wells and sticking to "proven technologies."

The tunnel panel agreed that the decision not to extend the subway tunnel in 1985 "was prudent, given the circumstances and extent of information and technology available at that time."

But, the experts said, "Much has changed since then to significantly improve tunneling and operation safety." The report cited instances in which the City of Los Angeles has excavated two large sewer tunnels using construction techniques similar to those it recommended for the Wilshire Corridor.

The report said the construction industry has benefited by "creating a safety culture and by striving toward zero accident incidents." It also

noted that Metro's workplace safety record "has improved over time" and that the agency "has been applying Dupont Safety Program practices."

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