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Bus Overhaul Funds, Rt. 710 Tunnel Study, Red Line Electronic Signs on Committees' March Agendas

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(March 9, 2007) Approval of three programs to replace and maintain bus engines, fund the next steps of the Rt. 710 Tunnel environmental process and enhance Metro Red Line electronic signage are some of the topics coming before Board committees in March.

Item 6, Preliminary Studies for Rt. 710 Tunnel. The Planning and Programming Committee will consider authorizing the CEO to commit \$5 million in 2006 State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) Augmentation funds for preliminary engineering and technical studies for the Rt. 710 Tunnel, contingent upon Caltrans providing \$5 million in the state's own funding for these studies.

At its December 2006 meeting, the Board directed Metro staff to work with Caltrans in initiating the next phase of the Rt. 710 Tunnel. Caltrans is drafting a scope of work for engineering and technical studies that will be utilized in the environmental clearance process.

In consultation with Metro, Caltrans is also in the process of retaining a community outreach facilitator to assist with forming one or more committees consisting of representatives from affected local jurisdictions and agencies to develop a framework for participation by all interested stakeholders.

Item 28, Purchase of 400 Natural Gas Engines. The Operations Committee will consider authorizing the CEO to award a contract to Cummins Cal Pacific for 400 Cummins CNG engines.

The contract, not to exceed \$14.6 million, would replace 400 Detroit Diesel Series 50 engines which are no longer available nor supported by their manufacturer. The new CNG-fueled, heavy-duty engines would be installed during FY 2008.

The new engines would be installed in 40-foot Neoplan 6700 series buses and in New Flyer high-floor 5000 series and low-floor 5300 series buses.

Of the 400 engines requested, 150 will be used for the FY 2008 Regional Rebuild Center Bus Engine Replacement Program and 250 will be used for the FY 2008 Bus Midlife Program.

Item 29, Establish Bus Midlife Overhaul Budget. Continuing its focus on bus maintenance, the Operations Committee will be asked to establish a \$29.5 million budget for FY 2008 for a Bus Midlife Overhaul Program and approve the addition of 20 full-time Central Maintenance employees and one Logistics employee to support that program.

Initiated in FY 2004 in an effort to improve the performance and reliability of Metro buses, the Bus Midlife Program targets a series of buses each year for preventive, midlife maintenance. This maintenance includes engine and fuel cylinder replacements, suspension work, body repair, painting, and interior refurbishment (including graffiti abatement) and wheelchair lift maintenance.

One bus midlife overhaul takes approximately 514 hours to complete. The overall improvements and condition of the program's vehicles contribute to reduced maintenance costs at Metro's bus operating divisions.

Item 30, Fund Engine Replacement Program. The Operations Committee will consider authorizing an FY 2008 budget totaling \$11 million for a Regional Rebuild Center (RRC) Engine Replacement Program. The budget includes funds for hiring 16 employees to work in Central Maintenance and two in Logistics.

The staff analysis indicates that in FY 2008, bus engines will begin failing at a rate considerably higher than Metro's current ability to replace them. The staff reports that 1,249 buses were purchased between 1999 – 2001 and estimates that the bus engines, in addition to 69 other buses purchased before 1999 or after 2001, will begin to fail in the next three years.

Item 32, Enhancement of Red Line Electronic Signage. The Operations Committee will consider authorizing the CEO to award a contract to replace the Metro Red Line's existing Transit Passenger Information System with high-resolution technology.

The Red Line Variable Message Sign (VMS) Upgrade project would replace the existing VMS, installed in 1995, with a new integrated public address/VMS passenger information system. The existing single-line VMS signs would be replaced with high resolution LCD displays.

The new information signage would have 46-inch LCD monitors that are easier to read than the current four-foot long, six-inch high LED signs.

The staff reports that the aging VMS faces an increasing component failure rate, and its vendor no longer supports the system. Parts are not readily available from any known source, exposing Metro to heightened maintenance and operation risks due to the safety-critical nature of the VMS.

The Operations Committee will consider whether to increase the upgrade project's budget by \$1.2 million, raising the not-to-exceed budget to \$2.45 million.