

# EXPOSITION METRO LINE CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY

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**DATE:** DECEMBER 1, 2005

**TO:** BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**FROM:** RICHARD D. THORPE  
INTERIM CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

**ACTION:** RECOMMEND THAT THE LACMTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS APPROVE THE FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT/REPORT (FINAL EIS/EIR) FOR THE EXPOSITION LIGHT RAIL PROJECT

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## **RECOMMENDATION**

Recommend to the LACMTA Board of Directors that they approve the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Los Angeles Mid-City Westside Transit Corridor, Mid-City/Exposition Light Rail Transit Project, as identified by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) Board of Directors on June 28, 2001 and modified in the Final EIS/EIR as the Light Rail Transit Build Alternative from Downtown Los Angeles (7<sup>th</sup>/Metro Center) to Culver City (Venice/Robertson Station) incorporating the following design options:

- a. Flower Street East Side Design Option incorporating an undercrossing between Jefferson Boulevard and Trousdale Parkway with option for a future USC/Exposition Park Station near Kinsey Drive;
- b. La Brea Aerial Station & Grade Separation;
- c. La Cienega Station Parking Facility on Southeast Corner (East Central Interceptor Sewer- ECIS Construction Staging Site);
- d. Jefferson Boulevard Northside Widening at La Cienega Boulevard;
- e. Jefferson Boulevard Grade Separation near Ballona Creek; and
- f. Venice/Robertson Interim Station located East of National Boulevard within the Metro-owned Exposition Right-of-Way.

## **SUMMARY**

The LACMTA Board of Directors is scheduled to certify the Final EIS/EIR and adopt a Locally Preferred Alternative for the Exposition Light Rail Transit Project on December 15, 2005. The Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority, which has the responsibility for the construction of the project, can now consider the information

contained in the Final EIS/EIR and make recommendations to the LACMTA Board. These recommendations were presented to the Construction Authority Board as a Receive & File item in November 2005. Approval of these recommendations by the Construction Authority Board will support approval of the Final EIS/EIR by the LACMTA Board and help keep the project on schedule for the issuance of a Notice to Proceed to the Design Build Contractor by February 2006.

The Federal Transit Administration approved the release of the Final EIS/EIR for public review and circulation on October 4, 2005. A 45-day public review period extended from October 14<sup>th</sup> through November 28<sup>th</sup> and included three public workshops that were attended by approximately 500 persons. In addition, nine advertisements of the availability of the Final EIS/EIR were placed in local newspapers and more than 60,000 postcards were mailed to all businesses and residences within ¼ mile of the project route. The complete Final EIS/EIR document was posted on the Metro website and copies of the document were placed in 15 libraries in the project corridor. Copies of the full Final EIS/EIR document were delivered to more than 150 agencies, groups and individuals. Copies of the Executive Summary of the Final EIS/EIR were delivered to more than 800 agencies, groups and individuals.

Several hundred comments have been received and are now being reviewed by LACMTA staff. Principally, the City Councils of Los Angeles and Culver City have submitted comments that are generally supportive of the staff recommendations contained in the Final EIS/EIR. Furthermore, the City of Los Angeles is considering a commitment of \$40 million toward the \$640 million construction cost of the project inclusive of \$5 million for improvements to Grand Avenue at Los Angeles Trade Technical College. The University of Southern California may contribute an additional \$7.6 million towards the project.

On December 15, 2005, the LACMTA Board is scheduled to take the following actions:

- (1) Certify the Los Angeles Mid-City/Exposition Transit Corridor Final EIS/EIR;
- (2) Adopt Findings of Fact and a Statement of Overriding Considerations in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA);
- (3) Adopt a Mitigation Monitoring Plan (MMP);
- (4) Adopt the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Los Angeles Mid-City Westside Transit Corridor, Mid-City/Exposition Light Rail Transit Project. The staff recommendation contained in the Final EIS/EIR is the LPA, as identified by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LACMTA) Board of Directors on June 28, 2001 and modified in the Final EIS/EIR as the Light Rail Transit Build Alternative from Downtown Los Angeles (7<sup>th</sup>/Metrocenter) to Culver City (Venice/Robertson Station) incorporating the following design options:
  - a. Flower Street East Side Design Option incorporating an undercrossing between Jefferson Boulevard and Trousdale Parkway with an option for a future USC/Exposition Park Station near Kinsey Drive;

- b. La Brea Aerial Station & Grade Separation;
- c. La Cienega Station Parking Facility on Southeast Corner (East Central Interceptor Sewer- ECIS Construction Staging Site);
- d. Jefferson Boulevard Northside Widening at La Cienega Boulevard
- e. Jefferson Boulevard Grade Separation near Ballona Creek; and
- f. Venice/Robertson Interim Station located East of National Boulevard within the Metro-owned Exposition Right-of-Way.

Once the LACMTA Board takes the above actions, a Notice of Completion will be filed with the Los Angeles County Recorder signifying completion of California environmental clearance of the project. The LACMTA will then request a Record of Decision from the Federal Transit Administration, signifying completion of federal environmental clearance of the project. Both of the above actions must occur prior to any award of construction contracts by the Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Final EIS/EIR includes evaluation of 14 minor design options affecting the project configuration. Five of these design options were recommended by staff in the Final EIS/EIR for adoption as part of the revised LPA. In addition, one change to the 2001 LPA is recommended as a result of LACMTA Board action in 2003 to add a grade separation to the project at La Brea Avenue. Summary descriptions of each of the 14 design options and the La Brea design change are provided in the following paragraphs under their respective headings.

Downtown Alignment Design Options – In response to concerns expressed by the City of Los Angeles and others, two design options to the original LPA alignment have been evaluated in the Downtown Connection segment of the project. These include the Hill Street Couplet Design Option and the Flower Street Design Option. As a result of evaluation of the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) that was previously approved by the LACMTA Board of Directors in June 2001, and these two design options, staff has concluded that both the Flower Street and Hill Street Couplet are superior to the original LPA alignment. Staff has further concluded that the Flower Street Design Option is superior to the Hill Street Couplet Design Option because it is shorter, more direct, faster and serves a denser area. The Flower Street Option is recommended in the Final EIS/EIR for adoption provided the funding contributions from the City of Los Angeles and USC, as identified in the adopted Funding Plan, are obtained.

In accordance with the Grade Crossing Policy adopted by the LACMTA Board of Directors in 2003, the Flower Street Design Option requires a grade separation for the transition from Flower Street to the median of Exposition Boulevard from just south of Jefferson Boulevard on Flower Street to Exposition Boulevard just east of Trousdale Parkway. USC requested and jointly funded studies to develop and evaluate additional design options for the Flower Street undercrossing. Two of the design options resulting from these studies are included in the Final EIS/EIR. These design options involve fully

covering the undercrossing trench and additional landscaping. One option includes extending the undercrossing to west of Trousdale Parkway. In a letter dated September 6, 2005, the President of USC, Dr. Sample indicated his intent to recommend to his Board of Trustees that USC contribute \$7.6 million to construction of the Flower Street alignment and authorize funding for the Exposition Project design-build contractor to develop a design for extension of the undercrossing to west of Vermont Avenue. In addition to the undercrossing design options, the Flower Street alignment also includes identification of an optional USC/Exposition Park Station between Kinsey Drive and Trousdale Parkway.

La Brea Aerial Station and Grade Separation – The 2001 Draft EIS/EIR included an at-grade transit crossing at La Brea Avenue with an at-grade station located just east of the intersection. Subsequent analysis undertaken in 2003 as a part of the *Metro Grade Crossing Policy for Light Rail Transit* established the need for an aerial grade separation at this location. Although the LACMTA Board approved a grade separation of this intersection in December 2003, it now needs to be formally adopted as part of the LPA.

La Cienega Station Parking Facility – The La Cienega Station has been designed as an aerial structure spanning over La Cienega Boulevard with a contiguous parking structure for approximately 500 spaces on the southeast corner of Jefferson and La Cienega Boulevards. The parking structure is proposed to be located on a site owned by the City of Los Angeles, which was used as a construction-staging site for the East Central Interceptor Sewer Project (ECIS Project). In November 2004, the Los Angeles City Council passed a motion requiring further consideration by the Council to determine if the remaining portion (part of the site is required for an ECIS Air Treatment Facility) of the ECIS property will be made available for use by the Exposition LRT Project. In the event the ECIS site is not made available, an alternative parking facility design has been developed on the southwest corner of the intersection. However, adoption of this alternative would require acquisition of the parcel currently occupied by a Public Storage warehouse which is not within the adopted budget.

Jefferson Boulevard Design Options: Grade Separation and Widening Options – The Cities of Los Angeles and Culver City raised concerns about the grade crossing of Jefferson Boulevard identified in the Draft EIS/EIR due to potential traffic impacts. In response to these comments, several Design Options were developed to evaluate a potential grade separation of the Jefferson Boulevard crossing. Because of the close proximity of the aerial crossing of La Cienega, all the alternatives involved extension of that planned grade separation. Analysis of these alternatives found the extension of the La Cienega grade separation across Jefferson Boulevard and Ballona Creek returning to grade just east of Fay Avenue would be the superior alternative to the LPA. Therefore, it is recommended for inclusion in the proposed project.

The traffic impact analysis for the relocation of Metro Bus Division 6 concluded that Jefferson Boulevard would need to be widened from La Cienega to La Cienega Place to accommodate buses turning west onto Jefferson from southbound La Cienega in route to Division 6. This plus the need for bike lanes and two eastbound left turn lanes on

Jefferson results in the need to widen Jefferson by a total of 14 feet. Two options for widening Jefferson have been identified: one involves widening the existing roadway to the north and the other involves widening the roadway to the south. Although the widening to the north requires acquisition of the parcel on that side of Jefferson, it is recommended for inclusion in the project as the superior alternative because of its lower overall cost.

Venice/Robertson Station Design Options – The LPA includes an interim at-grade station at Venice/Robertson, with at-grade crossings of National and Washington Boulevards. The City of Culver City requested that this decision be reconsidered in favor of an aerial station with grade-separated crossings of National and Washington Boulevards. Following adoption of the Grade Crossing Policy for Light Rail Transit in 2003, the Metro Board of Directors agreed that an aerial station would be required in the future when the line is extended further west. In the meantime, interim station designs have been developed that do not preclude future conversion to an aerial station. The design of the aerial station can be better developed in the future, when funding is identified and the routing of the future extension is known.

To respond to the City of Culver City’s concerns about the at-grade crossings of National and Washington Boulevards, four additional interim station Design Options have been developed that do not require LRT crossings of these streets. These options consist of three “North of ROW” Design Options, which would locate an interim station on various parcels of land north of the Expo ROW and east of the intersection of Washington and National, including parcels on either side of Wesley, and the “ROW” Design Option, which would locate the interim station on the Metro owned railroad ROW east of National Boulevard. Staff is recommending the “ROW” Design Option but will continue to work with Culver City on the design of a permanent aerial station to be located near Venice Boulevard.

### **FINANCIAL IMPACT**

Recommendations are consistent with the approved project budget.

### **ATTACHMENT(S)**

None