INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) has begun preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)/Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Regional Connector Transit Corridor Project in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is the lead agency for the purposes of NEPA, and Metro is the lead agency for the purposes of CEQA.

Over the past two decades, Metro and its predecessor agencies (Los Angeles County Transportation Commission and Southern California Rapid Transit District) have initiated rail transit service in multiple corridors spanning much of Los Angeles County. Three of Metro's current and under-construction light rail transit (LRT) lines serve downtown Los Angeles, but they do not directly connect to one another. The existing Metro Blue Line to Long Beach and the Metro Expo Line to Culver City (scheduled to open in 2010) terminate at 7th Street/Metro Center Station in the southern part of the downtown area. The Metro Gold Line to Pasadena and East Los Angeles (East Los Angeles extension is scheduled to open in late 2009) passes through the northeastern portion of the downtown area with stops at Union Station and Little Tokyo/Arts District Station. Passengers must transfer to the heavy rail Metro Red and Purple Lines in order to make connections between these light rail lines.

The proposed Regional Connector project would provide new LRT tracks through downtown Los Angeles that would link the Metro Blue, Expo, and Gold Lines and enable them to operate as a single system. For example, trains would run directly from Long Beach to Pasadena and from East Los Angeles to Culver City via the Regional Connector route, with no need for passengers to transfer to the Metro Red or Purple Lines. The proposed Regional Connector project would also include new stations in downtown Los Angeles, thereby expanding the rail transit coverage of the central business district.

A Final Alternatives Analysis (AA) Report was prepared for the Regional Connector Transit Corridor and published by Metro in January 2009. The AA report is incorporated into this Scoping Report by reference. During the AA process, Metro hosted agency and public early scoping meetings and community updates. The input received at these meetings, as well as subsequent technical analysis, formed the basis for narrowing the initial 32 conceptual alternatives to two LRT alternatives for study in the EIS/EIR, along with a No Build Alternative and a Transportation System Management (TSM) Alternative. Subsequent to the release of the Final AA report, FTA and Metro initiated the public and agency NEPA and CEQA scoping to obtain input on the scope of the EIS/EIR. The Notice of Intent/Notice of Preparation (NOI/NOP) identified the four alternatives carried forward from the AA for study. This report summarizes the results of the NEPA/CEQA scoping process.

The Draft EIS/EIR (DEIS/DEIR) will build upon the AA study and form the basis for selection of a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), performance of Preliminary Engineering, and preparation of a subsequent Final EIS/EIR. One of the primary purposes of scoping is to identify possible environmental impacts of the project, and eliminate proposed alternatives with substantial environmental impacts from further analysis. High-capacity transit improvements in the Regional Connector Transit Corridor would be financed with a mix of local, state, federal New Starts, and other federal funds. Accordingly, the project will be executed in compliance with current FTA Section 5309 New Starts guidelines, and all environmental documents will satisfy NEPA and CEQA requirements.

The proposed Regional Connector Transit Corridor Project is also designated to receive funding from Measure R, a half cent sales tax measure passed by Los Angeles County voters in November 2008. The project is also included in Metro's Draft 2008 Long Range Transportation Plan. Final adoption of the 2008 Long Range Transportation Plan by the Metro Board of Directors is expected to occur in mid-2009.

1.2 Project Area

The proposed project lies entirely within the downtown area of the City of Los Angeles. The project area is generally bounded by US Highway 101 on the north, 7th and 9th Streets on the south, Alameda Street on the east, and State Route 110 on the west. A map of the project area is provided in Figure 1-1.

1.3 Alternatives

Four alternatives were carried forward from the AA process for study in the EIS/EIR (See Appendix A for maps of alternatives). These include the No Build Alternative, the TSM Alternative, and two LRT Alternatives. The **No Build Alternative** would maintain existing transit service through the year 2030. No new transportation infrastructure would be built, except projects identified as funded under Metro's 2008 Long Range Transportation Plan. Transit service under the No-Build Alternative would be focused on the preservation of existing services and projects. By the projection year of 2030, some bus service would have been reorganized and expanded to provide connections with the new rail lines; however, the transit network within the project area would largely be the same as it is now.

The **TSM Alternative** would include the provisions of the No Build Alternative and add two shuttle bus routes from 7th Street/Metro Center station to Union Station, providing an enhanced link between the unconnected LRT lines. One route would run along Grand Avenue and 1st Street, and one along Figueroa, Flower, 2nd, and 3rd Streets. The shuttle buses would use existing bus-only lanes, where available, and would be fitted with transit-priority signalization devices similar to those used on Metro Rapid. Stops would be located every few blocks so as to provide full coverage of the area. Each shuttle route would be one and one-half to two miles in length.

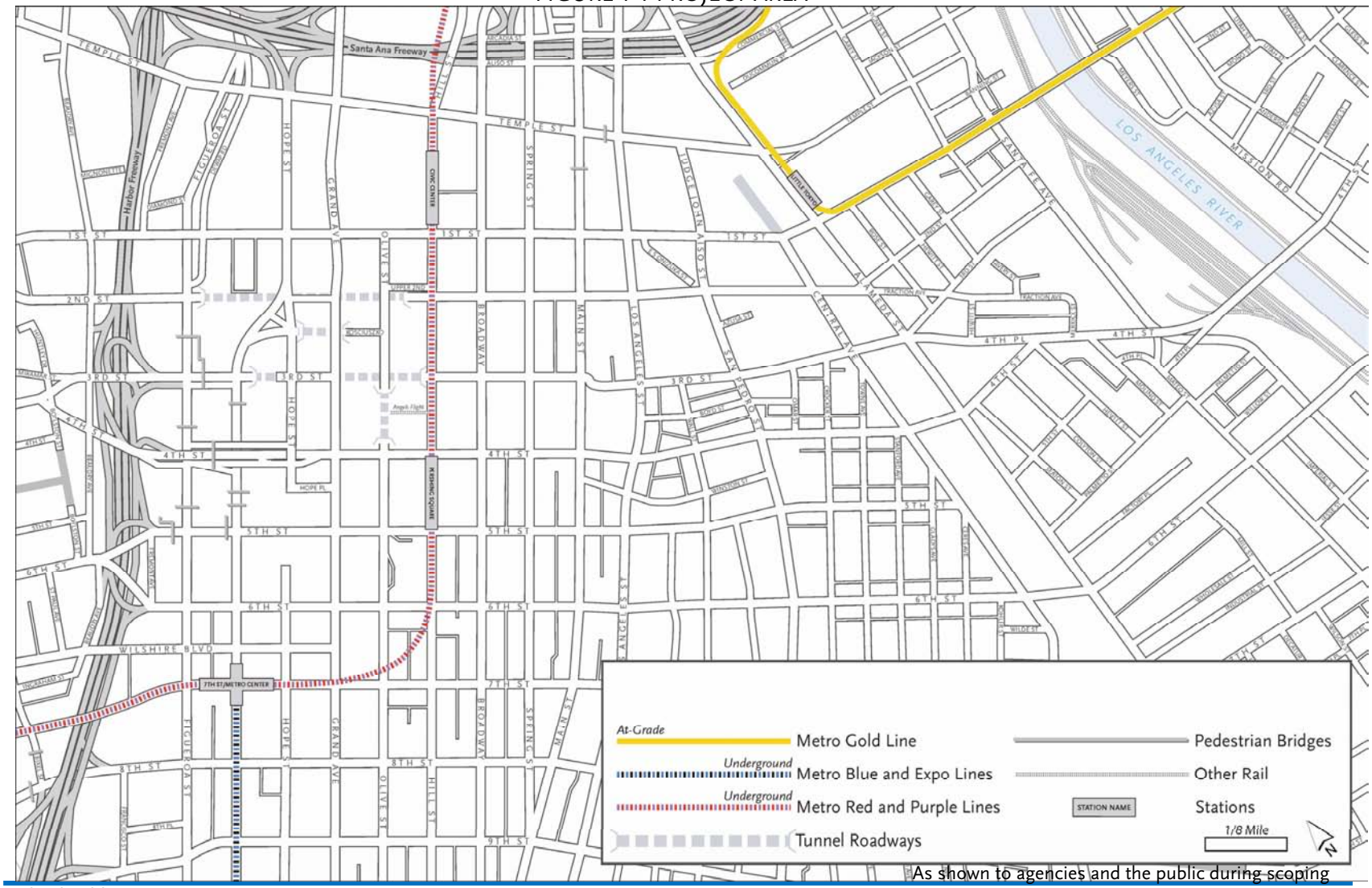
The **At-Grade Emphasis LRT Alternative** would extend north under Flower Street from 7th Street/Metro Center Station, surface to at-grade north of 5th Street, cross 3rd Street, enter Bunker Hill, and turn northeast through a new entrance to the existing 2nd Street tunnel. The alignment would continue along 2nd Street where it would split into an at-grade couplet configuration on Main and Los Angeles Streets (one track on each roadway) to Temple Street. Then it would head east on Temple Street, realign into a dual track configuration east of Los Angeles Street, and join the Metro Gold Line just north of the Little Tokyo/Arts District Station on Alameda Street. Trains headed east toward East Los Angeles would then proceed to Little Tokyo/Arts District Station. Trains headed north toward Pasadena would bypass Little Tokyo/Arts District Station and proceed to Union Station. An automobile underpass and pedestrian overpass would be constructed at the intersection of Temple and Alameda Streets to reduce pedestrian-train and automobile-train conflicts.

There are two options for the At-Grade Emphasis LRT Alternative's configuration on Flower Street. For Option A, tracks would extend north under Flower Street from 7th Street/Metro Center Station to a new underground station just south of 5th Street, then surface just before crossing 3rd Street at grade. For Option B, tracks would extend north under Flower Street from 7th Street/Metro Center Station and surface between 5th and 4th Streets before reaching a new at-grade station just south of 3rd Street, then the tracks would continue across 3rd Street at grade. In total, the At-Grade Emphasis LRT Alternative would add 1.8 miles of new double track to the light rail system.

In addition to the Option A and Option B Station configurations, there would be an underground station south of 2nd and Hope Streets and a split station on Main and Los Angeles Streets between 1st and Temple Streets.

The **Underground Emphasis LRT Alternative** would extend north along Flower Street from 7th Street/Metro Center Station with a new underground station north of 5th Street. At 2nd Street, the underground tunnel would extend east. New underground stations at 2nd and Hope Streets and on 2nd Street between Los Angeles Street and Broadway would provide access to Bunker Hill and to the area south of the Civic Center. The tunnel would emerge to at-grade connections just southwest of the intersection of 1st and Alameda Streets. At 1st and Alameda Streets, a new underpass would carry car and truck traffic along Alameda Street below the rail junction, and a new overhead pedestrian bridge structure would eliminate most conflicts between pedestrians and trains. Trains headed north toward Union Station and Pasadena would then proceed to the Little Tokyo/Arts District station, while trains headed east toward East Los Angeles would bypass the station and continue to Pico/Aliso station. This alternative would have a single at-grade crossing at the intersection of 1st and Alameda Streets. The rest of the route would be underground. The length of this proposed route would be 1.6 miles.

FIGURE 1-1 PROJECT AREA



As shown to agencies and the public during scoping

1.4 Summary of Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to improve the region's public transit service and mobility. The overall goal of the project is to improve mobility within the corridor by connecting the light rail services of the Metro Gold Line to Pasadena, the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension, the Metro Blue Line, and the Metro Expo Line.

The proposed Regional Connector Transit Corridor project would improve region-wide public transit service, despite being located in a relatively small portion of downtown Los Angeles. The connection would allow direct light rail service from Long Beach to Pasadena and East Los Angeles to Culver City, with both services using the same tracks and stations in downtown Los Angeles. This service improvement would in turn eliminate many transfers, reduce wait time, overcrowding at stations, and shorten trip times across the entire light rail system.

The project area is located within the largest regional employment center of Los Angeles, and is densely developed with multi-family residences, industrial and public lands, commercial and retail establishments, government office buildings, and private high-rise office towers. The enhanced transit services made possible by the proposed Regional Connector project would serve communities across the region, allowing greater mobility between existing light rail corridors and improved access to downtown Los Angeles. The project would thus help the transportation system accommodate the population and employment growth projected to occur in central business district between now and 2030. Mobility issues throughout the region and the identified need to join the unconnected segments of the light rail system have been documented in several past studies, including the *Pasadena – Los Angeles Light Rail Transit Project Environmental Impact Report* (1993), the *Blue Line Connection Preliminary Planning Study* (1993), and the *Regional Light Rail Connector Study* (2004).

Additional considerations that support implementation of the proposed Regional Connector Transit Corridor project include:

- Potential for increased travel times and station overcrowding in the absence of substantial capacity increases. This is primarily due to the number of transfers required to traverse the project area, and the need to reverse trains in the busiest parts of the system. Station overcrowding is a safety concern.
- Poor schedule reliability due to the need to reverse trains in downtown Los Angeles, the busiest part of the regional rail system.
- Current system enhancements under construction will increase transit ridership in the project area and magnify the effects of poor system connectivity and station overcrowding due to transfers.
- High numbers of transit dependent residents living in the project area.

- Existing high transit ridership in the project area is projected to increase.
- High concentrations of transit-supportive land uses in the project area.
- Substantial population, employment, and congestion growth in the project area is expected by 2030.
- Location of several redevelopment areas within the project area, where improved transit access can support properly located economic growth.

1.5 Project Participants

The project participants include FTA, Metro, and Metro's consultants. Metro's consultants include the Community Participation Program Consultant (The Robert Group), the Environmental and Engineering Consultant (CDM), and CDM's subconsultants. Other project participants include federal, state, and local participating agencies identified in accordance with the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act – A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU) 6002.

1.6 Purpose of Report

The Council on Environmental Quality's NEPA regulations and the State of California's CEQA guidelines require federal and state lead agencies to conduct agency and public scoping when defining the appropriate range of issues and depth of analysis for a major environmental document (40 CRF part 1500 et seq.; 14 CA Code of Regulations, §15082-15083). This Scoping Report documents the proposed Regional Connector Transit Corridor project's lead agencies' compliance with these requirements.