

# Long-range plan a long time coming

BY [STEVE HYMON](#) , [OCTOBER 20, 2009](#)

The Metro Board of Directors huddle up for their monthly meeting on Thursday. The big ticket item on the agenda is the Board's scheduled vote on adopting a [long-range plan](#) ([http://www.metro.net/board/Items/2009/10\\_October/20091014P&PIItem10.pdf](http://www.metro.net/board/Items/2009/10_October/20091014P&PIItem10.pdf)) to guide the agency for the next three decades.

The draft plan was released in early 2008 but approval from the Board has been delayed. First, the Board decided last year to wait to see if the Measure R transportation sales tax would pass — which it did, in November of last year. More recently, the Board has lacked consensus on several aspects of the plan.

To help you understand what the hub-bub is all about, here's a little Q&A:

**Question: What exactly is the long-range plan?**

**Answer:** As the name implies, it's the document that guides how Metro operates for the next three decades. It also lists the transit and road projects that the agency wants to build and sets out a timeline for constructing them. The plan isn't chiseled on stone tablets — it can be changed and amended in future years — but the Board in the past has generally tried to stay faithful to the plans that they adopt.

**Q: How is the long-range plan different than Measure R?**

**A:** Measure R mostly pays for specific road and transit projects — [click here for a list](#)

([http://www.metro.net/measurer/images/expenditure\\_plan.pdf](http://www.metro.net/measurer/images/expenditure_plan.pdf)) — that voters were asked to consider. The long-range plan is the umbrella plan that guides everything that Metro does.

Agency staffers also say that it's important for the Board to approve a long-range plan to demonstrate to both the state and federal government — who provide some funding for Metro — that there is consensus within the agency about what to build. One big question that won't be resolved Thursday: will Washington deliver?

**Q: So what is getting built?**

**A:** The big number to chew on is that the long-range plan proposes to build \$300 billion worth of road and transit projects in the next three decades.

Among those are opening 10 transit projects in the next decade alone: the Eastside Gold Line (2009), the Expo Line from downtown L.A. to Culver City (2011), the Orange Line busway extension to Chatsworth (2013), the Wilshire Boulevard bus lane (2015), the Expo Line from Culver City to Santa Monica (2015), the Gold Line Foothill Extension from Pasadena to Azusa (2017), the Crenshaw Corridor busway or light rail to Inglewood (2018), the subway extension from Wilshire & Western to Fairfax Avenue (2019) and the Downtown Regional Connector light rail line to conveniently tie together the Gold, Blue and Expo lines (2019).

The highway side is no less interesting. One big-ticket item is widening the 5 freeway between the 605 and the Orange County line — the present three-lane configuration is a bear. In the San Fernando Valley, the plan also envisions carpool lanes for the 5 freeway from the 118 to the 134. There is also the controversial but keenly-watched plan to convert parts of the HOV lanes on the 10 and 110 freeways to

congestion pricing toll lanes.

**Q: Why has the plan been controversial?**

**A:** The gist of it is that Board Members are trying to ensure that adequate funding is in place for particular projects that they support. For example, County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas has been pushing to get the Crenshaw Corridor line built as soon as possible while supporters of the Gold Line Foothill Extension in the San Gabriel Valley are hoping to advance the 2017 opening of that project.

One interesting point likely to come up during the meeting, according to Board member John Fasana: The long-range plan has Metro paying to operate the Foothill Extension beginning in 2017. But what if the Foothill Extension Construction Authority finds a way to save money and complete the project before that date? Would Metro provide the money to operate the line before 2017?

In an email to a Foothill Extension supporter this weekend, Metro CEO Art Leahy wrote that he is hopeful that the project can be done sooner but that one of the issues that still needs to be resolved is where to put a maintenance facility in the San Gabriel Valley.

Another potential issue is which projects the agency should ask the federal government to fund. I'll post more about that later.

**Q: The plan says that the subway to Westwood would open in 2036? Is that correct?**

**A:** Yes — for now. The 2036 date is based on the subway getting about \$4.1 billion from Measure R, as well as significant money that Metro is asking the federal government to provide.

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has publicly said several times that he wants to see the opening date advance — and said so again in a statement this week. “If we had all the funding secured, we

could complete the subway to westwood in 10 years, with jobs to boost the region's economy while reducing traffic and greenhouse gas emissions," Villaraigosa said.

Metro planning officials have said that completing the subway to Westwood prior to 2036 is possible. As is the case for projects that people want to see built sooner, something in the funding situation would have to change for the better. Tax revenues could be far higher than predicted, state government could begin aggressively funding mass transit and the next version of the federal transportation bill could greatly increase the amount of money for big transit projects.

These are all 'ifs.'

### **Q: How will the Board vote go on Thursday?**

A: It's a 13-member Board and it's fair to say that on a plan of this size, there will be some concerns and several points likely to be debated about when and how money flows to various projects. Agency staffers — whose work is ultimately approved by the Board — seem optimistic they have a plan in place that will satisfy the Board.

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