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Metro to Maintain Wilshire Boulevard Peak Period Buses-Only Lane, Evaluate Potential for More Dedicated Transit Lanes

Friday August 27, 2004

(Los Angeles) - Metro will ask the City of Los Angeles to make a one-mile dedicated buses-only lane on Wilshire Boulevard in West Los Angeles a permanent improvement. A staff recommendation approved yesterday by the Metro Board of Directors also calls for the evaluation of additional segments of Wilshire Boulevard and other Metro Rapid bus corridors that have potential for dedicated peak period transit lanes.

"This demonstration project has clearly shown the value of giving buses their own lane," said Frank Roberts, Chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board and Mayor of Lancaster.

"Dedicated transit lanes will greatly benefit our customers, ensuring them safer, faster, more efficient and more reliable service. I am confident this improved service would attract new customers to the Metro Bus System."

Metro opened the peak-period buses-only lane in both directions of Wilshire Boulevard between Federal and Centinela Avenues on March 8, 2004. The demonstration project was implemented in cooperation with the City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) and Santa Monica Big Blue Bus.

Time Savings

An evaluation by Metro staff determined that the exclusive lane produced average travel timesavings for Metro and Big Blue buses of up to six percent in the a.m. peak hours (7 a.m. to 9 a.m.) and up to four percent in the p.m. peak hours (4 p.m. to 7 p.m.).

In addition, bus patrons experienced greater service consistency. Prior to implementation of the project, buses traversed the one-mile segment during peak hours in as little as four minutes or in as many as 12 minutes. Since implementation of the project, the consistency of run times during the

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most congested periods has improved by up to 27 percent.

Local Bus Benefits

Local service buses make more stops compared to Metro Rapid buses. As a result, local buses are experiencing even greater benefit from the transit lane, due to less merging into and out of traffic lanes at bus stops.

Operation Safety

One of the biggest delays and potential causes of accidents for buses occurs as buses wait to reenter traffic after making a passenger stop. In most cases the exclusive lane eliminated this delay, as well as the potential traffic safety hazard of buses re-entering the flow of traffic.

No impacts to automobile traffic were observed. In fact, automobiles may benefit from not having to wait behind buses pulling away from stops or while other automobiles parallel park or pull out of parking spaces.

"Safety is Metro's first priority and the buses-only lane certainly improves the safety of our patrons and employees, as well as drivers of other vehicles on Wilshire Boulevard," said John Catoe, Metro deputy chief executive officer and chief operations officer. "The buses-only lane is an excellent example of how safety and efficiency can go hand in hand."

Parking

Surveys indicate that cars displaced from Wilshire Boulevard did not saturate available parking on side streets, partly due to extensive off-street parking in the area. As a consequence, the impact to parking availability on cross streets has been marginal.

Bus Operators

The demonstration project produced positive comments from bus operators, who expressed the desire to see buses-only lanes elsewhere along the route and elsewhere on the Metro Bus system.

Based on the results of the evaluation period, a decision is now required by the Los Angeles City Council to either cancel the demonstration project or extend the operation as a permanent improvement. LADOT has requested that Metro make a recommendation to the City of Los Angeles prior to consideration by the City Council.

The cost to implement the demonstration project was approximately \$161,000, which included construction plans, fabrication and installation of signage, LADOT staff time and enforcement.

The demonstration project was developed as part of the Wilshire Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project. The Metro Board approved the environmental study for the project in August 2002. The Los Angeles City Council approved implementation of the buses-only lane in November 2003.

