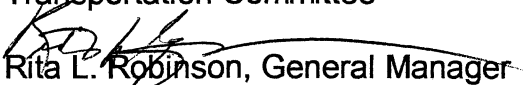


CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTERDEPARTMENTAL CORRESPONDENCE

Date: March 15, 2010

To: The Honorable City Council
c/o City Clerk, Room 395, City Hall
Attention: Honorable Bill Rosendahl, Chair
Transportation Committee

From: 
Rita L. Robinson, General Manager
Department of Transportation

Subject: **EAST SAN FERNANDO VALLEY NORTH/SOUTH TRANSIT CORRIDORS BUS
SPEED IMPROVEMENT PROJECT**

The Department of Transportation (LADOT) has completed a bus speed improvement study for the East San Fernando Valley North/South Transit Corridors - Reseda, Sepulveda, Van Nuys and Lankershim/San Fernando (map attached.) The study was prepared in accordance with a funding agreement between LADOT and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) for the "San Fernando Valley North/South Bus Speed Improvements Study," funded by the state Traffic Congestion Relief Program (TCRP).

After detailed analyses and extensive consultation with elected officials and Metro, LADOT has identified a range of bus speed and service improvements for the four north/south corridors. These improvements include a new interlined bus service for Van Nuys, signal timing adjustments, traffic striping improvements, street widenings, concrete bus pads, bridge widening, bus stop relocations, transit station enhancements, and a median busway on Van Nuys Boulevard. We are also recommending further study of north/south passenger rail service improvements in the Valley, beginning with the Lankershim/San Fernando Corridor between the North Hollywood Metro Red Line Station and the Sylmar Metrolink Station.

LADOT has developed a three-phase plan to design, environmentally clear and construct near-term (Phase I) and mid-term (Phase II) improvements and plan, design and environmentally clear long-term (Phase III) improvements. The three phases are projected to cost a total of \$63.9 million. Phase I improvements include engineering measures such as signal re-timing, lane re-striping and bus stop relocations. As part of these Phase I improvements, Metro has already implemented a new interlined bus service (Line 902) from the Metro Red Line North Hollywood Station to Pacoima via Van Nuys Boulevard and Burbank Boulevard, which started operation on December 12, 2009. Phase II improvements entail capital improvements such as roadway widening and transit enhancements at bus stops. In Phase III, a 5-mile dedicated, median busway with a direct connection to the Metro Orange Line along Van Nuys Boulevard is recommended for further analysis. While Metro's *2009 Long Range Transportation Plan* allocates \$170 million for the San Fernando Valley East North/South Transit Corridor, additional funding may be needed to construct this median busway on Van Nuys Boulevard.

In addition to these bus speed improvements, staff recommends preparation of an Alternatives Analysis for expanded north/south passenger rail service in the Valley.

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the City Council, subject to the approval of the Mayor:

1. DIRECT LADOT to work with Metro on a scope, schedule and budget for federal/state environmental clearance and public outreach for all three phases of the East San Fernando Valley North/South Transit Corridors Bus Speed Improvement Project.
2. DIRECT LADOT to include in the environmental clearance three busway alternatives for the Van Nuys Corridor between Burbank Boulevard and Plummer Street: 1) median busway; 2) median busway with grade separations at major cross streets; 3) median busway with grade separations at major cross streets and a tunnel segment between the Metro Orange Line and Vanowen Street.
3. DIRECT LADOT to work with Metro to develop a scope, schedule and budget for an Alternatives Analysis of expanded north-south passenger rail in the San Fernando Valley, including a potential rail connection between the Metro Red Line North Hollywood Station and the Sylmar Metrolink Station.
4. DIRECT LADOT to report back on the project status every 12 months.

BACKGROUND

According to 2008 Metro data, Van Nuys Boulevard is one of the top ten transit corridors in the County, with average daily bus boardings of 31,800. Sepulveda Boulevard has 11,400 daily boardings, followed by Lankershim Boulevard with 10,700 daily boardings and Reseda Boulevard with 9,800 daily boardings.

In 2000, the state legislature allocated \$100 million in TCRP funds to Metro for development and construction of a *"North-South corridor bus transit project that interfaces with the... East-West Burbank-Chandler corridor project [i.e., Metro Orange Line] and with the Ventura Boulevard Rapid Bus project"* (AB 2928.) In 2001, LADOT began working with Metro on a Major Investment Study of north/south transit corridors in the San Fernando Valley, funded by \$2 million from the TCRP. The result was the *San Fernando Valley North-South Transit Corridor Regionally Significant Transportation Investment Study* (RSTIS), published in 2003. The RSTIS identified five major north/south transit corridors in the San Fernando Valley (Canoga, Reseda, Sepulveda, Van Nuys and San Fernando/Lankershim) and recommended specific improvements in those corridors.

In May 2003, the Metro Board received and filed the RSTIS report and directed their CEO to proceed with a phased implementation plan, which included preparation of an EIR for the Canoga Extension of the Metro Orange Line; capital and operational improvements in the other four corridors (Reseda, Sepulveda, Van Nuys and Lankershim/San Fernando); and expansion of Metro Rapid bus service. Subsequently, the expansion of Metro Rapid bus service was completed using a separate funding source. The EIR for Canoga Extension was prepared using a portion of the \$100 million TCRP funds.

In July 2007, LADOT and Metro entered into a \$900,000 Funding Agreement for the "San Fernando Valley North/South Bus Speed Improvements" study, pursuant to the Metro Board's request. LADOT immediately began work on the project, which is the subject of this Council report. In November 2008, County voters approved Measure R, a one-half cent County sales tax for transportation projects which provides \$68.5 million for the "San Fernando Valley East North-South Rapidways" (Reseda, Sepulveda, Van Nuys and Lankershim/San Fernando), with a projected opening date of 2018.

LADOT has completed Phase I of the San Fernando Valley North/South Bus Speed Improvements project with an extensive analysis of bus speed problems in the four north/south corridors and an array of recommended improvements that would result in improved bus speeds and reduced bus travel times in the corridors. Each corridor was analyzed on a segment-by-segment basis.

Many of the improvements originally identified in the 2003 RSTIS have been included in the project. In addition to improvements geared toward improving bus speeds, the RSTIS recommended station design standards consistent with those for Metro Rapid bus stops and on-street station area enhancements such as landscaping and street furniture. Since these types of transit and pedestrian enhancements improve the experience of transit riders and create more attractive transit corridors, they have been included in the list of potential improvements for each corridor.

DISCUSSION

Funding

The state's TCRP legislation (AB 2928) programmed \$100 million for a "North-South corridor bus transit project" in the San Fernando Valley. Of this, \$89 million is still programmed but not currently available. To date, \$11 million in TCRP funds has been allocated for the project; approximately \$10.5 million has been expended for Project Approval/Environmental Document (PA&ED) work on the Metro Orange Line Canoga Extension, the 2003 *Regionally Significant Transportation Investment Study*, and this study. Currently approximately \$450,000 in TCRP funds is still available to the City for PA&ED work. These funds will expire by June 2011 and must be spent before that time. Beyond that, Caltrans does not expect TCRP funds to be available for allocation until the state budget situation improves.

Measure R provides an additional \$68.5 million for the "San Fernando Valley East North-South Rapidways" (Reseda, Sepulveda, Van Nuys and Lankershim/San Fernando), which is projected to be spent by 2018. Metro's Financial Forecasting Model shows that \$800,000 in Regional Prop C 25% funds should be available for the project in FY 2011/12 and projects \$800,000 in Measure R funds for the project in FY 2012/13.

Metro's *2009 Long Range Transportation Plan* (LRTP) includes \$170 million for the "San Fernando Valley East North/South Transit Corridor" coming from the state TCRP, Measure R and other local sources. Congressional Representatives Brad Sherman (District 27) and Howard Berman (District 28) wrote to Metro in March 2009 urging prioritization of the East San Fernando Valley North/South Transit Corridors Project in the LRTP and federal transportation reauthorization bill. They also encouraged Metro to apply for federal Small Starts funding for the project.

In order to advance the project while awaiting release of state TCRP funds and position it to compete successfully for federal Small Starts funding, LADOT recommends preparing an EIR/EIS and conducting public outreach over the next three years using the \$450,000 in unexpended budget from this study (in FY 2010/11), \$1,000,000 in Regional Prop C 25% funds (in FY 2011/12), and \$1,000,000 in Measure R funds (in FY 2012/13.) This \$2,450,000 will provide a solid financial base for the work and is consistent with environmental clearance/public outreach budgets for other major transit projects.

Bus Lane & Busway Issues

LADOT examined the feasibility of creating new bus lanes in corridor segments where bus speeds are poor and would benefit significantly from bus lanes. Implementation options included converting mixed flow lanes to bus lanes, removing peak period on-street parking, and widening the street to create new bus lanes. Both full-time median bus lanes (i.e., busway) and peak period curbside bus lanes were considered.

Converting traffic lanes for bus lanes or a busways would impact traffic flow and parking. For example, bus lanes or a busway on Van Nuys Boulevard between the Metro Orange Line and the Panorama Mall are projected to increase traffic delay by 23% at Victory Boulevard, by 100% at Vanowen Street, and by 65% at Roscoe Boulevard. Approximately 900 on-street parking spaces would also have to be restricted during peak periods or removed completely.

Metro has expressed strong reservations about the implementation of curbside bus lanes along the north/south corridors in the San Fernando Valley because they present operational problems for buses that would impact performance gains. Buses in curbside bus lanes would have to stop or slow down for right-turning vehicles, pedestrians, and vehicles attempting to merge into mixed flow traffic. These interactions could negate the bus lane's time-saving benefits and present safety hazards as vehicles and pedestrians maneuver around buses to access driveways, alleys and side streets.

Instead, Metro supports development of full-time bus lanes in dedicated median busways. LADOT's research, however, indicates that full-time exclusive median bus lanes create policy trade-offs due to narrow roadway widths in most of the corridor segments where bus lanes are most needed to improve bus speeds. Median bus lanes work well along wide boulevards, but when inserted into narrower street segments, they create circulation and access problems for vehicles and buses. Median bus lanes also require stations and passenger loading in the middle of the street, similar to operations of the existing Metro Blue Line and Metro Gold Line. Exclusive median bus lanes would result in bus bunching at stations unless additional exclusive bus passing lanes are provided, requiring more street capacity and right-of-way acquisition.

Further information on bus lane criteria, impacts and implementation issues can be found in the attached Technical Appendix.

In general, policy makers need to consider that the public right-of-way is limited in capacity and must be allocated between competing uses - cars, trucks, buses, bicycles, pedestrians and parking. Improving bus speeds with bus lanes comes at a cost to other modes of transportation. Since bus lanes impact traffic flows, traffic circulation and parking for businesses and residences, those impacts should be weighed against the benefits of improved bus speeds and travel times. These issues can be more fully analyzed in the EIR/EIS.

Implementation Plan

LADOT has evaluated the benefits and costs of implementing improvements for the four corridors in three phases - near-term, mid-term and long-term. The cost of these improvements is estimated to be \$59,982,000, not including environmental clearance, staffing, and construction of major long term improvements.

LADOT recommends environmentally clearing all proposed improvements through an EIR/EIS, which would provide CEQA and NEPA clearances and position the project to compete for federal funding. The EIR/EIS and related public outreach are estimated to cost \$2,450,000 and would take approximately 3 years to complete. Metro has indicated a willingness to act as the lead agency for the environmental clearance and public outreach provided that the City dedicates staff to work on the project. Metro and City staffing (including salaries and overhead) are eligible expenses for project funding and are estimated to cost \$1,500,000 for the first three years. This would pay for one full-time equivalent position at Metro and one full-time equivalent position at the City in FY 2010/11, FY 2011/12 and FY 2012/13.

With all components accounted for, the total project cost is **\$63,932,000**.

Note: All schedule estimates assume full availability of City staff at LADOT, Bureau of Engineering and related agencies to support project development and implementation.

Near Term Improvements (Phase I)

- Van Nuys Boulevard:
 - New interlined bus service (Line 902) connecting Van Nuys Corridor with Metro Red Line North Hollywood Station
 - Transit station enhancements and concrete bus pads for Line 902
 - Signal priority and signal timing changes
 - Bus stop relocation
 - Traffic lane/turn pocket additions by re-striping
- Reseda Boulevard:
 - Signal timing changes
 - Bus stop relocations
 - Traffic lane/turn pocket additions by re-striping
- Sepulveda Boulevard:
 - Signal timing changes
 - Bus stop relocation
 - Traffic lane/turn pocket additions by re-striping
- Lankershim Boulevard/San Fernando Road:
 - Signal timing changes
 - Traffic lane/turn pocket addition by re-striping

It will take 1-2 years after completion of the environmental clearance for design, construction and implementation of Phase I engineering and operational improvements. The total cost is **\$1,482,000**, which will require approvals from Metro and California Transportation Commission for funding allocation.

Mid Term Improvements(Phase II)

- Van Nuys Boulevard:
 - Add a northbound lane between Huston Street and Chandler Boulevard (0.5 miles) through on-street parking restriction
 - Add a southbound lane between Arminta Street and Parthenia Street (0.9 miles) through lane re-striping.
 - Widen the bridge over a flood control channel on Van Nuys Boulevard at Arleta Avenue to increase average bus speeds and improve operational safety.
- Reseda Boulevard:
 - Widen Reseda Boulevard at Roscoe Boulevard to create a southbound right-turn lane and an additional northbound left turn lane to reduce bus delay at this intersection.

- Install transit station enhancements, including decorative stamped-asphalt crosswalks, security lighting, pedestrian amenities and
- Install landscaped median islands, at selected locations along Reseda Boulevard.

- Sepulveda Boulevard:
 - Widen Sepulveda Boulevard at Burbank Boulevard and Sherman Way to create new northbound right-turn lanes to reduce bus delay at these intersections.
 - Install transit station enhancements, including decorative stamped-asphalt crosswalks, security lighting, pedestrian amenities and landscaped median islands, at selected locations along Sepulveda Boulevard.

- Lankershim Boulevard/San Fernando Road:
 - Install concrete bus pads at bus stops.
 - Install transit station enhancements, including decorative stamped-asphalt crosswalks, security lighting, pedestrian amenities and landscaped median islands, at selected locations along Lankershim Boulevard and San Fernando Road.

It will take approximately 3-5 years after completion of the EIR/EIS for design, construction and implementation of Phase II capital improvements. Preliminary and final engineering will be performed. The total cost is estimated to be **\$47,500,000**, which will require approvals from Metro and California Transportation Commission for funding allocation.

Long Term improvements (Phase III)

A 5-mile, limited-stop median busway on Van Nuys Boulevard between Burbank Boulevard and Plummer Street is recommended for further analysis to provide a full-time, exclusive facility for Metro Rapid buses through this heavily-traveled segment. A median busway is expected to improve bus speeds by approximately 15%. The busway could include underground grade separations at major cross streets (e.g., Victory Boulevard, Sherman Way, Roscoe Boulevard and Nordhoff Street) to avoid significant traffic impacts. It could also include a tunnel segment of approximately 1-mile under the Van Nuys Civic Center between the Metro Orange Line and Vanowen Street.

It will take approximately 2 years after completion of the EIR/EIS for planning and design of the median busway on Van Nuys Boulevard. The cost for this work is estimated to be **\$9,000,000**. Additional funding, possibly through the federal Small Starts program, may be needed for construction. Budget is available for the planning and design work, subject to approvals from Metro and California Transportation Commission for funding allocation.

Rail Service Alternatives Analysis for Northeast Valley (San Fernando/Lankershim Corridor)

The northeast San Fernando Valley has a large transit-dependent population that must access

jobs, schools, goods and services in other parts of the region by bus. There is commuter rail but no mass transit rail service in this area, although there is an opportunity to create a north/south rail connection between existing passenger rail hubs that would provide such a service. The Metro Red Line now terminates at the North Hollywood Station, while further north is the Sylmar Metrolink Station, which may be designated a California High Speed Rail station. An Alternatives Analysis should be conducted to connect these two rail transit hubs via heavy rail subway, light rail transit or other rail along the San Fernando/Lankershim Corridor or a parallel north/south alignment.

The cost for such a Rail Service Alternatives Analysis for the northeast San Fernando Valley is estimated to be **\$2 million** and may be eligible for TCRP or Measure R funding. The Analysis could be completed within one year.

A chart of all recommended improvements showing phasing and costs is provided in Attachment 2.

Public Outreach

LADOT has conducted numerous project briefings for elected officials and VICA's Transportation Committee. Attendees have included staff from Congressional District 27 (Sherman), state Senate District 20 (Padilla), Assembly Districts 39 (Fuentes) and 40 (Levine), County Supervisory District 3 (Yaroslavsky), the Mayor's Office, and Council Districts 2, 6 and 7.

More extensive public outreach would be conducted in conjunction with preparation of the EIR/EIS.

COORDINATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

LADOT has coordinated closely with Metro Planning and Bus Operations staff on this project. Staff has also provided technical assistance to the CRA/LA's Pacoima Transportation Study, which focuses on improving mobility and quality of life along a 1.8-mile stretch of Van Nuys Boulevard between the I-5 Freeway and Glenoaks Boulevard.

FISCAL IMPACT

Development and implementation of recommended improvements would be funded by the TCRP, Measure R, and other outside sources, so there would be no impact on the City's General Fund.

Attachments:

1. Transit Corridors Map
2. Phasing, Schedule & Cost of Improvements
3. Technical Appendix