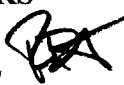


EXPOSITION METRO LINE CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY

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DATE: AUGUST 4, 2005

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: RICHARD D. THORPE 
METRO CHIEF CAPITAL MANAGEMENT OFFICER

ACTION: EXPOSITION METRO LINE CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY
ENVIRONMENTAL FEIS/FEIR STATUS REPORT

RECOMMENDATION

Receive and file this report on the status of the Final Environmental Impact Statement/ Environmental Impact Report (Final EIS/EIR) for the Los Angeles Mid-City Westside Transit Corridor, Mid-City Exposition Light Rail Transit Project, the modified Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) and summary of 12 additional design options considered therein.

SUMMARY

The Administrative Final EIS/EIR has recently been revised to address requirements identified by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) as a result of their review of the previous submittal in December 2004. The Final EIS/EIR also incorporates 12 additional minor design options developed to address comments by various stakeholders. The revised Administrative Final EIS/EIR was resubmitted to the FTA for review on July 27, 2005.

The Final EIS/EIR recommends adopting certain modifications to the LPA approved by the Metro Board of Directors in June 2001. The modified LPA also incorporates the following four of the 12 new design options: (1) the Flower Street Eastside Design Option, (2) the north-side widening of Jefferson Boulevard near La Cienega Boulevard, (3) a grade separation of Jefferson Boulevard and (4) an interim Venice/Robertson Station located within the Metro-owned Exposition Right-of-Way east of National Boulevard. The estimated cost for the modified LPA is within the \$640 Million budget adopted for the project by the Metro Board of Directors.

DISCUSSION

Earlier drafts of the Administrative Final EIS/EIR were submitted to the FTA in April and December 2004 for review and approval. Following its review, the FTA indicated

that the Final EIS/EIR could not be approved for public release until certain concerns regarding the modeling and patronage projections were satisfactorily addressed. In February, agreement was reached with the FTA that those concerns could be addressed in a White Paper if the Exposition LRT Project was withdrawn from the Section 5309 New Starts Program. Once the decision to withdraw the project from the New Starts process was approved by the Metro Board of Directors in April, the requisite White Paper was completed and submitted. The White Paper was accepted by the FTA in early July, clearing the way for completion of the revision of the FEIS/FEIR. The revised FEIS/FEIR has been completed and submitted to the FTA for review and approval.

The revised FEIS/FEIR includes evaluation of 12 minor design options affecting the project configuration. Four of these design options are recommended for adoption as part of the proposed LPA. A summary of each of the 12 design options evaluated are described 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 adopted by the Metro Board of Directors in June 2001, and these two design options, staff has concluded that both the Flower Street and the 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 Design Option is recommended for adoption provided the funding contributions from the City of Los Angeles and USC, as identified in the adopted Funding Plan, are obtained.

Flower Street Design Option – USC/Exposition Park Undercrossing Design Options – Several comments on the Draft EIS/EIR raised concerns about the operation of at-grade light rail on Exposition Boulevard between Figueroa Street and Vermont Avenue. Specific stakeholders, including the University of Southern California (USC), requested that a below-ground alignment be considered. In response to these concerns, the Metro Board approved the Grade Crossing Policy for Light Rail Transit in December 2003. Analysis using the adopted policy determined that the Flower Street Design Option would need to be grade separated from just south of Jefferson Boulevard on Flower Street to Exposition Boulevard just east of Trousdale Parkway. USC has requested and partly funded studies to develop and evaluate additional Design Options for the Flower Street undercrossing. These undercrossing options address three key concerns: 1) the location and design of the LRT portal; 2) possible covering or roof treatments for the underground trench segment including additional landscaping; and 3) the possible inclusion and location of a USC/Exposition Park Station, which is required for the Hill Street alignments but is optional for the Flower Street alignment due to the proximity of the station at Jefferson and Vermont.

Staff believes any change to the location of the Flower Street LRT portal(s) and/or the covering roof treatments should be considered architectural treatments or betterments that could be included if the Flower Street alignment is adopted and funded. Additionally, that any enhancements be supported by adjacent stakeholders and funded from sources outside the presently identified project budget. The staff recommended Flower Street Design Option is being designed not to preclude an optional USC/Exposition Park Station in the event that if additional funding is identified and there is a community consensus, it can be included as part of the project.

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 and would result in a serious impact on the project budget since the adopted budget was predicated on the City of LA making the ECIS site available at no cost to the project.

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 previously approved aerial crossing of La Cienega, all the alternatives for the Jefferson grade separation involved extension of the La Cienega grade separation. Analysis of these alternatives found that the extension of the La Cienega grade separation across Jefferson Boulevard and Ballona Creek and returning to grade just east of Fay Avenue would be the superior alternative to the LPA. Therefore, the Jefferson Boulevard aerial grade-separation 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 parcel(s) 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, 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 as funding is not available for full grade separation and an aerial station at this time. 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, two additional interim station design options have been developed that do not require LRT crossings of these streets. These options are the "North of ROW" Design Option, which would locate an interim station on a parcel of land bounded by National, Washington, Wesley and the Expo ROW, 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 since it is the only alternative that is within the Board adopted budget. In the mean time, Staff will work with Culver City to further develop the interim station locations, as well as the future grade separation of National, Washington and Venice Boulevards.