




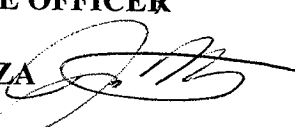
May 22, 2002

Metropolitan
Transportation
Authority

One Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA
90012-2952

TO: MTA BOARD OF DIRECTORS

THROUGH: ROGER SNOBLE
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER 

FROM: JAMES L. de la LOZA 

SUBJECT: FEDERAL ENVIRONMENTAL CLEARANCE FOR
THE MID-CITY/WILSHIRE BRT PROJECT

ISSUE

The current capital funding plan for the Mid-City/Wilshire Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project does not anticipate the need for any federal funding. Therefore, there appears to be no need for the MTA to seek Federal Transit Administration (FTA) approval of the Final Environmental Statement (FEIS) for the Project. If so, only the environmental clearance requirements under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) would apply to the project.

To deliver the Wilshire BRT Project as soon as possible, staff does not intend to seek FTA approval of the federal FEIS at this time, and will pursue the approval of the state Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) alone. The MTA could recirculate the FEIS at a later date if federal funds are needed for the project.

BACKGROUND

In June 1999, the MTA Board of Directors awarded a contract for alternatives analysis and environmental clearance for the Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor. As it was anticipated that federal and state grant funds would be sought for the project, both the state CEQA and federal National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) processes have been followed.

In July 2000, the MTA submitted information for the Section 5309 New Starts Rating Report to the FTA to qualify the Wilshire BRT project, as well as other projects, for New Starts funding. At that time, it was assumed that \$78.6 million in New Starts funds would be required for the project. Also in July 2000, the State approved the Traffic Congestion Relief Program (TCRP), which now provides \$256 million in funds for the Wilshire BRT and Exposition Light Rail Transit projects.

In June 2001, the Board selected BRT as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for the Wilshire corridor. The Board also adopted the Draft EIS/EIR and directed that the Final EIS/EIR for the project be completed.

In August 2001, the MTA submitted updated information for the Section 5309 New Starts Rating Report to the FTA to continue to qualify the Wilshire BRT Project for New Starts funding. However, as there were sufficient state TCRP funds available to fund the entire project, the financial plan submitted with the report did not indicate that New Starts funds were required at that time. However, staff believed that it was important to keep the door open for New Starts funds should project costs increase or if there was any shortfall in state funding.

Staff is now nearing completion of the FEIS/FEIR for the Wilshire BRT project, with certification of the document by the Board anticipated in June 2002. We believe that it is appropriate at this time to reconsider the merit of pursuing FTA approval of the FEIS, for the following reasons:

- FTA has been unwilling to approve entry into preliminary or final design for the project due to opposition to a dedicated bus lane on Wilshire Boulevard by local community and governmental interests.
- FTA review and approval of the FEIS could delay implementation of the project, including the expansion of Division 10, by three months or more.
- Unless peak-hour lanes are included as part of the project, the eligibility of the project for New Starts funds is in question. It is not certain at this time that such approvals will be granted.
- Recent information indicates that there is a strong possibility that the cost estimate for the project could be reduced below the present \$235.4 million (escalated).
- State TCRP funds sufficient to complete the project appear to be available.
- If necessary, federal funds could be applied toward individual project elements, such as bus acquisition and bus shelters, with a minimal amount of environmental review.

NEXT STEPS

Since FTA approval of the FEIS is not being sought, the next step would be to prepare the FEIR document for public review. Board certification of the FEIR, final adoption of the LPA and the filing of a Notice of Determination are anticipated to occur in June 2002.

Prepared by: Brian Boudreau, Director
Regional Grants Management & Administration

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