

**Metro**

May 19, 2006

TO: BOARD OF DIRECTORS

FROM: ROGER SNOBLE 

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO MARCH 23, 2006 – MTA BOARD ITEM 32  
MOTION BY DIRECTOR ANTONOVICH  
METRO GOLD LINE EASTSIDE EXTENSION  
ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATION AT THE  
L A COUNTY CREMATORIUM SITE

ISSUE

During the excavation that began in June 2005, for the widening of 1<sup>st</sup> Street on a portion of the LA County Crematorium property (that was acquired by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority [Metro] from the County of Los Angeles), human skeletal remains and artifacts were discovered. A number of the remains and artifacts have been identified and are believed to be those of the Chinese people who died over a century ago. Questions have been raised regarding how this mass grave went undetected by Metro staff during the environmental process and excavation process until Metro construction crews came in contact with the remains.

To address the concerns of the Chinese-American community, and to ensure that Metro's environmental and pre-construction processes avoid similar problems in the future, the Board at the March 23, 2006 Metro Board of Directors Meeting, directed the CEO to take the following actions:

1. Hold a public investigation into how and why Metro's environmental and pre-construction processes did not detect the mass grave prior to submission of the Final Environmental Impact Report and Statement to the FTA during the FTA New Starts process, and publicly present the results of the investigation;
2. Develop a plan for Metro to provide, in conjunction with appropriate cultural and historical agencies and communities, a dignified and fitting burial for these discovered remains, as well as future remains discovered through excavation, with Metro providing funding for re-interment;
3. Bring back to the Metro Board of Directors within 90 days a full review of Metro environmental and pre-construction policies, with recommendations for revising said policies to ensure that future archaeological and human remains can be detected and handled appropriately prior to submission of final environmental documents necessary to meet local, state and federal environmental guidelines in preparation for construction and excavation.

4. Bring back to the Metro Board of Directors within 30 days a plan to work with appropriate cultural and historical agencies to devise a memorial or historical exhibition that will highlight the role of Chinese immigrant laborers in developing Los Angeles County's transportation network in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

## BACKGROUND

The Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension is a 6-mile Light Rail Transit (LRT) project consisting of 6 at-grade stations and 2 underground stations. The 1.7-mile underground portion beneath Boyle Heights begins at the West Portal at 1<sup>st</sup>/Gless Street and surfaces at the East Portal near 1<sup>st</sup> Street and Lorena Street.

In June 2005, excavation began on a portion of the LA County Crematorium property that was acquired by Metro for the purpose of widening the north side of 1<sup>st</sup> Street to accommodate the construction of the East Portal. In late June 2005, construction crews unearthed the first evidence of a burial and all construction work stopped immediately and the construction area became an archaeological excavation site. Metro first informed the community when it made presentations at the July 2005 monthly Review Advisory Committee meeting. Archaeological excavation did not begin until a presentation was made to the community and a treatment plan was approved by the community Review Advisory Committee and County Officials. Archaeological excavation was completed in November 2005.

## CURRENT STATUS

In late 2005, the community Review Advisory Committee created an Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee to work with the community to receive public feedback to develop a proper and respectful re-interment plan, ceremony and monument that will be consistent with the desires of the community. The Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee Chairperson is a Review Advisory Committee member. Members of the Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee (Attachment A) were selected after an invitation to participate on the committee was mailed out to community members in neighborhoods along the alignment, including the Little Tokyo/Arts District, Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles and Chinatown. There are fourteen (14) members on the Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee. Three (3) of the members are from the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California.

Three (3) monthly Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee Meetings have been held in 2006, in which the community has been provided with information on the archaeological excavation timeline, initial findings and a display of artifacts that were discovered at the burial site. Meeting notifications in English, Spanish and Chinese are done through newspaper ads, mass-mailings and through Metro's website.

Metro is working with the staff from the County of Los Angeles, Department of Health Services who have been invited to participate in the Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee process by providing information including burial and cremation records that will assist in developing the re-interment plan and the identification of the deceased.

## NEXT STEPS

In response to the Metro Board of Directors direction to the CEO:

1. Within the next 30 days, as part of the investigation into how and why Metro's environmental and pre-construction processes did not detect the mass grave prior to submission of the Final Environmental Impact Report and Statement to the FTA during the FTA New Starts process, submit a copy of Metro's Project Archaeologist's Final Archaeological Report which is scheduled to be completed by mid-May 2006. In addition, Management Audit Services will outsource a forensic audit of the environmental and pre-construction process to a national CPA firm. The CPA firm selected will be required to have archaeological and construction expertise as part of their team and an understanding of FTA New Starts process and requirements. The CPA firm will brief the Board on their findings upon completion of their audit work. Board contingency funds will be used to pay for the CPA audit.
2. Metro staff, in conjunction with appropriate cultural and historical agencies and communities, has begun to develop a plan to devise a dignified and fitting burial for these discovered remains, as well as future remains discovered through excavation. Metro staff will require an additional 60 days to continue to work with the community through the Review Advisory Committee's Ad-Hoc Sub-Committee to receive the communities input and feedback in developing a proper and respectful re-interment plan, ceremony and memorial. Costs and funding sources for the re-interment, ceremony and memorial are yet to be determined.
3. Bring back to the Metro Board of Directors within 60 days a full review of Metro environmental and pre-construction policies, with recommendations for revising said policies to ensure that future archaeological and human remains can be detected and handled appropriately prior to submission of final environmental documents necessary to meet local, state and federal environmental guidelines in preparation for construction and excavation.
4. During the next 60 days, Metro staff will also solicit input and feedback from the community and appropriate cultural and historical agencies to devise a memorial or historical exhibition that will highlight the role of Chinese immigrant laborers in developing Los Angeles County's transportation network in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Costs and funding are yet to be determined.

