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SPECIAL BOARD WORKSHOP
July 19, 2001

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Metropolitan
Transportation
Authority

**SUBJECT: SAN FERNANDO VALLEY EAST-WEST TRANSIT
CORRIDOR**

ACTION: RECEIVE DRAFT EIS/R

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Los Angeles, CA
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INTRODUCTION:

Staff will present the San Fernando Valley East-West Transit Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (DEIS/R) transmitted under separate cover and the project alternatives for action at the July 26, 2001 meeting. At the July 26 meeting staff intends to recommend:

- A. Adopt the Full Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) alternative on the former Pacific Electric/Southern Pacific right-of-way, including the Chandler median, as the locally Preferred Alternative (LPA).
- B. Continue to work with adjacent communities during the Preliminary Engineering and Final EIS/R phase to refine project design features where appropriate to address concerns.

ISSUE

In June 1999, the Board awarded a contract for three phases of alternatives analysis and environmental clearance in the San Fernando Valley East-West Transit Corridor. These studies are necessary in order to make the project eligible for necessary state and federal grant funding, in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The first phase of the work was the Major Investment Study (MIS). The MIS was completed in February 2000 and brought to the Board for consideration. At that time, the Board narrowed the range of alternatives and authorized the initiation of the second phase of the work, the DEIS/R.

The DEIS/R is now complete, and the adoption of a Locally Preferred Alternative is a necessary action prior to the commencement of work on the third phase, which is

the Final EIS/R. The adoption of the LPA will identify a transit mode and alignment for the project.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The adoption of the DEIS/R and selection of an LPA is consistent with the November 1998 Board adopted policy defined in the Regional Transportation Alternatives Analysis (RTAA) and San Fernando Valley East-West Transit Corridor MIS (February 2000) which evaluated the transit alternatives that were carried forward for further evaluation in the DEIS/R for this corridor. The Valley East-West BRT project is included in the adopted MTA Long Range Transportation Plan.

OPTIONS

The MTA San Fernando Valley East-West Corridor MIS considered numerous route and mode alternatives including BRT, Light Rail Transit (LRT), Heavy Rail Transit, and Diesel Multiple Units in a variety of configurations. In February 2000, the Board adopted at-grade BRT as the modal alternative to be environmentally cleared. The BRT project consists of an exclusive busway with thirteen stations, park-and-ride lots, landscaping, signal and intersection improvements, mitigation measures, and project enhancements, which are all included as part of the project budget. The BRT modal alternative includes three options: (a) Full BRT using the former rail right-of-way to the fullest length, including the median of Chandler Boulevard; (b) A modified BRT alternative that includes on-street, mixed-flow operations on Lankershim Boulevard and Oxnard Street for the eastern three miles of the alignment; and (c) A Minimum Operable Segment (MOS) option (if funding is limited) that utilizes the former rail right-of-way only between Woodman Avenue and Balboa Avenue with on-street, mixed-flow operations on either end. (See Attachments A and B.)

The DEIS/R also includes a Transportation Systems Management (TSM) alternative, which increases headways on existing local Valley bus routes, and a No Build alternative, which provides a comparison baseline. Adoption of the TSM or No Build alternative would be contrary to the Board's adopted policy to provide a higher capacity project to improve travel times and reduce congestion in this corridor. In addition, TSM bus service improvements are included as part of the BRT options described above. Therefore, selection of any of the BRT alternatives would provide both TSM bus improvements and a new exclusive bus lane service.

The Oxnard/Lankershim BRT alternative addresses some of the concerns expressed by residents living adjacent to the Full BRT Chandler Median segment and has some technical strengths in comparison to the staff recommended Full BRT alternative as indicated below. It should be noted, however, that there is also community opposition to the Oxnard/Lankershim alternative.

- **Capital Cost Savings:** The Oxnard/Lankershim alternative would require approximately \$40 million less capital dollars to construct.
- **More Park-and-Ride Spaces:** The Oxnard /Lankershim alternative would provide one additional park-and-ride lot (an existing park-and-ride lot near the 170 Freeway).
- **Fewer Property Acquisitions:** The Oxnard/Lankershim alternative would eliminate the property acquisitions required for the Chandler median segment and diagonal, including several businesses, a religious institution, and a multi-family property with six units.
- **Two Less Complex Intersections:** The Oxnard alternative would simplify two intersection crossings where, in the Chandler Median alternative, the right-of-way alignment creates diagonal crossings (Burbank/Fulton and Woodman/Oxnard).

Despite the strengths of the Oxnard/Lankershim alternative listed above, staff intends to recommend the Full BRT, including utilizing the Chandler median, as the better alternative for the following reasons:

- **Shorter Travel Time:** In the year 2020, the model estimates that a cross valley trip would take approximately half-an-hour on the Full BRT, while the same trip would take at least five and ¾ minutes longer on Oxnard/Lankershim.
- **Increased Number of Passengers:** Due to the faster, more reliable trip times and the opportunity to serve the fairly dense multi-family and commercial station proposed at the intersection of Laurel Canyon and Chandler Boulevards, the MTA's travel demand model estimates that the Full BRT would carry approximately 24,700 patrons per day, which is approximately 1,400 more than the Oxnard/Lankershim alternative.
- **More Reliable Trip:** By utilizing the ROW to the fullest extent possible, the Full BRT will reliably take approximately half-an-hour, including during rush hour, both in 2005 when the project could open, as well as in future years. The Oxnard/Lankershim alternative requires operating in mixed-flow traffic for over three miles, including passing several schools, Valley College, and the 170 Freeway exit and entry ramps, which will result in slower, less reliable trips, particularly during rush hour.
- **Fewer Intersections and Driveways:** In the Chandler Full BRT alternative, the busway crosses 11 at-grade intersections, while there are over triple that number on the Oxnard/Lankershim alternative between the North Hollywood Terminus and Woodman Avenue. In contrast to the potential on-street operations on Oxnard/Lankershim, BRT operations in the median of Chandler Boulevard eliminates numerous potential conflicts with parked cars along the side of the road and traffic exiting and entering the many private driveways from single-family residences, apartments, commercial and institutional uses along the route.

- **Less Noise Concerns:** The location of the busway in the middle of the wide median on Chandler positions the buses farthest away from sensitive residential, community, and institutional receptors. In contrast, on the Oxnard/Lankershim alternative, the BRT buses would be operating in the mixed flow lanes closest to similar sensitive receptors.
- **Reduced Operational Costs:** The faster, more reliable travel times on the Full BRT would allow the BRT buses to operate more efficiently, which could result in operational cost savings of approximately \$100,000 per year.

Both the Full BRT alternative utilizing the Chandler Median and the Oxnard/Lankershim alternative have generated concerns and opposition primarily from residential neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the proposed routes. These concerns are described in more detail in the Background section of this Board Report, along with some of the project features, which address these concerns. Another option, however, that the Board could recommend, that might further respond to some of these concerns, would be to run weekday service on the Full BRT/Chandler median alternative with weekend service on the Oxnard/Lankershim route. This would partially address concerns of the Chandler community regarding the need for large numbers of pedestrians to safely cross the BRT project on Saturdays to attend religious services and other community/family activities. This would also address some of the concerns of the Oxnard/Lankershim community about the number of school children crossing Oxnard during the week and the already congested traffic, particularly when school is letting out. Another variation on this theme would be to limit the BRT service to Monday through Friday only. Staff has not recommended these options since providing seven day a week service using the Chandler median would be the most optimal for transit riders. In particular, some level of weekend service is recommended in order to compliment weekend Metro Red Line service.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Adoption of the LPA at the July 26 Board meeting, and the preparation of the FEIR/S and preliminary engineering for the Valley East-West BRT will not have an impact on the MTA FY02 Budget as the consultant contracts for these activities were previously approved and funded by the Board. Funding for construction of the Valley East-West BRT is included in the adopted MTA Long Range Transportation Plan, subject to the availability of anticipated State and local funding sources. The DEIS/R estimates the cost of the Full BRT alternative at \$285 million in 1999 dollars.

BACKGROUND

The preparation of the Draft EIS/R, together with the required circulation, public hearings, public participation and review, ensures that all significant transportation and environmental impacts are considered and analyzed. There has been a comprehensive community outreach

program conducted throughout the development of the DEIS/R. The MTA conducted two formal public hearings in accordance with Federal and State environmental law (one in the East Valley and one in the West Valley) that were attended by more than 500 people. Numerous meetings and briefings were held during the preparation of the DEIS/R with business, community, educational, and residential groups. Attachment C summarizes the community outreach including a summary of the public testimony submitted at the public hearings and throughout the comment period. A transcript of the hearings will be placed on the MTA's website, www.mta.net, and a copy of the hearing transcripts as well as the letters received are also available upon request. As a result of the outreach effort, staff has worked to include clarifications, enhancements, and mitigations to address specific community concerns.

Residential neighborhoods immediately adjacent to the project have expressed numerous concerns such as noise, pedestrian safety, delay at north/south intersections and other similar issues. A number of design features and mitigation measures have been included in the project to address these concerns along the length of the project. As an example, some of the specific concerns articulated by the neighborhoods adjacent to the Chandler Median section of the Full BRT alternative are highlighted below along with a description of the project features designed to address these concerns:

- **Operating Speeds:** Community members in the Chandler Median area expressed concerns about a "high speed" busway. The MTA however, in consultation with Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), will operate in this segment at the posted speed limit on Chandler, which is generally 35 miles per hour.
- **Bus Size:** Community members expressed concern about the use of longer Curitiba style buses, which can be up to eighty feet long. The DEIR/S indicates that service needs can be met with a combination of standard forty foot buses and sixty foot long articulated buses
- **Signal Priority:** Community members expressed concerns that bus drivers would have control over signals and the ability to immediately turn red into green lights at every intersection. In truth, the bus operators will not have any control of traffic signals. Per LADOT, signal priority is used to enhance travel times of the buses, but not at the expense of time allocated to pedestrian crossings or yellow caution lights. The DEIS/R traffic analysis indicates that impacts of BRT operations and bus signal priority can be mitigated to a level where there are no significant adverse impacts on north/south traffic. The current Metro Rapid bus operations on Wilshire and Ventura Boulevards validate this finding.
- **Pedestrian Crossings:** Community members expressed concerns about pedestrians being able to safely cross the busway in large numbers. The project retains all existing controlled pedestrian crossings and adds timers or other passive devices to pedestrian signals so that members of the Orthodox community will not have to push a button to activate a green light. The project also includes the creation of two (and could include

more) new mid-block pedestrian crossings , which will include protected, signalized pedestrian crossings of both North and South Chandler Boulevards and the median busway. Lastly, MTA staff is prepared to include pedestrian overpasses as part of these mid-block crossings if desired by the community.

- **Sound Walls:** Community members have expressed concerns about potential sound walls in the Chandler median dividing their community. However, the project does not require sound walls along the median segment and does not propose that they be constructed. The MTA is ready to work with the community on developing a landscaping design for the median as well as public art elements that reflect the community along the median and at the proposed stations. On the diagonals and elsewhere where the busway abuts up against residential back yards, sound walls will be constructed.

Many residents adjacent to the Oxnard/Lankershim alternative have also expressed concerns primarily that the increased levels of transit service would be very close to homes and apartments and would add to a street already heavily impacted by traffic particularly during school hours and rush hour. Although not currently included in the DEIS/R, the project could be enhanced if the Board chose this alternative. Some enhancements could include: double turning lanes at the intersection of Lankershim and Oxnard, the addition of a landscaped median in place of the painted median on Oxnard where feasible, and additional street trees.

Several homeowner groups along the alignment have expressed support for an “enhanced” TSM alternative. This would include the basic TSM alternative analyzed in the DEIR/S plus additional Metro Rapid Bus lines throughout the Valley. A comprehensive response to all public comments will be incorporated in the Final EIS/R and in the Mitigation Monitoring Plan (MMP). The MMP will be incorporated in the project budget and implemented during construction of the adopted project.

NEXT STEPS

Assuming Board adoption, at its July 26 meeting, of the DEIS/R and selection of the LPA, MTA staff and consultants will prepare the Final EIS/R for the Full San Fernando Valley East-West BRT project and complete the Preliminary Engineering. The final approval of the Locally Preferred Alternative as the “project” to be carried out by the MTA will not occur until the Final EIS/R is completed and certified by the Board and approved by the FTA through a Record of Decision (ROD).

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Map of Project Alternatives
- B. Brochure: San Fernando Valley East-West Bus Rapid Transit Corridor
- C. Summary of Public Outreach and Comments

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