



SR-710 Tunnel Technical Study  
Northeast Los Angeles Community Meeting Summary  
June 16, 2009  
Ramona Hall  
6:30 – 9:15 pm

## INTRODUCTION

On June 16, 2009, Caltrans held a community meeting to inform community stakeholders about the State Route 710 (SR-710) Tunnel Technical Study. The meeting took place at Ramona Hall, 4850 N. Figueroa Street, in Los Angeles. Approximately 150 community members attended.

SR-710 team members who attended included the following project management staff from Caltrans: Doug Failing, District 7 Director; Deborah Harris, Chief, Media Relations and Public Affairs; Abdi Saghafi, SR-710 Tunnel Technical Study Project Manager, and Pratheep Piratheepan, Geotechnical Lead. Other Study team members who participated in the meeting were: Yoga Chandran of CH2MHILL; Al Wattson of Paladin Professional Consultants; Bruce Schell of EMI Earth Mechanics; Rebecca Barrantes, Glenda Silva and Alma Villegas of The Sierra Group (TSG); Rena Salcedo, Claudia Gonzalez and Debbie Rusas of GCAP Services; and Katherine Padilla, John Limon and Thelma Herrera of Katherine Padilla & Associates.

## MEETING FORMAT

The meeting began at 6:30 pm with an informal Open House. There were informational stations set up around the room with displays that depicted a range of topics, including: The Study Background and Public Involvement Process; The Technical Advisory Committee and the Steering Committee, both of which provide Study oversight; research methodologies of The Exploration Program; examples of subsurface soil and rock samples collected as part of the Study; and modern tunnel building techniques. The Open House format provided community members with the opportunity to ask questions and engage in one-to-one conversations with knowledgeable Study Team members.

The Presentation portion of the meeting convened at approximately 7:15 pm. Doug Failing welcomed the audience.

Mr. Failing explained the Study background. He also stated that the Study is being conducted in a route neutral manner and defined the meaning and its significance. He also



stressed that this is a feasibility study and does not include an environmental document component.

Mr. Failing introduced elected official representatives in attendance: Yumi Ha, Congressman Becerra's office; Arturo Chavez, State Senator Gil Cedillo's office; Alana Yañez and Friné Medrano, Assemblymember Kevin de León's office; Elizabeth Garcia, Assemblymember Anthony Portantino's office; Susan Wong and Suzanne Jimenez Councilmember Ed Reyes' office; Paul Habib, Councilmember Jose Huizar's office; and Marcel Porras, Councilmember Eric Garcetti's office. He introduced other attendees, including Michael Blatt from Sycamore Grove, Scott Petrowski and Helene Schpak from Glassell Park Improvement Association, and Joseph Elkins.

The meeting transitioned to Rebecca Barrantes who reviewed the purpose of the meeting. Rebecca also outlined the ground rules for the Question & Answer period at the end of the meeting.

Yoga Chandran, one of the Study Team's geotechnical experts, then provided a PowerPoint presentation that described the Study purpose and process; geological factors and their influence on tunnels; modern tunnel systems in Madrid, Shanghai and Paris; and The Exploration Program that is currently underway to determine subsurface soil, rock and other geological conditions within the Study area.

Following the geotechnical presentation, Rebecca Barrantes described the notification process, including door-to-door outreach to neighborhoods adjacent to the exploration sites. The review of the Study's public involvement included community meetings, newsletters, website, information office and reports to the technical advisory and steering committees.

## **COMMUNITY DIALOGUE**

After the presentation, community members participated in a Question & Answer session. District Director Failing and members of the Study team listened, sometimes asking questions for clarification, and responded. Rebecca Barrantes facilitated the session. Topics discussed included: tunnel ventilation systems; the cost of the Study; potential costs of tunneling and possible sources of funding; and the need to report research findings to the community.

The categorized questions and comments offered by community members appear below. *Responses from Caltrans Director Failing and Study Team members are in italics.*



## Study Costs

- Who authorized this study to begin with and the whole concept of a tunnel? Is this something that the public has voted on?

*Caltrans authorized the Study. The Study is actually funded through multiple sources: the State (Caltrans), the California Transportation Commission, Metro, and there was money available through a federal grant.*

- Do the people have any vote on this? Is there any voting process that occurs?

*You do not have to vote on public transportation. Decisions are made between the Metro Board and Caltrans. The Metro Board of Directors has elected officials representing you..*

## Borings

- It seems to me that Northeast Los Angeles is the smallest area in diameter, but they have eight drill sites, more than the other drill sites. Why is this?

*Borings were selected in each of the zones was based on what information we were able to collect as well as the conditions we anticipated within the Study area.*

- Why do you have more borings in Zones 1, 2 and 5? Is it because there is more population there? Is it because it is flat land and that is where you plan to tunnel? I am looking at the numbers of borings on the PowerPoint presentation.

*The numbers you are looking at are borings or information already completed in those areas. They are existing data points utilized as part of the study.*

## Route Neutral Study

- Where does the 710 traffic go when the tunnel ends? You are looking at merging with the 2, the 134 and the 605. Where is that traffic going to go?

*Our commitment is to stay route neutral. Route selection would be part of an Environmental Impact Report, should Caltrans initiate that document.*



- Is it premature to do all the geological stuff when we do not know where you are trying to get to?

*It is not premature to do the geotechnical studies. We have been specifically asked to determine if a tunnel is feasible before we take those kinds of steps.*

- Are you going to eliminate Zones 1, 4 and 5 because they are SuperFund sites?

*Just because it is a SuperFund site does not mean that it is infeasible to tunnel through it. It creates a series of concerns that we would have, but the primary concern would be protecting the workers during construction as you are excavating material and as you go through the contaminated zone.*

- Exactly where will Zone 2 and Zone 3 be? Is it going to be including some public [eminent] domain decisions? Will you have to take certain properties out for the ramp in and ramp out? Is there a map available that will show street-level locations of the Zones? We are not able to see the details of the map provided during the presentation.

*As far as the southerly portal on the 710 is concerned, Councilman Huizar and Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa have made it very clear that they expect that tunnel portal to be as close to Valley Boulevard, if not south of Valley Boulevard, as possible. The northerly portal is the one that probably has the most variation; we have not begun to do geometrics yet on the northerly portal. In Zone 3, assuming that a tunnel would end up near the existing end of SR-710, it is possible that it could end in the area near the Sequoia School, and it is very possible that Sequoia School could remain. It is entirely possible that there would be no acquisition of any property there. In Zone 2, there probably would be some impacts, but again we would have to get into the environmental document related to the traffic analysis to come up with the geometry and approaches in order to make that decision. This question would be answered should we go forward with an environmental document, but we are not prepared to get to that level of detail in this study. We are a long time away from doing that engineering, which is what an environmental document would do.*

*A map of the zones is available on the website. It will go down to the street level to some degree; however it is not ideal for trying to pinpoint the location of your house. It gives you a general idea and it does have some helpful location information. You can get an idea of where the boundaries are of each zone.*



- Who is the committee? Who appointed the committee, and do they have our best interests in mind?

*There are two committees. All of the cities that are in the study are represented on both committees. We have a complete list of the Committees on the back table. Governing bodies appointed members of each Committee to represent their communities.*

- Why do we need to connect these freeways?

*There is a demonstrated transportation need within this corridor and not addressing it has created significant congestion in other parts of the greater Los Angeles area.*

## **Tunnel**

- What geotechnical conditions would stop a route through Zone 2 or through any zone?

*I do not think any geotechnical conditions as such would stop a tunnel. It would just affect the cost.*

- Are there any geotechnical conditions that would change the choice of the type of tunneling from tunnel boring machine to sequential?

*There are many different types of boring machines. The geology will determine the type of tunneling machine.*

- I would like to know what you found out about Zone 3 geologically or when would those results be available?

*We are still evaluating, but Zone 3 has the most variable soil conditions compared to the other zones. In about a month to a month and a half, we will have a little more information.*

- Regarding the ventilation system, will all the exhaust be removed? Is that going to be cleaned somehow in the process? How does that really reduce air quality if you are just going to remove it?

*At the operations and maintenance building, you have scrubbers that would clean the air before it is discharged into the environment. Theoretically you would get a better quality air coming out of it than if you had an open freeway in that area.*



- Where and how will the freeways connect from the tunnel? For instance, if you look at Zone 3, you have three existing freeway interchanges that would connect perfectly together, however if you look at Zone 2, you have a freeway interchange that is going to be right at the Raymond Fault, one of the most dangerous geological features in our neighborhood. How would you incorporate this concern in your study? I would like to recall that in the Northridge earthquake there was a section of the I-5 collapsed. If that proposed intersection would collapse, hundreds of people would die. How would you address this safety concern?

*The connectivity at the portals linking to the freeways in Zones 1, 2, 4 and 5, is something that will be looked at in the future phases. At this time we do not have an entire alignment, and we are not able to look at connectivity. As you go into the environmental phase based on the selected zones, you would start looking at some of the details and consider those options. From a seismic standpoint, you are correct. In Zone 2, the Raymond Fault extends through toward the end of Zone 2, close to the 2 Freeway, and we would have to incorporate that into the design. All we are doing is recognizing those constraints or impacts, and as we move to the next phase and the phases after that, that will be incorporated.*

- If you look at Zone 2, you have a freeway interchange that is going to be right at two thrusts of the Raymond Fault. How would you incorporate this concern into your study?

*In Zone 2, the Raymond Fault extends through toward the end of Zone 2, close to SR-2. We know the conditions there and we will have to incorporate that in our design.*

- Will that be part of your recommendation to Caltrans?

*We will recognize and present those factors to Caltrans, and if Zone 2 is one of the selected zones for future study.*

- I do not see data for exact routes for the public to look at. I would like to know if my property is going to be in the way. I want to know where that tunnel is going to be. Where are the portals? I want to know where the portals are going to be in every zone, where they begin and where they come out.

*The website has the map and you can look at it in detail. You may not be able to pinpoint where your house is, but it gives you a general idea and it does have some location information. You can get an idea of where the boundaries are of each zone.*



NOTE: In other Caltrans responses, it was stated that route selection and portal locations are not part of the geotechnical study.

- Where are you going to run this tunnel - from where to where? If we do not know what the traffic patterns are, we do not know where we need to go, why are you doing this?

*We know that we need to do something, and we have been looking at a project to connect one end of the SR-710 to the other for 30 years. The need to ease traffic and provide congestion relief is still in the Southern California Association of Governments Regional Transportation Plan. It is also in the Metro Long-Range Plan, and it does prove when you do the modeling out at that level to be the single most important project in this region for improving air quality.*

- Can the route literally be built in any of these area zones? If that is so, regardless of fault lines and polluted water and so forth, then what will be the deciding factor?

*The Study will point out a series of very important considerations to determine if there is a financial feasibility in addition to a technical feasibility in each zone, and we are doing this in a route neutral manner.*

- There was another feasibility study issued on 2006, and when the report came out, the scrubbers were eliminated due to financial considerations because they were very, very expensive. Are scrubbers back in the model or are they out?

*Scrubber technology would definitely be a part of the discussion.*

- Who is going to drive that route? The only people who are going to go through that tunnel are the trucks being diverted off the I-5 or somebody going up to La Cañada or the western part of Pasadena.

*There is a significant amount of diversion traffic, particularly on the I-5, creating congestion in those areas, these commuters would be the primary users of a route through this corridor, depending on where it begins and ends.*

- Is it not the real purpose and need for the tunnel is to get the trucks from the ports to the distribution centers in Ontario and Bakersfield to compete with the other ports?

*There will be trucks that we would expect would use this corridor, but it is not going to be a major truck route. The bulk of the trucks that are going towards Bakersfield will*



*remain on the I-5 because the grades are much better than would be expected through here.*

- How can you compute or project that air quality will improve with another freeway?

*We work with the US EPA, the local air quality district and the statewide air quality district to develop the models that predict what air quality will be doing based on traffic. The model is very widely recognized and used throughout the nation.*

- Nobody talked about the sound impact. How much will it add? How deep will this tunnel be and how would it affect noise?

*This tunnel is very deep, probably 100 to 200 feet below surface. If it is 150 or 200 feet below houses, you will not hear the tunnel.*

- Are we fully utilizing freight movement on rail out of the basin with our current infrastructure? We have a facility called Intermodal Transfer Facility, which basically has cranes that take containers from trucks and puts them on trains that go up the Alameda corridor. If not, are there bottlenecks in the system that can be fixed to increase capacity?

*The Intermodal Container Transfer Facility (ICTF) is running pretty much at 100% capacity. We have two other major rail yards here in the greater Los Angeles area, the East Los Angeles and the Hobart Yards, which currently run pretty much at capacity. There is a modernization proposed of the ICTF that will be going through environmental documents that is looking at modernization to improve their ability to move freight on that.*

*There are specific ON DOT rail yards that have been developed by both the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach that are able to load containers directly off the ships onto trains. A lot of the yard capacity is currently used up. The ON DOT yard capacity is perhaps a little more underutilized, but it usually takes special circumstances to use it. It requires full shipments with a whole series of containers that are going to Chicago, for instance. The other thing we are looking at is inland ports. This is the ability to take some of those on-dock facilities and shift the transportation of goods to other areas. All of these options are being looked at in the region*



- With respect to the capacity issue, are the capacity issues primarily in the handling yards, the taking them on and off the train, or is it flow issues on the trains?

*There are two issues. One is the capacity issues at the yards. We have many Metrolink trains, we have Amtrak trains and we have freight trains all competing for slots on the few rail lines that we have in and out of the greater Los Angeles basin.*

- I am worried about “the big one” that is coming. How well prepared are you? What are you going to do underground to address this issue?

*The tunnel design will incorporate a certain amount of flexibility. People should realize is that earthquakes cause tremendous more damage on the surface than they do in tunnels. In the Northridge quake, those tunnels had cracks but no failures, where the freeway collapsed. Much more damage happened above ground in that quake. There are all kinds of methods developed by engineering now to make the tunnels flex rather than fail.*

## Outreach

- You indicated you spoke to 2,000 people. That seems like a small fraction of people for the area that this encompasses. What are you doing to keep people informed?

*The 2,000 people that I referenced were people that we contacted in the field at the various sites where we conducted testing. It does not represent everyone that we have sent information to or everyone that we are trying to reach by any means. We have had meetings like this in every community, and have reached out to every community. We have worked very closely with the neighborhood councils. We distributed flyers to many of the community centers. We have worked with your elected officials to get the word out, as well as putting ads in the newspaper. Now that we have your contact information we are going to use that information to keep you informed, and keep you in the process should the study move forward.*

## Study Conclusion

- Who are the “they” that make the decisions? Is Caltrans is the deciding authority?

*It is very difficult in today’s day and age for any one party or person to have sole say on anything. Certainly, Caltrans would be an important part of it. Metro will be an important partner in making those decisions as to whether a project will ultimately go forward. These two agencies are the two primary funding sources.*



- Is there a state body that also is involved in that?

*The California Transportation Commission is an independent body that decides what projects are funded through the State Transportation Improvement Program (STIP) and the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP) which are two sources of funding, but they wouldn't necessarily play a decision-making role.*

## Other

- If air quality attainment is your primary goal, have you considered other things than building more highways, for instance, maybe a Metro (rail)? Or tolls? Gas tax? Why are you not considering more practical ways of improving air quality and reducing vehicle usage?

*All alternatives, traffic and other alternatives for reducing congestion and improving air quality are evaluated as a part of an environmental study. No-build, low cost alternatives will be considered at multiple levels. First there is the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (RTIP), and then there is the Metro Long-range Plan, and finally a more detailed project-level analysis of alternatives is conducted if a decision is made to move forward. We do have a transportation need in this region due to congestion. The need and demand for relief is still there. The greatest improvements to air quality are in a couple of different areas. The first one is by dealing with the vehicles themselves. We are all moving towards much more efficient vehicles, such as hybrids and smaller vehicles. That is one of the greatest improvements we have to combust fuels more efficiently. Looking at existing options, such as signaling intersections and creating progressive signal synchronization is also one of the most important methods. We are doing that throughout this region to the extent no one else in the world is. Finally, when necessary, we look at building projects and all that gets analyzed during the environmental document phase.*

- Why have there not been tolls put in place to reduce traffic, to get people to carpool more, and to support the Metro?

*This region recently got a \$210 million grant through the United States Department of Transportation. We are looking at the I-10 corridor from downtown to the I-605, and at the I-110 corridor from the 91 to Adams Boulevard. Most of that money is going into buying new buses, trains and measures that would enhance transit in the corridors. We are also looking at putting tolls on the HOV lanes so that people who get stuck in traffic and hit slow lanes can take advantage of any capacity that is available in the toll lanes. This is similar to what you see on route 91 in Orange County / Riverside and can create*



*revenue. The issue is always operating money. We can use those tolls to operate that transit and eventually we hope to buy it with the federal grant fund. These are options currently being considered.*

## **NEXT STEPS**

The meeting concluded at 9:15 pm. At the meeting conclusion, Rebecca Barrantes thanked the community of Northeast Los Angeles for their participation. She promised the community continuous updates during the Study.