

# Memorandum

To: Chairman and Commissioners

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From: Robert I. Remen

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Action

Ref: **Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Report on the San Fernando Valley East-West Bus Rapid Transit Corridor**

## **Issue:**

Should the Commission comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement/ Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR) for the proposed San Fernando Valley East-West Transit Corridor bus rapid transit (BRT) project by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA)?

## **Recommendation:**

The proposed Full BRT would be an at-grade exclusive busway with priority signalization. However, if the priority signalization reaches saturation, buses would have to operate within normal traffic. The same saturation could also occur under the other BRT alternatives. It may be worth considering putting in grade separations, if funding is available for such an option, at appropriate intersections.

MTA states that it has the financial capacity to build and operate the San Fernando Valley East-West Full BRT alternative (\$284.3 million), while continuing the operation and maintenance of the entire regional transit system. Beyond the Full BRT alternative, additional financial capacity (up to \$12 billion in unallocated funds) is available according to MTA to fund other corridors. The Draft EIS/EIR states that MTA anticipates an operating deficit of \$151.2 million for the Fiscal Year (FY) 2004-FY 2010 period.

Staff recommends that the Commission, as a responsible agency, make the following comment on the Draft EIS/EIR:

- MTA should consider, if revenues permit, using grade separations along the proposed Full BRT line at appropriate intersections to ensure that the BRT can maintain/increase its average speeds, decrease headways and avoid traffic congestion.
- The MTA Board should ensure that the anticipated \$151.2 million operating shortfall is remedied by implementing necessary strategies developed by its Cost Reduction Team to eliminate the shortfall.

## **Background:**

**Overview:** MTA has proposed five alternatives in its Draft EIS/EIR (see attachment); three are project alternatives, one is a low cost alternative and one is the no project alternative. The three project alternatives are all Bus Rapid Transit proposals that differ in terms of the length of Southern Pacific right-of-way used for an exclusive busway and the use of existing streets with mixed traffic, with partial priority to buses.

Under the Full BRT alternative, as well as the other BRT alternatives, buses would receive priority at street intersections, along the Southern Pacific right-of-way, either by lengthening or shortening a signal's green cycle to permit a bus to go through an intersection with the least amount of delay. Bus preference at signalized intersections would be accomplished by installing detection loops in the roadway that would change the traffic priority on the City of Los Angeles' Automated Traffic Surveillance and Control (ATSAC) system to favor the BRT buses. This priority system would operate until the number and frequency of buses exceeds the ability of the ATSAC system to handle both priority buses and regular traffic on cross streets. When this occurs increased cross street congestion would occur and priority buses would wait with other traffic for a green light.

The three project alternatives are the Full BRT Alternative, Lankershim/Oxnard On-Street Alignment Alternative and the Busway Minimum Operable Segment(MOS). Each alternative is summarized below.

Capital Project Alternative	Alternative 1 Full BRT	Alternative 2 Lankershim/Oxnard On-Street Alignment	Alternative 3 Busway Minimum Operable Segment
Estimated Cost	\$284.3 million	\$245 million	\$151.4 million
Operations Begin	FY 2004	FY 2004	FY 2004
Estimated Headway: N. Hollywood to Warner Transit Center	28.8 minutes	31.6 minutes	35.6 minutes
Estimated Headway: N. Hollywood to Downtown	55.8 minutes	58.6 minutes	62.6 minutes
Initial bus operating frequency @ peak hr	10 minutes	10 minutes	10 minutes
2020 Bus operating frequency@ peak hr	2.5 to 5 minutes	2.5 to 5 minutes	2.5 to 5 minutes
Average speed	29 mph	26.9 mph	23.6 mph
Daily Transit Boardings @ fixed guideway stations only	24,700	23,400	22,000

All of the BRT alternatives consider five alignment options for entering and leaving the North Hollywood Station. The Warner Transit Center has one alignment option that has the station located between the Promenade shopping center and the Blue Cross office complex on Owensmouth Avenue between Erin and Oxnard Streets.

Station platforms would handle either three conventional buses or two articulated buses. Park and ride lots would be located at six of the 13 stations.

Bus storage would be handled by expanding existing bus maintenance facilities located near the North Hollywood Station and the Warner Transit Center. The extent of the expansion would depend on the number and type of buses needed under each alternative.

**Project Alternatives:** Three project alternatives are summarized below.

Full BRT Alternative (Alternative 1): The Full BRT alternative is a 14.2-mile, thirteen station bus rapid transit line that follows the old SP Burbank branch right-of-way from the North Hollywood Metro Red Line Station at Chandler and Lankershim Boulevards (see maps, Figures S1 and S4). The proposed line would go westward along Chandler until it reaches Valley College where it would diagonally cross the intersection at Fulton and Burbank. From there, the line would parallel Oxnard until it crossed I-405 at an existing undercrossing. The line would then follow the northern boundary of the Sepulveda Basin onto the SP right-of-way and to the proposed Warner Center Transit Hub. The proposed at-grade busway would be more like a typical light rail transit alignment in terms of its exclusive right-of-way and its stations.

Lankershim/Oxnard On-Street Alignment Alternative (Alternative 2): Under this alternative, the proposed bus rapid transit line would be a 14.4-mile line with 13 stations. The line would first go northerly from the Metro Red Line North Hollywood station along Lankershim and then turn westward along Oxnard Street until it reaches the old SP right-of-way at Woodman Avenue. Once on the old SP right-of-way, this alternative is similar to the Full BRT alternative. This alternative is proposed to address potential community concerns in the Chandler Boulevard area.

Alternative 2 is estimated to cost \$245 million, which is \$39.3 million less than the Full BRT alternative. Estimated vehicle costs would be about \$2 million more than the BRT alternative (\$55.5 versus 53.4 million) because more vehicles would be needed to maintain service comparable to the Full BRT along a longer, slower route.

Busway Minimum Operable Segment (Alternative 3): The Busway Minimum Operable Segment (MOS) alternative is a phased approach that would be implemented if the full BRT alternative were not fully funded. Under the MOS alternative, a shorter busway segment would be integrated with bus transit projects already planned along Oxnard Street and Victory Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley East-West Transit corridor. The result would be a transit corridor from North Hollywood to Warner Center running partially on exclusive lanes for about 1/3rd of the 14-mile route and partially on the street with other traffic for about 2/3rds of the route, (see Figure 2-28). Transit priority would be similar to the BRT alternative on the exclusive part of the route and partial priority in mixed traffic for the on-street portion.

**Estimated Project Cost:** According to the draft EIS/EIR, the project alternatives range in cost from \$151.4 million to \$284.3 million (not including the cost of previously acquired right-of-way).

Eighty percent of the estimated \$284.3 million needed to implement the Full BRT project funding is anticipated to come from the State’s Traffic Congestion Relief Program (\$145 million, 51%) and federal section 5309 new starts funds (\$82.4 million, 29%). The remaining \$56.9 million (20%) would come from federal CMAQ (Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program) and RSTP (Regional Surface Transportation Program) funding and local sales tax. The cost of each build alternative is shown in the following chart.

Capital Cost Estimates for the San Fernando East West Bus Rapid Transit Alternatives			
	Alignment difference		
	Full BRT Alternative 1	BRT Alternative 2	BRT Alternative 3
Cost Category	On SP right-of-way	Lankershim/Oxnard On Street alignment	Minimum Operable Segment & Existing Streets
	1999 \$ Millions	1999 \$ Millions	1999 \$ Millions
Construction	\$ 132.0	\$ 109.1	\$ 61.6
Vehicle Procurement	\$ 53.4	\$ 55.5	\$ 41.7
Pre-revenue costs	\$ 9.2	\$ 7.6	\$ 4.3
Right-of-way <sup>1</sup>	\$ 26.7	\$ 19.2	\$ 11.4
Public Art	\$ 0.7	\$ 0.6	\$ 0.3
Professional Services	\$ 31.7	\$ 26.2	\$ 14.8
Contingency	\$ 30.6	\$ 26.8	\$ 17.3
<b>Total Capital Cost</b>	<b>\$ 284.3</b>	<b>\$ 245.0</b>	<b>\$ 151.4</b>

1. SP right-of-way costs were not included in the estimate it acquired previously. Costs were assigned based on the length of the SP right-of-way used in each alternative. The right-of-way cost is \$159 million for the Full BRT, \$124.8 million for the Lankershim alternative, and \$51.5 million for the MOS alternative.

In 2020, the estimated annual operating cost under the No Build alternative is \$842 million. The incremental increase between the No Build alternative and the low-cost Transportation System Management alternative and the three BRT alternatives is ranges between \$12.9 million/year and \$29.8 million/year in 1999 dollars.

**Environmental Impact of the Bus Rapid Transit Project:** Three tables (see Table S-1, S-2 and S-3) from the Draft EIS/EIR identify the impacts from the proposed BRT alternatives and the maintenance station options. Under the California Environmental Quality Act, unavoidable significant impacts must be identified. According to the Draft EIS/EIR:

- “All potentially adverse effects of the proposed project are expected to be mitigated to an acceptable level. The only possibility of some unavoidable adverse effects after mitigation would be the noise impacts at some locations that would remain if quieter buses could not be placed in service. The residual effect would be adverse noise effects under CEQA and NEPA at about 25 sensitive noise receptors.”

**Historical and Financial Background:** In 1990, MTA selected, as its preferred alternative for the San Fernando East-West Rail Transit Project, an extension of the Red Line heavy-rail subway. Work on the proposed East-West heavy-rail subway project was suspended in 1998 due to a massive funding shortfall on the local level. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Commission expressed their concerns over MTA’s ability to deliver the Red Line subway extensions to North Hollywood, Eastside and Mid-City, as well as the Pasadena Blue light rail line. As a result, MTA met with its funding partners, FTA and the Commission, to discuss how it would accomplish its plans with the funding available. Ultimately, MTA was required to show that its revised capital plan would fund and complete the proposed projects within the agreed upon schedule and funding available. After MTA restructured its capital-financing plan, it adopted in May 1998 its Restructuring Plan for completing the Red Line North Hollywood extension and the Pasadena Blue light rail line. MTA suspended its San Fernando Valley East-West Corridor, Eastside Corridor and Mid-City rail extensions. The Plan also called for studying viable and effective options in Los Angeles County for the corridors in which rail projects had been suspended. With the San Fernando Valley East-West Transit corridor, this meant an examination of alternative fixed guideway options to the suspended heavy rail subway project.

In mid-1999, MTA completed a Major Investment Study for the San Fernando East-West Transit Corridor that reviewed all of the alternatives in previous environmental documents, proposed at public hearings, and suggested by interested parties. Alternatives considered included heavy rail, light rail, bus rapid transit, dual mode rail, diesel multiple unit technology (self propelled rail vehicles), a low cost alternative (transportation systems management – TSM), and no project. (TSM and the no project alternative are always considered in an environmental document.)

Bus Rapid Transit was found to have the lowest capital and operating and maintenance costs of all the build alternatives. It was also found to have the most cost-effective alternative per new transit rider. MTA directed it staff to proceed with environmental documentation of the BRT alternative. On February 24, 2000, MTA directed its staff to proceed with the draft environmental document. MTA has \$145 million in State Traffic Congestion Relief Program funding that is available for this project. (Of the \$145 million available, the Commission approved one MTA applications in January 2001 totaling \$12.3 million for environmental and preliminary engineering.)

Attachment

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