

# Memorandum

**To:** CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

**Date:** August 30, 2010

**From:** BIMLA G. RHINEHART  
Executive Director

**File:** Book Item 2.2c (9)  
Action

**Ref:** **Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase 2 (Resolution E-10-85)**

**ISSUE:** Should the Commission, as a Responsible Agency, accept the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR), Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations for the Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase 2 from the Westside of Los Angeles to Santa Monica and approve the project for future consideration of funding?

**RECOMMENDATION:** Staff recommends that the Commission accept the FEIR, Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations and approve the project for future consideration of funding.

**BACKGROUND:** The Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority (Expo Authority) is the CEQA lead agency for the project. On February 4, 2010, the Expo Authority Board of Directors certified the FEIR for the Exposition Corridor Project Phase 2.

The Recommended Preferred Alternative (RPA) for the Expo Phase 2 project is an approximate 6.6-mile light rail transit (LRT) extension of the Expo Phase 1 project. The Expo Phase 2 project would utilize the existing Exposition right of way from the Expo Phase 1 terminus in Culver City to its intersection with Olympic Boulevard in Santa Monica. From that point, the LRT alignment would continue within the Exposition right of way to west of 19<sup>th</sup> Street, then diverge from the right of way and enter onto Colorado Avenue east of 17<sup>th</sup> Street and follow the center of Colorado Avenue to the proposed terminus between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets.

The FEIR determined that impacts related to aesthetics and construction air quality would be significant and unavoidable as follows:

- Implementation of the Expo/Westwood Station and the associated parking area in Segment 1 (Venice Blvd. to Sepulveda Blvd.) would represent a substantial change in the surrounding area's character and visual quality, which would be a significant impact. No feasible mitigation measure other than conformance to the *Metro Design Criteria* has been identified to reduce this impact.
- The Expo/Westwood Station No Parking Design Option would eliminate 170 surface parking spaces at the Expo/Westwood Station. However, 20 parking spaces would be

dedicated to neighborhood residents east of Westwood Boulevard and north of the LRT line to address community concerns regarding on-street parking losses. While removing the 170 spaces would lessen the visual character impacts, implementation of this design option would still result in an impact because of the associated street modifications, removal of a limited number of street trees, and introduction of the LRT system. No feasible mitigation measure other than conformance to the *Metro Design Criteria* has been identified to reduce this impact.

- Construction of the project would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to air quality as a result of diesel construction equipment and haul trucks used during construction. However, the construction equipment will comply with applicable air quality control regulations including Best Available Control Measures and is considered a temporary impact since it would only occur during the construction phase.

Findings of Fact were developed which provide that mitigation measures and/or alternatives to the proposed project that would substantially reduce or avoid these significant unavoidable impacts are infeasible. On February 4, 2010, the Expo Authority Board of Directors found that there were several benefits that outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects of the project. These benefits include, but are not limited to, improved mobility and traffic reduction; improved access to major activity centers and destinations; increased alternatives for commuters to avoid the congested I-10 freeway and adjacent parallel streets; extended mobility of the Expo Phase 1 project; utilization of approximately five miles of existing Exposition ROW; reduced regional emissions, thereby supporting efforts to attain the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) and AQMD thresholds; and expansion of economic growth and development potential. The Expo Authority established a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program to ensure that the mitigation program specified is implemented.

On February 4, 2010 the Expo Authority Board of Directors provided written confirmation that the preferred alternative set forth in the final environmental document is consistent with the project programmed by the Commission in the STIP and included in the Southern California Association of Government's Regional Transportation Plan.

According to the Expo Authority, the estimated project cost is \$1,511,158,000 (YOE). The project is fully funded with Proposition 1B (PTMISEA) \$250,000,000; STIP \$201,100,000 and Local \$1,060,058,000 funds. Construction is estimated to begin FY 2010/11.

#### Attachments

- Resolution E-10-85
- Statement of Overriding Considerations
- Project Location

# CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

## Resolution for Future Consideration of Future Funding 07 – Los Angeles County Resolution E-10-85

- 1.1 **WHEREAS**, the Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority (Expo Authority) completed a Final Environmental Impact Report (Final EIR) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines for the following project:
  - Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase 2, Los Angeles, Culver City and Santa Monica, California
- 1.2 **WHEREAS**, the Expo Authority certified that the Final EIR has been completed pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines for its implementation; and
- 1.3 **WHEREAS**, the Expo Authority approved the Project and adopted CEQA Findings of Fact and a Statement of Overriding Considerations on February 4, 2010; and
- 1.4 **WHEREAS**, the project will utilize the existing Exposition right of way from the Expo Phase 1 terminus in Culver City to its intersection with Olympic Boulevard in Santa Monica. From that point, the light rail transit (LRT) alignment would continue within the Exposition right of way to west of 19<sup>th</sup> Street, then diverge from the right of way and enter onto Colorado Avenue east of 17<sup>th</sup> Street and follow the center of Colorado Avenue to the proposed terminus between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets; and
- 1.5 **WHEREAS**, the California Transportation Commission, as a Responsible Agency, has considered the information contained in the Final EIR; and
- 1.6 **WHEREAS**, Findings of Fact made pursuant to CEQA guidelines indicate specific unavoidable significant impacts related to aesthetics and construction air quality; and
- 1.7 **WHEREAS**, the Expo Authority adopted a Statement of Overriding Considerations for the project; and
- 1.8 **WHEREAS**, the Expo Authority adopted a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project; and
- 1.9 **WHEREAS**, the above significant effects are acceptable when balanced against the facts as set forth in the Statement of Overriding Considerations.
- 2.1 **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the California Transportation Commission does hereby accept the Final Environmental Impact Report, Findings of Fact and Statement of Overriding Considerations and approve the above referenced project to allow for future consideration of funding.



**Expo**

Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority

**Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase 2**

Final Environmental Impact Report

# **Statement of Overriding Considerations**

February 2010





**Contents**

**INTRODUCTION** ..... 1

**SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS** ..... 1

    Aesthetics..... 1

    Construction Air Quality ..... 2

**COMPELLING OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS** ..... 2

    Improved Mobility and Traffic Reduction ..... 2

    Access to Major Activity Centers and Destinations ..... 3

    Alternative Travel Choices ..... 3

    Extending Mobility Benefits of the Expo Phase 1 Project ..... 4

    Utilization of Existing ROW ..... 4

    Cost Effectiveness ..... 4

    Economic Growth and Development Potential..... 4

    Improved Operational Air Quality ..... 5

    Global Climate Change ..... 5





## INTRODUCTION

The *California Environmental Quality Act* (CEQA) requires the Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority (Expo Authority) as the decision-making agency to balance, as applicable, the economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase 2 (Expo Phase 2) against its unavoidable environmental risks when determining whether to approve the project. If the specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other benefits of the proposed Expo Phase 2 project outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects, the adverse environmental effects may be considered acceptable (CEQA Guidelines 15093(a)). CEQA requires the Expo Authority to support, in writing, the specific reasons for considering the Expo Phase 2 project acceptable when significant effects are not avoided or substantially lessened, based on substantial evidence in the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) or Administrative Record (CEQA Guidelines 15093(b)).

The Expo Authority finds that the Mitigation Measures identified in the FEIR and the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, when implemented, avoid or substantially lessen virtually all of the significant effects identified in the FEIR for the Recommended Preferred Alternative (RPA). However, certain significant impacts remain unavoidable, even after the incorporation of all feasible Mitigation Measures.

## SIGNIFICANT AND UNAVOIDABLE IMPACTS

The Expo Authority Board of Directors hereby finds that, for the reasons set forth below, the economic, social, and other consideration of the Expo Phase 2 project outweigh the significant and unavoidable air quality and aesthetic impacts resulting from RPA, as identified in the Findings of Fact. These significant and unavoidable impacts are summarized below:

### Aesthetics

Impacts related to implementation of the Expo/Westwood Station in RPA Segment 1 (Expo ROW) would represent a substantial change in the surrounding area's character and visual quality, which is a significant impact. Although the Expo ROW served as a rail corridor up until the mid-1980s, the surrounding community in Segment 1 (Expo ROW) has grown accustomed to the existing visual character, identified as moderate high in the FEIR. As part of the RPA, Westwood Boulevard would be widened by approximately 4 feet between Ashby Avenue and Richland Avenue, which would result in a limited number of the liquidambar trees along Westwood Boulevard being removed and replaced with younger trees. Conformance to the *Metro Design Criteria* would ensure that street trees and landscaped areas shall be preserved wherever practicable. Also, trees that require removal would be replaced on a one-for-one basis, subject to local jurisdictional requirements for minimum size, species, and set-back requirements. The City of Los Angeles does not designate the liquidambar tree as a protected tree (City of Los Angeles, Ordinance 177404). As such, there is no requirement to save and/or replace these trees in kind.

Introduction of a 170-space parking lot and station within this area, along with modifying existing bus stops on either side of Westwood Boulevard, would change the character of the area. The



proposed street modifications, the surface station parking, as well as the minimal increased bus service and stops along Westwood Boulevard would alter the character of the station vicinity from that of a residential neighborhood with a vacant right-of-way that serves as an informal community open space to that of a transit corridor. The proposed Expo/Westwood Station would be designed according to the *Metro Design Criteria*, which would include public art, landscaping to screen the Expo/Westwood Station from view, and other design features that enhance the visual quality of the community.

No feasible mitigation measures other than conformance to the *Metro Design Criteria* have been identified to reduce the aesthetic impact. Therefore, the change in character of this area due to the introduction of the station, street widening, surface parking, and a minimal increase in transit will remain. Consequently, Segment 1 (Expo ROW) of the RPA was determined to have a significant and unavoidable impact to aesthetics.

### **Construction Air Quality**

The RPA would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to air quality during the construction period as a result of diesel construction equipment and haul trucks needed to build the light rail extension. The amount of nitrogen oxides (NO<sub>x</sub>) that will be emitted during the process exceeds the South Coast Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) daily construction threshold for that criteria pollutant, even after the implementation of Best Available Control Measures (BACM). In addition, the South Coast Air Basin (SCAB) is in non-attainment for ozone, meaning that the region does not satisfy the ambient air quality standard for this pollutant. Since construction of the RPA exceeds the threshold for NO<sub>x</sub>, and NO<sub>x</sub> is a precursor to ozone, the project would make a significant and unavoidable contribution to a pollutant for which the SCAB is in non-attainment. Although these emissions are considered a temporary impact since they would only occur during the construction phase of the RPA, this impact is considered significant and unavoidable because of the non-attainment status of the SCAB.

## **COMPELLING OVERRIDING CONSIDERATIONS**

The Expo Authority Board of Directors specifically finds that notwithstanding the disclosure of the significant and unavoidable impacts discussed above, there are specific overriding economic, legal, social, technological, and other reasons for approving this project and finding the above adverse effects to be considered acceptable. These reasons are described below.

### **Improved Mobility and Traffic Reduction**

The Project is an important component of the regional transportation plan and the transportation improvement program approved by the Southern California Association of Governments, metropolitan planning organization for Southern California. The Project contributes to the strategy in the transportation plan to establish transit alternatives to the private automobile and to improve regional mobility. The RPA would have a beneficial effect on Los Angeles County and the Expo Phase 2 study area traffic by reducing Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) and Vehicle Hours Traveled (VHT). For example, the RPA would result in the reduction of approximately 43,893 daily VMT in Los Angeles County in 2030 as compared to the No-Build Alternative, falling from a daily VMT of approximately 223,164,138 for the No-Build Alternative to a daily



VMT of approximately 223,120,245 under the RPA. Additionally, VHT would drop from a No-Build Alternative of approximately 9,363,595 daily VHT to approximately 9,354,590 daily VHT, a reduction of 9,005 daily VHT. Both VMT and VHT would be reduced by the RPA in the study area as well.

Furthermore, the RPA would increase regional daily transit trips from 1,528,323 under the No-Build Alternative to 1,542,709 under the RPA, an increase of approximately 14,386 trips. Transit mode share for the region would also increase from approximately 1.963 percent under the No-Build Alternative to 1.981 percent under the RPA. This would be an increase of approximately 0.018 percent and a difference of approximately 0.94 percent in the regional transit mode share.

The reduction in these important indicators of mobility and traffic is attributable to the diversion of motorists on the local and regional roadways to transit.

## **Access to Major Activity Centers and Destinations**

The Expo Phase 2 project, in conjunction with the Expo Phase I project, would vastly improve mobility by serving various educational, employment, cultural, commercial, and destination locations throughout the study area. These destinations include, but are not limited to: downtown Los Angeles, Los Angeles Convention Center, LA Live District, Staples Center, University of Southern California (USC), Los Angeles Trade Technical College, Paramount and Sony Studios, California African-American Museum, California Science Center, Los Angeles County Museum of Natural History, Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum, Bergamot Station, Santa Monica College, downtown Santa Monica, the future Santa Monica Place shopping center, and the beach. Regionally, the completion of Expo Phase 1 and Expo Phase 2 projects would provide a direct connection to the 7<sup>th</sup> Street Metro Center, which will provide access to the Metro Blue Line, Red Line, Purple Line, and Union Station.

## **Alternative Travel Choices**

The RPA offers commuters an alternative to the congested I-10 freeway and adjacent parallel streets. For example, the RPA would improve transportation mobility and connectivity for residents and commuters in the project study area; provide faster, more reliable public transportation services; increase the capacity of the transportation system; and provide more travel choices. Additionally, the I-10 freeway that serves the Expo Phase 2 corridor is currently over capacity in many segments. This congestion is anticipated to increase 7 to 9 percent by 2030.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this congestion, east/west arterials are being used as alternate routes with resultant congestion, particularly during peak periods. Expansion of freeways and arterials is limited by the significant amount of existing development surrounding them and would require significant property acquisition and costs. As such, rail transit improvements would offer a way to expand the capacity of the transportation network, providing additional transportation options within the study area and connecting the study area to the larger community, including downtown Los Angeles, Culver City and Santa Monica. Expansion of transit opportunities as a result of the RPA is also broadened for bicyclists, bus riders, and pedestrians.

Furthermore, the RPA would provide a safe means of transportation between the Westside and downtown Los Angeles by integrating the existing regional transit network and expanding the

---

<sup>1</sup> Iteris, *Transportation/Traffic Technical Background Report*.



region's transportation system capacity. Based on the proposed headways and frequency of the RPA, reliable transportation opportunities would be provided for a vast, transit-dependent population who have modest incomes or do not drive. The RPA would also increase the transportation choices for patrons available for both work and non-work related trips.

### **Extending Mobility Benefits of the Expo Phase 1 Project**

The RPA would provide light rail transit service to the Westside and Santa Monica from downtown Los Angeles. The RPA would also complete the ultimate connection for the Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase I, which is currently under construction. Completing Phase 2 will increase the utilization of Phase I and will ensure that the full benefits of Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase I are realized.

### **Utilization of Existing ROW**

The RPA would utilize approximately 5 miles of existing Exposition ROW from the Expo Phase I terminus until reaching 17<sup>th</sup> Street in the City of Santa Monica. This would allow for the Expo Authority to capitalize upon and maximize the use of existing assets to effectively and efficiently provide transit to the study area. Acquisition of new and/or additional right-of-way would be costly due to the financial investment needed for property acquisition, as well as the disruption to existing uses.

### **Cost Effectiveness**

Although the Expo Authority is not seeking federal funding for the Expo Phase 2 project, the FTA's Section 5309 New Starts Criteria are a useful means by which to measure the RPA's cost effectiveness. The RPA has a cost effectiveness index of \$24.34 per annual hour of user benefit. By comparison, Alternatives LRT 1, LRT 3 and LRT 4 have a cost effectiveness index of \$25.12, \$37.75, and \$36.64, respectively. Therefore, the RPA is considered more cost effective.

### **Economic Growth and Development Potential**

Construction of the RPA will create new construction jobs. The Expo Authority has adopted a small business enterprise policy which encourages small business participation in the project.

Employment in the Los Angeles County between the years 2000 and 2030 is expected to increase from approximately 4,761,400 jobs to approximately 5,775,000 jobs. Similarly, in the study area, employment is anticipated to increase from approximately 222,633 jobs to approximately 275,405 jobs in the same period. Furthermore, employment in both the Culver City and Santa Monica areas are anticipated to almost double. In addition to providing a cost effective, jobs-producing project, the RPA could result in community investment and the development of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) around station areas. Similar developments have occurred around stations on the Metro Gold and Red Lines.

**Improved Operational Air Quality**

The FEIR found that, due to the overall reduction in VMT in the study area, as well as in the larger Los Angeles County area, the RPA would have a beneficial effect on air quality locally and in the region. As shown in Table 1 (Annual Reductions in Criteria Pollutant Emissions in Los Angeles County), the measure of all criteria pollutants would be reduced with implementation of the RPA due to the reduction in annual VMT. Additionally, the electrically operated light-rail vehicles under the RPA would not produce CO, VOC, NO<sub>x</sub>, SO<sub>x</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, or PM<sub>2.5</sub> emissions and, therefore, would not add to emission levels.

**Table 1 Annual Reductions in Criteria Pollutant Emissions in Los Angeles County**

<b>Measure</b>	<b>No-Build Alternative (baseline)</b>	<b>Recommended Preferred Alternative</b>	<b>Change from No-Build (tons per year)</b>
VOC	11,447.88	11,445.63	2.25
NO <sub>x</sub>	13,127.14	13,124.56	2.58
CO	131,703.25	131,677.34	25.91
SO <sub>x</sub>	401.01	400.93	0.08
PM <sub>10</sub>	70,218.60	70,204.78	13.82

SOURCE: Data from URBEMIS2007; based on VMT in the *Transportation/Traffic Technical Background Report*.  
\*Countywide Emissions measured in tons per year; Annual total.

The RPA would result in a lessening of regional emissions, thereby supporting efforts to attain the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) and AQMD thresholds. In addition, the RPA would not conflict with and would serve to help achieve the pollution reduction measures identified in both the regional Air Quality Management Plan and the California State Implementation Plan.

**Global Climate Change**

Development of the RPA was determined to have a beneficial impact on global climate change since the greenhouse gas emissions predicted for operation of the project would not exceed any threshold of significance. For example, while the RPA would result in approximately 345 metric tons per year of CO<sub>2</sub> over the No-Build Alternative, California Air Pollution Control Officers Association (CAPCOA) considers an incremental increase below 10,000 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year to be less than significant. The increase anticipated under the RPA would result in an increase in CO<sub>2</sub> of approximately 3.5 percent of the allowable incremental increase. This increase is compared to approximately 57.8 percent and 71.6 percent for other alternatives considered. Implementation of the RPA would reduce daily VMT, a significant contributor to global climate change, which contributes substantially to the low increase in CO<sub>2</sub> generation. The State of California has adopted legislation and other policies that require that utilities increase the generation of electric power from renewable sources. It is anticipated the percentage of power used by the Project and derived from renewable sources will increase as the legislation and policies are implemented.



