

Agenda Report

July 13, 2015

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Department of Transportation

SUBJECT: SUBMITTAL OF COMMENTS TO CALTRANS REGARDING THE DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT AND PROPOSED ALTERNATIVES FOR THE SR 710 NORTH STUDY

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Find that the following proposed action is exempt from review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15061 (b) (3); and
2. Authorize the Mayor to send a letter to Caltrans on behalf on the City of Pasadena transmitting comments on the SR 710 North Study Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR/S) as contained in the following:
 - A. The 5-Cities Alliance comment letter (Attachment A); and
 - B. The supplemental City of Pasadena comment table (Attachment B); and
 - C. The *Pasadena Preferred Alternative* report (Attachment C); and
 - D. The *Beyond the 710: Moving Forward New Initiative for Mobility and Community* report (Attachment D).

BACKGROUND:

On March 6, 2015, Caltrans released the draft of a joint DEIR/S for the SR 710 North Study. Prepared by Metro and a team of consultants, the Draft EIR/S evaluates five alternatives (one of which is no build) for addressing travel demand in the corridor bookended by the stubs of the SR 710 freeway in Alhambra and Pasadena. The public comment period for the Draft EIR/S closes on August 5, 2015. Following the close of the comment period, Caltrans will respond to the comments and prepare a Final EIR/S. The EIR/S process will be used by Caltrans to determine a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) for purposes of advancing the project for funding and construction after the Final

EIR/S is certified. Although no specific timeline has been provided by Caltrans, depending on the volume and complexity of comments, it may take one year or more before Caltrans responds to all comments for the purpose of releasing the Final EIR/S.

The SR-710 North Study DEIR/S studied the following five project alternatives:

- **No Build Alternative:** The No Build Alternative does not include any improvements to the SR 710 North Study area.
- **Transportation System Management/Transportation Demand Management (TSM/TSM) Alternative:** The TSM/TDM Alternative consists of strategies and improvements to increase efficiency and capacity for all modes in the transportation system with lower capital cost investments and/or lower potential impacts.
- **Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Alternative:** The BRT Alternative would provide high-speed, high-frequency bus service through a combination of new, dedicated, and existing bus lanes and mixed-flow traffic lanes to key destinations between East Los Angeles and Pasadena. The proposed route length is approximately 12 miles.
- **Light Rail Transit (LRT) Alternative:** The LRT Alternative would include a passenger rail line that is operated along a dedicated guideway similar to other Metro light rail lines. The LRT alignment is approximately 7.5 miles long, with approximately 3 miles of aerial segments and approximately 4.5 miles of bored tunnel segments, and 7 stations.
- **Freeway Tunnel Alternative:** The alignment for the Freeway Tunnel Alternative would start at the existing southern stub of SR 710 in Alhambra, north of I-10, and connect to the existing northern stub of SR 710, south of the I-210/SR 134 interchange in Pasadena. Short segments of cut-and-cover tunnels would be located at the south and north termini to provide access via portals to the bored tunnels. The portal at the southern terminus would be located south of Valley Boulevard. The portal at the northern terminus would be located north of Del Mar Boulevard. No intermediate interchanges are planned for the tunnel.

The DEIR/S identifies a number of environmental impacts for each of the four build alternatives. A summary of those impacts are attached as Exhibit 1: Summary of Alternatives and Impacts. The full EIR/S can be found online at <http://www.metro.net/projects/sr-710-conversations/>.

The City of Pasadena is a member of the 5-Cities Alliance with the Cities of Glendale, La Cañada Flintridge, Sierra Madre, and South Pasadena. The 5-Cities Alliance retained the firm of Shute, Mihaly and Weinberger LLP along with several consulting firms specialized in the fields of transportation, air quality, seismic, hydrology, geology, noise and greenhouse gas analyses to prepare an in-depth review of the DEIR/S. The findings of that review are assembled into a comment letter (Attachment A) with technical reports (Technical Appendix 1 – Transportation, Technical Appendix 2 – Noise and Vibration, Technical Appendix 3 – Geology, Seismic, Soils, and Groundwater, and Technical Appendix 4 – Air Quality).

City of Pasadena staff also reviewed the DEIR/S and summarized specific impacts to Pasadena not addressed by the specialized consultants. Staff comments are summarized in Attachment B – Staff Comments.

The broad themes of deficiencies which emerged from staff and consultant analysis of the Tunnel Alternative for the SR 710 North Project include the following:

- The tunnel project increases regional vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and CO2 emissions.
- Regional traffic is not improved as a result of the tunnel; rather, it shifts congestion around.
- Traffic gets significantly worse on various connecting freeways as a result of the tunnel, in part by inducing extra driving.
- The EIR doesn't allow comprehensive analysis of real solutions to the San Gabriel Valley's transportation needs, particularly for transit.

On August 18, 2014, Mayor Bogaard and City Manager Beck convened a special Pasadena Working Group (PWG) or committee comprised of City staff and knowledgeable community members to identify the best project alternative for Pasadena, in particular recognizing that much of the impact associated with the alternatives proposed in the Draft EIR/EIS will have a profound impact on the future of Pasadena. To that end, the PWG, with assistance from the staff of the Department of Transportation, evaluated the SR 710 North Study alternatives, formulated a general understanding of the range of impacts to Pasadena from each and identified a responsible alternative design that has the potential to minimize impact to Pasadena while increasing regional connectivity.

The PWG recommendation highlights the need for coordination and connectivity with neighboring and distant communities in the north-south corridor that the PWG interprets as extending southerly beyond the limits of the SR 710 North Study. To that end, the PWG *Pasadena Preferred Alternative* report (Attachment C) describes an area wide approach that recommends a multi-modal alternative with Local Street Network Enhancements, Mobility Hubs, Bicycle Network Enhancements, and an enhanced north-south transit network that would connect with the Metro Gold, Silver and Green Lines along two corridors – Atlantic Boulevard/Fair Oaks Avenue and Rosemead Boulevard – and in doing so would enhance connectivity to areas traditionally underserved by high-capacity transit. Similar recommendations are made for connections to the Metro Red Line via Glendale and Burbank and with Metrolink routes that cross the north-south corridor. On April 13, 2015, the City Council adopted the recommendation of the SR-710 Pasadena Working Group (PWG) for a Pasadena Preferred Alternative and adopted a position in opposition to the tunnel alternative in the DEIR/S.

The City of Pasadena is a member of the Connected Cities and Communities Beyond the 710: Moving Forward initiative that has developed the *New Initiative for Mobility and Community* report (Attachment D) that puts forward a concept consistent with and complimentary to the PWG concept and calls for expanded transit linkages, active transportation and transportation demand management in conjunction with conversion of the two freeway stubs in Pasadena and Alhambra to local arterial roadways.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

The proposed action is consistent with Council adopted Mobility Element objectives to promote a livable community and to protect neighborhoods by discouraging traffic from intruding into neighborhoods, as well as the City Council's Strategic Plan Goals to support and promote the quality of life and local economy and increase conservation and sustainability.


ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The proposed action of providing comments on the environmental documents for the SR710 North Study is exempt from CEQA per section 15061 (b) (3), the General Rule. The General Rule can be applied when it can be seen with certainty that the activity will not have a significant effect on the environment.


FISCAL IMPACT:

The costs associated with this action are minor and include ongoing staff work to prepare the comment transmittal. Although the true cost of the Tunnel Alternative is not completely known at this time, it is believed that if that alternative were to be built, it could significantly reduce the available transportation funding from Metro for local projects.

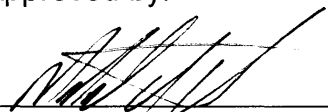
Respectfully submitted,


FOR FREDERICK C. DOCK
Director
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Prepared by:


FOR Bahman Janka
Transportation Administrator

Approved by:


MICHAEL J. BECK
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Attachments: (8)

- Exhibit 1 –Summary of Alternatives and Impacts
- Attachment A – 5-Cities Alliance Comment Letter
 - Technical Appendix 1 – Transportation
 - Technical Appendix 2 – Noise and Vibration
 - Technical Appendix 3 – Geology, Seismic, Soils, and Groundwater.
 - Technical Appendix 4 – Air Quality
- Attachment B – Staff Comments
- Attachment C – Pasadena Preferred Alternative Report
- Attachment D – New Initiative for Mobility and Community Report