



OFFICE OF THE CITY MANAGER

June 23, 2003

TO: City Council
FROM: City Manager
SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE OF THE
PASADENA METRO BLUE LINE CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY
BOARD FOR GOLD LINE PHASE II

Attached please find a summary report including background and governance alternatives. This report was prepared by Councilmember Little for your review.

Respectfully submitted,

Cynthia J. Kurtz
City Manager

GOLD LINE PHASE II Governance Issues

Brief Background

When it was created, the Metro Blue Line Construction Authority was chartered by the state legislature to build a light rail system from Union Station in Los Angeles to Claremont. (The total cost to complete the **Phase I** project is \$437 million. \$347 million available for construction was designated for the project and property assets were transferred to the Construction Authority. The Authority put together a balanced financial plan that filled the \$90 million funding gap, created a construction schedule and hired staff to implement the project using a design-build methodology. The Authority received all approvals and developed working relationships with the California Transportation Commission, MTA, the Public Utilities Commission, and staff from the cities of Los Angeles, South Pasadena and Pasadena. Despite delays resulting from the PUC processes, four and one half years after creation of the Authority the first Phase of the Gold Line light rail project is opening, on time and slightly under budget.) **It is anticipated the Phase II design and construction will cost \$1.3 billion, using present budgetary and construction scheduling assumptions.**

Once it became clear that there actually might be a Phase II of the Gold Line, San Gabriel Valley cities east of Pasadena began meeting to discuss the possible impacts the project may have on their communities. At the same time, a federally required Alternatives Analysis was begun. The intention of that document is to examine, in very broad terms, the need that exists and the means available to meet those needs. The Alternatives Analysis involves considerable community input as that document determines what mode of transportation will be recommended and where the project will travel and how the public will access it. The first draft of the Alternatives Analysis was turned in several months ago (on time). Comments back from the Federal Transportation Agency asked for further analysis of the use of busses and a busway to achieve the goal of moving people from Claremont to the light rail station at Sierra Madre Villa and then into Los Angeles. The revised Alternatives Analysis is being completed now, still on schedule to meet all federal deadlines. The emphasis on busways by the federal government is significant because a busway is much less expensive and could be seen as a fiscally conservative alternative by the FTA. This alternative would most likely be strongly opposed by the cities of the San Gabriel Valley.

During the past several months, the Authority embarked on the approved workplan to begin hiring consultants to perform the environmental analysis. (All Phase II items are reviewed and approved by the Construction Authority's Phase II Committee which consists of Al Leiga (the COG representative on the board) and Paul Little and then considered by the full board. Every Phase II agenda item before the full board has been approved unanimously.)

The prospect of work actually being done on Phase II raised concerns among the Phase II cities who rightfully feel they need input and control over what happens in their communities. They requested, thought a San Gabriel Valley COG Phase II committee,

the opportunity to form a JPA to more directly involve the cities in decision-making for the project. The Construction Authority Board, by unanimous vote of all five members present, supported that concept at its meeting in November, 2002. Since then, the COG put together a JPA proposal calling for a governing board of 11 members, one from each of the Phase II cities. Since then, COG and the Authority staff have been trying to work out a JPA that keeps the project moving forward at the necessary pace but incorporates the 10 additional cities into the process.

Those discussions have not gone well at all and no compromise resolution seems possible at this time, though alternate governance structures have been suggested. These are explained later in the report.

Here are some of the “baseline facts” that relate to Phase II:

- 1.) Existing Construction Authority Board cannot expand itself. Legislation that created the Authority clearly defines size and membership. Therefore, either legislation needs to be created to form another agency or to alter the existing one or a contractual relationship must be created between the existing authority and a new entity. Seeking legislative solutions creates a risk of delay for state legislature to act and also the distinct possibility any legislation could fail.
- 2.) Existing Authority may be able to delegate some or all of its state granted powers to another entity through a contractual relationship that includes complete indemnification for the Authority and may require approval from MTA.
- 3.) Contracts between the existing Authority and MTA preclude transfer of property without prior MTA approval. It is a possibility that, if MTA is not compelled to transfer the property, they may not choose to do so. (Legislation creating the existing Authority also required MTA to turn over assets and existing funding.)
- 4.) The approved financial plan for Phase II calls for a \$1.3 billion expenditure through completion to Claremont in 2113. The federal government will be asked to contribute 50%. (The maximum new federal guidelines allow for transit projects.) The remaining funds must come through state and local agencies (CTC and MTA). The federal government will pay little, if anything, for preliminary engineering or Environmental Impact Study work. That work is expected to cost between \$20 and \$35 million and take two years to complete.
- 5.) Before any funds can be released from local, state or federal agencies for design or construction, there must be a financial plan that includes a commitment by MTA to operate the line once it opens for revenue service and to commit in advance to fund it upon revenue operations. Local agencies (MTA and SCAG) must also place the project on constrained (funded) project lists.
- 6.) Funds at the local, state and federal level are tight and diminishing.
- 7.) To maintain eligibility for Phase II to access federal funds it is best for it to be included in the TEA 21 reauthorization. To keep the project in contention for funding benchmarks must be met, including beginning environmental reviews and revising the Alternatives Analysis.
- 8.) The existing Authority has \$13 million of funding dedicated to Phase II and as much as \$22 million in carryover reserve funds (some of which are expected to

fund projects related to Phase I – like the south pedestrian overcrossing at Sierra Madre Villa and parking lots in Los Angeles and possibly re-configuring the intersection at Monterey Road and Pasadena Avenue in South Pasadena). The \$13 million comes through CalTrans as funding to replace the Santa Anita freeway bridge in Arcadia. The Authority has written permission from CalTrans to use those funds for planning, environmental and other preliminary work in return for guaranteeing that the bridge will be built as part of Phase II once the project is constructed. It is unclear at this time whether those funds can be transferred to another agency or must be returned to CalTrans if the Authority ceases to function for any reason.

- 9.) The existing Construction Authority Board has supported the Phase II project consistently over the past four and one half years. In fact, every agenda item put before the Construction Authority board pertaining to Phase II of the project has been approved unanimously by all members present (Los Angeles, MTA, South Pasadena, Pasadena and the COG). Despite our focus on completing Phase I of the Gold Line, the existing agency has allocated funds and staff time to support work on Phase II.

Joint Powers Authority proposals (as of 6/18/03)

The following are very brief discussions of the proposals that have been made regarding governance of the Phase II JPA at this time, in chronological order. If applicable, the entity which proposed the alternative is identified.

Proposal A1 (Construction Authority understanding of original JPA relationship with SGV cities) – Existing authority continues with its work plan through project construction. Advantages: small board; maintains all the experience, leverage and goodwill generated by successful completion of Phase I; funding secured for next two years of work; incorporates LA and MTA in existing relationship. Disadvantages: no direct representation from SGV cities (except Pasadena). ***A contractual relationship with a Phase II JPA would be worked out to ensure input from cities throughout environmental, design and construction process and that concerns would be heard and addressed. (Similar to Pasadena relationship between Council and Operating Companies.)***

The following all presuppose, in one way or another, the proposed entity taking over all responsibilities of the existing Authority so all would require some form of legislative action at the state level. (any of these could also have a contractual relationship with the existing Authority, but that would not satisfy the San Gabriel Valley cities request for “full voting power and authority”.

Proposal A – 5 member board consisting of 2 members from existing Construction Authority (Pasadena & LA), two members from the San Gabriel Valley east of Pasadena and an MTA representative. Advantages: balances existing authority with new members from SGV; small board; maintains experience and reputation of existing board while broadening representation to include new stakeholders; maintains Los Angeles and MTA

presence on board with existing “balance of power”; continues workload at already established pace; Disadvantages: not all San Gabriel Valley cities represented;

Proposal B (initial Council of Governments proposal) – 11 member JPA board consisting of a representative each from the Phase II cities. Advantages: Equal representation by all SGV cities with stake in project. Disadvantages: Large board; little continuity from existing authority to new JPA board; no representation by MTA or Los Angeles; unlikely to be able to gain support for project at MTA. *As a result of this proposal, the Los Angeles City Council took a formal position calling for the federal recipient of funds for Phase II to be either the existing Construction Authority or the MTA. Concerns were expressed that this JPA lacks representation for LA and MTA. MTA staff responded to this proposal by suggesting that the JPA could be an advisory committee with no actual power or authority at any level of decision-making process.*

Proposal C – 7 member board consisting of three members from existing Authority (the city reps), three members from the San Gabriel Valley east of Pasadena (one from the easternmost four cities, one from the middle four cities and one from the western three cities) and an MTA representative. Would include a “Technical Coordinating Committee made up of JPA staff and staff from cities and MTA who would discuss issues of mutual concern and review board items to preclude problems and address technical concerns. Advantages: balances existing authority with new members from SGV; small board; maintains experience and reputation of existing board while broadening representation to include new stakeholders; maintains Los Angeles and MTA presence on board with existing “balance of power”; continues workload at already established pace; incorporates and memorializes a mechanism for staff members to have input. Disadvantages: not all San Gabriel Valley cities represented;

Proposal D – 7 member board consisting of a representative of each “pair” of interested parties. MTA and LA would share a seat, one being the representative the other an alternate. South Pasadena and Pasadena would share a seat as would Arcadia and Monrovia, Duarte and Irwindale, Azusa and Glendora, San Dimas and Pomona and LaVerne and Claremont. Advantages: includes new stakeholders; maintains Los Angeles and MTA presence on board; Disadvantages: not all San Gabriel Valley cities represented; MTA and LA not completely enfranchised; could create inter agency rivalries in determining who has representative and who is alternate.

Proposal E (COG proposal as of 6/1/03) – Existing Authority board expanded to 15 member board consisting of existing Authority Board (less representative of COG) expanded to include a representative of each of the Phase II cities and Montclair. Advantages: incorporates all stakeholders (including potential partner in San Bernardino County); Disadvantages: large board; could disenfranchise MTA and LA by diluting their representation on board;

Proposal F (Star-News/Tribune proposal) – Existing authority be reconfigured to five members with an MTA member and one each from Pasadena, Arcadia, Monrovia and Duarte while project is competed to those cities, then shift to MTA, Irwindale, Azusa,

Covina, and Glendora ; then MTA, San Dimas, Pomona, LaVerne and Claremont.
Advantages: Small board. Increased representation for San Gabriel Valley cities.
Disadvantages: disenfranchises almost everyone at some point in the project's progress, especially during the initial environmental work and preliminary engineering when input is most effective and valuable. No continuity from existing Authority.

Issues needing resolution:

- 1.) Composition of JPA board
- 2.) Size of JPA board
- 3.) Powers of JPA board
- 4.) Relationship to existing Authority (if any)

Concerns and issues that arise from the JPA consideration:

- 1.) Risks to Phase II funding due to lack of coherent and unified support for Phase II and potential opposition from MTA and Los Angeles as well as competition from other agencies and cities in California (especially the Bay Area).
- 2.) Risks to Phase II momentum due to slowness of action if legislation is required (or if legislation fails).
- 3.) Lack of local funding strategies and risks to local funding if MTA and/or Los Angeles oppose Phase II funding.
- 4.) Existing Authority must return property to MTA if it does not continue with Phase II.
- 5.) By contract and state legislation, existing Authority may be required to expend funds or return them to MTA if it does not continue with Phase II. (No carryover funds could be available from Phase I, only the \$19 million dedicated to Phase II to replace the Santa Anita Bridge, which may be required to be returned to CalTrans. Excess joint development funds could be disbursed to the Phase I cities for their use to make improvements relative to the Gold Line or returned to MTA at the discretion of the Authority Board.)

There are other issues and concerns, of course, but these seem to be those around which the discussions have centered, so far.

Recommendation: That the Pasadena City Council adopt the attached resolution in support of the San Gabriel Council of Governments seeking legislative action creating a separate and distinct San Gabriel Valley Gold Line Construction Authority

DRAFT RESOLUTION:

A RESOLUTION OF THE PASADENA CITY COUNCIL SUPPORTING CREATION OF A SEPARATE AND INDEPENDENT SAN GABRIEL VALLEY GOLD LINE PHASE II CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY

Whereas it is vital to meet the transportation needs of the San Gabriel Valley and Los Angeles County, the City of Pasadena supports design and construction of Phase II of the Gold Line light rail project linking east Pasadena to Claremont; and

Whereas the existing Los Angeles to Pasadena Blue Line Construction Authority is chartered and empowered by the State of California, through legislative action, to construct the entire project from Union Station in Los Angeles to Claremont; and

Whereas the San Gabriel Valley Cities of Arcadia, Monrovia, Duarte, Irwindale, Azusa, Covina, Glendora, San Dimas, LaVerne and Claremont have expressed a legitimate and **recognized** need to maintain control over the design and construction of the Gold Line Phase II light rail project; and

Whereas there have been attempts to reconcile the need of the San Gabriel Valley cities with the state-granted mandate of the existing Construction Authority; and

Whereas these efforts have been unsuccessful in garnering support from the San Gabriel Valley cities;

Now be it resolved that the City Council of the City of Pasadena request that the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments work to create a governing structure for the San Gabriel Valley Gold Line Phase II Construction Authority that meets the needs of the San Gabriel Valley cities; and

That the San Gabriel Valley Cities of Pasadena, Arcadia, Monrovia, Duarte, Irwindale, Azusa, Covina, Glendora, San Dimas, LaVerne and Claremont request that the Legislature of the State of California charter and empower the San Gabriel Valley Gold Line Phase II Construction Authority with full power and authority to design and construct the project; and

That the San Gabriel Valley Gold Line Phase II Construction Authority begin operation on January 1, 2004; and

That the existing Los Angeles to Pasadena Metro Construction Authority be requested to complete and close out the **Phase I** of the Gold Line project from Union Station to East Pasadena and continue its existing workplan for Phase II until December 31, 2003, at

which time the new agency will assume responsibility for all work on the Gold Line Phase II project, including but not limited to financing, design and construction; and

Should the San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments be unsuccessful at creating the San Gabriel Valley Gold Line Phase II Construction Authority, responsibility for completion of the project will remain with the existing Los Angeles to Pasadena Blue Line Construction Authority; and

Should the Los Angeles to Pasadena Blue Line Construction Authority maintain responsibility for all aspects of financing, design and construction of the Metro Gold Line Phase II project, it will work in partnership with the cities of Pasadena, Arcadia, Monrovia, Duarte, Irwindale, Azusa, Covina, Glendora, San Dimas, LaVerne and Claremont to ensure each has adequate control, input and assurance that their local needs will be met and their local concerns will be appropriately addressed and resolved; and

That the Project will move forward on the schedule proposed, with an anticipated completion date of July, 2113.

Now hereby be it resolved by the City Council of the City of Pasadena this 23rd Day of June, 2003.

submitted by Paul Little

Can Light Rail Carry the Load?

■Some say it's not worth the money. Others call it region's lifeblood.

By Dan Weikel and Kurt Streeter, Times Staff Writers

Packed with tourists and Mexican laborers, the San Diego Trolley ushered in a new era for light rail in California when its boxy red cars began running between downtown and the international border in 1981.

The street car revival has spread to Sacramento, San Jose, and Los Angeles, where transit officials this summer plan to open their third — the 14-mile Gold Line from downtown Los Angeles to Pasadena. Other regions are eager to sign on, including traffic-choked Orange County, where Irvine voters will decide Tuesday whether to be part of an 11-mile, \$1.4-billion starter line — one of the most expensive in the nation.

Such light-rail systems are critical to meet California's growing transportation needs, many transit experts say, because modern street cars take less space than new freeways and can haul more people faster than buses. They predict white-collar workers will abandon their cars to be whisked to the office as well as the theater when light rail becomes more available.

But 22 years after the San Diego Trolley's inaugural run, the promise of light rail has yet to materialize in California. Although the San Diego line has expanded and is a success by most measures, light-rail performance in the three other regions is mixed despite an outlay of \$3 billion in public funds for construction and hundreds of millions of dollars in annual subsidies to operate them.

"There are good examples of light rail, but our track record is not that good," said Robert Cervero, a professor of city and regional planning at UC Berkeley.

Light rail is different from subways and railroads such as Metrolink, the Bay Area Rapid Transit system or the Metro Red Line in Los Angeles. Modern trolleys use smaller cars, go slower, and make more stops.

Though cheaper to build than subways, light-rail costs usually exceed projections, sometimes dramatically so.

A 1982 estimate to build the 22-mile Blue Line from Long Beach to Los Angeles was \$192 million; at completion in 1990, it cost taxpayers \$877 million. The 20-mile Green Line along the Century Freeway in Los Angeles County cost \$980 million, more than three times the original estimate. Sacramento County's 20.6-mile "RT" system was

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estimated at \$117 million in 1981. It cost \$176 million by its 1987 completion.

The Gold Line has been built by a construction authority created by state lawmakers, who demanded it be finished for \$725 million. But the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which will run it, is adding rail cars and extras, pushing the total closer to \$900 million.

Predictions Are Off

Ridership also has varied from original predictions.

The Sacramento line, for example, has about 30,000 "boardings" each weekday, far below projections of 50,000. The Los Angeles Green Line — called "the train to nowhere" by some because it stops short of Los Angeles International Airport and serves neither shopping nor tourist destinations — has about 29,000 boardings each weekday, less than a third of the forecast.

In contrast, the San Diego Trolley and the Los Angeles Blue Line, each with more than 70,000 boardings per weekday, either meet or surpass original forecasts. Gold Line ridership is expected to be 30,000 per weekday, doubling in 20 years.

Many riders say they prefer the comfort and speed of light rail to bus service. But some studies show that transit's share of commuters has increased little, if at all, despite the investment in modern street cars. Research suggests that many light-rail riders simply switched from the buses the trolley lines replaced.

In Los Angeles County on an average weekday, 1.5 million people use municipal buses, the subway and two light-rail lines operated by the MTA. Before transit officials raised the 50-cent fare two decades ago, 1.8 million rode buses.

Light rail's mixed record has some experts and academics asking if the lines are worth such enormous investments. Innovative or expanded use of buses can provide a cheaper alternative, they say, especially in sprawling suburban areas.

"If the goal is to move as many people as possible as far as you can per dollar spent, light rail is not effective," said Jim Moore, director of USC's transportation engineering program.

Jonathan E.D. Richmond, a Massachusetts consultant and former Harvard University research fellow, said when similar service is compared, express buses require less subsidy.

Richmond studied an express route along Wilshire Boulevard in Los Angeles and the Blue Line. He found the operating subsidies per passenger for light rail were at least double those of the rapid bus line. The U.S. General Accounting Office concluded in September 2001 that capital costs for express-style bus service ranged from \$200,000 a mile on existing streets to \$55 million a mile for roads built exclusively for buses. Light-

rail systems cost \$12.4 million to \$118.8 million a mile.

Transit advocates say it's premature to judge light rail's performance because most California systems are in their infancies and have yet to benefit from being part of a broad rail network. High-density housing and commercial centers are being built near trolley lines, which could boost ridership. Advocates also say mounting traffic congestion and an aging population will increase demand.

"In time, we could see this turn around," Cervero said. "Little villages are blossoming around transit centers. Demographics are changing. There's the highway crunch. A confluence of events is occurring in favor of light rail's future."

San Diego illustrates their point: The now 47-mile system serves an area of about 2.8 million people and links an array of major destinations — the U.S.-Mexico border, a revitalized downtown, one of the state's most visited parks, densely populated blue-collar neighborhoods, shopping centers, hotels and the San Diego stadium.

"I wasn't a transit rider until about a year ago," said Robert Ahrensberg, a San Diego County probation officer who parks his car for free at a Mission Valley transit station and rides the trolley for the last part of his rush-hour commute to the Civic Center. "I wish I would have been a whole lot sooner."

San Diego's network cost about \$750 million to build, or \$16 million a mile. The initial 15.9-mile segment between downtown and the border, which uses an existing railroad right of way, cost about \$7 million a mile.

Since county transit leaders created the nonprofit San Diego Trolley Inc., the operation has had a no-frills, pragmatic philosophy. Stations are spartan. Staffing is minimal. No federal funds are used.

Today, the system carries 25 million riders a year. Fares pay about 60% of operating costs, a far higher rate than many bus routes, including express lines.

"If you put the right pieces of the puzzle together, the right things can happen," said Peter Tereschuck, San Diego Trolley president and general manager. He conceded it has drawn few white-collar workers so far. Construction costs have escalated during a recent expansion, and ridership, though healthy, has not always grown as fast as predicted.

If San Diego is considered the best performing light-rail line in the state, Santa Clara County's may be the worst.

Troubled Line

Before the county committed to light rail in the mid- to late 1970s, Santa Clara transit advocates promised it would lure nearly 30% of motorists — mostly middle-class commuters. Fares would cover 85% of operating costs, and trolleys would average 25 to

30 mph.

After almost 27 years of planning and \$1 billion, ridership on Santa Clara's 30.5-mile system peaked three years ago at about 30,000 boardings per weekday, not the 41,200 predicted. Average speeds are about 15 mph, and fares have covered no more than 35% of operating costs.

The first 20 miles of the line and a transit mall in downtown San Jose cost more than \$640 million when completed in 1991, not the \$189.7 million estimated in the early 1980s.

"Light rail is not a time-saver, but there is less wear and tear on my car. It's a trade-off I can live with," said Kent Owen while commuting home to San Jose from his Silicon Valley computer networking firm. "But I don't think light rail works in a car culture. Everyone drives here."

When the Silicon Valley leg opened in 1999, ridership on the 8-mile segment reached 6,000 to 6,500 boardings each weekday six years ahead of projections. Builders were adding high-density housing nearby.

Two years later, the high-tech downturn devastated the San Jose area and sales tax revenue used for transit plunged. Overall light-rail ridership dropped by a third to about 20,000 boardings daily. That's only slightly more than one of the county's busy bus routes, which costs about 60% less to operate and maintain a year than the entire trolley line.

With the Valley Transportation Authority facing a potential \$200-million deficit in years ahead, transit officials plan to reduce the shortfall to \$70 million by cutting both bus and rail service up to 40%. Some Santa Clara County transit officials say that the line doesn't serve the San Jose airport; that it creeps through the downtown at 5 to 8 mph; and that the area's 1.7-million people are too dispersed to make light rail practical.

"We have invested a billion dollars and we don't want to pull the plug carelessly, but how long do we carry the light-rail system if it is not serving the needs of the people?" asked San Jose Vice Mayor Pat Dando, who has been a VTA board member for two years. "All of this will be hashed out in the next three to four months. I'm not ready to throw in the towel yet."

Orange County transit planners hope to avoid such problems with the proposed CenterLine project — a partly elevated 11.4-mile system through Irvine, Costa Mesa and Santa Ana at an estimated cost of \$1.4 billion. Planners project 21,000 boardings each weekday in the first year, increasing to 32,000 within 15 years. But CenterLine's fate is unclear if Irvine voters reject it Tuesday. Opponents cite the potential disruption of Irvine neighborhoods and question whether public funds should be spent to supplant a tiny fraction of the millions of vehicle trips made daily in the county. Better, they say, to spend the money on road improvements and expanded bus service, including expresses

and neighborhood shuttles.

"It is horrendous we are thinking about light rail given those numbers," said Michael G. McNally, a professor at UC Irvine's transportation institute. "We've been directing a large amount of resources to attracting choice riders to transit. This is not better for the masses."

Proponents see it as the next Blue Line or San Diego Trolley. With 2.8 million people, Orange County has population and job densities along the proposed route that are equal to or greater than San Diego's. Orange County, however, lacks the urban core and international border that have been key to the San Diego Trolley's success.

CenterLine would start at Santa Ana's train station, also a hub for buses, and move west to the city's Civic Center. It would go south on Bristol Street through dense residential and business areas to South Coast Plaza, then to John Wayne Airport and the Irvine Business Complex, before ending at UCI.

A comparable bus rapid transit system with exclusive roadways, county transit officials say, would shave only 10% from CenterLine's cost, and be slower and less comfortable to use.

"Which is better, a 747 or a Cessna? It depends on where you want to go," said Arthur T. Leahy, OCTA's chief executive officer. "If you're going into heavily congested Los Angeles, you want a 747. If you are going to Oceanside, a Cessna will do. We need the 747."



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LOS ANGELES

In Need of a Plan, Any Plan, to Improve Freeway

■ Delay in choosing a way to expand the 710 could cost such a project federal funding.

By Deborah Schoch, Times Staff Writer

Although no one can say just how the Long Beach Freeway might be upgraded to improve traffic flow, a transportation panel is rushing to meet a deadline to secure federal funding for whatever project might evolve.

The panel is seeking up to \$400 million from Congress in a major transportation funding bill that could pass this fall. Those who support expanding the truck-choked freeway say that developments this week buoyed the project's chances to secure federal dollars in a race for funds on Capitol Hill.

Some residents remain on edge, worried that their homes might be vulnerable if the freeway is significantly widened.

The last 10 days have been a roller-coaster ride for those residents and commuters monitoring a 29-month, \$3.9-million study of how to improve a major artery overwhelmed by cargo moving from the ports of Long Beach and Los Angeles.

First came the May 22 vote by the board of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority that seemed to apply the brakes — at least for now — to plans to expand the freeway between East Los Angeles and Long Beach. Then, on Wednesday, a separate transportation panel advanced an ambitious schedule to design a plan over the summer.

"We just got the feeling it was moving full speed ahead," said Julie Masters, a senior staff attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council who attended the meeting Wednesday.

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The panel has promised to minimize the demolition of homes and businesses.

The vote comes amid continued debate over how to better move cargo through the nation's largest port complex and what costs should be borne by surrounding communities. Most people agree the freeway must be improved, but the preferred methods vary widely.

Three construction plans made public this spring called for major construction along an 18-mile stretch of freeway.

The plans were widely condemned by residents along the freeway because they could force the removal of up to 1,000 homes and businesses.

The board of the project's lead agency, the MTA, last week voted to shelve the three plans and recommend a fourth that would not take homes. It also asked that MTA staff work with local officials to develop a new "hybrid" plan with pieces from the rejected construction plans, as long as homes were not taken.

Then, on Wednesday, the transportation panel voted 8 to 4 to move ahead with designing a hybrid plan this summer. The panel represents local cities, the ports and four state and regional planning agencies.

Some critics were mystified by the vote, especially in light of concerns that the panel already had ignored residents' concerns.

Making matters even murkier, it was unclear who in the end would decide whether and how the Long Beach Freeway should be improved.

Some say that authority belongs to the transportation panel, known as the Oversight Policy Committee.

"In this process, the final decision on picking the locally preferred strategy is the body that met [Wednesday]," said Richard Powers, executive director of the Gateway Cities Council of Governments, which provides staff to the panel. "The MTA is one of 20 members on this board, and the collective body is the one that makes the determination on the locally preferred strategy."

But the MTA's executive officer for planning, Jim de la Loza, said Friday that the policy committee will make a recommendation, but that the MTA board has the final say.

Under a revised schedule, local officials will meet June 11 to start choosing what parts of the old plans they want included in a hybrid design. The policy committee is to choose a conceptual plan July 16 and endorse a final strategy Oct. 16.

The process ahead is akin to pulling apart Lego pieces and fitting them



together in a different design, planners say.

Some residents say they are grateful the committee is taking a harder look, rather than rubber-stamping the earlier plans, as some had feared.

"I'm glad they are at least slightly slowing down and recognizing that their previous approaches have raised some issues. It's too bad some of these issues were not raised sooner," said Linda Ivers, a longtime Long Beach resident who expressed concerns about potential health and environmental effects of an expanded freeway.

One policy committee member said he will try to slow down the process even more.

Bell Gardens City Councilman Daniel Crespo, who voted against the Wednesday resolution, said the vote was premature and that he believes the ports and shippers are behind the drive for freeway expansion.

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