

Agenda Report

TO: CITY COUNCIL
FROM: City Manager
SUBJECT: State Route 710 Project Status Report

March 8, 2004

RECOMMENDATION

This report is for information only.

BACKGROUND

On December 17, 2003, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) advised the California Department of Transportation that the Record of Decision (ROD) for the State Route 710 project must be supplemented before the project can proceed (Attachment A). In essence, this means the social, economic and environmental information for the project must be updated. They indicated this decision was made based on several factors, which included two legal challenges, new developments that have occurred since approval of the ROD, and elements of the ROD that have not been implemented.

The two legal challenges were the lawsuit filed by the City of South Pasadena regarding their opposition to the project, and the lawsuit filed by the City of Alhambra advocating that the project move forward.

The new developments that influenced FHWA's decision that a supplemental environmental document be prepared include:

- Changes related to the project (implementation of the Gold Line Light Rail Transit and the Alameda Corridor).
- Consideration of the more thorough evaluation of the feasibility of a bored tunnel for the entire length or large portions of the project alternative.
- The unusual and extended period of time involved and lack of progress on key initiatives anticipated in the 1998 ROD, including the series of interim transportation improvements, the development of a more comprehensive mitigation plan, and a fiscal plan to implement the project.

The December 17, 2003, letter raised several questions:

1. Does the letter indicate a change in FHWA's support of the 710 Freeway Project?

This was the conclusion reached in a December 3, 2003 Los Angeles Times article (Attachment B). A subsequent response from FHWA said the conclusion was misleading in that it is not FHWA's responsibility to either support or oppose a State project, and the December 17 letter was simply their attempt to carry out their responsibilities of receiver. The FHWA letter is included as Attachment C.

2. Are the "interim" mitigation projects (many of which are in Pasadena) on hold or cancelled?

Caltrans suggested specific clarification of this question in a January 9, 2004, letter from former Caltrans Director, Jeff Morales to the Acting FHWA Division Administrator, David Nicol (Attachment D). The FHWA Division Administrator answered that question in a January 13, 2004, letter (Attachment E), which clearly stated that it is FHWA's intent that these projects move forward.

3. Does the letter require stopping the feasibility study for the tunnel project currently proposed by the MTA, SCAG, and Caltrans?

The same January 9 letter requested clarification on this question and the January 13, 2004, letter confirmed that this study should move forward.

Update on Pasadena's Interim Projects

Staff from the Public Works Department is currently working on two "interim" SR 710 Projects: the Fair Oaks Avenue Corridor Transportation Improvements Project and the SR 710 Mitigation Project.

- *Fair Oaks Avenue Corridor Transportation Improvements Project* –
The design of the project was completed in summer 2003. The City has received FHWA authorization to proceed with construction and the federal funds have been obligated. Construction began in January 2004, and it is anticipated that construction will be completed by August 2004.
- *SR 710 Mitigation Project* –
The City of Pasadena's SR 710 Mitigation Project includes eight individual transportation projects. All of Pasadena's projects are currently on schedule to obtain funding obligation by the original lapse deadline of September 30, 2004. Environmental clearance has been obtained on seven of the eight individual projects with the clearance for the final project anticipated in March 2004.. The land acquisition process has commenced on the four projects that require additional right-of-way. The design status of the eight projects ranges from 65% to 95% complete, and the design of all eight projects will be completed by July 2004. Construction of the eight projects will occur between FY 2005 and FY 2007.

Update on Tunnel Study

The MTA is moving forward with a feasibility study to determine if a tunnel is a viable alternative for the I-710 freeway gap project. MTA representatives met with City staff to discuss the preliminary scope of work for the project and are meeting with all affected parties to solicit their input on the project scope. The Tunnel Feasibility Technical Assessment will take 12 months, and MTA anticipates having work underway by this summer. Staff comments on the scope are included in Attachment F.

FISCAL IMPACT:


There is no fiscal impact from this report.

Respectfully submitted,



CYNTHIA J. KURTZ
City Manager

Approved by:



Joyce Y. Amerson
Director of Transportation

Attachment A – December 17, 2003 FHWA letter to Caltrans

Attachment B – December 31, 2003 Los Angeles Times Article – “Freeway Expansion”

Attachment C – January 18, 2004 response from FHWA representative to Los Angeles Times article

Attachment D – January 9, 2004 letter from Caltrans to FHWA requesting clarification on December 17, 2003 letter

Attachment E – January 13, 2004 response from FHWA to Caltrans

Attachment F – Staff comments on Scope of Works for Tunnel Feasibility Study