

Agenda Report

October 25, 2021

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

FROM: Department of Transportation

**SUBJECT: CALIFORNIA BOULEVARD GRADE SEPARATION PROJECT
UPDATE**

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the City Council:

1. Find this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3), Review for Exemption; and
2. Direct the City Manager to identify potential projects, to submit to Metro for consideration in lieu of the Metro L Line California Boulevard Grade Separation Project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

In November 2018 and again in September 2019, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) Board of Directors authorized programming funds for the State Route 710 North Mobility Improvement Projects (MIP) to jurisdictions along the 710N corridor to fund capacity enhancement projects. From these approved projects, Metro allocated a total of \$230,500,000 to the City of Pasadena in Measure R MIP funds to be used to complete the environmental study, design, right-of-way (ROW) acquisitions, and construction of the Metro L (Gold) Line Grade Separation at California Boulevard. Following the award of this funding, City staff coordinated with Metro to review the feasibility of the potential grade separation project, analyze the potential alignment alternatives and refine the conceptual level cost estimate.

Based on this collaborative effort, City staff believes the grade separation costs and potential impacts outweigh the initially identified need and potential benefits of this project. Given the 710N corridor's mobility challenges, it is staff's position that there

are other transportation solutions that would more efficiently address mobility along the corridor. Staff recommends to pursue the identification of other potential projects in lieu of the California Blvd Grade Separation and engage Metro in discussion to have the Measure R MIP funds reallocated.

BACKGROUND:

In November 2018 and September 2019, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) Board of Directors authorized programming funds for the State Route 710 North Mobility Improvement Projects (MIP) to jurisdictions along the 710N corridor to fund capacity enhancement projects. These projects are intended to address mobility challenges that are the result of the 710N project not moving forward. From these approved projects, Metro allocated a total of \$230,500,000 to the City of Pasadena in Measure R MIP funds to be used to complete the environmental study, design, right-of-way (ROW) acquisitions, and construction of the Metro L (Gold) Line Grade Separation at California Boulevard. Following the award of this funding, City staff coordinated with Metro to review the feasibility of the potential grade separation project, analyze the potential alignment alternatives refine the conceptual level cost estimate. At the request of former Mayor Terry Tornek, the Foothill Gold Line Construction Authority provided a peer review of Metro's assessment.

Below is a summary of the initial analyses completed in collaboration with Metro and the Metro Gold Line Construction Authority, and the finding resulting from the analysis.

Metro Assessment

Staff from the City's Department of Transportation (DOT) and Metro established joint meetings to begin discussions on the roles and responsibilities of both parties for the L Line Grade Separation at California Boulevard. The initial meeting with Metro was held in October 2019. At this meeting, staff discussed project management options, the tentative project schedule, initial conceptual alternatives, and the need for a project feasibility study.

Following the October 2019 meeting, understanding that the City would need to carry out a feasibility study wherein a range of reasonable alternatives would be analyzed, at the City's request and in coordination with the City, the Metro team reviewed various options to identify the most feasible alignment alternatives to be carried forward into a feasibility study.

In November 2019, City staff met with Metro to review the short list of potential alternatives and reach consensus on which alternatives should move forward. Based on the physical constraints of the grade crossing the three alternatives below were selected for further analysis:

- Alternative 1 – Rail alignment raised over California Boulevard (aerial configuration)
- Alternative 2 – Rail alignment lowered under California Boulevard (underground configuration)

- Alternative 3 – Rail alignment raised and California Boulevard roadway alignment depressed (hybrid)

In addition to the three grade separation alternatives discussed, this project also has a Transportation System Management/Rail Signal Control alternative and a no-build alternative.

Based on a preliminary high level review, DOT and Metro agreed to carry out additional analysis of Alternative 3, the hybrid option.

On April 20, 2020, Metro transmitted to DOT the results of their initial assessment (Attachment A). The work carried out did not include design work and was developed at a very high level intended to provide the City with a preliminary understanding of project area constraints, construction challenges, potential L Line service and roadway network impacts and a rough order of magnitude cost. The Metro project assumptions regarding project area constraints, potential property impacts and operational challenges are reflected in the estimated cost of over \$577-million. Based on standard construction scheduling forecasts, the total construction schedule was estimated to take up to 4-years. It was understood by both agencies that further analysis and coordination would need to take place to better define the project and associated potential benefits and impacts.

Metro Gold Line Construction Authority Assessment

At the request of former Mayor Terry Tornek, the Foothill Gold Line Construction Authority reviewed Metro's assessment. The Construction Authority's review (Attachment B) concluded that the Grade Separation at California could be constructed at a lower cost than estimated by Metro with far fewer operational, construction and property impacts. Subsequent to an initial meeting where the Construction Authority's conclusions were discussed, DOT staff met with the Construction Authority staff to discuss the technical and operational assumptions that informed their conclusions.

The Construction Authority's conclusions are largely based on key assumptions that resulted in significant project cost and construction schedule reductions. However, for these assumptions to hold, Metro would ultimately need to provide review and approval. The most notable assumptions reflected in the Construction Authority's work include use of Metro's Midway Yard and bus bridging during construction as opposed to construction of a shoo-fly. (A shoo-fly is a temporary parallel track used to allow rail operations to continue while construction occurs on the main track.) By building in these key assumptions into their review, the Construction Authority's modification of Metro's cost estimate came in at approximately \$183-million. In addition, an assumption that double shifts would be allowed for construction, the construction schedule was reduced to 18-months.

City staff previously discussed the use of the Metro Midway Yard and extended bus bridging to eliminate the need for a shoo-fly with Metro during the coordination

meetings. While they would be further evaluated and considered should the City proceed into the next project phase, Metro's initial assessment reflected that all rail yards would be at capacity by the time the Grade Separation entered construction and Rail Operations expressed serious concerns over long term bus bridging given the lack of a direct route, potential inconvenience to customers and estimated loss of ridership. The Construction Authority's initial assessment also failed to reflect more recent land use changes within the City that further constrain the project area and which if the properties were to be acquired, would further increase the cost of the project. These land use assumptions also contributed to the low estimated cost. A comparison of the Metro cost estimate and the Construction Authority Modification to the Metro Cost Estimate can be found as Attachment C.

Staff Evaluation

City staff reviewed the cost estimates, construction schedule, adjacent land use and potential construction impacts to traffic circulation and adjacent neighborhoods during the construction period and determined that the recommended costs and potential impacts outweigh the benefits of constructing a grade separation on an active light-rail transit grade crossing at California Boulevard. Changes in the existing and proposed land use adjacent to this intersection played a role in this determination. When the grade separation project was initially identified, the land use along this corridor included vacant properties adjacent to the intersection. That vacant property is no longer available.

Within the past three years, the City has implemented various projects to enhance the safety and mobility of California Boulevard crossing the Metro L Line. Transit preemption time and corresponding traffic signal operations have been modified to reduce delay to motorists, pedestrians and bicyclists. Signalized intersections along California Boulevard, between Fair Oaks Avenue and Marengo Avenue now operate utilizing adaptive traffic control, which provides real time traffic signal timing adjustments in response to traffic conditions and L Line train activity. The adaptive traffic control system also extends north and south from Cordova Street on the north to Glenarm Street on the south along Fair Oaks Avenue, Raymond Avenue, Arroyo Parkway and Marengo Ave. In addition, an extension to the adaptive traffic control system is anticipated to be constructed in 2022, to extend the adaptive system on California Boulevard from St John Ave to Lake Avenue, further reducing delay along this corridor. While there continue to be opportunities to better address queuing during key travel times and motorist delay associated with Metro L Line train operations, the intersections on California Boulevard, adjacent to the at-grade crossing operates efficiently and do not demonstrate any safety concerns.

Based on staff evaluation of the Metro and Construction Authority analysis as well as staff's assessment of the corridor mobility needs and challenges, staff has determined that other transportation solutions could more effectively address mobility needs, reduce intersection delay and address multimodal safety along the 710N corridor and identified parallel streets, as well as cross streets such as California Boulevard providing links to the I-210 freeway.

Recommended Next Steps

It is recommended that staff identify and pursue projects that could be designed and constructed in lieu of the California Boulevard grade separation. An updated project list would build on the project list previously approved by City Council on January 28, 2018 but would also take into consideration more recent mobility needs and opportunities. Initial project proposals and conceptual level project cost estimates would be developed in early 2022, and submitted to Metro for consideration. The final project list would be brought back to City Council for consideration and approval.

COUNCIL POLICY CONSIDERATION:

The proposed action is consistent with the goals of the General Plan Mobility Element and also the goals of the Strategic Plan including “Improve, Maintain and Enhance Public Facilities and Infrastructure, Improve Mobility and Accessibility throughout the City, and Support and Promote the Quality of Life and Local Economy.” Projects identified for potential Measure R Mobility Improvement Program funding will support the Department of Transportation in addressing the following policies of the Mobility Element:

- Policy 1.6 Continue to invest in innovative information technology and applications to help improve access to all transportation choices
- Policy 1.12 Apply traffic management measures to manage vehicular speeds as a function of designated street type to ensure safe and orderly movement of all modes of travel.
- Policy 1.30 Pursue funding opportunities such as grants, impact fees, or fair share contributions from development to implement programs and projects that contribute to the City’s Mobility Element objectives.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

The City’s Environmental Administrator has determined that this action is categorically exempt under the California Environmental Quality Act (“CEQA”) Guidelines in Section 15061 (b) (3), Review for Exemption. A decision to review potential future projects does not result in a significant effect on the environment. As projects are identified and the planning process for each project starts, an environmental analysis will be conducted for each project individually.

FISCAL IMPACT:

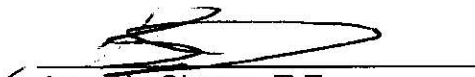
Work completed in accordance with the recommended action would be done using existing Transportation Department Operating Budget. Potential projects identified by staff will be presented to City Council for approval before being submitted to Metro for consideration. The fiscal impact of the proposed projects would be identified at that time.

Respectfully submitted,



LAURA RUBIO-CORNEJO
Director
Department of Transportation

Prepared by:



Joaquín Siques, T.E.
Deputy Director

Approved by:



STEVE MERMELL
City Manager

Attachments (3):

- Attachment A – Metro Assessment of Hybrid Alternative
- Attachment B – Construction Authority Review of Metro Assessment
- Attachment C – Cost Estimate Comparison