

**Board Report**

File #: 2017-0400, **File Type:** Motion / Motion Response**Agenda Number:** 19

**PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
JULY 19, 2017****SUBJECT: VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR - RAIL
FEASIBILITY STUDY****ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE****RECOMMENDATION**

RECEIVE AND FILE update in response to the March 23, 2017 Board motion directing staff to study potential future rail for the Vermont Transit Corridor.

ISSUE

At the March 23, 2017 Board meeting, staff presented the findings and recommendations from the Vermont Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) technical study. At that same meeting, the Board approved a motion (Attachment A) directing staff to proceed with the Vermont BRT project as a near-term "Phase 1" transit improvement; initiate a study of extending the Red Line heavy rail along Vermont Avenue to 125th Street, specifically focusing on connecting the Wilshire/Vermont Red Line Station to the Expo Line Station at Exposition/Vermont as an initial segment rail project; include a heavy rail alternative in the Alternative Analysis and Environmental Studies; and report back to the Planning and Programming Committee on all the above during the July 2017 Board cycle.

DISCUSSION**Background**

In July and October 2014, Board motions were passed (Attachments B and C) directing staff to begin technical analysis of BRT on the Vermont Avenue Transit Corridor, which was identified in the Los Angeles County Bus Rapid Transit and Street Design Improvement Study (CBRT) as a strong candidate for BRT implementation. In July 2015, staff formally kicked off the Vermont BRT technical study. The purpose of the study was to further evaluate the feasibility of implementing BRT. BRT is a high quality bus-based transit system that provides fast, comfortable, and cost effective service through the provision of a number of capital and operating improvements such as dedicated bus lanes, enhanced station stops, off-board fare payment and/or all-door boarding, branded vehicles, and enhanced transit signal priority (TSP). The Vermont Avenue Transit Corridor currently extends approximately 12.5 miles from Hollywood Boulevard to 120th Street and is the second busiest bus corridor in Los Angeles County, carrying approximately 45,000 passengers per day.

The study, which was completed in February 2017, identified four initial BRT concepts, two of which appeared to be the most promising in terms of improved passenger travel times, faster bus speeds, and increased ridership. In January and February 2017, staff held a final Technical Advisory meeting, elected officials and Board staff briefing, and an Open House for key targeted stakeholders to present and discuss the findings for the Vermont BRT study. Overall, there was strong agreement that BRT could greatly improve transit service along Vermont Avenue, but that the Corridor needed to be considered for future conversion to rail. Measure M includes conversion to LRT or HRT after FY 2067 based on ridership demand.

Vermont Rail Feasibility Study

In response to the March 23, 2017 Board motion, coupled with the community's expressed interest to examine the potential for rail conversion, staff is proceeding with augmenting the BRT technical study with an additional scope of work to conduct a Rail Feasibility study. The augmented study will re-evaluate the initial BRT concepts identified in the initial work completed in the BRT technical study to ensure that any design of a BRT system on Vermont Avenue would not preclude a future conversion to rail. This additional scope of work will also include evaluating and comparing multiple rail modes and/or alternatives (heavy rail, light rail, streetcar/tram), including an extension of the Metro Red Line along Vermont Avenue, specifically focusing on connecting the Metro Red Line at the Wilshire/Vermont Station to the Metro Expo Line at the Exposition/Vermont Station as a first segment. The study will also identify ridership thresholds that inform the conversion of BRT to rail.

Each rail alternative identified will be evaluated based on its engineering feasibility, constructability, operability, system performance, potential environmental issues/concerns, and consistency with community goals and priorities. The study will also forecast system benefits including ridership, develop planning-level capital and operating cost estimates, and examine the potential for a phased implementation of transit improvements on the corridor beginning with BRT. Environmental clearance of the Vermont Avenue Corridor BRT could commence thereafter. The Measure M expenditure plan lists the Vermont BRT project with a groundbreaking date of FY 2024.

Environmental review of the Vermont BRT will be delayed by at least 18 months to secure a contract and complete the work on the Rail Feasibility study, which is anticipated to conclude in early 2019. The environmental review could begin thereafter and conclude in late 2021, followed by final engineering concluding mid-2023. This sequence aligns with the Measure M groundbreaking date of FY 2024. Concepts resulting from the rail feasibility study may not necessarily be incorporated into the BRT project environmental document. That determination will be made in the future upon review of the augmented study results.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

Funding of \$350,000 to initiate the Vermont Rail Feasibility study is included in the FY 2018 budget under Cost Center 4240 (Regional Transit Planning), Project 471402 (Vermont Transit Corridor). The expanded scope of work for the Rail Feasibility study in response to the March 23, 2017 Board motion is anticipated to increase the cost of the work effort by approximately 25%. Since the work on this project would be multiyear, it will be the responsibility of the cost center manager and Chief Planning Officer to budget funds in future years.

Impact to Budget

The source of funds for this recommendation is Measure M 35% which is not eligible for bus and rail operating expenditures.

NEXT STEPS

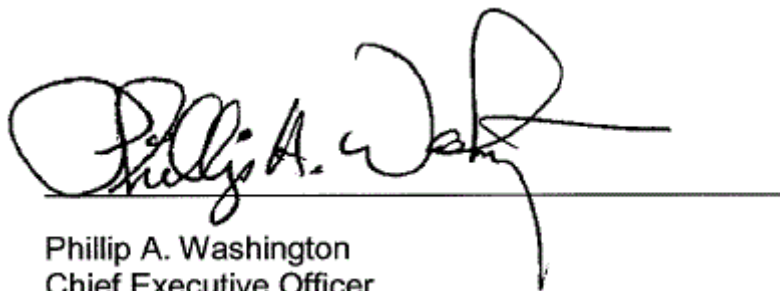
Staff will proceed immediately to procure consultant services for the Vermont Rail Feasibility study. This effort is expected to take approximately 12 months to complete from the time of contract award. Staff will keep the Board apprised of the study and return to the Board with study findings and recommendations.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A - March 23, 2017 Board motion
- Attachment B - July 24, 2014 Board motion
- Attachment C - October 16, 2014 Board motion

Prepared by: Lauren Cencic, Sr. Manager, Countywide Planning & Development, (213) 922-7417
Martha Butler, Sr. Director, Countywide Planning & Development, (213) 922-7651
David Mieger, EO, Countywide Planning & Development, (213) 922-3040
Manjeet Ranu, SEO, Countywide Planning & Development, (213) 418-3157

Reviewed by: Therese W. McMillan, Chief Planning Officer, (213) 922-7077



Phillip A. Washington
Chief Executive Officer

Metro

Los Angeles County
Metropolitan Transportation
Authority
One Gateway Plaza
3rd Floor Board Room
Los Angeles, CA



Board Report

File #:2017-0213, File Type:Motion / Motion
Response

Agenda Number:

**REGULAR BOARD MEETING
MARCH 23, 2017**

Motion by:

Directors Garcetti, Ridley-Thomas and Dupont-Walker

March 23, 2017

Relating to Item 9, File ID 2016-0835; Vermont Transit Corridor

Vermont Avenue has the second-highest number of transit boardings of any corridor in Los Angeles County, behind only Wilshire Boulevard.

In February 2017, the Vermont Avenue Rapid and Local bus lines combined for over 43,000 average weekday boardings, higher than the Green, Orange, and Silver Lines.

Recognizing the need for additional transit investment along Vermont Avenue, the 2009 Long Range Transportation Plan included a "Vermont Corridor Subway" in the list of Strategic Unfunded projects.

Since then, MTA staff has worked diligently to advance transit on Vermont Avenue. Vermont was listed as the number-one corridor for Bus Rapid Transit investment in the 2013 Countywide Bus Rapid Transit Study.

In 2014, MTA initiated technical studies for a Vermont Avenue Bus Rapid Transit project and is proceeding with Alternatives Analysis, including providing for a future conversion to light rail.

Bus service improvements on Vermont Avenue are vital, and MTA should proceed with Bus Rapid Transit improvements as quickly as possible. However, the Measure M Expenditure Plan anticipated future conversion to light or heavy rail. Given Vermont Avenue's intense transit ridership, MTA needs to pursue a path now for future rail options to serve this corridor.

Motion by Garcetti, Ridley-Thomas and Dupont-Walker that the Board direct the CEO to:

- A. Proceed with the Vermont Bus Rapid Transit project as a near-term "Phase 1" transit improvement along the Vermont Avenue Corridor;
- B. Initiate the study of extending the Red Line along Vermont Avenue to 125th Street, specifically

focusing on connecting the Wilshire/Vermont Red Line Station to the Expo/Vermont Expo Line Station as a "Section 1";

- C. Include a heavy rail alternative in the Alternative Analysis and Environmental Studies for the Measure M Vermont Transit Corridor; and
- D. Report back on all the above to the Planning and Programming Committee during the July 2017 Board cycle.

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***MOTION BY DIRECTORS MICHAEL ANTONOVICH,
ARA NAJARIAN, MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS AND ERIC GARCETTI***

July 24, 2014

After several years of evaluation, MTA staff developed a list of eligible corridors for additional bus rapid transit (BRT) projects based on, among other things, ridership potential and net savings of operations funding. Two of the corridors hit upon unmet transit needs, which would greatly relieve congestion and link major transit centers.

The first corridor, Vermont Avenue, has long been recognized as one of the most congested streets in Los Angeles. According to MTA statistics, the Vermont Avenue corridor has among the most daily bus boardings in all of LA County. The bus system is unable to accommodate commuter demands without service improvements.

The second corridor between the North Hollywood Red/Orange Lines and the Pasadena Gold Line, by all accounts, has huge ridership potential and would connect the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys. Metro, in collaboration with Bob Hope Airport, is providing an important plane-to-train connection through improvements to the Metrolink Antelope Valley and Ventura County Lines. The Airport recently opened its Regional Intermodal Transit Center that provides seamless connectivity from trains to buses to planes. An additional connection through enhanced BRT is warranted to increase mobility.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the CEO direct staff to advance these projects and provide the Board with a report back in September on an implementation plan to include:

- A. Operations requirements
- B. Funding requirements
- C. Implementation timelines

I FURTHER MOVE that the CEO:

- A. Immediately initiate the hiring process for the Bus Rapid Transit planning position included in the Board-approved MTA Fiscal Year 2014-15 budget
- B. Dedicate additional staff to the aforementioned projects and the Countywide BRT Study as needed

MOTION BY DIRECTORS ARA NAJARIAN, GARCETTI AND ANTONOVICH

Construction Committee

October 16, 2014

At the July 24, 2014 board meeting, the MTA board approved moving both the Vermont Avenue BRT and the North Hollywood to Pasadena BRT to the environmental phase in preparation and anticipation of future funding. Board Chair, Mayor Garcetti, amended the motion to direct that both BRT's should be MTA's top priority for federal small starts funds.

At the board staff briefing this week, MTA staff stated that a consultant was being procured only for the Vermont Avenue BRT, in direct contrast to the board's direction that both BRT projects move forward in tandem to be positioned for small starts funding. To support this motion,

WE THEREFORE MOVE that the consultant procurement for BRT advancement be amended to include the North Hollywood to Pasadena BRT.