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

File #: 2025-0044, **File Type:** Project **Agenda Number:** 9.

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
MARCH 19, 2025

SUBJECT: VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLANNING STUDY

ACTION: APPROVE RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION

CONSIDER:

A. RECEIVING AND FILING the Vermont Transit Corridor environmental study findings as per Senate Bill 922 Statutory Exemption requirements;

B. APPROVING the proposed Vermont Transit Corridor Project, a new 12.4-mile at-grade, side-running bus rapid transit (BRT) line with 26 stations at 13 intersection locations (Attachment A), as the Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA);

C. APPROVING the finding that the Project is statutorily exempt from CEQA under Section 21080.25(b); and

D. AUTHORIZING the Chief Executive Officer to file a CEQA Notice of Exemption (NOE) for the Project with the Los Angeles County Clerk and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research.

ISSUE

The Vermont corridor is the busiest bus transit corridor in Los Angeles County with approximately 38,000 weekday boardings and serves several communities heavily dependent on public transit providing connectivity to four Metro rail lines, several east-west bus routes, and major activity centers.

The Vermont Transit Corridor Project (Project) brings long-awaited improvements in travel time, service reliability, and customer experience along a 12.4-mile stretch of Vermont Avenue between

Sunset Boulevard and 120th Street (Attachment B).

The Vermont Transit Corridor is a Measure M Project with an anticipated opening date as early as 2028, in time for the 2028 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games in Los Angeles. Critical to meeting this schedule, a Project and a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) must be identified, and the environmental review complete. The Project is statutorily exempt under CEQA through SB 922 and staff seek Board approval of this finding.

BACKGROUND

In December 2013, Metro completed the Los Angeles County Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and Street Design Improvement Study identifying Vermont as one of the top candidate corridors for BRT. At that time, Vermont was the second busiest bus corridor with approximately 45,000 daily boardings. With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, systemwide ridership dropped significantly. However, the Vermont corridor today is the busiest bus corridor with 38,000 daily boardings, which are projected to increase to 66,000 by 2045.

The Vermont Transit Corridor has been under study for nearly a decade starting with the Vermont BRT Technical Study initiated in 2015 and completed in 2017. This was followed by the Vermont Transit Corridor Rail Conversion/Feasibility Study completed in 2019. Both studies examined potential BRT and rail alternatives for the corridor from Hollywood/Sunset Boulevards to 120th Street, where Metro's local and Rapid services on Vermont Avenue terminate and where Gardena Transit continues service. In June 2022, Metro implemented a community-based planning approach to engage with community partners and stakeholders to build a common vision for the corridor, listen to their transit needs and concerns, and incorporate their feedback into developing equitable mobility options for Vermont. Through the six months of extensive community outreach work with the CBOs, the community shared their desire for the following:

- Make immediate improvements to the existing bus service;
- Build a BRT line in the mid-term; and
- Deliver a rail project when funding becomes available longer-term.

As a result, in September 2022, the Board passed a motion (Attachment C) directing staff to advance a three-pronged strategy for immediate quick-build improvements, medium-term BRT, and long-term rail transit as funding becomes available. As part of the motion, the Board confirmed the limit of the transit improvements by directing staff to include an extension south of 120th Street in a list of Metro's future, strategic unfunded projects. Near-term improvements are being implemented through the Bus Speed and Reliability Program, which includes bus-only lanes in two areas of the Vermont corridor. To implement near-term improvements, existing and/or new extended weekday parking restrictions on Vermont Avenue between Sunset and Wilshire Boulevards will be implemented 7-10 a.m. and 3-7 p.m. Additionally, all-day bus-only lanes will be implemented between Gage Avenue and the Athens C Line Station. These improvements are underway, separate from the Vermont Transit Corridor Project, and are anticipated to be complete by Spring 2025.

In September 2023, the Board approved a contract award in support of developing a medium-term BRT, including consultant services for environmental clearance, design, and outreach. Work was initiated in November 2023 and included further evaluation of two initial bus lane configurations, end-to-end side-running bus lanes, and a combination side- and center-running bus lanes.

The 12.4-mile Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project features 26 stations at 13 locations (one on each side of the street) (Attachment A). The BRT Project extends from 120th Street (a discharge and layover

location), south of the Vermont/Athens Metro C Line Station, to Sunset Boulevard and a connection to the Vermont/Sunset Metro B Line Station in Hollywood. The study area encompasses several densely populated communities defined as Equity Focus Communities (EFCs) (Attachment D).

Most of the Study Area is within the City of Los Angeles and includes several communities, including East Hollywood/Los Feliz, University Park/Exposition Park, Koreatown, and South Los Angeles. Approximately 2.5 miles at the southern end (on the western side of Vermont Avenue only), the Study Area encompasses the West Athens and Westmont communities, which are in unincorporated Los Angeles County. These communities are among the most densely populated in the region and have a significantly higher percentage of transit-dependent residents. The corridor also features various cultural and institutional amenities as well as numerous major activity centers, including the University of Southern California (USC), BMO Stadium, the Exposition Park Museums, Kaiser Permanente Los Angeles Medical Center, Children's Hospital Los Angeles, and Los Angeles City College (LACC).

The Project seeks to enhance the existing north-south transit service for residents and businesses located west of the I-110 Harbor Freeway. Additionally, it aims to create opportunities for reinvestment in the communities along the corridor. The need for transit improvements along Vermont is highlighted through several key themes.

- **Growing Travel Market**: The high number of daily transit trips accessing or using the corridor is projected to increase over time from 38,000 daily riders today to 66,000 by 2045.

- **Deteriorating Traffic Conditions**: Segments of the corridor have constrained public rights-of-way, resulting in competition between modes, increased operating conflicts, inefficient movement of people, and decreased safety.

- **Degrading Transit Network Reliability**: Transit travel times, service quality, and service reliability are significantly impacted by traffic congestion in the corridor.
- **Inequitable Allocation of Resources**: The corridor has a disproportionately high number of transit-dependent riders. The entire corridor is within EFCs-resulting in disparate outcomes for those with the highest need when comparing service availability in corridors with a lower concentration of EFCs. Additionally, approximately one-third of the corridor's population resides within designated Federal Opportunity Zones.

- **Poor Safety and Customer Experience Conditions:** The poor condition or lack of transportation infrastructure (roadway, transit, bicycle, and pedestrian) near transit stops discourages riders. The Vermont Corridor is also on the City of Los Angeles' High Injury Network with more pedestrian incidents than any other street in LA over the last 10 years.

DISCUSSION

Project Goals

The goals and objectives for the Project are summarized as follows:

- Advance a premium transit service that is more competitive with private auto travel
- Improve transit access to major activity and employment centers
- Enhance connectivity to Metro and other regional transit services
- Provide improved passenger comfort and convenience
- Improved safety on the corridor

Stakeholder and Community Outreach

In addition to the community meetings required by SB 922, the Vermont Transit Corridor Project team has prioritized community engagement throughout Project development, achieving significant milestones and shaping its direction.

- **Cultural Needs and Equity Workshops** were conducted to ensure that the Project is responsive to the diverse communities along the corridor.

- **Station Design Workshops** provided a platform for residents and stakeholders to actively participate in shaping the design of future BRT stations. This collaborative approach ensured that station designs were functional, accessible, and integrated well with the surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Surveys** at key stops along Vermont Avenue and on Bus Lines 204 and 754 were completed with 371 transit riders who provided feedback on their experience and preferences for improvements along the corridor.

- **Ongoing Project updates** through various channels staff have kept the public informed about the Project's progress, critical decisions, and upcoming opportunities for engagement. This transparency has maintained community awareness and has reinforced its crucial role in shaping the future of the Vermont Transit Corridor. Engagement activities have included sharing information at 25 community events (5 CicLAvias, Leimert Park Jazz Festival, Honduran Business Fair, and several others), 22 briefings at key institutions, block clubs, and community groups located along Vermont Avenue, and presented to 22 neighborhood councils, block clubs, and community groups.

A robust Partnership Program was also implemented with 38 Community-, Community Development- or Faith-Based Organizations with deep roots in the corridor communities the Project will serve. The partnerships have allowed Metro to reach a wider audience and gain valuable insights from stakeholders who do not typically engage with Metro's planning processes, including reaching out to over 24,300 community members. Staff also conducted three rounds of community meetings as well as an additional five public meetings in early December 2024 to present the SB 922 analysis/reports and solicit comments. Attachment E includes a summary of the community engagement activities and comments received.

BRT Alternatives Considered

Based on the work done as part of the two earlier BRT studies in 2017 and 2019, two alternatives were brought forward as part of the Vermont Transit Corridor Planning and Environmental Study - an

all-day end-to-end side-running and an all-day combination side- and median-running BRT. Given the right-of-way constraints on Vermont Avenue, the majority (2/3) of the corridor north of Gage Avenue cannot physically accommodate median-running BRT and stations. After further analysis of the two alternatives and all the feedback received, the end-to-end side-running BRT alternative emerged as the best performing option. Additionally, 63% of those who commented preferred the side-running alternative well only 37% preferred the combination side- and median-running alternative.

The benefits of the end-to-end side-running BRT alternative outweigh the benefits of the combination side- and median-running BRT. Some of the advantages of the side-running alternative include:

- Preservation of more on-street parking (94%) versus the combination side and median-running alternative (77%), which was a key concern heard from the community and businesses;
- Shared bus lanes and BRT stations with local buses (Metro and DASH), thereby providing more BRT benefits to more riders;
- Access to stations from the sidewalk was preferred by the community as walking to/from stations in the middle of Vermont Avenue was perceived as being less safe from the perspective of user experience;
- Preservation of trees in the median valued by the community (total of 11 trees at two station locations);
- Extended pedestrian areas (bulb-outs) at stations enabling shorter crosswalks for improved pedestrian safety;
- Shorter construction schedule compared to the combination side and median-running alternative by at least 5 to 8 weeks; and
- Bus lanes that could continue to be used by buses when rail is eventually implemented.

Since the median-running BRT configuration is only feasible in about a two-mile segment south of Gage Avenue, only 3 of the 13 station locations could accommodate median stations (Century, Manchester, Florence). This is due to the additional right-of-way required for median-running bus lanes and stations resulting in additional time for demolition, median and street reconstruction, additional signal and utility conflict work, and some tree removal, resulting in a cost increase of $20 to $80 million. Because Metro's Line 204 and LADOT DASH need to make additional stops between Imperial and Gage Avenues, local buses would not be able to use the median-running bus lanes or stations.

Additionally, the overall travel time for the median-running bus lanes would be only 1-2 minutes less than the side-running bus lanes due to the relatively short section of the corridor that can accommodate median-running lanes and stations.

Recommended Project Description

The recommended Project would consist of 12.4 miles of all-day side-running dedicated bus lanes from 120th Street on the south to Sunset Boulevard on the north. This configuration allows 94% of the existing parking to remain, which is one of the most important assets to the community.

Dedicated bus lanes are one of the most crucial components of BRT. Combined with other BRT attributes such as transit signal priority, limited stops, frequent headways, all-door boarding, and enhanced stations, bus lanes significantly improve bus speeds and service reliability by allowing for more consistent travel times and enhancing the customer experience. Implementing these attributes ensures the BRT meets the Project goals and objectives and maintains its high performance over time even as traffic congestion worsens.

Additional Project features to be implemented at all 13 station locations include approximately 52 enhanced crosswalks to improve visibility and pedestrian safety, updated ADA-compliant curb ramps at 52 corners, and 26 bus bulb-outs. These bulb-outs will create larger pedestrian areas and reduce crosswalk distances. Additionally, bus bulb-outs will facilitate faster and more reliable bus operations by minimizing the time lost when buses merge in and out of bus or travel lanes.

Implementation of the Project is expected to result in travel times savings of 24% or 17 minutes end-to-end, as well as a 30% mile per hour improvement for buses. The Project is expected to increase corridor ridership from 38,000 daily boardings to approximately 66,000 daily boardings by 2045 due to more frequent service, faster travel speeds, and better reliability with dedicated bus lanes. The current on-time performance (OTP) of service on Vermont Avenue is approximately 70%. The goal is to improve OTP to at least 80% or better, and the bus-only lanes proposed in this project contribute to service reliability and on-time performance.

In March 2024, voters in the City of Los Angeles passed the Healthy Streets LA (HLA) initiative. HLA requires the City, when doing work on a city-owned street, to implement street enhancements described in its Mobility Plan 2035. Although the HLA ordinance does not specifically apply to Metro projects, the Vermont Transit Corridor Project helps achieve partial build-out of the Transit Enhanced Network (TEN) called for in the City of Los Angeles' Mobility Plan 2035. The Project also complements the City's goals of achieving a safer, more sustainable, and inclusive transportation network. Additionally, the Project and its associated street improvements do not preclude the City from implementing additional street improvements included in the Mobility Plan 2035.

A traffic analysis was conducted in 2024, in coordination with the City of Los Angeles, and estimated that approximately 25% of auto traffic on Vermont Avenue would divert to Hoover Street and Normandie Avenue, both of which have unused capacity that can accommodate the additional traffic. Another 15% of auto traffic on Vermont is expected to divert to other parallel major arterial streets outside of the study area (east of Hoover and west of Normandie). Consistent with the goals of the Mobility Plan 2035, the Project prioritizes transit in the corridor through the introduction of dedicated bus lanes with the expectation that auto traffic would adjust travel patterns as necessary. Staff also anticipate up to a 5% mode shift from single occupancy vehicles to transit.

Environmental Analysis and Findings

Metro is seeking a statutory exemption under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) through Senate Bill 922 (SB 922), which is codified as California Public Resources Code (PRC) 21080.25 (b). SB 922 exempts active transportation projects, including BRT projects, from CEQA requirements.

To support the case for the applicability of statutory exemption under SB922, Metro prepared three required analyses/reports: 1) Racial Equity Analysis; 2) Residential Displacement Analysis; and 3) Business Case Analysis. The SB 922 analyses are presented in the Vermont Transit Corridor Project Senate Bill 922 Reports: Racial Equity Analysis, Residential Displacement Analysis, and Business Case available on the Metro website at <https://www.metro.net/projects/vermont>.

Additionally, SB 922 requires that at least one public meeting be held to discuss each of the three reports, offering the public a chance to review and comment on them. The SB 922 documents were made available for review and comments at public libraries located on or near the corridor, as well as on the Metro website. The Metro project page noted the period to provide comments on the reports were November 22 to December 20, 2024. In early December, Metro hosted five (5) public meetings (Attachment F) throughout the corridor to not only present the report's findings but also to:

- Communicate details of the statutory exemption process so stakeholders are aware of the legal and environmental framework governing the Project
- Provide a comprehensive description of the Project's benefits and impact
- Allow the public to review the SB 922 documents

Approximately 80 comments were received at those meetings on the SB 922 reports. The sections below describe the three required analyses that were provided to the public about the impacts and benefits of the Project.

Racial Equity Analysis

The purpose of the Racial Equity Analysis is to examine the impacts of the Project on different racial communities. The analysis identified which communities might benefit or be burdened by the Project, as well as strategies to mitigate any disproportionate impacts. Overall, based on data collected on race and ethnicity, low-income households, and zero-car households of the Project Area, 91.2% of the census tracts in the Project Study Area are considered Metro Equity Focus Communities (EFCs).

The findings showed that the Project would be implemented in a corridor with a high percentage of individuals identifying as Black or African American, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). In Los Angeles County, the BIPOC population is 74.8%, while in the City of Los Angeles, it is 71.9%. In contrast, the percentage of BIPOC individuals in the Project Study Area is significantly higher, at 88.8%. Additionally, the analysis revealed that the Project Area contains 55.6% of low-income households and 20.4% of households with no access to a car.

These communities will benefit from the project as it would provide improvements to north-south transit services and thus improved access to jobs, education, and essential services along the corridor. The BRT will help alleviate the existing inequities such as slow bus speeds due to heavy traffic that affect those who rely on transit services, especially zero-car households. The project will also provide BRT stations with overhead bus canopies, passenger amenities, and clear signage in a heavily transit-dependent corridor.

The Vermont Transit Corridor Project would narrow the existing inequities by investing in a transit

system that supports a broad base of current and future users and reflects the needs of each distinct community by improving access, safety, and comfort. The Project would improve transit performance, enhance the experience for customers, invest in the community, and develop a cost-effective project.

Residential Displacement Analysis

The purpose of the Residential Displacement Analysis was to identify areas at risk and the potential for residential displacement and develop strategies to mitigate the potential risks. The Project Study Area has a high percentage of BIPOC populations, low-income households, and renter-occupied homes, including vulnerable communities that could be affected by residential displacement. Residential displacement can occur in two ways: physical (direct) displacement and economic (indirect) displacement. Physical displacement results from eviction, property acquisition, rehabilitation, demolition, or the expiration of covenants on rent- or income-restricted housing. The Project involves a BRT project located entirely within the Vermont public right-of-way and would not directly contribute to residential displacement during either the construction or operation phases**.**

Economic displacement is related to unaffordable escalating rents or property taxes as related to development activities and changes in land uses. Metro does not have jurisdiction over land use or other community development efforts. The Project would provide better transit connectivity in the Vermont Corridor, which may indirectly spur new economic development opportunities and interest in housing development near transit stations that may benefit the community and increase the overall housing supply in the area. Strategies to avoid potential indirect impacts focus on Metro coordination and partnerships with Los Angeles County, the City of Los Angeles, public agencies, private developers, and the community. These coordination efforts would include encouraging land use plans and policies that minimize residential displacement, potential opportunities on public land to support housing, and joint development opportunities on Metro-owned parcels that could be developed to serve BRT users.

Business Case Analysis

The purpose of the Business Case Analysis was to assess the Project's benefits, feasibility, costs, and overall impact of the investment. This analysis answers several key questions, including how the Project aligns with Metro's long-term goals, what the associated costs and benefits are, what the societal impacts might be, what the long-term financial implications are, and how the Project would be developed and implemented.

The Vermont Transit Corridor is currently the busiest bus corridor in the Metro system, with about 38,000 daily boardings. The selected Project would improve efficiency along the congested corridor and facilitate safe and accessible transport to major employment, social services, educational facilities, and regional activity centers. The Project supports the ambitions and goals from federal, state, and local governments, including transportation goals in Metro’s 2020 Long Range Transportation Plan. The Project objectives would meet these long-range goals by significantly improving service reliability and ridership, reducing passenger travel times, enhancing stations and passenger amenities, improving pedestrian/bicycle access and safety and security, and better access to key destinations. Additionally, this Project complements the City’s goals of achieving a safer, more

sustainable, and inclusive transportation network as outlined in their Mobility Plan 2035.

Other Project benefits include the creation of an estimated 1,000 construction jobs per year, increased road safety, cleaner air, and $5.40 in community benefits for every dollar spent. In addition, the Project is projected to save $18.99 million by replacing Metro Rapid Route 754 and reducing Metro Line 204 travel times, resulting in a net operation and maintenance cost increase of $8.54 million.

CEQA Determination

Metro staff have identified that the Project qualifies for statutory exemption under SB 922. The Project improvements fall within the exemptions described in Section 21080.25(b) as noted below.

- Introduction of a new premium BRT service on Vermont Avenue, an existing public right-of-way (Section 21080.25(b)(5))
- New all-day bus lanes on 12.4 miles of Vermont Avenue from 120th Street to Sunset Boulevard (Section 21080.25(b)(4))
- An increase in weekday headways from 10 to 5 minutes throughout most of the day (Section 21080.25(b)(5))
- The implementation of transit signal priority and all-door boarding (Section 21080.25(b)(3))
- The addition of 26 enhanced stations and passenger amenities at 13 station locations, including real-time next-bus information (Section 21080.25(b)(5))
- The addition of bus bulbs at the 13 station locations to reduce bus stop delays and increase space for bus stop amenities and pedestrians (Section 21080.25(b)(5))
- The use of zero-emission, battery-electric buses (Section 21080.25(b)(5) and (6))

Given the above, the Project meets the definition of a statutory exempt project and is consistent with SB 922's intent to accelerate sustainable transportation projects by providing an exemption from CEQA for a targeted set of sustainable transit projects, “active transportation” (walking and biking), and projects that expand sustainable mobility.

DETERMINATION OF SAFETY IMPACT

Approval of this item and eventual completion of the Project will enhance safety by introducing dedicated bus lanes and bus bulbs. These improvements will reduce potential conflicts caused by buses weaving in and out of traffic. Additionally, bus bulbs will improve pedestrian safety by providing larger waiting areas and shortening crossing distances at station locations. The Project will also feature improved crosswalks for increased visibility of pedestrians and enhanced lighting at stations to boost safety and security for our customers. The Project will not compromise the safety of Metro’s customers or employees.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The FY 2025 budget includes $15M in Cost Center 4240 (Mobility Corridors Team 4), Project 471402 (Vermont Transit Corridor Project). Since this is a multiyear contract, the Cost Center Manager and Chief Planning Officer will be responsible for budgeting in future years for the balance of the

remaining Project budget.

Impact to Budget

The funding source for the Vermont Transit Corridor Project is Measure M 35% Transit Construction. As these funds are earmarked for the Vermont Transit Corridor project, they are not eligible for Metro bus and rail capital and operating expenditures.

The preliminary cost estimate for the Project is $393 million (year of expenditure) based on the 15% design developed for the end-to-end side-running configuration. Program Management will conduct an independent bottoms-up cost estimate during the Preliminary Engineering phase. The Measure M Expenditure Plan includes $25 million in Measure M funds. The remaining $400 million is anticipated to come from other local, state and federal sources. Staff are currently exploring opportunities for both state and federal funding opportunities, including a federal Small Starts Grant as directed by Motion 51 by Directors Dupont-Walker, Najarian, Mitchell, Solis, and Butts (Attachment C).

EQUITY PLATFORM

The Vermont Transit Corridor Planning and Environmental Review contract was awarded in October 2023, with a significant Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) goal of 41.16%. The Vermont Transit Corridor will provide new benefits of enhanced mobility and improved regional access and connectivity in a corridor with a high percentage of individuals identifying as Black or African American, Indigenous, or People of Color (BIPOC). In Los Angeles County, the BIPOC population is 74.8%, while in the City of Los Angeles, it is 71.9%. In contrast, the percentage of BIPOC individuals in the Project Study Area is significantly higher, at 88.8%. Additionally, the Project Area contains 55.6% of low-income households and 20.4% households do not have access to a car.

The Project will also help support transit-oriented communities' policies, improve safety, support first/last-mile connections, and invest in disadvantaged communities. The Vermont Transit Corridor is located almost entirely within (98%) Equity Focus Communities (EFCs). Throughout the planning and environmental review of this project, advancing transit equity was a critical part of setting up project objectives in evaluating alternatives, developing design elements, and engaging the community and stakeholders. In addition, Metro partnered with 38 CBOs/FBOs to support this work and advance equity in alignment with Metro's CBO Partnering Strategy. These partnerships were valuable in allowing Metro to reach a wider audience and gain valuable insights from stakeholders who may or may not typically engage with Metro's planning processes, resulting in a project that will reduce travel times by 24% (17 minutes end-to-end) and improve access to key destinations along the corridor. This partnership also resulted in the development of a recommended and/or preferred BRT alternative.

VEHICLE MILES TRAVELED OUTCOME

VMT and VMT per capita in Los Angeles County are lower than national averages, the lowest in the SCAG region, and on the lower end of VMT per capita statewide, with these declining VMT trends due in part to Metro's significant investment in rail and bus transit.* Metro's Board-adopted VMT reduction targets align with California's statewide climate goals, including achieving carbon neutrality

by 2045. To ensure continued progress, all Board items are assessed for their potential impact on VMT.

As part of these ongoing efforts, the Vermont Transit Corridor Project is expected to contribute to further reductions in VMT as it includes the implementation of a high-quality Bus Rapid Transit alternative along Vermont Avenue. This BRT service will enhance transit along the corridor by shortening passenger travel times and increasing service reliability and efficiency. This project is expected to encourage a shift from single-occupancy vehicles to public transit. Additionally, it will enhance access for cyclists and pedestrians to/from the stations.

To help characterize the VMT effects of the Project and provide a basis for comparing Project scenarios, the travel demand model estimated the Project's VMT benefit by multiplying the number of person-trips shifted from automobiles to transit because of the Project (as forecasted by the CBM18 B model [Metro, 2019b]) by the associated station-to-station (or comparable zone-to-zone) trip distances. The estimated user benefit is a savings of about 85,000 VMT resulting in the removal of 37 metric tons of CO2 daily due to the implementation of the Project. A dedicated BRT lane can move 3 times the number of people per hour than a mixed traffic lane. This analysis was conducted as part of the Vermont Transit Corridor Planning and Environmental Study and aligns with the State statuary goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing multimodal transportation networks.

*Based on population estimates from the United States Census and VMT estimates from the highway performance monitoring system data between 2001-2019.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

This Project will support the goals of the strategic plan by enhancing communities and lives through improved mobility and access to opportunities through the addition of a new high-quality mobility option, closing a gap in the transit network, and providing outstanding trip experiences.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The Board could consider not approving the Project/Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) nor concur that the Project should be exempt under SB 922. This option is not recommended as this would be contrary to the analysis conducted by staff and the community input received over the last year. The Board could also consider approving a combination side and median-running alignment. This option is also not recommended as it would result in a higher project cost, longer construction time, additional loss of on-street parking, and would not allow the local bus services to benefit from the BRT bus lanes and stations. This Project will provide long overdue benefits of enhanced mobility and improved regional access for transit-dependent and minority and/or low-income populations within the study area. Board approval of the Project and Locally Preferred Alternative does not preclude future extension of services beyond 120th Street to El Segundo Street.

NEXT STEPS

Upon Board approval, staff will file a CEQA Notice of Exemption (NOE) for the Project with the Los

Angeles County Clerk and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research. Staff will also continue design work to 30% and continue coordination with the Federal Transit Administration on environmental clearance under the National Environmental Policy Act, which is anticipated to be complete by Summer 2025. Metro staff will continue to partner and work with the City of Los Angeles on any needed agreements in support of a timely construction schedule to meet the 2028 timeline. Additionally, staff will evaluate the potential extension of Metro and/or Gardena transit service on Vermont Avenue south of 120th Street to El Segundo Boulevard in response to some comments received.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Map of Proposed Project with Station Locations
Attachment B - Map of Vermont Transit Corridor
Attachment C - September 2022 Board Motion
Attachment D - Map of Vermont Corridor EFCs
Attachment E - Community Engagement Activities
Attachment F - December 2024 Public Meeting Details

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ATTACHMENT A

MAP OF PROPOSED PROJECT WITH STATION LOCATIONS

ATTACHMENT B

MAP OF VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR

ATTACHMENT C

SEPTEMBER 2022 BOARD MOTION

Metro

Board Report

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

File #: 2022-0676, **File Type:** Motion / Motion Response **Agenda Number:** 51.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING
SEPTEMBER 22, 2022

Motion by:

DIRECTORS DUPONT-WALKER, NAJARIAN, MITCHELL, SOLIS, AND BUTTS

Vermont Transit Corridor Motion

Vermont Avenue is a principal transit corridor in Southern California that will benefit immensely from Metro investments.

Vermont Avenue is the second-busiest transit corridor in Southern California after Wilshire Blvd. According to Metro ridership data, Vermont currently carries more transit trips than any of Metro's rail and BRT lines except the A Line (Blue) and B Line (Red).

Likewise, the neighborhoods along Vermont contain some of the most densely populated, diverse, and highest transit-dependent communities in the region, many of which have a legacy of severe historical underinvestment. Race and class have had a glaring involvement. Nine out of ten riders on lines 204 and 754 identify as black, indigenous, and people of color. Additionally, over 60% of these riders live below the poverty line and 84% do not have access to a car. With that makeup, intentional action supporting safe, reliable service along Vermont could represent a dramatic shift toward equity for these communities.

With this existing high ridership and high need, Vermont will benefit from new investment more than any other existing transit corridor in the Metro system. Metro buses on Vermont travel at just 10 miles per hour and have an on-time performance of about 70 percent, highlighting the need for improvements.

To address these needs, the Metro included the Vermont Transit Corridor in the Measure M Expenditure Plan. Following studies to identify technically feasible bus and rail alternatives, Metro recently completed an innovative Community-Based Partnership Program engagement effort. Across

all engagement methods, feedback from the entire Vermont corridor showed clear support for short-, medium-, and long-term improvements.

Accordingly, Metro plans to advance the Vermont Transit Corridor through a three-pronged approach:

- Short-term: quick-build improvements, including new bus shelters, more bus service, and bus-only lanes
- Medium-term: a full BRT corridor project
- Long-term: a rail project to be delivered as funding becomes available

This smart approach balances tangible bus improvements with future plans for rail. Additionally, this approach also prevents the Board from being forced to select one mode at the conclusion of a single project development process.

Historically, Vermont was the second priority for rail transit investment after Wilshire. Rapid Transit along the Vermont Corridor has been part of Southern California transit master plans since the mid-1970s, including part of a proposed 1976 rail “Starter Line.” After Rapid Transit service north of Wilshire was realized in the 1990s, Metro continued to evaluate Vermont south. In the lead-up to Measure R and the 2009 Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Metro found that rail on Vermont would have more boardings than any other then-unfunded rail corridor except Wilshire. Consequently, Metro included Vermont rail in the 2009 LRTP’s Strategic Unfunded project list. This high performance was further reinforced by the initial Vermont Transit Corridor studies in the 2010s.

The Board should act now to reaffirm this three-pronged strategy and take steps to ensure that rail remains a longer-term priority, even as Metro aggressively advances bus improvements.

SUBJECT: VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR MOTION

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE Motion by Directors Dupont-Walker, Najarian, Mitchell, Solis, and Butts that the Board direct the CEO to:

A. Advance the Vermont Transit Corridor with a three-pronged strategy, completing immediate-term quick-build improvements as soon as is practicable, a medium-term BRT project opening for revenue service no later than FY27, and a longer-term rail transit project thereafter;

B. Evaluate the medium-term BRT project for a federal Small Starts application;

C. Of the $425 million included for the Vermont Transit Corridor in the Measure M Expenditure Plan (line item 17; 2015$), reserve no less than ten percent for the development of the long-term rail transit project. If it ever becomes necessary for Metro to recommend this funding for a shortfall on the Vermont BRT project, Metro will work with the subregion to identify replacement funds that ensure the rail transit project continues to meaningfully advance;

D. Identify a strategy to make the Vermont rail project shovel-ready consistent with voter- and Board-adopted Measure M project sequencing or acceleration priorities (Measure M Project Evaluation Readiness Tool). Without affecting existing voter- and Board-adopted project sequencing or acceleration priorities (except as allowed by the Measure M decennial process), make the Vermont rail project a first priority for any future new capital funding;

E. Explore new opportunities to optimize bus service offered by municipal operators on the Vermont corridor, including evaluation of overlapping and connecting lines and schedule coordination to allow for seamless timed transfers; and

F. Include an extension south of 120th Street in Metro’s forthcoming list of future strategic unfunded projects, building off of the recently-completed Vermont Transit Corridor South Bay Extension Feasibility Study.

ATTACHMENT D

MAP OF VERMONT CORRIDOR EFCs

ATTACHMENT E

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR

Community Outreach
Executive Summary

The Vermont Transit Corridor (VTC) is a 12.4-mile stretch where community collaboration is essential to shaping the future of transportation. Metro has prioritized a robust community engagement process centered on understanding residents' needs and ensuring their voices are heard. Metro provides ample opportunities for residents to share their input on Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) and rail alternatives through various channels.

Metro has woven community engagement into the fabric of the project's development. Since 2021, Metro has implemented an extensive outreach program to inform and involve local communities. This commitment is not merely a box to be checked but a fundamental principle guiding every step of the journey.

*As of February 2025, the VTC project has actively engaged over **24,300 individuals** through various community engagement activities.*

Public Meetings & Workshops

- Eighteen public meetings, including three Cultural Needs Assessment workshops in February 2024 and seven Urban Design Workshops (May–June 2024), involving over 1,621 participants and 900 feedback responses.

CBO Partnership Program

- Collaborations with 38 hyper-local Community-Based, Community-Based Development and Faith-Based Organizations to expand outreach, gather insights, and build trust with communities along the corridor.

Elected Official and Stakeholder Briefings

- Engagements with City Council Districts 1, 8, 9, 10, 13, and 15, local institutions, business associations, and advocacy groups.

Project Updates

- Regular communication through canvassing, community meetings, newsletters, website updates, social media, and email notifications.

Background

In April 2019, the Metro Board directed its staff to advance both BRT and rail concepts into the environmental review.

At the same time, the Board directed staff to study the feasibility of extending these BRT and/or rail concepts further south—evaluated separately as the Vermont Transit Corridor South Bay Extension Feasibility Study, which was completed in December 2021.

Prior to the Vermont Transit Corridor Project moving into the environmental review process, Metro conducted a pre-environmental, community-based planning effort aligned with the agency's Equity Platform Framework that has successfully elevated the voices of stakeholders who live, work, play, study, and/or worship along Vermont Av. The purpose of the community-based planning approach is to engage with community partners and stakeholders early to build a common vision for the corridor, listen to their transit needs and concerns, and incorporate their feedback into the development of an equitable transit solution for the corridor.

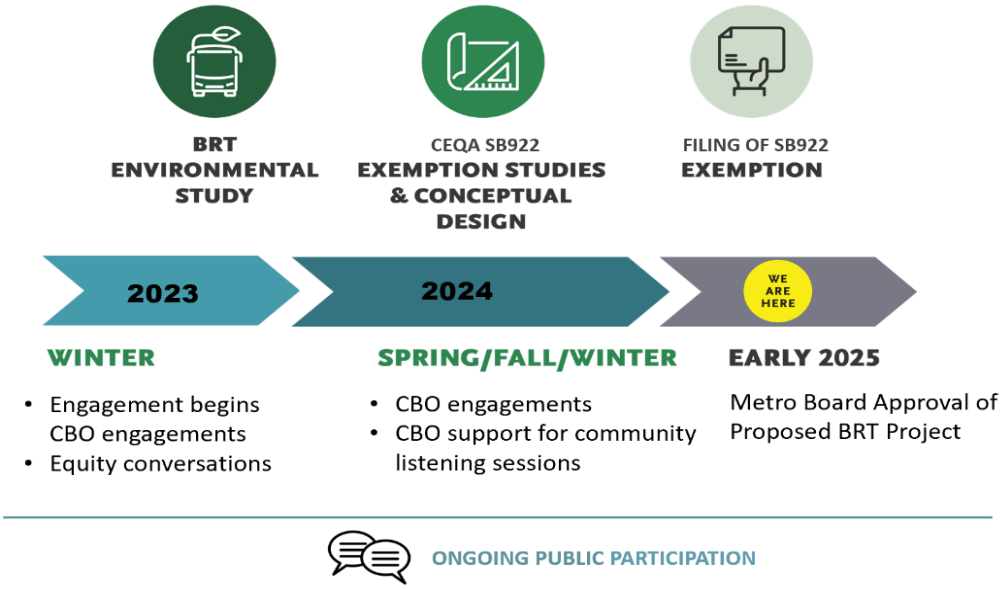
Over a seven-month period, from December 2021 to June 2022, Metro partnered with community-based organizations, faith-based groups, and local neighborhood groups to solicit feedback about the types of improvements that should be planned for the Vermont Transit Corridor (VTC) Project.

Project Area

The 12.4-mile-long corridor traverses six Los Angeles City Council Districts, two Supervisorial Districts, 14 neighborhood councils, and many key educational, cultural, medical, social, and faith-based centers. The various communities that make up the VTC include, but are not limited to, East Hollywood, Thai Town, Little Armenia, Little Bangladesh, Wilshire Center, Koreatown, West Adams, USC Village, Expo Park, Vermont Square, Vermont Knolls, Vermont Vista, Broadway-Manchester, and Westmont-Athens.

All corridor-wide communities are considered Equity-Focused Communities given their socioeconomic characteristics: More than 40% of households are low-income (making less than $35,000 annually), 80% are non-white, and 10% do not have access to a vehicle.

Project Timeline



Engagement Approach

As an agency, Metro ensures people can safely and reliably reach everyday destinations, such as jobs, schools, healthy food outlets, and healthcare facilities. For Los Angeles County as a whole, but specifically for the Vermont Transit Corridor, public transportation services play an essential role for people who depend on it – such as those who are unable to drive or do not have access to personal vehicles; low-income adults; children; individuals with different abilities; older adults, among other populations.

Outreach was conducted in Armenian, English, Korean, Spanish, and Thai to ensure all groups participated. In addition, the team connected with stakeholders who spoke Russian, Bangladeshi, and Zapotec (an Indigenous dialect from the southern part of Mexico).

Transit investment along the Vermont corridor is a critical equity issue because improvements will provide people with faster, more reliable mobility options and improve access to employment, community resources, medical care, and recreational opportunities, which in turn will drastically improve the quality of life for area stakeholders.

Community-Based Organization Partnership Program

The CBO Partnership program is based on Metro's CBO Partnering Strategy, written and adopted by the Metro Board of Directors in 2021. It plays a vital role in ensuring the VTC project is responsive to the needs and priorities of the diverse communities it serves.

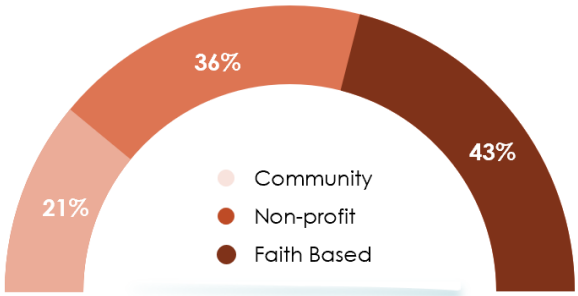
A key aspect of the engagement approach was implementing a CBO partnership program providing stakeholders various opportunities to engage with Metro.

The program currently partners with 38 Community and Faith-Based organizations with deep roots in the corridor communities the project will serve. These organizations vary in size and scope, ranging from large, established institutions to grassroots community groups.

Partnering with them allows Metro to:

- Reach a wider audience: CBOs can help disseminate information about the project and encourage participation in engagement activities, especially among hard-to-reach populations and stakeholders who traditionally do not participate in the public involvement process with public agencies.
- Gain valuable insights: CBOs can provide helpful feedback on the project's potential impacts and help identify solutions that address specific community concerns.
- Build trust: Working with trusted community partners helps foster a sense of collaboration and ensures that the project is responsive to local needs.

CBO Partners by Service Category



CBO Partners by Study Area Segment

North	Central	South
12	15	11

Cultural Needs Assessment and Equity Assessments

To ensure residents had a voice in shaping the future of Vermont Av, Metro hosted a series of three (3) workshops in February 2024, spread strategically across the corridor, and specifically targeted community and thought leaders from various parts of the corridor. These workshops aimed at:

- Identify and Prioritize Key Assets: Participants helped refine the project's cultural and historical assets list, highlighting those most important to the community.
- Improve Transit Service: Discussions focused on current transit service and proposed BRT stations, ensuring they effectively serve residents and commuters.
- Enhance Community Spaces: Breakout sessions allowed for detailed feedback on study area maps, identifying key community places, landmarks, and pedestrian areas that need improvement.

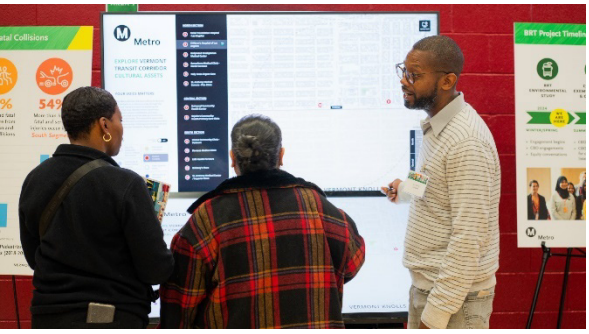
Metro conducted thorough assessments to understand each community's unique transportation challenges and priorities along the corridor. These assessments considered income levels, vehicle access, spoken languages, and cultural preferences.

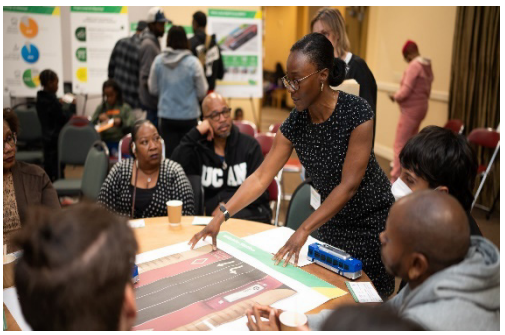
Station Design Workshops

Metro held a series of interactive workshops in May and June 2024 to ensure that future BRT stations along the Vermont corridor genuinely reflect the needs and character of the communities they serve. These workshops, attended by over 700 participants, provided a platform for community members to participate, ensuring that station designs were functional, accessible, and integrated well with the surrounding neighborhoods.

Key Focus Areas:

- Station Location: Participants provided input on the optimal placement of stations within their neighborhoods.
- Accessibility: Discussions centered on incorporating features like ramps, elevators, and tactile paving to ensure accessibility for all riders.
- Amenities: Community members shared their preferences for amenities such as seating, shelter from weather elements, real-time information displays, and public art.
- Neighborhood Integration: The workshops explored ways to seamlessly integrate stations with the surrounding neighborhood, including pedestrian walkways, bike paths, and community gathering spaces.





Project Update Meetings

Transparency and community involvement were fundamental priorities throughout the project. Metro conducted seven meetings in March and October 2024 to update community members and stakeholders on the project update, next steps, and anticipated timeline.

Key topics included pedestrian safety, station access, design options for the median parkway, and desired BRT amenities.

Senate Bill 922 Mandated Public Meetings

In December 2024, Metro held public meetings, which provided the opportunity for community engagement and a public comment period. In addition, Metro presented the three required reports under SB 922: 1) Racial Analysis 2) Residential Displacement 3) Business Case.

Metro offered in-person and virtual options to accommodate diverse schedules and preferences. It also held an open-house format where participants could learn about the project and engage with staff at information booths.

The meetings aimed to provide comprehensive information about the project and gather feedback on key aspects, including:

- Project plans and design
- Construction schedule and impacts
- Mitigation measures
- Community benefits

This multi-faceted approach ensured all stakeholders could engage with the project and provide valuable input.

Elected Official and Stakeholder Briefings

Regular briefings have been held with elected officials' staff members at the city, state, and federal levels to provide them with the overall project plans. These briefings have been essential throughout the project's lifecycle to seek guidance and gather input from our elected officials, who represent many of the communities and business owners along the corridor.

Key institutions and stakeholders along the corridor are also briefed to inform their representatives of the project schedule, plans, and invitations to upcoming project update meetings.

Transit Rider Survey

The transit rider intercept surveys were vital to the Vermont Transit Corridor's near-term improvement engagement initiative. These surveys gathered valuable data on rider experiences and satisfaction with the implemented changes. Metro surveyed 371 transit riders at key stops along Vermont Av and on Bus lines 204 and 754 to understand their experiences and preferences. The surveys were conducted in multiple languages during on- and off-peak times.

Metro implemented the following methodology:

- Onboard surveys: Distributing surveys on buses to gather feedback on travel times, service frequency, comfort, and amenities.
- Intercept surveys: Conduct surveys at bus stops and stations to gather information about rider demographics, trip purposes, and satisfaction with existing service.
- Online surveys: Using online platforms to reach a broader audience and gather feedback on proposed improvements and design options.

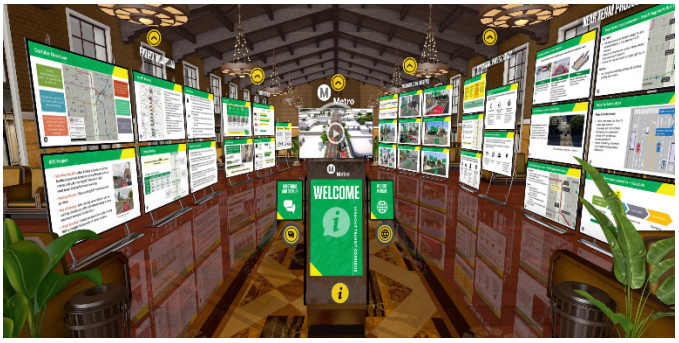
Canvassing Program

Canvassers educated small business owners, residents, transit riders, and street vendors about the project, invited them to attend upcoming meetings, and allowed stakeholders to share their opinions.

Since December 2023, Metro canvassed on 15 different occasions along the corridor during various hours on weekdays and weekends to ensure different groups of people were engaged. Canvassers engaged over 1,286 people in Armenian, English, Kiche, Korean, Spanish, **Thai, and Zapotec.**

Ongoing Communication Methods

Metro has employed various communication channels to keep the public informed and engaged throughout the project's lifecycle. These channels include newsletters, project websites, social media, direct contact, email notifications, and interactive platforms, including virtual reality, simulation videos, and virtual environments to share project information. These channels ensure stakeholders have multiple avenues to access information and participate in developing the Vermont Transit Corridor Project.

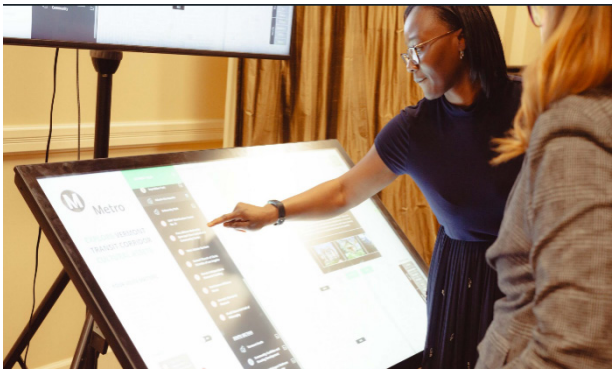


Virtual Open House for March and December Meetings

Community member experiencing a VR tour of Vermont Av

Community member participating in an interactive activity

Interactive Cultural Asst Map of the Vermont Transit Corridor



ATTACHMENT F

DECEMBER 2024 PUBLIC MEETING DETAILS

Meeting	Date/Time	Location/Address
Community Meeting #1 Central Subarea	Saturday, December 7, 2024 10:00 AM-11:30 AM	Masjid Umar Ibn Al-Khattab 1025 Exposition Blvd Los Angeles, CA 90007
Community Meeting #2 South Subarea	Monday, December 9, 2024 6:00 PM-7:30 PM	Crenshaw Christian Center 7901 S Vermont Ave Los Angeles, CA 90044
Community Meeting #3 Virtual	Wednesday, December 11, 2024 12:00 PM-1:00 PM	Zoom Webinar
Community Meeting #4 North Subarea	Wednesday, December 11, 2024 6:00 PM-7:30 PM	Los Angeles City College 700 N. Heliotrope Drive Los Angeles
Community Meeting #5 Virtual	Monday, December 16, 2024 6:00 PM-7:30 PM	Zoom Webinar

We're planning a new way to ride on Vermont.

Planning & Programming Committee

VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR

Legistar File 2025-0044

March 19, 2025

Metro

Recommendation

CONSIDER:

A. RECEIVING AND FILING the Vermont Transit Corridor environmental study findings as per Senate Bill 922 Statutory Exemption requirements;

B. APPROVING the proposed Measure M Vermont Transit Corridor Project (a new 12.4-mile at-grade, side-running bus rapid transit (BRT) line with twenty-six (26) stations at thirteen (13) intersection locations);

C. APPROVING the finding that the Project is statutorily exempt from CEQA under Section 21080.25(b); and

D. AUTHORIZING the CEO to file a CEQA Notice of Exemption (NOE) for the Project with the Los Angeles County Clerk and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research

SB 922

- Metro is seeking a statutory exemption under CEQA through Senate Bill 922 (SB 922)
- SB 922 exempts active transportation projects, including BRT projects, from CEQA requirements
- To support the case for the statutory exemption under SB 922, Metro prepared the three (3) required analyses/reports:
  - Racial Equity Analysis
  - Residential Displacement Analysis
  - Business Case Analysis
- December 2024 - Metro held five (5) public meetings to present the findings of each report and solicit public comment

BRT Alternatives Studied

- November 2023 - staff initiated environmental clearance, design, and outreach including further study of two alternatives identified in earlier BRT feasibility studies on Vermont
  - An all-day end-to-end side running alternative
  - A combination side and median-running BRT
- Based on all public comments received over the last year and after further technical analysis of the two alternatives, staff is recommending an end-to-end, side-running BRT
- Some benefits of side-running bus lanes include:
  - Preserves more on-street parking (94%)
  - Local buses (Metro line 204 and Dash services) can use the bus lanes and stations providing more BRT benefits to more riders
  - Access to stations perceived by community as safer
  - Preserves trees valued by the community in center medians
  - Bulb-outs at stations increase pedestrian space and shorten crossing distances for pedestrian safety

Visual Simulation

Project Description

- Converts rightmost travel lanes to bus-only lanes
- Includes 12.4 miles of all-day dedicated side-running bus lanes from Sunset Bl to 120th St
- Includes 26 enhanced stations at 13 locations, with enhanced shelters and passenger amenities
- Other station area improvements include enhanced crosswalks and ADA-compliant curb ramps
- Bus bulbs at stations extend pedestrian area and shorten crossings for improved safety
- Restriping and/or bus lane pavement repair
- Other safety/security improvements include enhanced lighting and potential emergency call buttons/security cameras

Next Steps

- Upon Board Approval, staff will:
  - File a CEQA NOE for the Project with LA County Clerk's office and the Governor's Office of Planning and Research
  - Continue Preliminary Engineering (PE) 30% design work
  - Continue coordination with FTA on environmental clearance under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
  - Continue to work with the City of Los Angeles on any needed agreements in support of a timely construction schedule to meet the 2028 timeline
- Additionally, staff will evaluate the potential extension of transit service south of 120th Street to El Segundo Bl in the nearer term