



Metro

Los Angeles County
Metropolitan Transportation Authority

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NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

DATE: September 23, 2009
TO: Agencies, Organizations, and Interested Parties
SUBJECT: Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report
PROJECT TITLE: Wilshire Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) is the lead agency in the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The City of Los Angeles and County of Los Angeles are the responsible agencies as they have discretionary approval power over the project. The EIR's purpose is to evaluate the social, economic, and environmental issues associated with the proposed improvements included in the Wilshire BRT Project within the Wilshire Boulevard Corridor. In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), an Environmental Assessment (EA) will be prepared as a joint document with the EIR. The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is the lead agency for the EA.

The purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to notify agencies, organizations, and individuals that Metro plans to prepare a Draft EIR (DEIR) and to request input on the environmental analysis to be performed. From public agencies, we are requesting comments on the scope and content of the environmental information, which is germane to each agency's statutory responsibilities with regard to the proposed project. We are also requesting interested individuals' or organizations' views on the scope of the environmental document.

PROJECT HISTORY: In November 2008, four community meetings were conducted by Metro and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) to present the proposed project to the community. During those meetings, the community was informed of the preparation of a joint document, consisting of an Initial Study/Environmental Assessment (IS/EA) to meet State and Federal environmental requirements. Since that time, Metro and LADOT have been preparing technical studies to assess the feasibility of implementing the proposed project. Upon further evaluation, it has been determined that the proposed project could potentially have some significant impacts that were not originally anticipated. Consequently, an EIR is now the appropriate document for the proposed project.

PROJECT LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SETTING: The project is along a corridor of Wilshire Boulevard between Valencia Street to the east (west of the I-110 Freeway) and Centinela Avenue to the west, excluding the portion of Wilshire Boulevard within the City of Beverly Hills. A majority of the project falls within the mid-western area of the City of Los Angeles and includes 9.6 miles of peak period curbside bus lanes. A small portion of the project, between Sepulveda Boulevard and Federal Avenue (approximately 0.6 mile), near the Veterans Administration facilities, is within Los Angeles County jurisdiction. The Wilshire corridor is a densely populated, highly developed inner urban region with extensive commercial and nearby residential uses. Regional access to the Wilshire corridor is provided by a large number of intersecting streets, including Alvarado Street, Hoover Street, Vermont Avenue, Western Avenue, Crenshaw Boulevard, Highland Avenue, La Brea Avenue, Fairfax Avenue, San Vicente Boulevard, La Cienega Boulevard, Robertson Boulevard, Santa Monica Boulevard, Beverly Glen Boulevard, Westwood Boulevard, Sepulveda Boulevard, the San Diego Freeway (Interstate 405), Barrington Avenue, Bundy Avenue, and Centinela Avenue.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROJECT: Wilshire Boulevard is the most heavily used bus corridor in the County of Los Angeles, with approximately 93,000 transit boardings taking place along the corridor each weekday. In addition to being the most heavily used transit corridor in the County, Wilshire Boulevard has the distinction of having some of the highest average daily traffic (ADT) volumes in the City of Los Angeles. Approximately 110,000 automobiles pass through the intersections of Westwood Boulevard, Gayley Avenue, and Veteran Avenue each weekday in the Westwood area. While ADT volumes are lower along the eastern portion of the project area (e.g., the ADT volume at Fairfax Avenue is 62,000), the corridor's average ADT volume is estimated at 80,000. With increasing ADT volumes on Wilshire Boulevard, demands for viable alternatives to the automobile have increased as congestion continues to slow automobile travel. This same congestion also slows buses, increasing travel time, and reducing schedule reliability for transit customers, while increasing operating costs for Metro. Average bus speeds, along with automobile speeds, have declined steadily over the past 20 years. The Wilshire BRT Project is intended to improve bus passenger travel times, service reliability, and ridership of the existing Wilshire BRT system, and encourage a shift from automobile use to public transit.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION: A number of general improvements are required as part of the proposed project. These general improvements include restriping of traffic lanes, as necessary; conversion of existing curb lanes to peak period bus lanes in each direction; upgrade of the existing transit signal priority system; street widening and/or street reconstruction in select areas; and installation of traffic/transit signage and pavement markings, as necessary. Most of the existing curb lanes in the City of Los Angeles would be "converted" to bus and right-turn only operation in the peak periods (7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.) on weekdays. In these segments, the curb lanes would be repaired or reconstructed, where necessary, and restriped and signed as peak period bus lanes. In other areas, curbside bus lanes would be added as new lanes to Wilshire Boulevard by widening and restriping. Upgrades to the transit signal priority system would also be implemented, including the following: (1) addition of bus signal priority at intersections with near-side bus stops (a recently developed and successfully tested concept), (2) increase in the maximum available time for transit signal priority from 10 percent to 15 percent of the traffic signal cycle at minor intersections, and (3) reduction in the number of traffic signal recovery cycles from two to one at key intersections along the corridor. The Los Angeles County project components include the extension of the eastbound left turn pocket at Sepulveda Boulevard and street widening and restriping between Federal Avenue and Bonsall Avenue to add an eastbound peak period bus lane.

PROBABLE ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS: The following topics will be included for evaluation in the EIR/EA: Air Quality, Cultural Resources, Land Use, Noise, Transportation/Circulation, and Growth-Inducing Impacts.

ALTERNATIVES: In addition to the proposed project, four alternatives, including the No Project Alternative and three build alternatives, will be identified in the EIR. One of the three build alternatives will be studied at the same level of detail as the proposed project. This build alternative would be similar to the proposed project with the following exceptions: (1) the alignment would extend from S. Park View Street on the east to Centinela Avenue on the west (excluding the City of Beverly Hills) and include only 8.87 miles of peak period curbside bus lanes; (2) the existing "jut-outs" on the north and south sides of Wilshire Boulevard between Comstock Avenue and Malcolm Avenue would be retained, and the existing curbside traffic lane would be converted to a bus lane in each direction; and (3) the portion of Wilshire Boulevard between Sepulveda Boulevard and just west of Gayley Avenue would be excluded from the project to avoid potential conflicts with the I-405 on-/off-ramp traffic.

SCOPING MEETINGS: Four public scoping meetings will be held for the project. Information regarding the Wilshire BRT project presented at these meetings will be identical.

Monday, October 5, 2009 6:00 p.m.
Felicia Mahood Center
11338 Santa Monica Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90025

Thursday, October 8, 2009, 6:00 p.m.
Westwood Presbyterian Church
10822 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90024

Wednesday, October 7, 2009, 6:00 p.m.
Wilshire United Methodist Church
4350 Wilshire Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90010

Tuesday, October 13, 2009, 6:00 p.m.
Good Samaritan Hospital
Moseley-Salvatori Conference Room
637 Lucas Avenue
Los Angeles, CA 90017

AGENCY RESPONSE TO THIS NOP: Written responses and comments will be accepted until October 23, 2009. Please send written comments to Martha Butler, Project Manager, Metro, One Gateway Plaza, Los Angeles, CA 90012. Your comments may also be sent by email to wilshirebrt@metro.net (Please include the name of the project in the subject heading.). Or you may call the Wilshire BRT Project hotline number at (213) 922-2500 and leave a message.

