



REGION 9

SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94105

March 29, 2024

Michael Cano, Executive Officer
Countywide Planning and Development
LA Metro
One Gateway Plaza, MS 99-13-1
Los Angeles, California 90012

Subject: US EPA Comments on the Long Beach-East Los Angeles Corridor Mobility Investment Plan

Dear Michael Cano:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the Long Beach-East Los Angeles Corridor Mobility Investment Plan (CMIP), an effort established following the halt of the continued consideration of Alternative 5C that was a part of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement analysis for the 710 South Expansion. EPA understands that although the Final EIS for the 710 Corridor has not yet been publicly released, Caltrans and Metro have stated a commitment to no longer pursue capacity enhancement/expansion along the mainline of the 710 Corridor.

The EPA appreciates participating as an Ex Officio member in the CMIP Task Force, and values that the Metro Board established the process “must include a renewed commitment to inclusive and meaningful engagement of communities as well as a steadfast commitment to addressing the equity, displacement, air quality, congestion and economic concerns that have plagued communities around major freeway corridors (CMIP, p. 1-2) EPA appreciates the time, patience, energy, and resources Metro has offered over the last two years to promote an accessible and inclusive, interactive process, including offering evening meetings in multiple languages.

While the CMIP was not prepared to comply with the National Environmental Policy or Clean Air Act regulations, the EPA has acted as an Ex Officio Member to provide early feedback to Metro and Caltrans regarding important considerations, as early in the process as possible, for improving public health and the environment with an eye toward a future need to comply with national policy and air regulation.

EPA Review Summary

The EPA commends Metro for establishing a Task Force process that has included priorities for equity considerations and community engagement. We also appreciate the multiple commitments for pollution reduction, emerging technologies, reducing particulate matter emissions, increasing active

transportation, transit, and community programs. EPA’s feedback at this conclusion of the development of the Investment Strategy consists of recommended considerations related to NEPA and Clean Air Act transportation conformity as projects within the Investment Strategy are advanced for analysis.

12 Interchange Projects, 2 Auxiliary Lane projects

- **Commitment to meet conformity requirements:** EPA appreciates the stated commitment in Section 8.6.3.1 (p. 8-74) that, “Metro will ensure that freeway projects that move forward for implementation consideration complete the appropriate CEQA/NEPA.” EPA recommends that Metro also directly state in the CMIS that, “Metro will ensure that freeway projects that move forward for implementation consideration complete the appropriate project level transportation conformity requirements.”
- **Confirm Alternatives Analysis structure/scope:** Metro is proposing an intermediary, planning level process, an Alternatives Analysis, that will occur prior to CEQA/NEPA analysis,

“Bundle all the proposed Investment Plan freeway infrastructure projects into one set of candidate projects for an Alternatives Analysis/Prioritization study. This is necessary because the Investment Plan evaluation of design concepts is not detailed enough to prioritize the freeway infrastructure projects. Assess the 12 Investment Plan interchange project concepts and two auxiliary lane projects in more detail to ascertain which ones should advance to preliminary engineering and environmental analysis and in what order. This will include an update of the multimodal benefits of each project including improvement of freeway mainline safety and operations based on updated traffic data, and refined design concepts, and reassessment of key impacts, particularly displacements and air quality conformity. It will include a robust public and community involvement and engagement process.

Also assess the independent utility and logical termini of each proposed project, which may lead to packaging some projects into one combined project—for example, packaging the proposed auxiliary lane between the Del Amo Boulevard and Long Beach Boulevard interchanges with the redesign of those interchanges. Another multimodal packaging opportunity is to incorporate active transportation elements into the design of the arterial overcrossings to improve AT mobility and reconnect communities on either side of I-710. These elements are included in the Caltrans complete streets policy.” (p. 8-28)

We appreciate that next steps will address displacements and air quality conformity. Consistent with the project’s environmental justice and equity objectives, EPA continues to strongly recommend avoiding displacements and consideration of all measures to reduce adverse air quality impacts to the maximum extent practicable. Given recent history and prior challenges regarding transportation conformity along the 710 Corridor, the EPA requests that the CMIP include a commitment for Metro and Caltrans to meet with EPA before the proposed Alternatives Analysis process is initiated. EPA requests an opportunity to provide feedback to

Metro and Caltrans regarding the intended Alternative Analysis design and process, data sources, methodology, and analysis to insure that the conclusions can inform future NEPA and project level conformity analyses without needing to be revisited pursuant to statutory requirements.

- **Process suggestion for how Alternatives Analysis will inform future NEPA/CAA conformity analysis:** In order for the data, analysis, and conclusions from the “Alternatives Analysis” process to adequately reflect cumulative impacts to communities adversely affected by the I-710 corridor and be used for informing future decisionmaking pursuant to NEPA, EPA recommends that Caltrans consider pursuing analysis of the 12 highway projects and 2 Auxiliary Lanes on I-710 (and the associated connected Active Transportation projects) through one combined programmatic environmental analysis, or through a formal Planning and Environmental Linkages (PEL) process. Caltrans has completed a Planning and Environmental Linkages Handbook that provides additional information about this approach,¹ which is designed to formally document planning level analyses so that information and conclusions derived from such processes can be incorporated by reference (and not have to be revisited) for later NEPA analyses.
- **Update the reason why US EPA determined a hot spot analysis would be required for prior I-710 Expansion alternative:** Page 1-6, states, “2020 - The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determined that a hotspot analysis would be required for the LPA (Alternative 5C) due to their concerns regarding the air quality conformity of the project.” Please revise this to state, “2020 - The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) reiterated through a letter to Caltrans and Metro that a hotspot analysis would be required for the LPA (Alternative 5C) due to the project resulting in increased truck-related diesel emissions and resulting potential challenges meeting air quality standards.”
- **Update Timeline to reflect Caltrans/Metro choosing to halt analysis of Alternative 5C:** On Page 1-6, in the timeline, it appears that a milestone is missing from the timeline. Directly following the EPA letter from 2020, the next item states, “2021 - In July, in response to Metro’s action, the...”, yet there is no bullet point stating Metro’s action. Please add a Milestone stating that Caltrans/Metro paused the EIS process. A summary of the milestone is included later in the document on Page 1-9 (Section 2): “In May 2021, the Metro Board suspended the environmental review of the I-710 South Corridor Project’s Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA) 5C (herein referred to as Alternative 5C) due to significant concerns that the proposed project would not meet air quality conformity standards; would create untenable displacement in disadvantaged communities adjacent to the freeway; and would contradict updated local, state, and federal policies related to freeway widening or expansion projects.”
- **Provide Status of the Final EIR/EIS for 710 South Expansion:** On Page 1-6, a bullet point states, “The Metro Board acted on a request from Caltrans to rescind the LPA (Alternative 5C) and, in its place, approve Alternative 1, the “No Build” alternative, as the new LPA for the I-710 South

¹¹ Caltrans Planning and Environmental Linkages Handbook, <https://dot.ca.gov/-/media/dot-media/programs/environmental-analysis/documents/ser/ct-pel-guidebook-a11y.pdf>

Corridor Project Final Environmental Document (Legistar File #2022-0100). This request was based on a state policy change intended to align transportation investments with improvement in climate change effects. This action effectively concluded the prior environmental process. Please revise the last sentence, here, and throughout the document where applicable, to reflect the current status of the pending Final EIR/EIS and Record of Decision, which we understand is still in preparation and will, when published, be the conclusion of the prior environmental review process. Per National Environmental Policy Act procedure, the environmental review process is still ongoing and there has been no published documentation of Caltrans/Metro rescinding the Draft EIS or choosing the No Action Alternative.

- **Clarify, with a description, in the CMIP what the separate “qualifying I-710 CMCP” is:** Section 1.4, Page 1-8 states, *“Through the development and approval of the LB-ELA CMIP. Metro is also preparing a qualifying I-710 CMCP to compete for and secure a portion of the \$250 million in state funding made available through the Senate Bill 15 Solutions for Congested Corridors Program. This critical funding supports Metro’s ability to deliver Measures R and M.”* EPA is not aware of a separate, additional ongoing I-710 CMCP and requests clarity regarding what a separate I-710 CMCP consists of and how it compares to, or will inform, the Alternatives Analysis of the 12 Interchanges and 2 Auxiliary Lanes.
- **Prioritize Community Programs in the Initial Investment:** Projects proposed for the Initial Investment are listed in Table 8-2 (p. 8-9) and appear to be focused on Active Transportation, Arterial Roadways/Complete Streets, Freeway Safety and Interchange Improvements, Goods Movement Projects, and Transit Projects. Community Programs are referenced in Section 8.5, but it’s unclear whether these programs would be included in the Initial Investment. EPA recommends that Metro clarify whether Community Programs would be included in the Initial Investment. Given the existing disparities faced by communities along the I-710 corridor, EPA recommends that Metro prioritize Community Programs for implementation.
- **Comprehensive analysis of zero tailpipe emission technologies:** EPA recommends that Metro pursue a robust analysis of potential zero tailpipe emission technologies and associated infrastructure contemplated in the Draft CMIP, including upstream and downstream impacts. We recommend considering technologies that are least impactful and most protective of communities affected by the I-710 corridor.
- **Include robust and meaningful community engagement throughout the process.** EPA recommends that Metro incorporate meaningful community engagement and commitments to environmental justice and equity throughout all phases of the Corridor Investment Plan process, including through NEPA/CEQA reviews, through evaluation of available technologies, and as other next steps/Working Groups are rolled out.

The EPA appreciates the opportunity to review the Long Beach-East Los Angeles Corridor Mobility Investment Plan and we are interested in continuing to participate in continued working group discussions regarding projects in the corridor, measure to reduce particulate matter, and efforts to integrate emerging technologies and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. If you have any questions,

please contact me at donez.francisco@epa.gov, or Connell Dunning, the EPA Region 9 NEPA Transportation Team Lead, at (415) 947-4161 or dunning.connell@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

Francisco Dóñez
Acting Manager
Environmental Review Section 2

cc: Kelly Ewing-Toledo
Deputy District Director, Division of Environmental Planning, Caltrans District 7