

2022 Community-Based Partnership Program Documentation Report

WE'RE PLANNING A NEW WAY TO RIDE ON VERMONT.

VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR



Metro

Executive Summary

Background

The study area for the Vermont Transit Corridor extends 12.4 miles from Hollywood Boulevard in the north to 120th Street in the south. The study area map is illustrated as Appendix A. It is the busiest north-south travel corridor in the entire Metro system with about 45,000 daily boardings pre-COVID, connecting the B/D Lines (Red/Purple), the E line (Expo) and C Line (Green), and various east-west bus lines to many key activity centers, including educational, cultural, medical, governmental, and faith-based institutions.

The Vermont Transit Corridor is a Measure M project with \$425M in funding for improvements. To prepare for those improvements, Metro has completed two studies:

- > Vermont Transit Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Technical Study
- > Vermont Rail Conversion Feasibility Study

In February 2017, Metro identified two promising Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) alternatives for the project when it concluded the Vermont Transit Corridor BRT Technical Study. In March 2019, the Vermont Rail Conversion Feasibility Study identified several feasible rail modes and further evaluated the BRT alternatives to ensure that they not preclude a future conversion to rail.

In April 2019, the Metro Board directed staff to advance both BRT and rail concepts into the environmental review. At that 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 agency's Equity Platform Framework that has successfully elevated the voices of stakeholders who live, work, play, study and/or worship along Vermont Avenue. 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.

Figure 1

Project Timeline



ONGOING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Community-Based Outreach

This report documents the activities completed as part of the Community Partnership Program, highlights the findings of all engagement efforts and recommends next steps for planning transit improvements along this important corridor.



Local neighborhood groups provided feedback about improvements that should be planned for the VTC Project.



This process included a wide range of opportunities for feedback that were designed to be transparent and inclusive.



The Metro team gathered feedback regarding technical aspects of the study, proposed BRT and rail concepts, potential station locations, and general comments regarding project funding, ridership, and preferred alternative selection process.



Purpose

The purpose of the community-based planning process was to:

- > Promote project awareness of the Vermont Transit Corridor.
- > Ensure that community stakeholders had an opportunity to better understand the transit options being considered and provide feedback.
- > Partner with community-based organizations with deep roots within the corridor to meaningfully engage stakeholders.
- > Establish a vision for the corridor and re-evaluate the project goals and objectives.
- > Identify near-, mid-, and long-term transit improvements for the corridor.

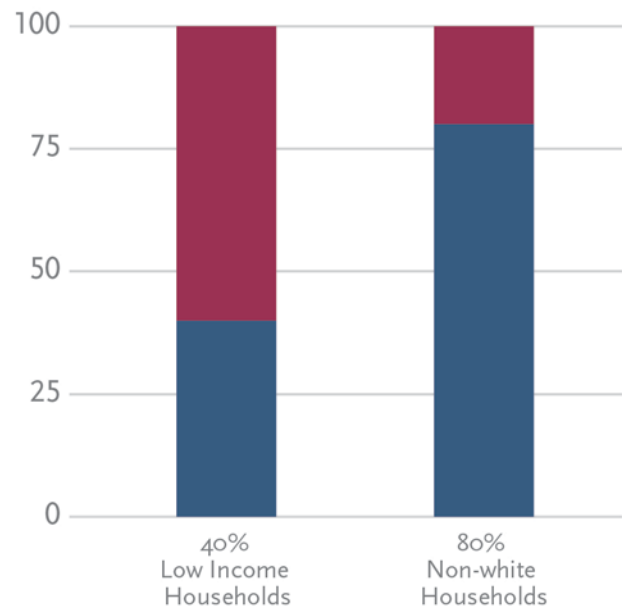
Program Area

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 where 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.

Equity Focused Communities

Metro identified communities throughout the corridor that are considered Equity Focused Communities given their socioeconomic characteristics.



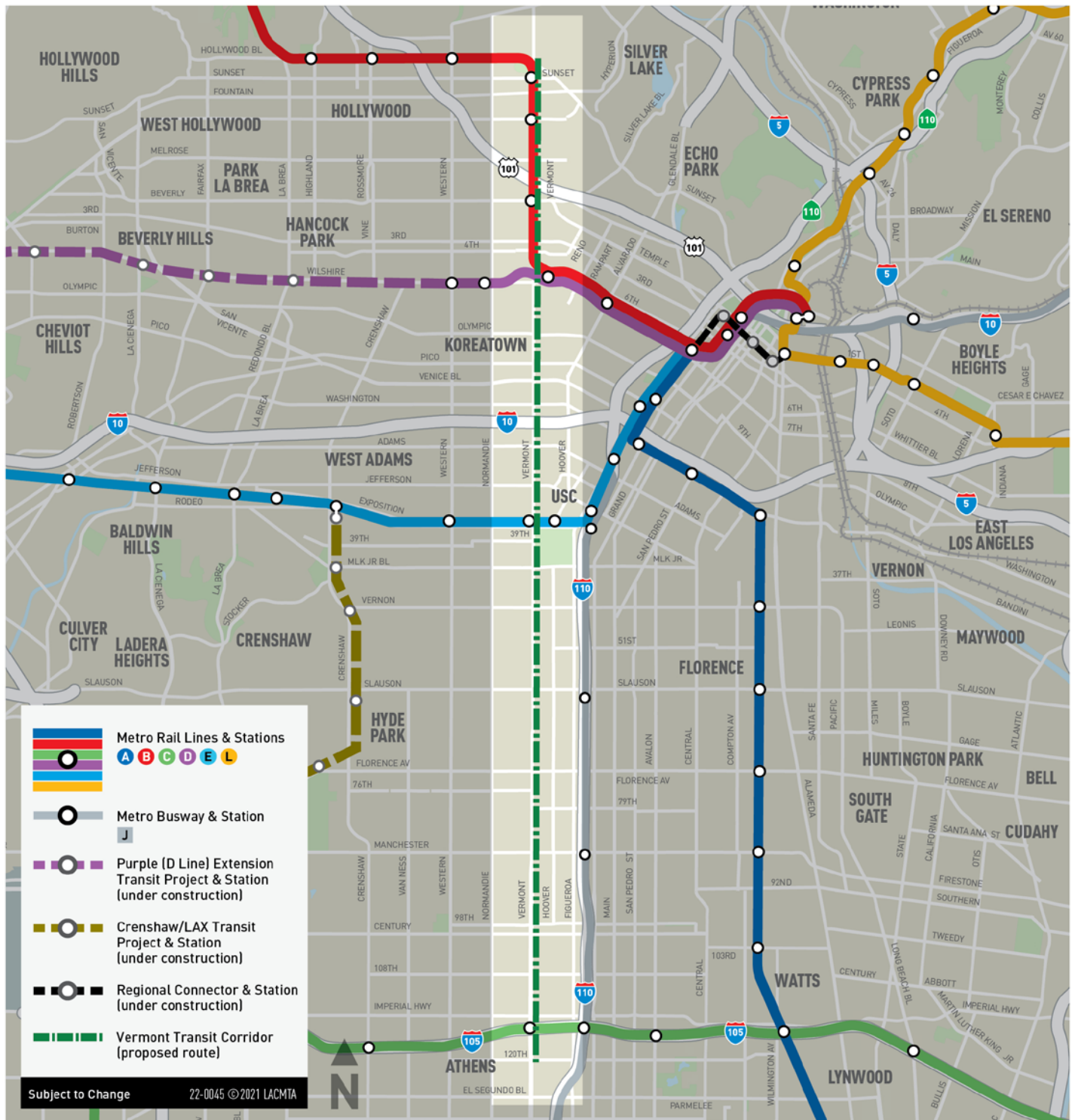
As of May 2022



We engaged area stakeholders by partnering with community-based organizations throughout the corridor.

Vermont Transit Corridor

Study Area



Engagement Approach

As an agency, Metro ensures people can reach everyday destinations, such as jobs, schools, healthy food outlets, and healthcare facilities, safely and reliably. 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 that 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. 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 that, in turn, drastically improve the quality of life for area stakeholders.

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To capture the feedback of the diverse stakeholders that make up the Vermont Transit Corridor, Metro implemented a comprehensive engagement program that included:

- > Market Research Surveys
 - 9 focus groups
 - 1 telephone survey
 - 1 online survey targeting transit riders at 6 key bus stops along Vermont Avenue and via Metro's Transit app
- > 11 pop ups at community and school events
- > 21 briefings with key institutional stakeholders
- > 4 community listening sessions
- > 32 community conversations hosted by 20 Community-Based Organization (CBO) partners

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

Project Information was shared by Metro via virtual and in-person meetings, community events, project website, The Source/El Pasajero blogs, social media posts and email campaigns.

Figure 2

Outreach Overview



Community-Based Organization Partnership Program

A key aspect of the engagement approach was the implementation of a CBO partnership program that provided stakeholders with various opportunities to engage with Metro. The conversations also allowed Metro staff with the chance to listen to the community and know what they want and need – which is the guiding principle of Metro’s Equity Platform Framework.

Metro partnered with 20 community and faith-based organizations that provide services along the Vermont Transit Corridor to engage with their network of stakeholders who traditionally do not engage with Metro on transportation planning projects.

Metro’s CBO partners shared information through their email and/or text message campaigns, WhatsApp community group chats, newsletters, websites, announcements made at gatherings, flyer distributions and hosted community conversations to elicit feedback from stakeholders on their experiences riding Metro, their current transportation needs, and future vision for transit improvements along Vermont. Collectively, CBO partners hosted 32 virtual and in-person community conversations throughout the entire corridor.

Through these various engagement activities, more than 6,000 stakeholders actively participated sharing their thoughts for future transit improvements along Vermont.



Collaborative communication is key when reaching out to large bodies of people. Listening to each individual response is imperative to learning the culture of the community.

Findings

Throughout the engagement process stakeholders were presented with possible transit improvements for the Vermont Corridor, which included: near term bus improvements to existing lines 204 and 754, medium-term BRT, long-term Rail, and an option to do all improvements. The benefits and tradeoffs of each transit option were presented in order for stakeholders to provide informed feedback as to their preferred approach that would best address their transit needs, concerns, and priorities as well as achieve the goals of the project.

The following summarizes the feedback received at the various engagement activities.

Focus Groups

Nine focus groups were conducted with residents representing the various communities that make up the Vermont Transit Corridor. The focus groups were held in January 2022 with 72 ethnically diverse participants and were facilitated in English, Spanish, Korean and Armenian.

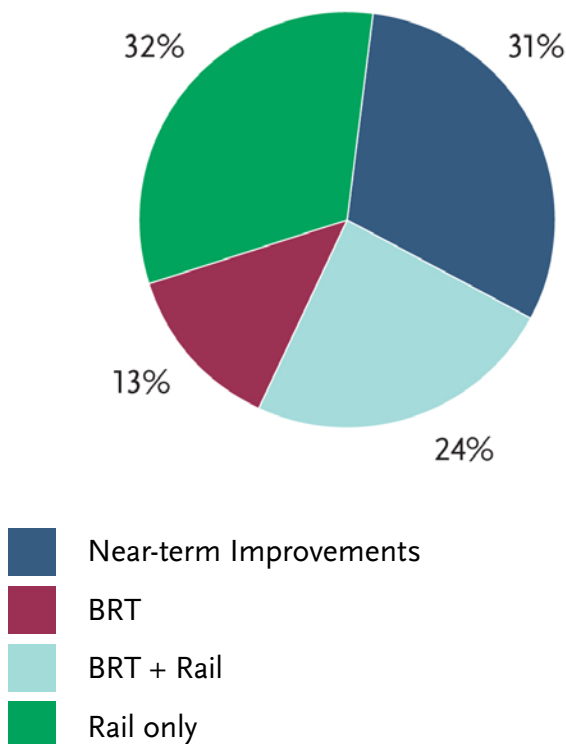
During the focus groups, participants discussed their travel experiences along Vermont (walking, riding, driving), positive and negative aspects of the overall corridor and with Metro service, then participated in a facilitated exercise to discuss transportation options being explored by Metro that include making bus service improvements, adding Bus Rapid Transit and/or a rail project along Vermont. In doing so, various tradeoffs were explored that included available funding, construction length with each transit mode, possible impacts and benefits with each mode.

During the focus groups, participants discussed their travel experiences along Vermont.

Of the focus groups, 32% of participants shared they preferred a rail project, 31% opted to make bus improvements, 24% said to implement bus and rail projects, and 13% opted for a BRT project.

Figure 3

Focus Group Results



Survey

A telephone survey was conducted in March 2022 where 1,137 residents participated reaching them in English, Spanish and Korean. The questions asked of survey participants were similar to those of the focus group participants.

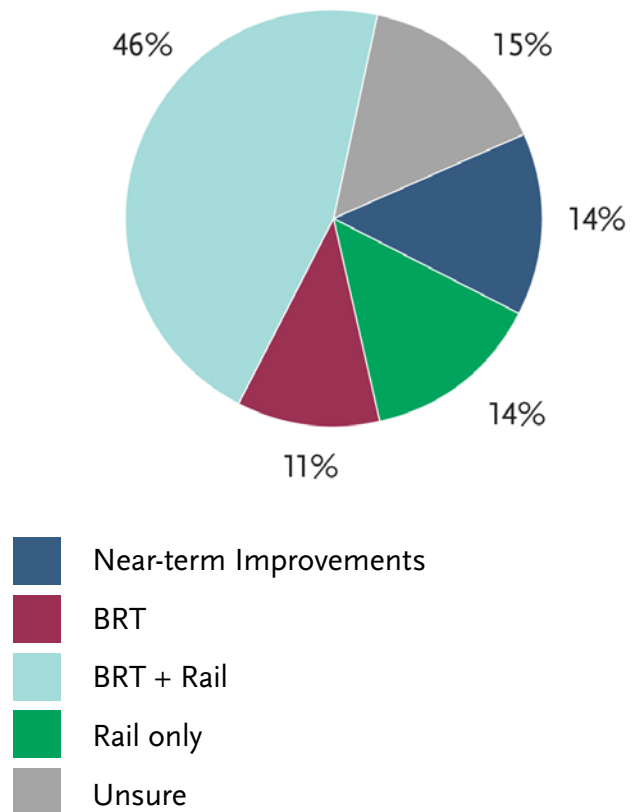
Seven in ten participants felt public transportation improvements along Vermont would benefit their community and over half would prefer a faster route with fewer stops over a slower route with more stops. Overall, the sentiment from the survey was that BRT should be built now and rail should be built sooner than 2067 (as projected under Measure M).

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Of the survey participants 46% opted for building both a BRT and rail project, 15% were unsure, 14% opted for rail, 14% opted for bus improvements and 11% opted for a BRT project.

Figure 4

Telephone Survey



Community conversations were held in English and Spanish as reflected here.

Transit Rider Intercept Survey

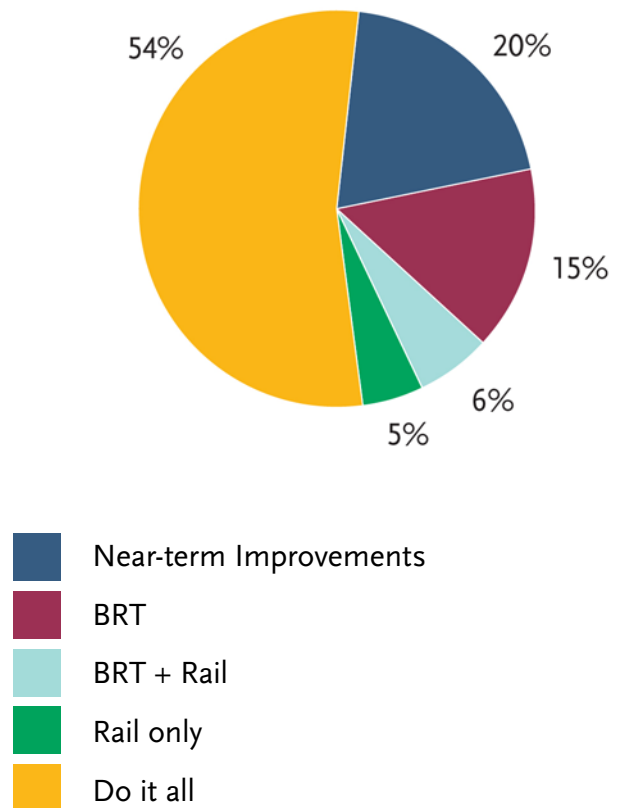
Over 2,250 bus riders along Vermont Avenue responded to the transit rider intercept survey at six of the busiest bus stops both in the morning and afternoon peak travel hours as well as virtually via Metro's Transit app.

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Of the surveys completed, 54% of respondents urged Metro to do it all (make immediate bus improvements, deliver BRT by 2028 and plan for rail), 20% shared that they preferred immediate bus service improvements, 15% opted for a BRT project, 6% want to see both BRT and a rail project and 5% urged for rail only.

Figure 5

Transit Rider Intercept Survey



The team talked to transit riders about their personal experiences with the services Metro provides.



Discussions were often related to themes of safety and security, equity, customer experience, and traffic.

Community and School Pop Ups

Staff held eight pop up events at various community events and hosted 11 presentations at local schools during December 2021 – May 2022. Approximately 620 community members provided feedback in English, Spanish and Korean.

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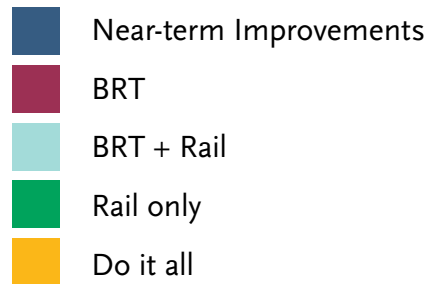
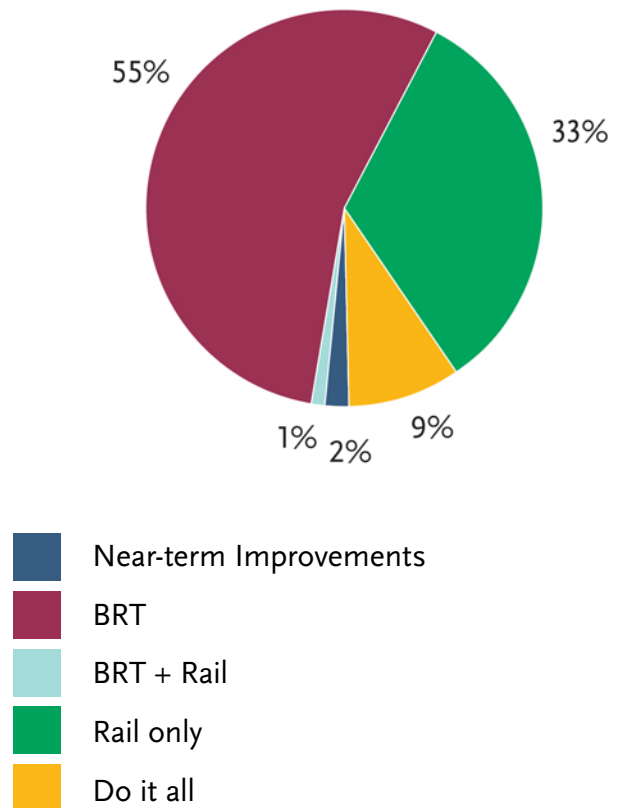
Through these conversations, staff asked stakeholders what their choices for transportation improvements along Vermont would be and 55% opted for a BRT project, 33% chose rail, 9% said to do it all, 2% opted for immediate bus improvements and 1% opted for BRT and rail.



The Metro team engaged the public in one-on-one conversations about their transit needs for the future of Vermont Avenue.

Figure 6

Community and School Pop Up Events



Interpreters were available during the listening sessions to ensure equitable engagement with the local residents.

Community Listening Sessions

Metro hosted four interactive community listening sessions with the intent to get feedback on the proposed options for the future of the VTC. One took place virtually, to ensure that everyone in the corridor could attend and the other three took place in-person:

- > Los Angeles City College
 - Saturday, April 30, 2022
- > Ward African Methodist Episcopal Church
 - Saturday, May 7, 2022
- > Irmas Youth Center
 - Saturday, April 23, 2022
- > Virtual Meeting
 - Wednesday, May 4, 2022

The in-person community listening sessions featured various stations:

Station 1: Registration

Attendees would sign in for the event and to receive project updates, after they registered, they would receive directions on how to take part in the listening session.



Community stakeholders registered to participate.



Station 2: VTC Virtual Reality (VR) Simulation

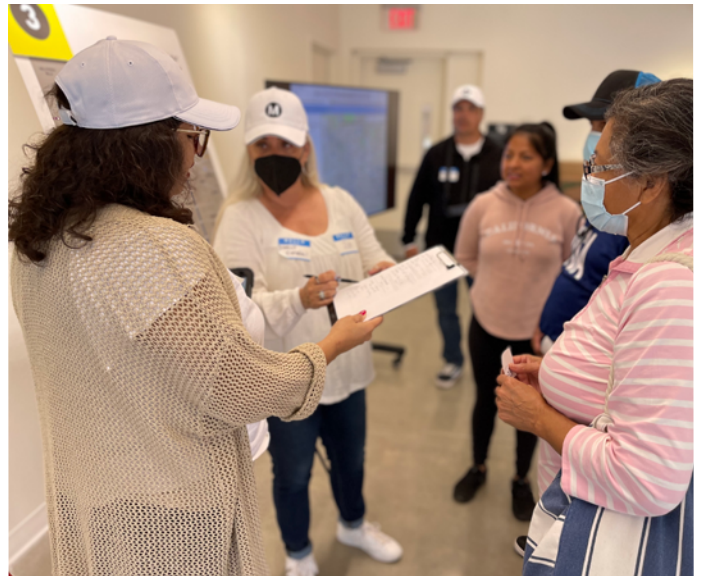
Attendees wore VR goggles to experience a thrilling virtual tour of Vermont Avenue. The trip started south from 120th Street and took participants on a wild ride north to Hollywood Boulevard, making stops along the way to several historic landmarks and favorite destinations: USC, L.A. Coliseum, Koreatown, museums, churches, and much more.



Community stakeholders experienced a VR tour of Vermont Avenue.

Station 3: Storymap

After learning about the entire VTC in the virtual tour, participants had one more digital exercise. With a touchscreen computer, they identified all the places along Vermont Avenue that they frequent, whether it was for home, work, study, play, worship, or other activities.



Participants identified places along Vermont Avenue that they frequent



Station 4: "Taco About Transportation"

The outreach team had one-on-one conversations with participants, sharing details of the VTC project. In those conversations, the team provided information on the Bus Rapid Transit and Rail alternatives, answered any questions, and asked for feedback from current public transit users about their experience. After the conversation, participants were given a ticket to receive a light snack that included tacos.



The team discussed transit options with public transit riders.



Participants received a light snack after providing feedback.



Station 5: Vote

In the last activity, participants voted on which option they felt would best serve public transit needs. Options included:

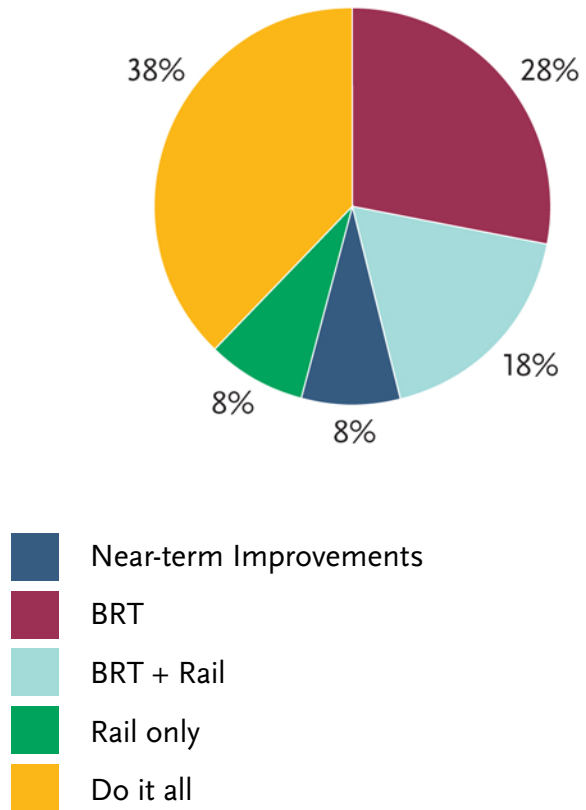
- > Make immediate improvements to the existing bus system along Vermont Avenue
- > Pursue BRT for completion by 2028
- > Pursue BRT and begin planning for rail beyond 2028
- > Pursue rail only
- > Do it all

Over 300 people participated in the community listening sessions. Of the participants, 38% selected to do it all, 28% opted for a BRT project, 18% opted to build both BRT and rail, and 8% shared they would like to see either bus improvements only or a rail project.

Over 300 people participated in the community listening sessions.

Figure 7

Community Listening Sessions



Participants voted for their preferred VTC transit options.



Community Conversations

As a core task of CBOs in their partnership with Metro, community conversations were hosted by the 20 partner groups. Collectively, CBOs hosted 32 virtual and in-person community conversations throughout the entire corridor. The intention of the community conversations was to provide a safe space for members of the community to share opinions and experiences about their transportation needs, the services Metro provides, and the future of the VTC. Through this effort, stakeholders were reached at shelters, rehabilitation centers, churches and via immigrant support, parent and youth groups.

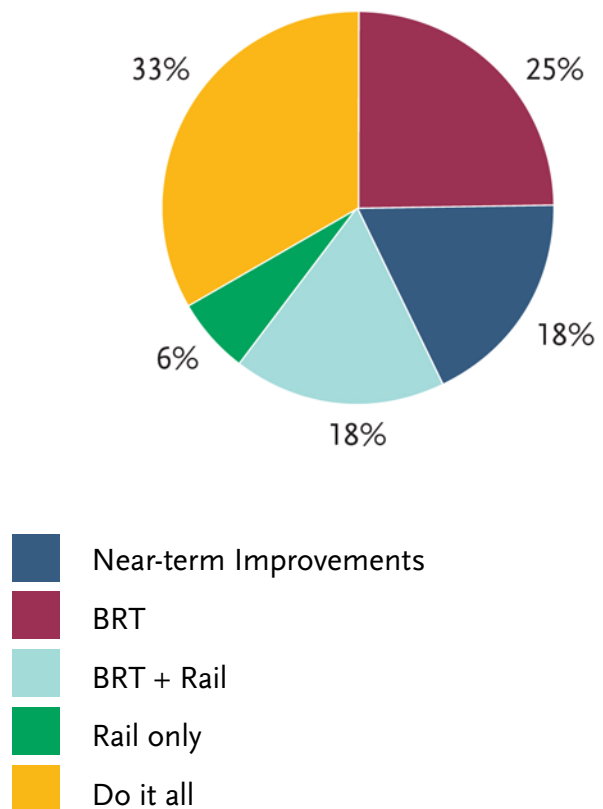
During the conversations, participants shared personal experiences taking bus and trains, as most people who participated use public transportation as their only way to get to their destinations. They also learned about options for potential transportation improvements and provided their choices.

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Of the 340 people reach through the community conversations, 33% shared that Metro do it all, 25% opted for a BRT project, 18% opted for either BRT and Rail and bus improvements and 6% selected rail only as a choice.

Transit Options on Vermont Avenue

Participants learned about options for potential transportation improvements and provided their choices during Community Conversation events.





Community, policy and business leaders provided insight informed by their deep community ties.

Key Stakeholder Briefings

Metro staff met with 21 community, policy, and business leaders and their teams to provide in-depth presentations and discussions about the VTC that included:

- > American Career College
- > Children's Hospital Los Angeles
- > East Hollywood Business Improvement District
- > Empowerment Congress
- > Exposition Park Leadership Meeting
- > Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council
- > Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center
- > Los Angeles City College
- > Los Angeles Exposition Park Leadership
- > Los Angeles Southwest College
- > Lucas Museum of Narrative Art
- > Neighborhood Council Briefings - Corridor-Wide
- > North Area Neighborhood Development (Empowerment Congress North)
- > Pico-Union Neighborhood Council
- > Rampart Village Neighborhood Council
- > Rampart Village Neighborhood Council Pub Safety, Housing, Transportation Committee

- > University of Southern California (USC)
- > Voices Neighborhood Council
- > West Athens Westmont Task Force
- > West Coast University
- > Wilshire Center Business Improvement District Board

While specific results of their options were not calculated, Appendix B of the full report provides meeting summaries of each meeting where questions and comments are detailed.



Participants learned of community engagement events through community partnerships.

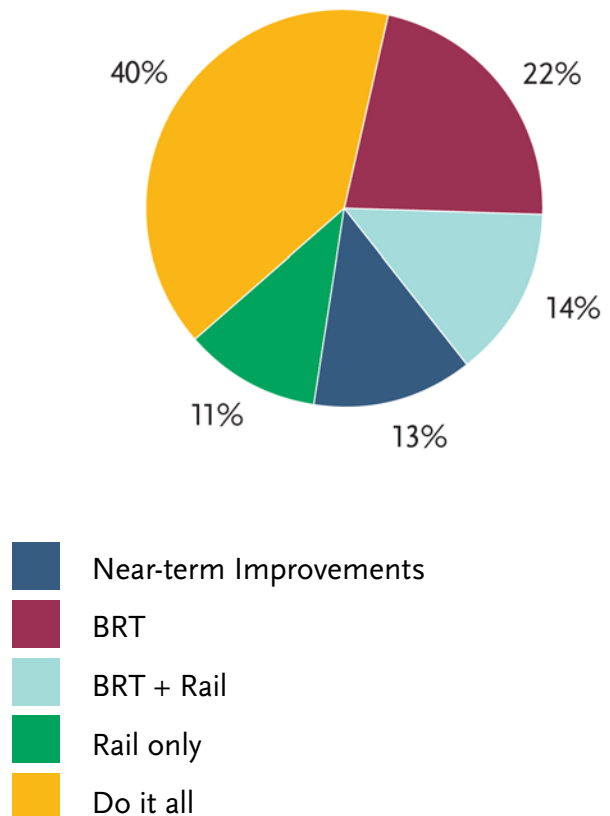
Overall Findings

Based on all the engagement activities completed as part of the Community Based Partnership Program, 40% of all stakeholders prefer that Metro do it all and implement immediate bus improvements, deliver BRT by 2028 and plan for rail as quickly as possible (not waiting until 2067). Further, 22% opted to implement a BRT project. 14% opted for both BRT and rail, 13% would like to see bus service improvements and 11% would like to see rail only.

Combined between doing it all and adding either bus and/or rail, overwhelmingly 76% of stakeholders would like to see major capital improvements along Vermont.

Overall Findings from All Engagement Activities

The majority of participants preferred for Metro to implement major capital improvements along Vermont Avenue.



Participants received Metro swag that included free TAP cards for use on Metro transit.

Context

To fully understand why people selected all viable options available – do it all – one must comprehend their decision in a deeper context. Historically, public agencies and other government institutions representing Vermont Avenue have promised critical infrastructure and quality of life improvements. Unfortunately, many of these promises have not been delivered to date.

Unsure if the improvements promised under Measure M will be implemented, community members have taken a stance to ensure immediate transportation improvements are delivered as quickly as possible and certainly before 2028. Although people like rail, they feel that 25 to 30 years is too long to wait for improvements that are critically needed today. The question becomes, “What can we have now?” BRT, in the near medium term, is more appealing when compared to a thirty–forty-year wait for rail. However, rail is ultimately preferred by the majority of the corridor-wide stakeholders.

When community members opted for immediate improvements, they selected this option as a call to action for Metro to create a safer public transportation experience – where riders feel valued and respected.

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Through the engagement activities conducted, various sentiments were expressed by stakeholders that included themes related to safety and security, equity, customer experience, and traffic. These sentiments are detailed in the full report.

Recommendations

Given the context of service on Vermont Avenue, the street conditions, the customer experience, the core issue of equity underlying everything, and more importantly, based on community feedback, the overall recommendations are that Metro:

- > Implement immediate bus improvements to Metro Lines 754 and 204.
- > Deliver a medium-term Bus Rapid Transit Project by 2028, and
- > Begin to plan a rail project as quickly as possible.



Transit rider feedback helps us plan a better transportation experience.