I-605 Corridor Improvement Project

Environmental Planning Phase: Frequently Asked Questions

We're reimagining better mobility along the 605 corridor from the 105 to the 10.

Overview

What is the I-605 Corridor Improvement Project (CIP)?

Metro has a plan to improve mobility and safety along the I-605 Corridor from I-105 to I-10. This plan focuses on reducing travel time, increasing trip reliability, providing safe access for pedestrians, and increasing multimodal improvements to promote active transportation. These improvements are being proposed while maintaining the goal of avoiding residential displacements.

Metro is working in coordination with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to evaluate four alternatives, including one no-build and three build alternatives, to add high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, also known as carpool lanes, or high-occupancy toll lanes, also known as ExpressLanes, in both directions along I-605, from I-105 to I-10, within the freeway right-of-way to the extent possible. The Project will include improvements along I-105, I-5, SR-60, and I-10, and will evaluate Transportation System Management/Transportation Demand Management (TSM/TDM) strategies, Complete Streets improvements, transit enhancements, including improvements to promote walking, biking, equestrian, and transit access in communities adjacent to the I-605 Corridor.

What is the current status of the project?

The Metro Board acted in October 2020 and directed staff to pause the circulation of the I-605 environmental document. They asked staff to revise the alternatives to avoid right-of-way impacts, help reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and greenhouse gas emissions (GHG), and align with state and local policies. Since then, Metro and Caltrans District 7 staff have revised the alternatives that avoid or reduce right-of-way (ROW) impacts. Alternative designs are contained mostly within the state right of way and avoid full residential displacements. However, some partial ROW impacts and temporary construction easements (TCE) may be unavoidable. The alternatives will align with local and state policies to reduce VMT and GHG. They will consider smart freeway technology to manage the freeway and include multi-modal and complete street improvements. The Board also directed staff to expand outreach efforts to solicit input from stakeholders during the environmental review phase and to return with a final report for Board approval before releasing the Draft EIR/EIS for circulation and public comment.

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Why is the project needed?

The corridor experiences collisions at rates higher than the statewide average for similar facilities, high travel times, and lower trip reliability during peak commute hours. Traffic congestion continues to impact the project corridor, with over 300,000 vehicles traversing the corridor per day. Segments of the existing HOV lanes are classified as "degraded" by federal standards, meaning that speeds on the HOV lanes are less than 45 miles per hour (mph) more than 18% of the time, and during peak hour travel speeds average less than 45 mph for 29% of the time or more.

Proposed improvements to the I-605 freeway focus on multimodal, safety, and mobility benefits, including pedestrian, bicycle, equestrian trail, and transit connections along the corridor and HOV or ExpressLanes to help increase time reliability. Metro is implementing new ExpressLanes on I-105 and operates ExpressLanes on the I-10 and I-110. Once complete, an ExpressLane network will connect Los Angeles to Southeast Los Angeles County.

The project team will consider the social, economic, and environmental impacts alongside technical aspects to ensure decisions are made in the public's best interest. Several key factors will be considered, including:

> **Need for Inclusive Transportation:** When feasible, transportation projects should cater to the needs of all users, including motorists, bicyclists, transit riders, and pedestrians. This entails creating infrastructure that accommodates diverse modes of transportation to promote accessibility and mobility for all.

> **Community Goals and Objectives:** Projects should align with the communities' goals and objectives. This involves engaging stakeholders to understand local priorities and ensuring that proposed transportation solutions contribute positively to community development.

> **Equity for Low Mobility and Disadvantaged Communities:** To ensure equitable access to transportation and other services, the needs of low-mobility and disadvantaged groups must be prioritized. Projects should address barriers to mobility faced by impacted communities and strive to create inclusive transportation networks.

> **Cost-Benefit Analysis of Environmental Impact:** Decision-making should involve a thorough assessment of the costs and benefits associated with minimizing adverse effects on natural resources, environmental values, public services, aesthetics, and community integrity. This includes evaluating the long-term sustainability and environmental impact of transportation projects.

What is the status of the project?

Since 2020, the technical team has refined the proposed alternatives to avoid and minimize right-of-way impacts. In the Summer of 2024, the team will host a series of community meetings to share the updated project objectives, refined alternatives, and proposed process for moving forward with the surrounding community and stakeholders. Information obtained from these community meetings will be used to inform the Metro Board and to request moving forward with the environmental process, including a more robust community engagement plan.

Who is leading the project?

Metro is leading the environmental phase in coordination with Caltrans. Per CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) and NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act), an Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is being prepared to assess the likely influences that future improvements may have on the environment and communities within and adjacent to the study area. The EIR/EIS also includes design alternatives to reduce or avoid possible adverse environmental impacts.

Alternatives and Operations

What are the proposed alternatives for this project?

The I-605 Corridor Improvements Project (CIP) will analyze the following alternatives:

> **Alternative 1:** Existing conditions (no build)

> **Alternative 2:** Convert the existing HOV lane in each direction to an ExpressLane and incorporate multimodal and TSM/TDM improvements.

> **Alternative 3:** Convert the existing HOV lane in each direction to an ExpressLane, add a second ExpressLane in each direction, and incorporate multimodal and TSM/TDM improvements

> **Alternative 4:** Maintain the existing HOV lanes in each direction, add a second HOV lane in each direction, and incorporate multimodal and TSM/TDM improvements

How will traffic flow be managed on the ExpressLanes to minimize congestion issues currently experienced in High-Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) Lanes?

ExpressLanes are dynamically priced to ensure vehicles travel at least 45 miles per hour (as required by law), so reliability and time savings are maintained. The I-10/I-110 ExpressLanes rates are updated based on real-time traffic demand on the facility, with prices increasing or decreasing based on the current usage of the ExpressLanes. By using variable pricing to manage travel demand, traffic flow in the ExpressLanes is continuously managed to maintain speed and flow, providing a more reliable option to the heavily congested general purpose and HOV lanes during peak periods.

How will rates in the ExpressLanes be determined?

Tolls for vehicles that do not qualify to travel for free are calculated based on traffic conditions and vary according to the congestion level – tolls are higher when traffic congestion is heavier and lower when traffic is lighter within the ExpressLanes.

What happens to the net toll revenue from the ExpressLanes?

State law requires toll revenues generated from the Metro ExpressLanes be reinvested in the corridor from which they were generated. If ExpressLanes are extended to the I-605 corridor, Metro would use the toll revenues first to pay for the cost of operating the ExpressLanes, including roadway and equipment maintenance, administration, toll collection, debt service, customer service, California Highway Patrol (CHP) enforcement and Freeway Service Patrol tow trucks. Additional revenue would be reinvested in discount programs for Metro ExpressLanes customers through the Low-Income Assistance Plan, Carpool Loyalty and the Transit Rewards Program. The remaining revenues could be reinvested into local corridor jurisdictions to improve transit service and active transportation.

Environmental

What is the environmental process for this project? What type of documents are being prepared?

The I-605 Corridor Improvement Project is in the environmental planning phase, and an Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is under development to evaluate the implementation of ExpressLanes or additional HOV lanes on the I-605 between I-105 and I-10. The EIR/EIS will be prepared following state and federal laws, including the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). During this development phase, environmental and technical studies are prepared to evaluate project alternatives and their effects on the human and natural environment. In addition, a project report will be prepared that provides details on facility design, traffic forecasts, cost, and schedule.

If a build alternative is selected, will any properties adjacent to the I-605 corridor be impacted by this project?

The project's goal is to limit the proposed improvements to the existing right-of-way to avoid full residential property acquisitions and impacts to private properties to the extent possible.

Metro, in coordination with Caltrans, has developed build alternatives that will not require residential displacements. In compliance with state and federal laws, further details will be determined through the environmental planning phase.

Who will select the Preferred Alternative, and when is this decision anticipated?

Based on public input received during the public review period for the Draft EIR/EIS, the project development team will recommend a Preferred Alternative for the Metro Board's consideration and approval. The Preferred Alternative will then be included in the Final EIR/EIS.

Project Definitions

What is a HOV lane?

HOV lanes, also known as carpool lanes, are generally commuter lanes designed to encourage and support vehicles with greater occupancy to motivate carpool and bus travel. Qualified vehicles with a Clean Air decal may also use the HOV Lanes. HOV lanes help to reduce traffic congestion during peak hours by reducing the number of single drivers. HOV lanes are not toll lanes.

How does this benefit carpoolers and transit riders?

Through the Carpool Loyalty and Transit Rewards Programs, incentives are available to Metro ExpressLanes users who are frequent carpoolers and transit riders. The Carpool Loyalty Program automatically enters Metro ExpressLanes FasTrak account holders who use the lanes as carpoolers into a monthly drawing to win toll credits. Frequent transit riders and Metro ExpressLanes accountholders can earn a $5 toll credit on the I-10 and I-110. Carpooling helps reduce greenhouse gases, reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT), and manage congestion.

Metro ExpressLanes through the Transit Rewards Program, the first in the transit and toll industry. Transit riders will also benefit from increased transit service in the corridor, paid for by net toll revenue, as currently on the I-10/I-110 ExpressLanes. Finally, transit riders and carpoolers are expected to benefit from reduced travel time and increased travel reliability on the HOV/ExpressLanes.

What are Transportation System Management/ Transportation Demand Management (TSM/TDM) strategies?

All alternatives will include Transportation System Management/Transportation Demand Management (TSM/TDM), which are features designed to maximize the efficiency of the existing transportation system by improving capacity on the local street system and reducing the effects of bottlenecks and chokepoints. These relatively low-cost, low-impact strategies are included to enhance performance. TSM strategies include coordinated traffic signal timing to help relieve congestion, ramp metering to control the entry of vehicles onto a freeway, and minor street widening and intersection improvements to improve traffic circulation. TDM strategies promote carpooling, staggered work shifts, and more transit use.

Will some noise barriers be reconstructed?

Noise barriers may be reconstructed. However, a noise analysis is required when an existing highway is significantly altered, for example, by changing the height or width of the road or by increasing the number of through-traffic lanes. As a result, some sound walls may be reconstructed to increase the wall height or relocated to the State right-of-way line. Soundwall relocation may trigger a temporary construction easement (TCE).

What is a temporary construction easement (TCE)?

A TCE is where a landowner gives another a limited right to use their land, most often for reasonable access to things like roads, construct sound walls, and construct retaining walls. It is not an ownership right in the land; it is the mere right to use another's land for limited purposes. Although actual and physical use of a property may be anticipated for a limited duration within the specified time, the property is considered burdened and encumbered for the entire duration of when the anticipated construction activity(ies) may occur. The valuation and offer of just compensation must, therefore, consider and evaluate the damages to the remainder due to the TCE term, including impacts to the owner's loss of utility and enjoyment of the encumbered area and whether the impacts are consistent throughout or varying, for the duration of the entire TCE term/window period of potential activity.

Public Involvement

How can local communities and the general public participate in this process?

A robust stakeholder engagement program will be implemented to support the project's environmental planning process to build an inclusive vision that balances the unique and diverse needs of the corridor stakeholders. Metro is committed to a comprehensive community engagement program that provides project stakeholders with the necessary information, tools, and resources to become engaged and informed and provide valuable input at key milestones.

Members of the public and other interested parties are encouraged to participate at public engagement activities, including scoping meetings and public hearings. Engagement with low-income and impacted communities and organizations will also be a key component of this process to ensure equity concerns are considered and addressed as part of this project phase.

How can I become involved in the process?

Interested parties are encouraged to participate in the upcoming project update meetings. You can also sign up on the website to be part of the project database and receive all information about the project and future meetings.

How will Community Based Organizations be involved?

As part of Metro's Community Based Organization (CBO) Partnering Strategy, Metro will engage with CBOs along the corridor to ensure the voices of underrepresented communities are listened to and included in the assessment of the project alternatives. The CBO Partnering Strategy is how Metro's Equity Platform is implemented at each project planning and development steps.

STAY CONNECTED

Metro is committed to equity, transparency, and maximizing public participation. Metro welcomes your input on the upcoming effort, including comments during future project update meetings. Please share your thoughts and comments using any of the contact methods listed:

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