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Mass Transit Committee Proposes Two Possible BH Subway Stations

By Kelly Hartog

On Nov. 2, The Beverly Hills Mass Transit Committee held a public town hall meeting to discuss its findings on options for subway alignments and station locations within the city, should the Red line subway be extended through Beverly Hills.

The Mass Transit Committee was established in April 2006, and charged specifically to develop recommendations for the City Council regarding route alignments and station locations. The committee has met every Thursday evening since April with representatives from the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), City staff and outside consultants and experts. All the meetings have also been open to the public.

As a result of those meetings, the committee reported at the Nov. 2 gathering that two possible stations seemed the most feasible in Beverly Hills; one at Beverly Drive (at the corner of Rodeo Dr) and Wilshire Blvd. and the other at La Cienega and Wilshire Blvds.

Co-chairs Allan Alexander and Mark Egerman addressed some 50 people who turned out to the meeting, however Alexander stated that as yet no recommendations had been made to the Council and no votes had been taken. He also made it clear that ultimately all final decisions would rest with the Mass Transit Authority (MTA). Alexander added, "This is a long term planning issue. It could be 15 to 20 years away, however now is the time to look at these issues."

Currently, the MTA has four phases for the extension planned; the first from Wilshire and Western to Fairfax Blvd; the second from Fairfax to Century City (which would include Beverly Hills); the third from Century City to Westwood and the fourth from Westwood to Santa Monica.

Egerman told the attendees the committee rode the subway system as part of a field trip on Jun. 14 and visited various stations, and on Sep. 30, they toured the construction site of the existing subway station in East Los Angeles. "We got a good look at how to build a system, the tunnels and staging areas," he said.

Independent consultant Dick Kaku of Kaku Associates addressed the attendees and explained how they came to the conclusion that the best station sites should be at Beverly and La Cienega and the alignment should be along Wilshire Blvd. Kaku said the criteria employed when determining where the best stations and alignments should be, included employing the standard currently used by the MTA, which places stations approximately one mile apart. "This is not only good for service but also making sure you can maintain a good operating speed," said

Kaku. Other criteria included looking for high population and employment density areas, the degree to which the stations would be supported by bus services, and ensuring land uses were compatible with transit stations i.e. locations that had lots of office and retail business.

“We looked first at Santa Monica Blvd., traveling from West Hollywood through Beverly Hills and onto Century City,” Kaku said. “However, we discovered that until the line gets to Century City it doesn’t have the density of development [Beverly Hills] is looking for.” He also stated that while the Beverly Center and Cedars-Sinai Medical Center might appear to be high density they were not “high generators of transit usage” mostly because they have people traveling to their buildings throughout the day and night.

The second option looked at was Santa Monica Blvd traveling through Beverly and Rodeo Drive. However, that was also deemed not a good station location because of the residential area on the northern side of Santa Monica Blvd, which has low residential density. In addition, Kaku said, “It is also not well located to serve the key dense parts of the business triangle.”

However, a station at Beverly Drive and Rodeo Drive along Wilshire Blvd was seen as a good option for several reasons. Firstly, the distance from it to Century City is spaced evenly and there is high bus ridership from that area currently to Century City and further west. “It has a very high density in terms of employment and residential development; higher than the Santa Monica Blvd. corridor,” said Kaku.

Additionally, a station at the intersection of La Cienega and Wilshire Blvds was deemed a good location because the current station at Wilshire and Western contains relatively high-density development, high transit usage and lots of public transit service. A station at this intersection would also be one mile from both the proposed Rodeo/Beverly and Wilshire station and one mile from the proposed Fairfax Blvd station.

Alexander also spoke of four criteria the committee employed in even considering whether Beverly Hills should have stations on the red line at all or whether the line should simply travel from Fairfax straight through to Century City. The four issues were:

- * The potential of crime and terrorism
- * Land use considerations
- * Feasibility of station locations
- * Construction and operations impact

Alexander said that based on a great deal of information, and after meeting with the head of security at MA, the committee overall agreed that crime and terrorism were not really a major issue. “There are 128 bus stops in Beverly Hills and 6,000 buses in the city and the crime rate on buses is not very high,” said Alexander.

However, Simone Bennett said she felt more current studies should be done regarding stations being terror targets. And Chris Lockman who also sits on the Mass Transit Committee said crime should be looked at not necessarily on the subway but off the subway, “whether that means kids who are taggers in the alleys or who are imported on the subway from other stations.” He also suggested finding ways to support and sustain additional fire, police and emergency service personnel who would need to be around the subways particularly late at night “If there is a 2 a.m. or midnight curfew....what will happen to those who are drunk or loitering and waiting for the trains to start again?” he queried.

Regarding land use considerations, Alexander said although the MTA runs the subways, the City of Beverly Hills would still control land use issues including density and height.

As to the feasibility of the stations proposed, Alexander said it appeared that both could feasibly be built and operated with enough room to provide escalators and elevators and probably staging areas.

Finally, regarding operations and construction impact, Alexander said, “Everybody knows there will be an impact but the tunnels are not a problem as there is new technology...” He also said the committee is looking into noise and vibration impacts.

LA resident Dana Gabbard who also sits on the Southern California Transit Advocates committee, said, everyone needs to work together to make the Red line extension a reality. “A major transportation official in the Reagan Administration in the 80s noted that Wilshire Blvd. was the most dense corridor in the US lacking mass transit,” he said.

Beverly Hills resident Joe Safier expressed concern that West Hollywood would probably be more interested in having the extension run through Santa Monica Blvd. rather than Wilshire Blvd. However, Alexander said the mass transit committee had been charged with determining what was best for Beverly Hills and ultimately it would be the MTA making the final decisions.

The committee is set to meet again on November 16 to provide further information regarding the potential negative impact of construction of a line through Beverly Hills and running trains underground. On December 7 the committee will finalize its report to the City Council and ask for input and recommendations, and on January 9 it will present its final report to the City Council.