

## Crenshaw Transit Corridor ready for closeup

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CRENSHAW — This fall, the full Metropolitan Transportation Authority board will decide on a mode of transportation for the Crenshaw Transit Corridor project, which was approved last November by a two-third vote under Measure R.

The north-south oriented project will serve South Los Angeles, Hawthorne, Inglewood, El Segundo, parts of the unincorporated county of Los Angeles and LAX, all by way of Crenshaw Boulevard.

The corridor “is generally defined,” said an MTA report, “as the area extending north to Wilshire Boulevard, east to Arlington Avenue, south to El Segundo Boulevard, and west to Sepulveda Boulevard, La Tijera Boulevard and La Brea Avenue.”

In the first phase, the line would extend to Exposition Boulevard down to LAX. Upon completion of the project, it is expected to connect to the Green Line, Purple Line and the Expo Line — the latter of which is currently under construction — as will it utilize the Harbor Subdivision, a 26-mile stretch of rail track between downtown L.A. and the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, that was abandoned during construction of the Alameda Corridor.

Future plans would extend the project north from Wilshire Boulevard to Hollywood, where it would then connect to the Red Line subway in the San Fernando Valley. Currently, there is already a line connecting LAX to Redondo Beach, which under the project could then be extended to Long Beach.

After narrowing down several options, the MTA has devised two alternatives for the project: a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) or a Light Rail Transit (LRT).

“One alignment alternative provides for a BRT and LRT line operating south from Wilshire Boulevard or the Exposition LRT line [which is under construction], along Crenshaw Boulevard through Koreatown, the Crenshaw District, and downtown Inglewood on the MTA-owned Harbor Subdivision railroad right-of-way, where the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway operates some freight service, continuing to the Green Line Aviation Station,” said the study. “A transfer connection would be provided to LAX from the Aviation Station.”

Another alignment alternative “provides for operation of a BRT or LRT line south from Wilshire Boulevard or the Exposition LRT line along Crenshaw Boulevard to the Harbor Subdivision railroad right-of-way,” added the report. “The BRT alternative would then operate along the Harbor Subdivision railroad right-of-way to La Brea Avenue, where it would turn southward to Hawthorne

Boulevard and terminate at El Segundo Boulevard. The LRT alternative would operate along the Harbor Subdivision railroad right-of-way south to Prairie Avenue, then turn west to connect with the Green Line Hawthorne Station along the I-105 Freeway and south on Hawthorne Boulevard to El Segundo Boulevard.”

Currently, the project is in what is called the “alternative analysis” phase of the Environmental Impact Report. The latest EIR should be released by the MTA late summer or early fall, said MTA Transportation Planning Manager Roderick Diaz, but it must first be reviewed by the federal government. After which, the board will review and approve what is called a Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA), or a determined mode of transportation. Another level of environmental review will then be completed with the intent of moving forward with the selected alternative.

According to Diaz, the BRT alternative has “a cost estimate of between \$500-\$600 million.” The LRT alternative has a “cost estimate that will likely end up between \$1.5-\$1.8 billion.” This includes construction costs, design and labor.

“It could be completed anytime between 2016-2018 and that’s dependent largely upon the availability of funding,” Diaz added, who cited a declining sales tax receipts due to the recession. “The [completion] date may be affected by the availability of funding by those projections.”

Funds from Measure R, a ballot measure that will make \$40 billion available to address traffic and transportation upgrades throughout the county over the next 30 years, and other local sales taxes — such as Prop. A passed in 1980 and Prop. C passed in 1990 — will support funding of the project.

However, the MTA is “still looking to attract more funding for the project just in case the alternative that is selected exceeds what Measure R grants to the project.”

Esperanza Martinez, a Bus Riders Union organizer, said LRTs “are costly projects that historically go over budget and then they have to come back and figure out how they can meet the budget,” which she said causes huge delays.

Martinez added that LRTs take anywhere from 9 to 15 years to construct and operate versus BRTs, which could be up and running within the next five years.

The project has been a subject of debate since the Major Investment Study (MIS) was initiated between 1993-1994. Issues surrounding traffic, safety and impacts on the environment have all been raised by various groups.

The BRT could take away a lane from automobiles on streets along the path and be replaced by a bus-only lane, which may pose right-of-way issues as could it pose traffic. In comparison to the LRT, it is expected to go underground in congested areas and in certain places above ground or at-grade. Since the latter does not have to compete with traffic on the street, according to an MTA report, it would be a faster mode of transportation, beating the BRT by at least six minutes.

The Bus Riders Union, which advocate bus-only lanes, believes that buses should be given priority since they hold a higher capacity of riders per hour. In addition, “We believe eventually ... it will really increase the number of people who use public transit,” said Martinez. “And if you reduce the

number of autos you also impact public health as well as the climate change crisis.”

In terms of creating more traffic, Martinez said it may initially, “but how else are you going to get people out of their car?” she asked. “You have to give them a viable alternative. So, maybe the first week you’ll have someone like myself driving down Crenshaw Boulevard and you see that bus that’s zooming by you a lot faster than you are, you may think about leaving the car at home.”

To address pedestrian safety for at-grade levels, “standard cross-walk markings, control devices for pedestrian crossings includ[ing] flashing light signals, signs, markings along the outside of the rail line, curbside pedestrian barriers, pedestrian automated gates, swing gates, bedstead barriers and crossing channelization” will be considered. Below grade separations can be achieved by way of bridges, tunnels and trenches and are generally used where this no right-of-way or enough right-of-way for the project.

Advocates of the project say it will attract customers to businesses they may have never visited before due to a lack of mobility and as a result will help local businesses prosper.

According to Transit Coalition Executive Director Bart Reed, the corridor would also connect communities and provide “total flexibility.” He added, “with proper routing , station locations and urban design strategies the corridor to major activity centers, residential areas and job cores, helps ensure that LA is building an efficient and safe transit network that will be a success.”

In addition, either mode of transportation would likely create employment opportunities. If the LRT is chosen, a number of construction workers would be hired to construct the line as would operators. If the BRT is chosen, the number of buses and bus drivers would be increased.

“The manufacturing and the putting out on the street of one bus creates about eight jobs from the manufacturer to the mechanic to the bus operator,” said Martinez. “And these bus operator positions have been historically Black jobs, and those are jobs that we ... need to protect and expand.”