



# Baldwin Park plans to construct transit center

By Maritza Velazquez, Staff Writer

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BALDWIN PARK - Officials hope a new transit center will attract developers to the city's downtown area while making public transportation more accessible.

Construction of the Baldwin Park Transit Center is slated to begin in March. It will include a five-story, 500-stall parking structure to be built at City Hall's parking lot, and an overhead pedestrian bridge linking the structure to the Metrolink Station.

However, the city is still searching for contractors to build the project and keep within its \$8.4 million budget.

During a City Council meeting Wednesday, councilmembers voted to reject bids from all six contractors. The lowest bid was \$2.1 million over budget.

The project's final design was approved in October.

"We're hoping that by expanding and qualifying more contractors, there will be more competition and the bids will come down," Baldwin Park Chief Executive Officer Vijay Singhal said.

The city is employing other measures to reduce the cost of construction, such as using more inexpensive materials or giving contractors the option to install various features, such as video cameras.

Those items could be completed after the structure is built, Singhal said.

"I think this really improves the city's ability to be able have better access to transportation," Councilman Ricardo Pacheco said.

The majority of the project is funded through grants from the Federal Transit Administration

and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. In addition, the city is allocating \$2.5 million of its own Proposition C funding, which provides some revenues from Los Angeles County sales taxes to projects that improve transit services, reduce traffic congestion and improve air quality.

Currently, Metro, Foothill Transit and city-run buses stop near City Hall. The new parking structure would make the stops more accessible and allow for more convenient parking.

Baldwin Park public transit users can currently park in a free overflow lot located off of Ramona and Badillo. However, it's a two-block walk to access the train station or bus stops.

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"When you build a transit center, it brings immense benefits to the community because in

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transit everything is about walking," said Bart Reed, executive director of The Transit Coalition, a nonprofit organization based in San Fernando and centered on improving transportation in Southern California. "When you have got something on one side of street and another on the other, everything is disconnected and makes everything harder to use transit."

He praised Baldwin Park its initiative.

"These are things that Southern California has long needed. We put trains in 20 years ago, but didn't follow with the development which makes trains all the more viable."

Transit centers also make the area more attractive to developers. City officials hope that a less than two-acre parcel of vacant property off Ramona Boulevard could be the future site of a mixed-use development.

"Once you have a real product there, it's much more feasible," Singhal said of attracting developers. "We're hoping that once they see the finished product they'll say `ok, let's see what we can do.'"

The city wants to acquire an additional \$370,000 grant to pay for landscaping the proposed Baldwin Park Transit Center.

The landscape design plans should go before the City Council within the next three to four months, he said.

"If we get the environmental grant, we have a little more flexibility," Singhal said.

Construction of the Baldwin Park Transit Center should be completed within 14 months, he said.

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