

Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council
SPECIAL Meeting of the Transportation Committee
November 2, 2021
MINUTES

I. WELCOMING REMARKS

A. Call to Order

A duly noticed meeting of the Transportation Committee of the Greater Wilshire Neighborhood Council (“GWNC”) was held on Tuesday, November 2, 2021, via Zoom (online and by telephone). Committee chairperson Cindy Chvatal called the meeting to order at 7:10 p.m.

B. Roll Call

Mr. Carpenter called the roll. Five of the nine Committee Members were present at Roll Call: Jonah Bliss, Jeffry Carpenter, Cindy Chvatal (chair), and Conrad Starr and Julie Stromberg. GWNC board secretary Jennifer DeVore moderated the meeting. *[The GWNC Transportation Committee quorum (the minimum number of Committee Members needing to be present to take binding votes on Agendized Items) was 51% of 9 Committee Seats, or five, so the Committee was able to take such votes.]*

II. COMMENTS BY GOVERNMENT REPRESENTATIVES

This was a special meeting to hear a Metro presentation; there were no other government representatives that identified themselves.

III. GENERAL PUBLIC COMMENT ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

There were no comments from the public.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

A. Review and possible motion to adopt the July 26, 2021, Committee meeting minutes.

This item was deferred to the next Regular meeting.

V. NEW BUSINESS

A. La Brea Avenue Bus Priority Lanes Project. Josh Francis, Senior Project Coordinator for Arellano Associates and Metro’s community representative for the project, provided an introduction to the proposed project, then introduced Julia Brown, Metro’s project manager for the project; also joining were Emily Cadena from Metro, along with Kevin Ocuillo from LADOT. Ms. Brown then turned the presentation James Shahamiri from Metro who provided a narrated slide show on the project’s design and its service and equity objectives. He noted that in addition to increasing bus service travel speeds, service frequency (headways) would be halved during peak periods, reduced to 7-8 minutes from

current 15-minute intervals. The project is expected to improve traffic safety with reduced weaving in and out of the curb lane and generally promote more orderly traffic flow.

His presentation included demographics of current Line 212 riders who disproportionately are women, are from lower-income households and often do not have alternative means of transportation available.

Ms. Brown noted that the project is currently in the stakeholder engagement phase, with a physical “pop-up portal” scheduled for the afternoon of November 16 in the LADOT parking lot at 728 South Cochran. Comments can also be directed to Metro at labrea@metro.net. Project implementation anticipated in the spring of 2022.

Separately, Ms. Brown also noted that Metro’s current free fare pilot program will end early in 2022 with fare collection resuming on January 10th, along with re instatement of boarding only at the front of the bus. Metro is introducing the LIFE fare plan to help address the impact of transit fares on low-income individuals and households.

Discussion

Starting off responses to the presentation, Ms. Chvatal asked about what impacts there would be on adjacent streets and arterials as well as on La Brea Avenue. Mr. Shahamiri responded that La Brea is not presently near saturation level north of San Vicente and that the curb lane currently carries less than a third of the traffic that other lanes do during peak operation.

Mr. Shahamiri noted that staff conducted numerous drive through observations that confirmed very low peak hour utilization of the curb lane by cars. La Brea north of San Vicente is currently operating significantly below capacity and should be able to easily absorb the limited vehicle traffic using the peak hour curb lane and, therefore, significant traffic impacts are not expected in this stretch of La Brea. Traffic impacts could be further mitigated by the reduction in weaving movements that now occur with buses needing to change lanes, as well as cars moving in and out of the curb lane.

Mr. Shahamiri did allow, however, that effects are likely to be different south of San Vicente where present-day congestion is more significant.

Ms. Chvatal expressed the concern that the proposed project would shift traffic to Highland Avenue and asked for whatever written reports would address these potential impacts. Mr. Shahamiri responded that project analyses (done primarily with 2019 data for a “before pandemic” condition) did not examine Highland Avenue, that only intersections on La Brea Avenue itself were evaluated.

Mr. Carpenter, noting that the existing pavement was sub-par in many places and that the intensive use by buses would unquestionably worsen these conditions,

asked if the project was contemplating upgrading the entirety of the curb lane with concrete pavement, rather than just at bus stop locations as is presently done. Mr. Shahamiri responded that no paving improvements were included in the project.

Mr. Starr added his concerns, as a cyclist, over pavement conditions, such as asphalt rutting that posed particular hazards to bicyclists. Beyond the issue of pavement, Mr. Starr also expressed concerns about how the proposed project would handle construction staging, which presently often occupies the curb lane (sometimes displacing traffic into adjacent neighborhoods, such as his own). Another concern Mr. Starr had was that rideshare vehicles (and other double parking) will inevitably make incursions into the bus lane unless they are strictly controlled. In general, Mr. Starr wanted to know how the installation of the bus lane will impact adjacent streets.

Mr. Shahamiri responded that [current policy] limits concrete pavement to bus stops, where he indicated is where bus deceleration tends to cause rutting of pavements; Mr. Starr asked that attention needs to be given to all locations where rutting is occurring. Mr. Shahamiri stated that there was no funding available for pavement improvements. Regarding construction staging, he said he would defer to LADOT. (Mr. Ocubillo was unable to respond to the concern at the moment. The topic was identified for possible follow-up.)

Mr. Shahamiri noted that recent legislation, SB 517, should strengthen the ability of bus drivers to use photo enforcement to issue citations when they encounter vehicles illegally occupying the bus lane. When asked about comparative data on the implementation of the bus lane on Wilshire, Mr. Shahamiri replied that no traffic displacement studies were done in conjunction with that project.

Mr. Bliss, taking note of prospective “NextGen” Metro bus system service improvements, asked if the removal of some bus stop locations was under consideration in order to improve speed bus speeds. Mr. Shahamiri responded that express bus services (which skip some local stopes) will be continued but while some lines are being reconfigured and, thus, some stops relocated, elimination of stops specifically for increasing bus service speeds is not proposed unless the impact on patron access was found to be minimal.

Ms. Stromberg asked what relation the proposed project had to the North Extension of the Crenshaw [rail] line. Mr. Shahamiri responded that the project was just a “short-term” intervention unrelated to rail system planning. Ms. Stromberg asked if the performance of the La Brea bus lanes could influence decisions on the Northern Extension and Mr. Shahamiri responded that the project “entirely derived from bus system analyses”.

Ms. Stromberg then asked if there had been any outreach to schools along the corridor. Ms. Brown said that outreach to schools was ongoing and Mr. Francis noted that there would be stakeholder meetings the next day, specifically

including Jewish schools.

Cathy Roberts [a GWNC board member representing a neighborhood adjacent La Brea but attending as a stakeholder participant] expressed concern that there would commercial businesses along La Brea that would want to open for business before 10am, while the bus lane was still in operation, and asked about the extent to which the impact on businesses had been addressed. Ms. Brown said that the project team is walking the corridor to make contact with stakeholders on this concern. She mentioned the possibility of valet parking as a mitigation measure.

Ms. Chvatal asked how a decision is made to proceed with the project. Ms. Brown replied that the project development and programming is a collaborative process working with all the affected jurisdictions.

Mr. Starr returned to Ms. Robert's concerns about impacts on commercial businesses and asked if a business interruption fund was to be established [similar to that created for businesses impacted by rail construction facilities] and could those prospective agreements be shared with the public. Ms. Brown noted that the proposed project is an operational improvement, not a capital project, so no impact mitigation funds are a part of the project's implementation.

Ms. Chvatal asked what information was available on bus ridership trends. Mr. Shahamiri he would respond with available data on La Brea. With that, Mr. Starr indicated that the comment period needed wrap up. Ms. Brown concluded by reiterating the anticipated project implementation in spring, so urged that stakeholder input be submitted by early January 2022.

VI. COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were no Committee member comments.

VII. REQUESTS FOR POSSIBLE FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

There were no requests for future agenda items. The next meeting of the Committee was noted to be at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, November 22, 2021 [subsequently re-scheduled to November 29, 2021, as a Special Meeting, due to the Thanksgiving holiday] via Zoom ID 921 5993 555.

Mr. Carpenter motioned to adjourn, which was seconded by Mr. Bliss, and the meeting adjourned at 8:02pm.