

# Memorandum

To: CHAIR AND COMMISSIONERS

CTC Meeting: June 29-30, 2016

Reference No.: 2.2c.(13)  
Action

From: SUSAN BRANSEN  
Executive Director

Subject: **APPROVAL OF PROJECT FOR FUTURE CONSIDERATION OF FUNDING  
FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT FOR THE VAN NESS AVENUE BUS  
RAPID TRANSIT PROJECT (RESOLUTION E-16-49)**

**ISSUE:**

Should the Commission, as a Responsible Agency, accept the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Van Ness Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Project (Project) in San Francisco County for future consideration of funding?

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends the Commission accept the FEIR and approve the project for future consideration of funding.

**BACKGROUND:**

The San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA) is the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) lead agency for the project. The proposed project involves improvements to implement a bus rapid transit (BRT) along a 2-mile stretch of Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco, from Van Ness Avenue at Lombard Street in the north to South Van Ness Avenue at Mission Street in the south and includes: dedicated bus lanes, level or near level boarding, consolidated transit stops, high-quality stations, proof of payment, traffic signal optimization, transit signal priority, fewer left-turn pocket lanes, and pedestrian safety enhancements.

On September 10, 2013, SFCTA adopted the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Van Ness Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Project under CEQA.

The Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) determined that impacts related to traffic and the decline in levels-of-service in parallel streets would be significant and unavoidable.

The SFCTA found that there were several benefits that outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects of the project. These benefits include overriding economic, legal, social and technological considerations that outweigh the identified significant effects on the environment. The SFCTA cited benefits related to improved transit travel time; compliance with Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) platform requirements; increased pedestrian safety; improved median and streetscape features; the achievement of higher throughput numbers for

people in transit and cars through each lane of Van Ness Avenue; and reduced costs for operating bus routes 47 and 49 (fewer buses and drivers would be used).

On May 7, 2016, the SFCTA confirmed that the 2013 FEIR remains valid and that there are no new identified impacts requiring mitigation since adoption. The SFCTA also confirmed that the preferred alternative set forth in the final environmental document is consistent with the project scope of the work programmed by the Commission.

The Van Ness Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Project is a signature project of the SFCTA's Proposition K transportation sales tax program. The project aims to:

- Significantly improve transit reliability, speed, connectivity, and comfort;
- Improve pedestrian comfort, amenities, and safety;
- Enhance the urban design and identity of Van Ness Avenue;
- Create a more livable and attractive street for local residential, commercial, and other activities; and,
- Accommodate safe multimodal circulation and access within the corridor.

The project is estimated to cost \$5,075,000 and is fully funded through construction with Active Transportation Program (ATP) Funds (\$4,058,000) and Local San Francisco Metropolitan Transportation Authority Revenue Bond Funds (\$1,017,000). Construction is estimated to begin in Fiscal Year 2016/17.

#### Attachment

- Resolution E-16-49
- Project Location
- Statement of Overriding Consideration

# CALIFORNIA TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

## Resolution for Future Consideration of Funding 04– San Francisco County Resolution E-16-49

- 1.1 **WHEREAS**, the San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFMTA) has completed a Final Environmental Impact Report pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the CEQA Guidelines for the following project:
  - Van Ness Avenue Bus Rapid Transit Project
- 1.2 **WHEREAS**, the SFMTA has certified that the Final Environmental Impact Report was completed pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines; and
- 1.3 **WHEREAS**, the project involves improvements to implement a bus rapid transit (BRT) along a 2-mile stretch of Van Ness Avenue in San Francisco, from Van Ness Avenue at Lombard Street in the north to South Van Ness Avenue at Mission Street in the south; and
- 1.4 **WHEREAS**, the project is located on Van Ness Avenue and South Van Ness Avenue, from Van Ness Avenue at Lombard Street to South Van Ness Avenue at Mission Street, in the City and County of San Francisco; and
- 1.5 **WHEREAS**, the California Transportation Commission, as a Responsible Agency, has considered the information contained in the Final Environmental Impact Report; and
- 1.6 **WHEREAS**, the SFMTA on September 10, 2013, adopted the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR); and
- 1.7 **WHEREAS**, the SFMTA on September 7, 2016, confirmed that the 2013 FEIR remains valid with no new identified impacts; and
- 1.8 **WHEREAS**, the SFMTA determined that impacts related to traffic and the decline in levels-of-service in parallel streets would be significant and unavoidable; and
- 1.9 **WHEREAS**, the SFMTA adopted a Statement of Overriding Considerations for the project finding that the project benefits outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effects; and
- 2.0 **WHEREAS**, the SFMTA adopted a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program for the project; and
- 2.1 **WHEREAS**, the above significant effects are acceptable when balanced against the facts as set forth in the Statement of Overriding Considerations; and

**2.2** **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the California Transportation Commission does hereby accept the Final Environmental Impact Report and Addendum and approves the above referenced project to allow for future consideration of funding.

#### **4. Build Alternative 4: Center-Lane BRT with Left-Side Boarding and Single Median**

The purpose and need evaluation showed that Build Alternative 4 would perform similarly to the LPA for two performance indicators (ridership and lane productivity). It would also have the best performance among alternatives in the amount of buffer between platform and auto traffic. With the inclusion of Design Option B, it would perform as well as the LPA for additional indicators (transit travel time, likelihood of stops, and cost of Muni service). It would also perform better than the LPA in consistency of median footprint, number of lane transitions and total construction cost. In terms of environmental effects, Alternative 4 has similar traffic intersection impacts as the LPA, but it would require removal of fewer median trees and likely require less replacement of the sewer pipeline than the LPA.

Although Build Alternative 4 has less of an environmental effect on tree removal and sewer pipeline replacement, and performed strongly in terms of key purpose and need indicators, this alternative would require left-side boarding and the acquisition of left-right door motorcoach and trolleycoach vehicles. No such trolleycoach vehicles are known to be in use and operating in North America. For these reasons, Alternative 4 is rejected as infeasible.

#### **VI. Statement Of Overriding Considerations**

Pursuant to CEQA Section 21081, CEQA Guideline 15093, and Chapter 31, the Authority hereby finds, after consideration of the Final EIS/EIR and the evidence in the record, that each of the specific overriding economic, legal, social, technological and other benefits of the Project as set forth below independently and collectively outweighs the significant and unavoidable impacts of the Project and is an overriding consideration warranting approval of the Project. In addition, the Authority finds that the mitigation measures and alternatives to the Project that are rejected, are rejected for the following economic, social or other considerations in and of themselves, in addition to the specific reasons discussed above. The specific reasons for these findings are based on substantial evidence in the record including but not limited to the documents referenced in these findings.

On the basis of the above findings and the substantial evidence in the whole record of this proceeding, the Authority specifically finds, and therefore makes this Statement of Overriding Considerations:

The proposed project has been found to provide numerous benefits related to transit performance, passenger experience, access and pedestrian safety, urban design and landscape, system performance, and operation and maintenance, as described below.

#### **Transit Performance**

The project would significantly improve transit travel time, reliability, and ridership along Van Ness Avenue. In 2015, relative to the No Build Alternative described in the EIS/EIR, the LPA would reduce transit travel time by 33 percent, reducing the travel time gap between autos and transit by as much as 50 percent. Among other features, it would include transit signal priority for buses to provide additional green light time for buses approaching an intersection and to reduce delay at red lights. Reliability would also improve with the LPA; the likelihood of a bus unexpectedly stopping (excluding loading and unloading passengers) would decrease by 52 percent, allowing more consistent travel times. With the proposed project, transit boardings would increase by 37 percent throughout the routes of Muni bus lines 47 and 49 when compared with the No Build Alternative. BRT vehicles would offer increased passenger capacity over the Muni 47 line buses that presently operate in the Van Ness Avenue corridor, and include a mix of 60-foot electric trolley coaches and 60-foot diesel hybrid motor coaches. With implementation of the project, Van Ness Avenue BRT would increase the street's transit mode share to 44 percent of all motorized trips, relative to 30 percent under the No Build Alternative.

### **Passenger Experience**

The proposed project offers numerous enhancements to the passenger experience compared with existing conditions. High quality bus stations would be provided, each with an elevated platform, canopy for weather protection, comfortable seating, vehicle arrival time information, landscaping and other amenities, including protective railings as appropriate. The platforms would be large enough to comfortably accommodate waiting passengers, long enough to load two BRT vehicles, and designed to provide Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility. Level or near level boarding would be provided to minimize the horizontal and vertical gap between the platform edge and vehicle door threshold. A proof of payment system would allow passengers to swipe their fare cards either on the platform before buses arrive or on-bus once boarded, allowing for all-door loading. The number of lane-weaves made by buses along Van Ness Avenue would reduce by more than 50 percent compared with the No-Build Alternative, providing a smoother ride for passengers – especially for standing passengers. Improved station facilities with level or near level boarding, additional amenities, and real-time arrival information would also improve transit passengers' comfort.

### **Access and Pedestrian Safety**

The project would incorporate features to increase pedestrian safety at intersections, including pedestrian countdown signals, additional curb bulbs, nose cones and enhanced median refuges to reduce crossing distances at intersections and increase safety. With the proposed project, the median refuges within all of the crosswalks in the project corridor would be at least six feet wide, compared with existing conditions in which 47 percent of the median refuges are less than five feet wide. These features would shorten crossing distances, allowing nearly all intersections to meet local and federal standards for minimum pedestrian

crossing speed, while giving pedestrians more information about when it is safe to cross. New ADA curb ramps and Accessible Pedestrian Signals (APS) along Van Ness Avenue would improve safety and access for all users. Pedestrians would also benefit from wider effective sidewalk widths in many locations due to removal of existing bus shelters and addition of curb bulbs, pedestrian-scale lighting, and additional median trees and landscaping and tree plantings along the sidewalk.

### **Urban Design and Landscape**

A main component of the Van Ness Avenue BRT Project is to provide a consistent landscaped median treatment and pedestrian lighting, as well as establish a more unified identity for Van Ness Avenue as one of the City's most prominent arterials with a visible rapid transit service. The improved streetscape features of the project would enhance the amenity and urban design of Van Ness Avenue as a gateway into the city and support recently approved nearby high-density mixed-use development plans. The project would help transform the street into a vibrant pedestrian promenade that supports the Civic Center and commercial uses. Placement of BRT infrastructure would demonstrate an investment in the corridor and would provide a greater sense of permanence than existing bus facilities. Such facilities can support place-making and livability, while helping to stimulate further transit-oriented development. The Project also would replace the overhead contact system of wires and support poles/streetlights between Mission Street and North Point Street, which provides electrical energy for existing SFMTA operated trolley buses.

### **System Performance**

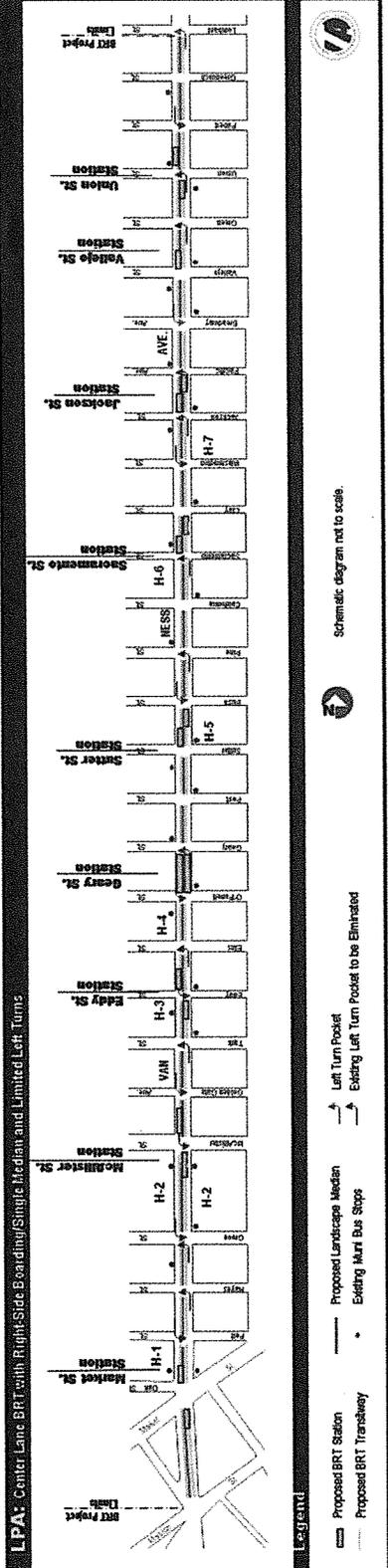
The project would increase the total number of people (in cars and on transit) that use each lane of Van Ness Avenue. While the No Build Alternative moves approximately 605 transit patrons and 630 people in private vehicles in each lane on Van Ness Avenue, the proposed project would move approximately 930 transit patrons and 680 people in private vehicles in each lane. Traffic in the corridor would be optimized using technology upgrades to allow real-time traffic management and optimal signal timing.

### **Operation and Maintenance**

The proposed project would reduce the cost of operating bus routes 47 and 49, because the projected travel time savings would allow the same service frequencies to be provided using fewer buses and drivers. The Project would reduce the cost of on-street service from Mission to Lombard streets from \$8.3 million annually, under existing conditions, to a projected \$6.1 million annually, a 27 percent reduction in annual operating and maintenance costs.

**Legend for Historic Properties Listed or Eligible within the APE (see map below):**

- H-1 Masonic Temple, 11-35 Van Ness Avenue
- H-2 War Memorial Complex and City Hall
- H-3 Wallace Estate Co. Garage, 799 Van Ness Avenue
- H-4 Ingold Chevrolet, 945-999 Van Ness Avenue
- H-5 Scottish Rite Temple, 1320 Van Ness Avenue
- H-6 Paige Motor Car Co., 1699 Van Ness Avenue
- H-7 California Oakland Motor Co., 1946 Van Ness Avenue



**Figure 4-5-3: LPA Project Features and Location Map of Historic Properties Listed or Eligible within Project APE**