



February 11, 2022

Sepulveda Transit Corridor Project
Attention: Peter Carter, Project Manager
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority
One Gateway Plaza
Los Angeles, CA 90012
sepulvedatransit@metro.net

Subject: **Sepulveda Transit Corridor Project Public Scoping Comment**

Mr. Carter:

For the past three years the Bel-Air community has attempted to engage with Metro staff in an effort to gather information on the proposed Sepulveda Transit Corridor Project, hoping to understand Metro's methods and motives. This experience has been frustrating at best. The lack of insight and transparency has shown the disinterest Metro staff holds for those concerned about the deleterious effects the project would have on their communities.

Issues of project affordability and time of construction will affect our community similarly to all other communities in Los Angeles. However, Metro's proposal to place a subway tunnel under our homes, streets, and schools means the Bel-Air community will be disproportionately harmed by environmental damage, eminent domain/sub-surface easements, and geotechnical instability.

For these and many other reasons, the Bel-Air Association submits the following comments and questions for the Public Scoping associated with the Notice of Preparation for the Sepulveda Transit Corridor Project.

Outreach & Transparency

From the beginning Metro staff has shown little interest in non-subway alternatives for the Sepulveda Pass Project, and has routinely given arbitrary reasons as to why these alternatives would not be feasible for other modes or paths of travel. For example, three years ago Metro staff claimed their addition of a Toll Lane on the 405 Freeway precluded a monorail alternative along its median. Meaning, before any official proposals were made, Metro was claiming its own Toll Lane project would preclude a less expensive and faster to construct Transit Project.

Metro has created a process that is designed to favor a subway project. Four years ago, interested communities were under the impression that a subway piercing through Sherman Oaks and Bel-Air was the only way to achieve a dedicated stop at UCLA. Before this misconception could be addressed, Metro placed a muzzle on all companies who submitted proposals. This muzzle kept project applicants from speaking to anyone attempting to correct the misinformation that had spread.

Metro's muzzle effectively made Metro the ONLY source of information. However, we were told that once the Metro Board chose the two companies that would "compete" for the project, the community could once again speak to the project applicants. However, once the Metro Board chose the two competing companies, Metro refused to remove the muzzle for project applicants. This gave Metro a monopoly on controlling information, and further exasperated the frustration felt by many.

One of the largest discussion points associated with the Sepulveda Project has surrounded UCLA having its own on-campus Metro Station. Both project proposals have at least one plan with a dedicated stop on the UCLA campus. However, because of Metro's refusal to allow any of the project applicants to speak to confused groups or individuals, large segments of the community still believe the subway is the only opportunity to have a Metro Station at UCLA.

How will Metro address these shortfalls in transparency? How will Metro repair the damage caused by allowing misinformation to spread, then silencing the only people with a vested interest in making sure the community heard accurate and complete information?

The sad reality is those communities most impacted by the Sepulveda Transit Corridor Project have lost trust in the process, and the information being controlled by Metro staff. **Will Metro allow the project applicants to address questions and concerns the community may have about their specific proposals?**

Construction Conflicts & Eminent Domain

For the past decade the Los Angeles hillsides have seen an explosion in new construction projects. These projects vary greatly in size and often exceed the average square footage of a grocery store (40,000SF), many with questionable adherence to current building and planning codes. These hillside projects sit upon a wide range of topography, from nearly flat to sheer cliffs. In nearly every instance the projects are located on Substandard Limited Hillside Streets and require caissons and soldier piles to be driven deep into the earth to provide structural integrity and combat high water-tables and liquefaction.

Subsurface construction is precarious on a good day, and deadly on a bad one. Metro's desire to build a tunnel under a westside hillside community seems to be a recipe for disaster. Nearly every project above the potential tunnel will need to construct caissons and pilings into bedrock to meet today's geo-technical and structural standards. However, many of those projects will not know the exact depth their caissons will need to go to hit bedrock. So, the depths of drilling are often unknown. Caissons reaching 80-100 feet in depth have occurred. **How will Metro address this**

issue and other geo-technical requirements for properties above their sub-surface easements? How will Metro enforce drilling limitations for the projects above them? What is the depth of the actual proposed tunnels and equipment that will be under the Bel-Air community? What subsurface limitations will Metro be placing on the properties above the tunnels?

Alternatives 4,5, and 6 propose a potential elevated heavy rail lines with mostly subterranean subway variations. In all instances, these Alternatives will be running beside, or below some of the most expensive real-estate in the County. Understanding the specific process and limitations of subsurface easement and how property owners are compensated is important. Additionally, Metro should provide analysis on the potential for loss of property value for those directly above, within the easement area, and within an area known to have a subway below.

A question that has been asked consistently for the past three years, but never answered, is: What will be needed for the proposed subways in the form of surface vents, escape/access tunnels, and permanent surface installations? How will those properties that can no longer be built on or improved upon be compensated?

The westside hills are a giant liquefaction zone with a very shallow water-table. In addition, natural springs and seasonal waterways are common throughout Bel-Air. Stone Canyon is notorious for its shallow water-table and crisscrossing “creek” that fills and empties water seasonally. How will Metro mitigate these liquefaction causing elements and ensure the integrity and stability of your tunnels?



The Bel-Air community is home to Lower Stone Canyon reservoir, a 117 acre open body of water. Built in 1924, the reservoir is an earth dam with little improvement completed on the downstream (Stone Canyon facing) side. The prospect of a subsurface tunnel anywhere near this 100 year old earth-dam causes extreme concern. This is even a greater concern when you realize Stone Canyon Road is the spillway in the event of a failure. Should that failure be significant, the damage and loss of life would be nothing short of catastrophic.

With nearly 3.5 billion gallons of water, the residents along Stone Canyon and its adjoining streets would be obliterated. The tidal wave wouldn't have an opportunity to dissipate until it reached UCLA, across Sunset Blvd. Much of the northern portion of UCLA and anyone unlucky enough to be there could be wiped-out as well.

It is critically important to understand the potential for damage to, and potential failure of the Lower Stone Canyon Reservoir. **What are the damage and death toll scenarios in the event a failure occurs? How will tunneling under Bel-Air generally, and near Stone Canyon Reservoir specifically, affect the stability of Lower Stone Canyon Reservoir?**



Cir. 1962 Aftermath of Bel-Air Fire. Construction of 405 in background.

Over the past four years, Bel-Air has experienced nearly 20 wild fires, with at least a dozen requiring airdrops of water from fire department helicopters. With Bel-Air considered a Very High Fire Severity Zone, many in the community are losing their fire insurance. We must understand what affects the venting systems will have on both the community and tunneling system. **Can a large-scale fire on the surface cause issues in the tunnels? Can a fire in the tunnels affect the community above? Will eminent domain occur to provide these vents and escape tunnels?**

Costs & Considerations

Angelenos need real and usable mass transportation from the Valley to the Westside, not decades of promises and slick concepts. Metro currently states that completion of this Valley/Westside project will not be completed until 2035 (13 years). It is hard to imagine the Sepulveda Corridor Transit Project will be the first Metro project to be completed on time and within budget. **With**

construction and litigation delays a near certainty, has Metro analyzed the likely completion date based on those factors? If so, what is the more accurate completion date?

The inclusion of a UCLA Metro station might be a wise decision in the abstract, but that single stop will increase the current project cost \$2bn - \$8.6bn, compared to the least expensive Alternative. With such a heavy financial cost, Metro must understand the following: **How many of UCLA's students, professors, and staff actually live in and around Van Nuys? How many of those students and professors do you estimate would use train? How does that compare to overall projected ridership? Since students often have class schedules outside of rush-hour time frames (the incentive to use the train), how does that factor into the analysis? How much time is added to a Valley to Westside trip when a UCLA stop is made? How many years are added to the overall project when there is a dedicated UCLA station? How does the increase in construction time and cost effect/delay the next phase of the Corridor Project that connect the Westside to LAX? What are the ridership numbers for those connecting to the Purple Line?**

Sepulveda Transit Corridor
Alternative 1 (Monorail)



ALTERNATIVE 1

**Monorail along 405 with Electric Bus Connection to UCLA
LA SkyRail Express**

Route: 15.3 miles along 405 median. East shoulder of 405 in Valley.

Stations: Eight aerial stations.
Four in Valley.
Four on Westside

UCLA Connection: 1.4 mile electric bus connection.

Affordability:
Cost of \$6.9 billion. Therefore Affordable per Metro's \$6.9 billion budget.

Acceptable Alternative if Valley portion is moved from the shoulder of 405 and onto median.

Sepulveda Transit Corridor
Alternative 2 (Monorail)



ALTERNATIVE 2
Monorail along 405 with Automated People Mover
Connection to UCLA
LA SkyRail Express (Metro contractor).

Route: 15.8 miles along 405 but route is along 405 east shoulder in Valley.

UCLA Connection: 1.0-mile UCLA automated people mover

Affordability:
Cost of \$7.0 billion

Acceptable Alternative if Valley portion is moved from the shoulder of 405 and onto median. Possibly affordable per Metro’s stated budget.

Sepulveda Transit Corridor
Alternative 3 (Monorail)



ALTERNATIVE 3
Monorail along 405 with Tunnel Under UCLA
LA SkyRail Express

Route: 16.2 miles along 405

UCLA Connection: 3.3 mile tunnel under Bel Air community to on-campus station.

Affordability:
Cost of \$8.9 billion in 2022 dollars (Reference 15).

Acceptable Alternative if 1. Tunneling portion avoids residential communities and 2. Valley portion is moved from the shoulder of 405 and onto median. Likely unaffordable per Metro’s stated budget.

Sepulveda Transit Corridor

Alternative 4 (Heavy Rail)



ALTERNATIVE 4 – Heavy Rail Subway under Bel-Air. Elevated above Sepulveda Blvd. in Valley
Sepulveda Transit Corridor Partners Bechtel

Ridiculous proposal. An example of the contempt Metro has for the communities that will forever bear the impact of this project.

Tunnels under Bel-Air causing significant geological and property damage.

An elevated heavy rail line rumbling down Sepulveda Blvd. next to homes, businesses, and office buildings, is the height of hubris on Metro's part.

Twenty years ago the pride and connection our local leaders had for the valley would have quickly placed Alternative #4 on the burn pile. Since that local leadership is lacking, the Sherman Oaks community has organized to do it themselves. And we are happy to join that fight. **Not Acceptable.**

Sepulveda Transit Corridor

Alternative 5 (Heavy Rail)



ALTERNATIVE 5
Heavy Rail Subway under Westside, Pass, and Sepulveda Blvd in Valley
Sepulveda Transit Corridor Partners Bechtel

Route: 14.0 miles under Westside, Sepulveda Pass, and Sepulveda Blvd in Valley.

Affordability
Cost – \$15.9 billion

Not Acceptable. Underground route damages Sherman Oaks and Bel Air communities.
Not Affordable.

Sepulveda Transit Corridor Alternative 6 (Heavy Rail)



ALTERNATIVE 6 – Heavy Rail Subway under Westside, Pass, and Van Nuys Blvd in Valley

HTA Partners

Route: 12.6 miles under Westside, Sepulveda Pass, and Van Nuys Blvd in Valley.

Affordability
Cost: \$15.3 billion

Not Acceptable. Underground route damages Sherman Oaks and Bel Air communities.
Not Affordable.

The Bel-Air Beverly Crest Neighborhood Council has offered an environmentally superior and cost-effective alternative to the costly scenarios currently offered. Instead of the gimmick of adding a toll lane to the freeway, Metro could add an electric Bus Lane. The use of a dedicated bus lane on the 405 Freeway would create a dedicated and congestion free pathway at a fraction of the cost, and at a fraction of the construction time. **Has Metro considered such an alternative?**

Closing

With an unprecedented opportunity to reimagine the transportation potential of one of the most congested yet visionary cities in the world, Metro has chosen yet again, an 1850's technology that will financially burden the next two generations. It won't be built within most of our lifetimes and will be obsolete the day its finally completed. We look forward to your written and substantive responses to our specific questions and concerns.

Thank You,

Jamie Meyer

Jamie Meyer
President
Bel-Air Association

Shawn Bayliss

Shawn Bayliss
Executive Director
Bel-Air Association