SR 710 EIR/EIS TAC Meeting No. 7 – Staff Notes

Alternatives Analysis – presentation /discussion

On Wednesday August 29, 2012, Metro held its 7th SR-710 Technical Advisory Committee meeting at Metro headquarters. Metro's consultant Technical Team (TT) provided information about the alternatives selection process and identified the five alternatives that will advance to the EIR/EIS phase of the work. The five alternatives are:

- No-Build – required by state/federal law – this alternative generates the 2035 future baseline that all other alternatives are evaluated against – it is different than existing conditions as it includes all of the projects in the fiscally constrained component of the Regional Transportation Improvement Plan (RTIP) – as an example, the Gold Line Foothill extension to Azusa is included as a completed/operating transit service in the No-Build alternative, but the extension to Montclair is not.
- TSM/TDM – also required by Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requirements – this alternative is the 2035 No-Build plus an approximate 25% increase in transit service to the study area over the programmed/planned elements in the RTIP and a number of intersection and street improvements as well as travel demand management (ridesharing, etc.) measures. This alternative forms the basis for comparison with the transit alternatives under FTA guidelines.
- BRT 6X – in addition to the TSM/TDM alternative's elements, this alternative would construct a bus rapid transit (BRT) route from Alhambra to Pasadena that generally follows Atlantic Blvd to Huntington Drive to Fair Oaks Ave to Colorado Blvd. There were two route variants in Pasadena for BRT 6 – both incorporate terminal one-way loops, one would follow Colorado to Hill to California to Lake back to Colorado, the other would follow Colorado to Hill to California back to Fair Oaks. Staff raised concerns about the impact on parking, businesses and residents, particularly on California and in the de-emphasized section east of Lake Avenue.
- LRT 4X – in addition to the TSM/TDM alternative's elements, this alternative would construct a Light Rail transit (LRT) route from Alhambra to Pasadena that generally follows the same route as BRT 6, but would have elevated trackway in Alhambra and be in tunnel north of Alhambra. The route would end at an underground station near the Fillmore Station on the Gold Line and would be under Fair Oaks Avenue. The portions of the South Fair Oaks Specific Plan area south of Fillmore to Glenarm is one of two locations that the TT designated as suitable for an at-grade maintenance facility for the LRT (the other is in Alhambra).
- Freeway 7X – this alternative would construct a freeway in tunnel between the two existing stubs of the 710 and would contain the new construction within the right-of-way that Caltrans already owns north of California Blvd in Pasadena and in Alhambra, thus minimizing acquisition of new parcels in the corridor.

The "X" designation for the alternatives is used to signify that further refinement of the alternatives will take place this fall prior to the scheduled start of the EIR/EIS late in 2012 or early in 2013. The TT is scheduled to identify different variations of the designs developed to date to reduce potential impacts.

A rather lengthy presentation was made that was divided into several sections –

- Recap of TAC Meeting 6 and community outreach to date
- Overview of TSM/TDM, BRT, LRT, Freeway and Highway alternatives
- Transportation Systems Analysis Overview
- Environmental screening of alternatives
- Details of the prioritization/ranking system used to select finalists

Recap of activities and the overview of alternatives did not present any new information. Essentially all of the information was presented at previous TAC and/or public meetings

The overview of the Transportation Systems Analysis presented a series of bar charts that compared all of the 12 alternatives performance with regard to

- Daily Study Area Freeway Throughput (i.e., how much traffic is moved on freeways)
- Change in Daily Arterial Volumes (how non-freeway traffic is affected)
- Miles of severely congested freeway miles
- Percentage of congested intersection approaches
- Travel Time performance (nine typical trip routes were identified) for transit and other vehicles (two graphs)
- Percent of jobs reachable within a typical travel time
- Percent of Cut-Through traffic on arterials
- New daily transit riders

Differential changes in traffic volumes caused by each alternative for the study area network were presented for the first time. The diagrams show a comparison of each alternative to the No-Build (future) condition using the 2008 SCAG model, which will be replaced in the EIR/EIS analysis with the 2012 SCAG model.

The environmental screening was described and noted that it was not conducted at the level of detail that would eventually occur in the EIR/EIS, but rather at a more macro level. Areas considered included:

- Air Quality – Mobile Source Air Toxics, Regional Criteria Pollutants and Greenhouse Gases (all of which use vehicle-miles of travel as the primary independent variable) were the metrics
- Noise – essentially a locational analysis that looked at acres of noise-sensitive land uses affected by each alternative
- Potential Property Acquisitions – a parcel level analysis based on the designs for the alternatives prepared by the TT; also looked at parcels over 45 years old for historical impact
- Parks, Recreational and Community Facilities affected
- Visual Effects – used Caltrans visual screening criteria

The TT developed a complex method for combining more than 40 measures of effectiveness quantified in both the transportation and environmental screening and spent the rest of the meeting explaining how the process worked and illustrating why the method supported the selection of the five final alternatives. Staff was able to follow the selection methodology, which is reasonably robust as an analytical approach. It does suffer from the shortfalls that are inherent in systems of this type in that it

allows for overweighting of criteria related to vehicle congestion because several of the metrics measure the same traffic performance although do so by using seemingly different metrics (e.g., vehicular travel time, congested miles of freeway and freeway throughput, which are listed as individual metrics in three distinct categories of criteria essentially measure the same basic metric – how well the system accommodates vehicular traffic). The TT did a reasonable job of showing that the methodology provides reproducible and internally consistent outcomes.

Concerns were raised by TAC members about the lack of analysis of tolls for the freeway alternatives

- The TT indicated that tolling would be addressed in the EIR/EIS

Concerns were raised by TAC members about the lack of specificity of cost information for the alternatives and about the general lack of cost-effectiveness/cost-benefit information

- The TT explained their relative cost assumptions used at this stage which were generally based on their understanding of low, medium, high based on published experience with other similar projects
- Metro indicated that cost-benefit at the level being requested was a post-EIR/EIS activity

Staff raised questions about when/how the TT would provide information about projected truck travel for the alternatives.

- The TT showed a graphic of a select link analysis (from the 2008 SCAG model) that showed truck traffic on the freeway system. The graphic illustrated how truck traffic to/from the Port area disperses over the 91, 605, 60 and 10 as it travelled to/from the Port area and indicated that the modeling using the 2012 SCAG model would provide similarly-detailed results for the alternatives.

TAC members offered comments at the end of the TT presentation that ranged from support of the process (San Marino, Alhambra) to concerns about how the process was being conducted (South Pasadena, La Canada/Flintridge). Metro and the TT responded to some of these (as noted above) and took others under advisement for future study.

Metro concluded the meeting by taking questions from the public.