



Board Report

File #: 2022-0416, **File Type:** Informational Report

Agenda Number: 41.

REGULAR BOARD MEETING AUGUST 25, 2022

SUBJECT: VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE status report on Vermont Transit Corridor Project's Community-Based Partnership Program.

ISSUE

In Fall 2021, Metro staff implemented a Community-Based Partnership Program (CPP) to inform the next phase of planning for the Vermont Transit Corridor. The CPP included various activities that focused on gathering quantitative and qualitative data that would be used to develop a proposed project for the Vermont Transit Corridor. Through the CPP, Metro sought to allow stakeholders an opportunity to provide important insights into the challenges and opportunities facing the communities in the area and can help improve Metro's ability to communicate and connect with a wide range of community members. The CPP was designed utilizing Metro's Community-Based Partnering Strategy. The CPP:

- A. Provided stakeholders who live, work, play, study and/or worship along Vermont with an opportunity to express their thoughts about possible transit improvements they envision.
- B. Ensured that Metro staff received comments from a diverse group of stakeholders who do not often participate in helping shape their community; and
- C. Informed a planning approach that considers short-term, medium-term, and long-term transit improvements for the Vermont Transit Corridor.

BACKGROUND

The study area for the Vermont Transit Corridor extends approximately 12.4 miles from Hollywood Boulevard in the north to 120th Street in the south (Attachment A). It is the busiest north-south travel corridor in the entire Metro bus system with about 45,000 daily boardings pre-COVID, connecting the B and D Lines (Red and Purple), the E Line (Expo) and C Line (Green), various east-west bus lines as well as many key activity centers, including educational, cultural, medical, governmental, and faith-based institutions.

Funding in the amount of \$425 million for improvements for the Vermont Transit Corridor is identified as part of the 2016 voter-approved ½ cent sales tax from Measure M and other local and state sources. To prepare for those improvements, Metro has completed three studies as discussed below.

Vermont Bus Rapid Transit Technical Study

In February 2017, Metro completed the Vermont Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Technical Study, which evaluated the feasibility of implementing BRT, including bus lanes and other key BRT features. The study identified two promising BRT concepts that were developed with the goal of improving bus speeds and reliability, accommodating higher ridership, and improving the customer experience.

At the March 23, 2017, Board meeting, staff presented the findings and recommendations from the Vermont BRT Technical Study (Item #9, Legistar File 2016-0835). At the same meeting, due to the high transit-dependent ridership on the corridor, the Board approved a motion by Directors Garcetti, Ridley-Thomas and Dupont-Walker (File # 2017-0213) directing staff to proceed with the Vermont BRT project as a near-term transit improvement, while also initiating a study that analyzed the feasibility of rail (Attachment B).

Vermont Rail Conversion/Feasibility Study

The Vermont Rail Conversion/Feasibility Study was completed in 2019. It analyzed rail options and further evaluated the BRT concepts to ensure they do not preclude a later conversion to rail. The study found that: BRT continues to be feasible in the Vermont Corridor; BRT does not preclude conversion to rail transit in the future; BRT has the capacity to serve ridership demand at least until 2042; rail transit would maximize the mobility benefits along the corridor and in the region; and three rail alternatives were identified and determined feasible for future implementation.

Additionally, on April 17, 2019, the Board approved Motion #16 by Directors Garcetti, Dupont-Walker, Hahn, Solis and Butts directing staff to advance three BRT alternatives and the three rail concepts identified in the study into environmental review. The Board motion also directed staff to look at the feasibility of extending the Vermont Transit Corridor approximately ten miles south from 120th Street to the South Bay J Line (Silver) Pacific Coast Highway (PCH) transitway station (Attachment C).

South Bay Extension Feasibility Study

The South Bay Extension Feasibility Study was completed in March 2022. It assessed the feasibility of extending the BRT and rail alternatives further south on Vermont Avenue from 120th Street to the South Bay J Line (Silver) PCH transitway station.

Current Status

In Fall 2020, Metro staff issued a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the environmental clearance of the BRT and rail alternatives identified in previous studies. However, staff later cancelled the RFP and instead implemented a new Community Partnership Program to inform the next planning phase for this important transit corridor and ensure that the community/stakeholders had an opportunity to better understand the transit options being considered and provide feedback. Working closely with the Office of Equity and Race and utilizing best practices outlined in Metro's CBO Partnering Strategy adopted in Spring 2021, the CPP for the pre-environmental phase of planning was launched in December 2021 and concluded in June 2022.

DISCUSSION

Prior to the Vermont Transit Corridor Project moving into the environmental review process, Metro has conducted a pre-environmental community-based planning engagement program. Because the individual experiences of people vary along the length of the Vermont Transit Corridor, Metro turned to people who live, work, play, study, and/or worship in the area, enlisting them as the subject matter experts and asking them how they envision transit improvements.

Therefore, as a key component of the CPP, Metro partnered with corridor-wide Community Based Organizations, including community development organizations, faith-based organizations, social service organizations, and local neighborhood groups, to solicit input about the types of improvements that should be considered along the corridor. Utilizing Metro's Community Based Organization Partnering Strategy, staff developed a CBO Partnership Program that fostered collaboration with local communities and allowed diverse stakeholders to share their vision for improvements along the Vermont Transit Corridor.

The objective of the CBO Partnership Program was to collaborate with organizations with deep roots within the Vermont Transit Corridor and enlist their network of stakeholders to participate in sharing their vision for future mobility improvements in the communities between Hollywood Boulevard on the north to 120th Street on the south and identify improvements for the corridor. Through this effort, Metro partnered with 20 different community-based organizations to expand engagement opportunities.

Equity-Focused Outreach Approach

Vermont Avenue reflects Los Angeles' cultural mosaic. If this avenue could talk, it would tell tales that range from Tinseltown, new migrant families coming to America, and the first Great Migration of African Americans to Los Angeles. Implementing an outreach approach across the corridor's vibrant and diverse communities is critical to ensuring that the multifaceted populations, along with the industry and social clusters, share their opinions about the future of public transit along Vermont Avenue.

Further, throughout the corridor, the project benefits Black, Indigenous, and other People of Color (BIPOC) and communities with very diverse socioeconomic backgrounds including a large percentage of low-income communities that heavily rely on public transportation to access jobs, schools, medical centers, and recreational facilities.

From attending services at the Islamic Center on Fridays to living near Fraternity Row by the University of Southern California to buying fruit from a street vendor near the Slauson/Vermont bus station to volunteering in the community garden in Westmont Athens, it is the people of the corridor that share a holistic narrative of the diverse communities that make up the entire corridor.

Further, Metro acknowledges there are institutional, systemic, and structural barriers that perpetuate inequity and silence the voices of communities over time. The CPP made equity the foundation of the community engagement approach. The outreach team had a singular guiding principle: Listen to and learn from the community what they know and what they want and deserve to be heard. Through this process, the CPP provided Metro with an opportunity to ensure stakeholders had a better understanding of the transit options being considered for Vermont Avenue and provide feedback.

Outreach was conducted in Armenian, English, Korean, Spanish, and Thai to ensure that all groups participated in the process. In addition, the team connected with stakeholders that speak Russian, Bangladeshi, and Zapotec (an indigenous dialect from the southern part of Mexico).

Community Engagement Activities

The engagement program started in December 2021 and was completed in June 2022. Throughout the six-month effort, the Metro team engaged with over 6,000 people via one of the following eight initiatives:

- 20 CBO Partnerships
- Thirty-two (32) CBO Partner-led Community Conversations
- Four (4) Metro-Hosted Community Listening Sessions
- Twenty-one (21) Key stakeholder briefings
- Twelve (12) Bus Rider Intercepts
- Eight (8) Community Events
- Eleven (11) School Presentations
- Eight (8) Focus Groups
- One (1) Corridor-wide Telephone Survey

Community-Based Organization Partnerships

Metro partnered with 20 community and faith-based organizations that provide services along the Vermont Transit Corridor to engage with their network of stakeholders who traditionally do not participate on transportation planning projects.

- Asian American Drug Abuse Program (AADAP) Employment Access
- AADAP Therapeutic Community
- AADAP Youth & Family Programs
- Anderson Munger YMCA
- Bryan Temple AME Church Community Development Corporation

- Bryant Temple AME Church
- Community Reflections
- El Salvador Foundation
- Friends of the Vermont Corridor
- Koreatown YMCA
- Koreatown Youth + Community Center
- Pacific Asian Consortium on Employment
- Southeast Community Development Corporation
- St. Mark AME Church
- Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE)
- TrueLA Church
- Ward AME Church
- West Athens Westmont Task Force
- Westmont-Athens ROTC Explorer Scouts
- Word of Encouragement Church

Details of all the activities that were completed for this effort including an overall summary of the findings, based on stakeholder feedback received, is summarized in a Community Partnership Program Documentation Report. The Executive Summary of the report is included as Attachment C.

Since the CBO partners work directly with people who live, work and study along the corridor, each provided a detailed plan for the engagement that included:

- Information distribution

Organizations shared information with the community in a manner that the population they serve is accustomed to receiving, such as newsletters, website announcements, email campaigns, flyer distribution to WhatsApp community group chats and church announcements.

- Community Conversations

Collectively, organizations hosted 32 virtual and in-person community conversations throughout the entire corridor. The intention of the community conversations was to provide a safe space for members of the community to share opinions and experiences about their transportation needs, the services Metro provides, and the future of the corridor.

Through the CBO Partnership Program, Metro staff was able to engage with seldomly heard stakeholders that included participants in shelters, rehabilitation centers, and those that are part of parent, youth, and older adult groups within the various, community-, social service- and faith-based

organizations. Of the 32 community conversations, nine (9) were held completely in Spanish.

Post Participation Evaluation

After the engagement period concluded, CBOs were encouraged to participate in a post engagement interview and complete a survey to provide feedback about their experience working on this program. All community partners felt that the people they serve felt heard during the engagement effort. They also recommended:

- Continued growth and partnership opportunities during the subsequent phases of the planning efforts.
- More workshops, discussions, and community interactive events and fairs.

Community Listening Sessions

More than 300 people participated in four Metro-hosted interactive community listening sessions that provided feedback on the proposed options for the future of the corridor. To ensure that everyone in the corridor could participate, one took place virtually in the evening and the other three took place in-person during the daytime and on weekends:

- Los Angeles City College - Saturday, April 30, 2022
- Ward African Methodist Episcopal Church - Saturday, May 7, 2022
- Irmas Youth Center - Saturday, April 23, 2022
- Virtual Meeting, Wednesday, May 4, 2022

The in-person community listening sessions featured various stations:

Station 1: Registration - attendees would sign in for the event and to receive project updates, after they register, they would receive directions on how to take part in the listening session.

Station 2: VTC Virtual Reality (VR) Simulation - attendees wore VR goggles to experience a virtual tour of Vermont Avenue. The trip started in the south at 120th Street and took participants on a ride north to Hollywood Boulevard, making stops along the way to several historic landmarks and favorite destinations: USC, L.A. Coliseum, Koreatown, museums, churches, among others.

Station 3: Storymap - After learning about the entire VTC in the virtual tour, participants had one more digital exercise. With a touchscreen computer, they identified places along Vermont Avenue that they

frequent, whether it was for home, work, study, play, worship, or other activities.

Station 4: “Taco about Transportation” - The outreach team had one-on-one conversations with participants, sharing details of the VTC project. In those conversations, the team provided information on the Bus Rapid Transit and Rail alternatives, answered any questions, and asked for feedback from current public transit users about their experience. After the conversation, participants were given a ticket to receive a light snack that included tacos.

Station 5: Vote - In the last activity, participants voted on which option they felt would best serve public transit needs. Options included:

- Make immediate improvements to the existing bus system along Vermont
- Pursue BRT for completion by 2028
- Pursue BRT and begin planning for rail beyond 2028
- Pursue rail only
- Do it all

Institutional Briefings

Metro staff met with 21 community, policy, and business leaders and their teams to provide in-depth presentations and discussions about the VTC. Below is a list of the organizations that participated in the briefings:

- American Career College
- Children's Hospital Los Angeles
- East Hollywood Business Improvement District
- Empowerment Congress
- Exposition Park Leadership Meeting
- Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council
- Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center
- Los Angeles City College
- Los Angeles Exposition Park Leadership
- Los Angeles Southwest College
- Lucas Museum of Narrative Art
- Neighborhood Council Briefings - Corridor-Wide
- North Area Neighborhood Development (Empowerment Congress North)
- Pico-Union Neighborhood Council
- Rampart Village Neighborhood Council
- Rampart Village Neighborhood Council Pub Safety, Housing, Transportation Committee

- University of Southern California (USC)
- Voices Neighborhood Council
- West Athens Westmont Task Force
- West Coast University
- Wilshire Center Business Improvement District Board

Bus Intercepts

Since the VTC has the highest daily north-south ridership throughout the Metro bus system, the outreach team conducted twelve (12) transit rider intercepts where over 250 bus riders completed a survey at the most frequented bus stops.

- Vermont Avenue/3rd Street
- Vermont Avenue/Wilshire Boulevard
- Vermont Avenue/Exposition Boulevard
- Vermont Avenue/Slauson Avenue
- Vermont Avenue/Manchester Avenue
- Vermont Avenue/Athens Station

In a span of two weeks, the outreach team asked transit riders questions about the types of improvements they would like to see in the bus system and along Vermont Avenue. Conversations took place in English, Spanish, Korean, and Zapotec.

Booths at Community Events

The team attended eight (8) community events starting in December 2021. Below are the events that the outreach team participated in:

- 21st Annual Navidad en Los Angeles
- Westmont Food Drive
- Los Angeles Urban League Job Fair
- TrueLA Church Community Event
- Keller Park Bunny Hop
- Koreatown Youth + Community Center's Flores de Mayo
- Koreatown Youth + Community Center's Teen Summit
- Anderson Munger Family YMCA Senior Food Distribution

The team also conducted eleven (11) school presentations during this period.

Public Opinion Research

Focus Groups and surveys were conducted with residents along the VTC. Eight (8) focus groups were held in January 2022 with 72 participants. Focus groups were held in English, Spanish, Korean and Armenian.

A telephone survey was also conducted between March - May 2022 that received 1,137 responses from residents throughout the corridor. Surveys were completed in English, Spanish and Korean by respondents.

Overall Results

Based on the feedback of each of these six initiatives that made up the pre-environmental community-based planning effort, the general feedback from stakeholders from throughout the corridor included support for doing short-, medium-, and long-term transportation improvements.

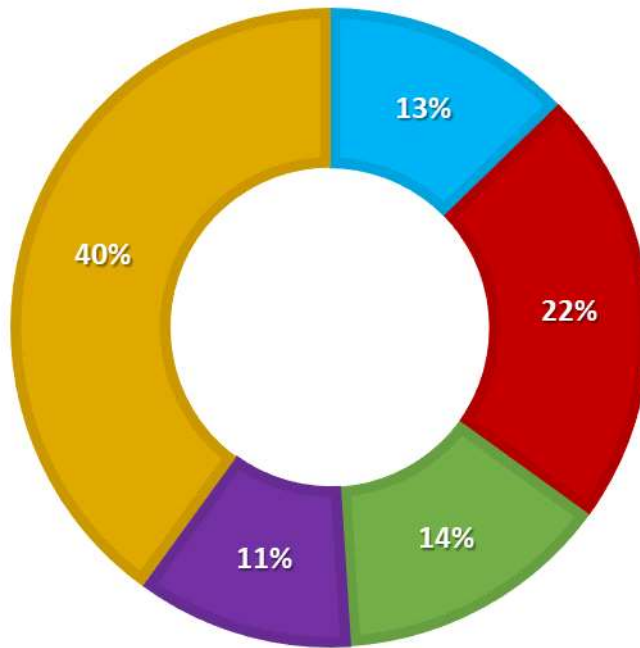
Short-term improvements: Metro should move forward with making immediate improvements to bus service along Vermont Avenue including adding benches, bus shelters and more buses to ensure frequency and reliability of services. Where possible, include bus-only lanes along key segments of the corridor during peak-hour service.

Medium-term improvements: Metro should begin planning for a Bus Rapid Transit project along Vermont Avenue to be in operation by 2028.

Long-term improvements: Metro should begin planning for rail to be delivered as soon as funding is available. Stakeholders recognize that this can take decades to implement.

Stakeholders were asked a series of questions about various transit modes they envision along Vermont that included making immediate improvements to the current bus service, delivering a BRT project by 2028, planning for rail as soon as funding is available or doing it all. Based on responses from all the various engagement activities, 40% of stakeholders would like to see Metro do it all: implement short-, medium- and long-term projects along Vermont as reflected in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Overall Feedback from Stakeholders for Transit Improvements along Vermont Avenue



Implement immediate to the existing bus service along Vermont

Pursue BRT for completion by 2028

Pursue BRT and beginning planning for Rail beyond 2028

Plan for Rail only

Do it all (short-term bus improvement; medium-term BRT; long -term rail)

Summary of Comments

Community feedback received is organized by key topic areas and is provided in the Community-Based Outreach Documentation Report (Attachment D). Key themes that emerged during the CPP activities follow:

- Safety/Security Concerns/Opportunities:
 - Impacts to overall customer experience and safety due to unsheltered individuals using transit - bus, rail, stops and stations - in a way in which they were not intended.
 - Personal safety on buses and at stops.
 - Lack of surveillance cameras at stops, stations, and vehicles.
 - Lack of lighting at bus stops, especially south of Gage Avenue, and at stations.

- Equity Concerns/Opportunities
 - Fear of gentrification and displacement from rising housing costs and eminent domain.

- Desire for TOD projects to include affordable housing.
- Stakeholders questioned the overall funding allocation to this project as compared to other projects in more affluent areas of the county.
- Economic Concerns/Opportunities
 - Need to prioritize local hiring and job opportunities.
 - Ensuring impacts to businesses are mitigated.
- Customer Experience Concerns/Opportunities
 - Crowded buses.
 - Rider/passenger conduct/decorum leads to safety issues and confrontations
 - Perceived dirty, unsanitary & vandalized vehicles, stops, & stations and requests for more and regular cleaning.
 - Ensuring operator safety and mental health; requests for operator support.
 - Many positive comments about operators - helpfulness, kindness, courtesy, professionalism.
 - Some negative comments about operators including perceived racist behavior toward riders.
 - Many recommendations to better train operators.
 - Riders want to be treated with respect by transit workers.
- Transit Mode Concerns/Opportunities
 - Bus Rapid Transit
 - Regular transit riders overwhelmingly support dedicated lanes along Vermont Avenue.
 - Loss of parking will impact businesses along Vermont Avenue.
 - Loss of general-purpose lanes causing increased congestion along Vermont Avenue.
 - Opportunity for Metro to prioritize transit riders by implementing bus-only lanes.
 - Adding more frequent and reliable bus services is good.
 - Adding passenger amenities will be beneficial such as Wi-Fi, USB ports, signage, digital displays, art, shelter, seating, lighting, and bike racks.
 - Rail (Light and Heavy Rail Transit)
 - The corridor deserves rail as the busiest north-south bus corridor in the entire system.
 - Concerns about rail given the construction impacts caused by the Crenshaw rail project.
 - Concerns about the timeframe needed to deliver a rail project which can take decades.

EQUITY PLATFORM

Metro's Equity Platform Framework was the guiding document utilized in developing the Vermont Transit Corridor's Community-Based Partnership Program. As stated in the Equity Platform

Framework, community engagement is the basis for Pillar 2: Listen and Learn, which addresses the agency's effort to "listen and learn from the communities we serve." Our engagement efforts worked to ensure that the diverse range of community members left feeling heard, reflected, and respected. In doing so, the engagement effort has helped shape a vision for the Vermont Transit Corridor Project through the CBO Partnership Program and various activities that were implemented (as described above).

One example of incorporating community feedback is the "do it all" option. Early on in the CPP, when discussing the future vision of the Vermont Transit Corridor, staff heard from stakeholders that not only are immediate bus improvements to existing lines 204 and 754 needed, but that more can be done. Stakeholders like the idea of a Bus Rapid Transit project along Vermont by 2028, but also want Metro to plan for a long-term rail project as soon as funding is available. In summary, stakeholders voiced that Vermont deserves immediate bus improvements, a BRT, and ultimately a rail project.

Therefore, Metro staff's approach for planning future improvements along Vermont are as follows: identify transit and other immediate improvements along the corridor, move forward with initiating environmental review for a BRT project, and develop approaches for future rail improvements.

Staff will also continue Metro's collaboration with local communities and stakeholders during the next phase of planning and throughout the development of this project to ensure that the community is engaged and listened to every step of the way. Further, Metro will continue to implement a CBO Partnership Program with local community-, faith- and social-based organizations in the project's future development phases.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The project will support the goals of the strategic plan by enhancing communities and lives through improved mobility and access to opportunities through the addition of new high-quality mobility options, closing a gap in the transit network that provides outstanding trip experiences and enhances communities and lives through improved mobility and access to opportunity.

NEXT STEPS


Staff will begin the environmental review phase with the implementation of potential near-term improvements and additional study of the BRT alternatives as a medium-term improvement, while considering community and stakeholder input and coordinating with Metro Service Planning. Rail, as a long-term improvement, will also be included as a future phase in the environmental study to be implemented when additional funding becomes available. It is anticipated that an environmental study Request for Proposal will be issued in Fall 2022. Metro will keep the community informed on the progress of the study and upcoming decision points. Metro will also continue to utilize a CPP throughout all project development phases. CPPs are currently being applied to the Eastside Transit Corridor Phase 2 Project and I-710 Task Force efforts. Other major projects that will utilize a community-based organization partnership approach include the Sepulveda Transit Corridor, I-405 ExpressLanes, and East San Fernando Valley Light Rail, among others.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Vermont Transit Corridor Map
Attachment B - Board Motion (March 23, 2017)
Attachment C - Board Motion (April 17, 201))
Attachment D - Community-Based Outreach Documentation Report

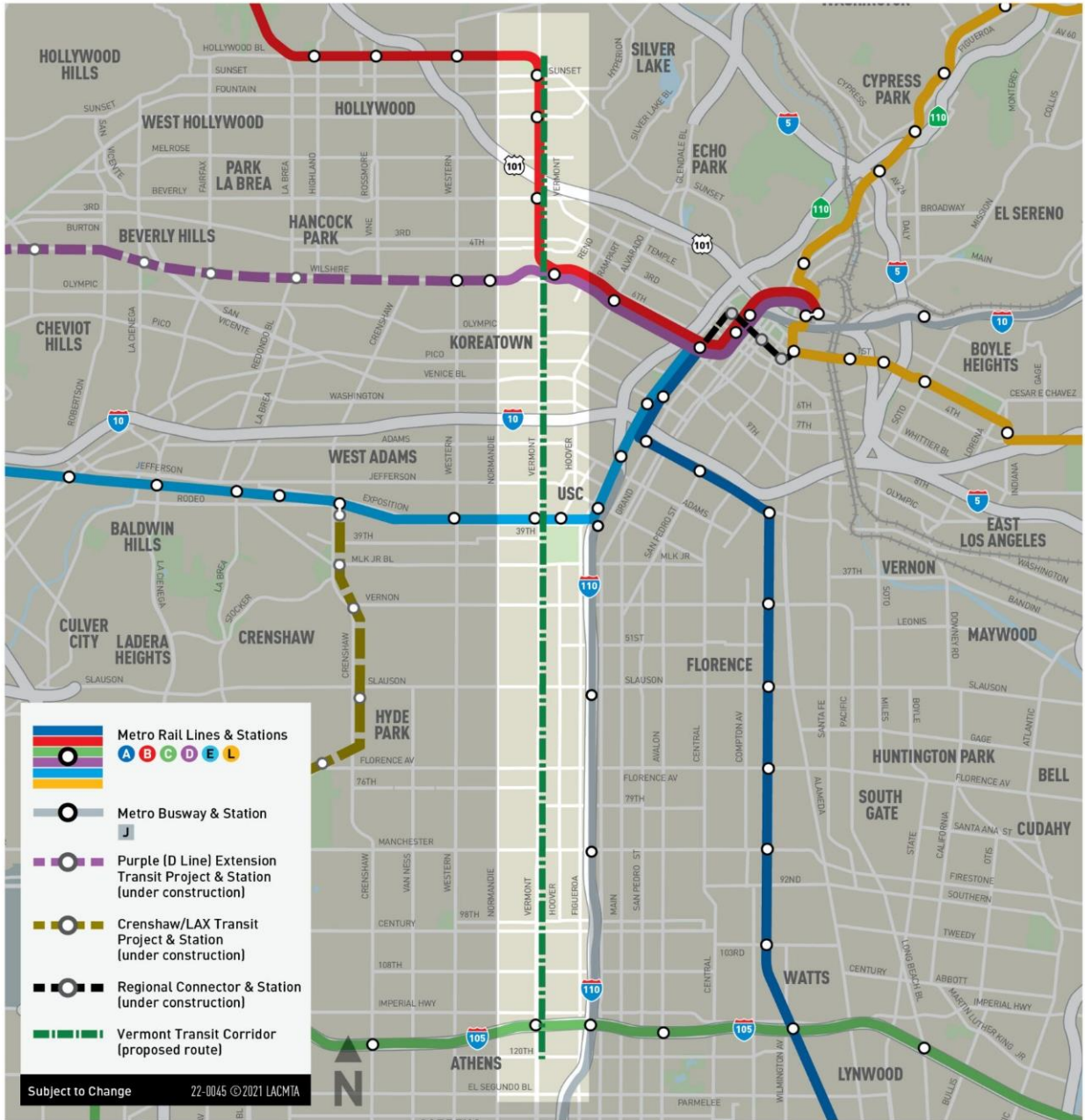
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Stephanie N. Wiggins
Chief Executive Officer

Vermont Transit Corridor Study Area





Metro

Board Report

File #:2017-0213, File Type:Motion / Motion
Response

Agenda Number:

**REGULAR BOARD MEETING
MARCH 23, 2017**

Motion by:

Directors Garcetti, Ridley-Thomas and Dupont-Walker

March 23, 2017

Relating to Item 9, File ID 2016-0835; Vermont Transit Corridor

Vermont Avenue has the second-highest number of transit boardings of any corridor in Los Angeles County, behind only Wilshire Boulevard.

In February 2017, the Vermont Avenue Rapid and Local bus lines combined for over 43,000 average weekday boardings, higher than the Green, Orange, and Silver Lines.

Recognizing the need for additional transit investment along Vermont Avenue, the 2009 Long Range Transportation Plan included a "Vermont Corridor Subway" in the list of Strategic Unfunded projects.

Since then, MTA staff has worked diligently to advance transit on Vermont Avenue. Vermont was listed as the number-one corridor for Bus Rapid Transit investment in the 2013 Countywide Bus Rapid Transit Study.

In 2014, MTA initiated technical studies for a Vermont Avenue Bus Rapid Transit project and is proceeding with Alternatives Analysis, including providing for a future conversion to light rail.

Bus service improvements on Vermont Avenue are vital, and MTA should proceed with Bus Rapid Transit improvements as quickly as possible. However, the Measure M Expenditure Plan anticipated future conversion to light or heavy rail. Given Vermont Avenue's intense transit ridership, MTA needs to pursue a path now for future rail options to serve this corridor.

Motion by Garcetti, Ridley-Thomas and Dupont-Walker that the Board direct the CEO to:

- A. Proceed with the Vermont Bus Rapid Transit project as a near-term "Phase 1" transit improvement along the Vermont Avenue Corridor;
- B. Initiate the study of extending the Red Line along Vermont Avenue to 125th Street, specifically

focusing on connecting the Wilshire/Vermont Red Line Station to the Expo/Vermont Expo Line Station as a "Section 1";

- C. Include a heavy rail alternative in the Alternative Analysis and Environmental Studies for the Measure M Vermont Transit Corridor; and
- D. Report back on all the above to the Planning and Programming Committee during the July 2017 Board cycle.

###



Metro

Board Report

Los Angeles County
Metropolitan Transportation
Authority
One Gateway Plaza
3rd Floor Board Room
Los Angeles, CA

File #: 2019-0259, File Type: Motion / Motion Response

Agenda Number: 16.1

PLANNING AND PROGRAMMING COMMITTEE
APRIL 17, 2019

Motion by:

GARCETTI, DUPONT-WALKER, HAHN, SOLIS AND BUTTS

Related to Item 16: Vermont Transit Corridor - Rail Conversion/Feasibility Study

MTA should always strive to deliver the best transit project possible and not prematurely eliminate warranted project alternatives.

The Vermont Transit Corridor is a significant Measure M project intended to improve mobility along Vermont Avenue. Vermont Avenue is MTA's highest-ridership bus corridor. Vermont connects some of the most economically and socially diverse communities and several major destinations in the Los Angeles region.

Historically, Vermont Avenue was the second priority for rail transit investment after Wilshire Boulevard, as seen by the current Red Line route north of Wilshire Boulevard. Current and future Vermont Transit Corridor users deserve a world-class, reliable, and convenient transportation option. While the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) concepts recommended by MTA will improve bus operations and travel times, the Vermont Transit Corridor rail concepts would deliver superior customer experience, connectivity, reliability, and capacity.

Exposition Park in particular is one of the significant destinations served by the Vermont Transit Corridor. Exposition Park currently draws about four million visitors per year and is developing a new master plan in anticipation of additional growth.

Exposition Park is experiencing nearly \$2 billion in new and recent investments, including the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, the Oschin Air and Space Center, the Los Angeles Memorial Coliseum renovation, and an addition to the Natural History Museum. The Lucas Museum alone is a \$1 billion investment forecasted to draw an additional one million visitors per year to the regional park. Additionally, the Los Angeles Football Club's Banc of California Stadium is a \$350 million investment with a significant transit-patron attendance. Lastly, Exposition Park will be a major venue for the future 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Vermont Transit Corridor also connects to the University of Southern California (USC). USC is LA County's second-largest private employer and eighth-largest employer in LA County overall. USC

serves about 47,500 students, over 20,100 faculty and staff, and many more visitors, whom share a highly constrained parking capacity.

With ongoing development along the corridor, MTA could draw significant public-private partnership interest and private infrastructure investment. The Vermont Transit Corridor Project is a historic opportunity for LA County to close a transit service connectivity gap and to provide a world-class, reliable transportation option for people to access education, employment, and entertainment. This critical corridor connects multiple MTA rail lines, serves various regional employment centers, and connects populous, lower-income communities who rely on transit as well as emerging transit-oriented communities.

Bus service quality and reliability improvements on Vermont Avenue are much needed. MTA should continue to develop world-class Bus Rapid Transit alternatives for Vermont Avenue to ensure transit riders experience a high-quality, seamless ride.

However, given high transit ridership and constrained, congested conditions on Vermont Avenue, MTA must also study all technically feasible rail alternatives during environmental review and explore innovative funding mechanisms to accelerate their effectuation. Additionally, should MTA recommend congestion pricing in the Downtown LA area, a Vermont rail alternative will ensure a high-quality transit option. Lastly, given that MTA seeks to advance BRT concepts that would not preclude future rail conversion, evaluating all technically feasible rail alternatives should not significantly affect the environmental analysis budget and schedule.

MTA should preserve the ability to deliver the Vermont Transit Corridor as a rail project should additional funding materialize. Historically, there is precedent for this. The Expo Phase 1 and Crenshaw/LAX projects included both BRT and rail alternatives in their respective environmental documents.

SUBJECT: VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR - RAIL CONVERSION/FEASIBILITY STUDY

RECOMMENDATION

APPROVE Motion by Garcetti, Dupont-Walker, Hahn, Solis and Butts that the Board direct the CEO to:

- A. Advance technically feasible rail concepts previously identified through the 2017 Vermont Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Technical Study into environmental review to preserve the ability to deliver rail transit if additional funding materializes;
- B. Include a feasibility study of extending the Vermont Transit Corridor to the South Bay Silver Line Pacific Coast Highway transitway station to ensure regional connectivity via Minimum Operable Segments, including identification of potential maintenance facility sites; and
- C. Report back to the MTA Board in July 2019 with a Public Private Partnership business case approach for each Minimum Operable Segment.

2022 Community-Based Partnership Program Documentation Report

WE'RE PLANNING A NEW WAY TO RIDE ON VERMONT.

VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR



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Executive Summary

Background

The study area for the Vermont Transit Corridor extends 12.4 miles from Hollywood Boulevard in the north to 120th Street in the south. The study area map is illustrated as Appendix A. It is the busiest north-south travel corridor in the entire Metro system with about 45,000 daily boardings pre-COVID, connecting the B/D Lines (Red/Purple), the E line (Expo) and C Line (Green), and various east-west bus lines to many key activity centers, including educational, cultural, medical, governmental, and faith-based institutions.

The Vermont Transit Corridor is a Measure M project with \$425M in funding for improvements. To prepare for those improvements, Metro has completed two studies:

- > Vermont Transit Corridor Bus Rapid Transit Technical Study
- > Vermont Rail Conversion Feasibility Study

In February 2017, Metro identified two promising Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) alternatives for the project when it concluded the Vermont Transit Corridor BRT Technical Study. In March 2019, the Vermont Rail Conversion Feasibility Study identified several feasible rail modes and further evaluated the BRT alternatives to ensure that they not preclude a future conversion to rail.

In April 2019, the Metro Board directed staff to advance both BRT and rail concepts into the environmental review. At that same time, the Board directed staff to study the feasibility of extending these BRT and/or rail concepts further south – evaluated separately as the Vermont Transit Corridor South Bay Extension Feasibility Study which was completed in December 2021.

Prior to the Vermont Transit Corridor Project moving into the environmental review process, Metro conducted a pre-environmental, community-based planning effort aligned with agency’s Equity Platform Framework that has successfully elevated the voices of stakeholders who live, work, play, study and/or worship along Vermont Avenue. The purpose of the community-based planning approach is to engage with community partners and stakeholders early to build a common vision for the corridor, listen to their transit needs and concerns, and incorporate their feedback into the development of an equitable transit solution for the corridor.

Over a seven-month period, from December 2021 to June 2022, Metro partnered with community-based organizations, faith-based groups, and local neighborhood groups to solicit feedback about the types of improvements that should be planned for the Vermont Transit Corridor (VTC) Project.

Figure 1

Project Timeline



ONGOING PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Community-Based Outreach

This report documents the activities completed as part of the Community Partnership Program, highlights the findings of all engagement efforts and recommends next steps for planning transit improvements along this important corridor.



Local neighborhood groups provided feedback about improvements that should be planned for the VTC Project.



This process included a wide range of opportunities for feedback that were designed to be transparent and inclusive.



The Metro team gathered feedback regarding technical aspects of the study, proposed BRT and rail concepts, potential station locations, and general comments regarding project funding, ridership, and preferred alternative selection process.



Purpose

The purpose of the community-based planning process was to:

- > Promote project awareness of the Vermont Transit Corridor.
- > Ensure that community stakeholders had an opportunity to better understand the transit options being considered and provide feedback.
- > Partner with community-based organizations with deep roots within the corridor to meaningfully engage stakeholders.
- > Establish a vision for the corridor and re-evaluate the project goals and objectives.
- > Identify near-, mid-, and long-term transit improvements for the corridor.

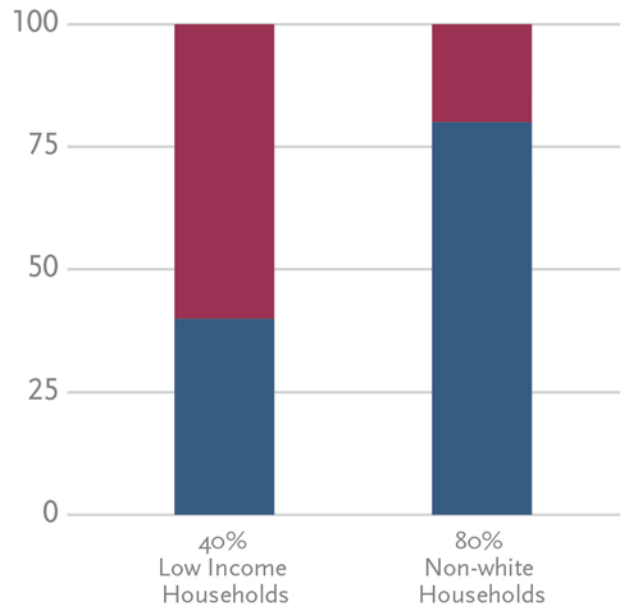
Program Area

The 12.4-mile-long corridor traverses six Los Angeles City Council Districts, two Supervisorial Districts, 14 neighborhood councils and many key educational, cultural, medical, social and faith-based centers. The various communities that make up the VTC include, but are not limited to: East Hollywood, Thai Town, Little Armenia, Little Bangladesh, Wilshire Center, Koreatown, West Adams, USC Village, Expo Park, Vermont Square, Vermont Knolls, Vermont Vista, Broadway-Manchester, and Westmont-Athens.

All corridor-wide communities are considered Equity Focused Communities given their socioeconomic characteristics where more than 40% of households are low income (making less than \$35,000 annually), 80% are non-white and 10% do not have access to a vehicle.

Equity Focused Communities

Metro identified communities throughout the corridor that are considered Equity Focused Communities given their socioeconomic characteristics.

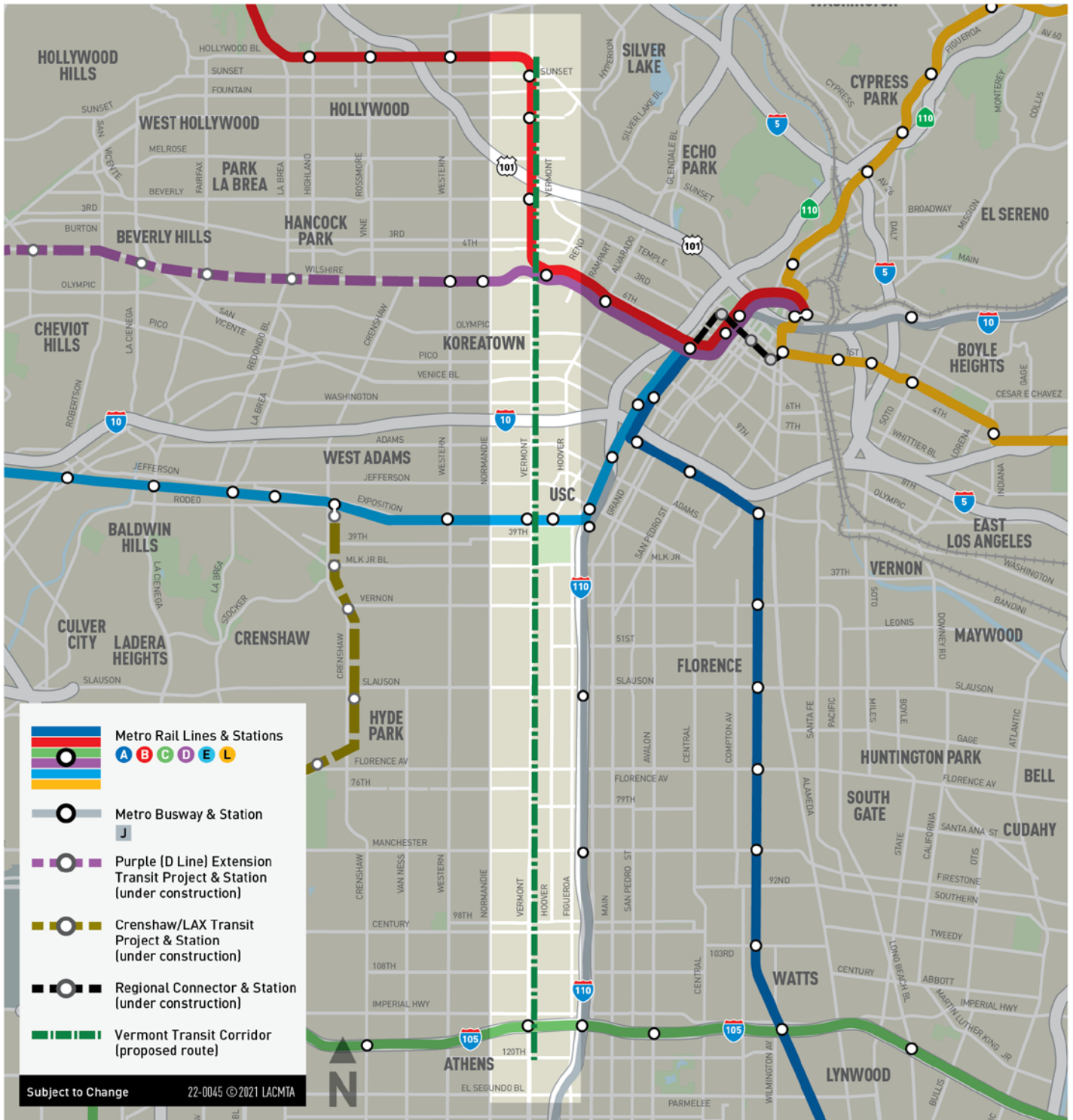


As of May 2022



We engaged area stakeholders by partnering with community-based organizations throughout the corridor.

Vermont Transit Corridor Study Area



Engagement Approach

As an agency, Metro ensures people can reach everyday destinations, such as jobs, schools, healthy food outlets, and healthcare facilities, safely and reliably. For Los Angeles County as a whole, but specifically for the Vermont Transit Corridor, public transportation services play an essential role for people who depend on it – such as those that are unable to drive or do not have access to personal vehicles; low-income adults; children; individuals with different abilities; older adults, among other populations. Transit investment along the Vermont corridor is a critical equity issue because improvements will provide people with faster, more reliable mobility options and improve access to employment, community resources, medical care, and recreational opportunities that, in turn, drastically improve the quality of life for area stakeholders.

Transit investment along the Vermont corridor is a critical equity issue because improvements will provide people with faster, more reliable mobility options and improve access to employment, community resources, medical care, and recreational opportunities that, in turn, drastically improve the quality of life for area stakeholders.

To capture the feedback of the diverse stakeholders that make up the Vermont Transit Corridor, Metro implemented a comprehensive engagement program that included:

- > Market Research Surveys
 - 9 focus groups
 - 1 telephone survey
 - 1 online survey targeting transit riders at 6 key bus stops along Vermont Avenue and via Metro’s Transit app
- > 11 pop ups at community and school events
- > 21 briefings with key institutional stakeholders
- > 4 community listening sessions
- > 32 community conversations hosted by 20 Community-Based Organization (CBO) partners

Outreach was conducted in Armenian, English, Korean, Spanish, and Thai to ensure that all groups participated in the process. In addition, the team connected with stakeholders that spoke Russian, Bangladeshi, and Zapotec (an Indigenous dialect from the southern part of Mexico).

Project Information was shared by Metro via virtual and in-person meetings, community events, project website, The Source/El Pasajero blogs, social media posts and email campaigns.

Figure 2

Outreach Overview



Community-Based Organization Partnership Program

A key aspect of the engagement approach was the implementation of a CBO partnership program that provided stakeholders with various opportunities to engage with Metro. The conversations also allowed Metro staff with the chance to listen to the community and know what they want and need – which is the guiding principle of Metro’s Equity Platform Framework.

Metro partnered with 20 community and faith-based organizations that provide services along the Vermont Transit Corridor to engage with their network of stakeholders who traditionally do not engage with Metro on transportation planning projects.

Metro’s CBO partners shared information through their email and/or text message campaigns, WhatsApp community group chats, newsletters, websites, announcements made at gatherings, flyer distributions and hosted community conversations to elicit feedback from stakeholders on their experiences riding Metro, their current transportation needs, and future vision for transit improvements along Vermont. Collectively, CBO partners hosted 32 virtual and in-person community conversations throughout the entire corridor.

Through these various engagement activities, more than 6,000 stakeholders actively participated sharing their thoughts for future transit improvements along Vermont.



Collaborative communication is key when reaching out to large bodies of people. Listening to each individual response is imperative to learning the culture of the community.

Findings

Throughout the engagement process stakeholders were presented with possible transit improvements for the Vermont Corridor, which included: near term bus improvements to existing lines 204 and 754, medium-term BRT, long-term Rail, and an option to do all improvements. The benefits and tradeoffs of each transit option were presented in order for stakeholders to provide informed feedback as to their preferred approach that would best address their transit needs, concerns, and priorities as well as achieve the goals of the project.

The following summarizes the feedback received at the various engagement activities.

Focus Groups

Nine focus groups were conducted with residents representing the various communities that make up the Vermont Transit Corridor. The focus groups were held in January 2022 with 72 ethnically diverse participants and were facilitated in English, Spanish, Korean and Armenian.

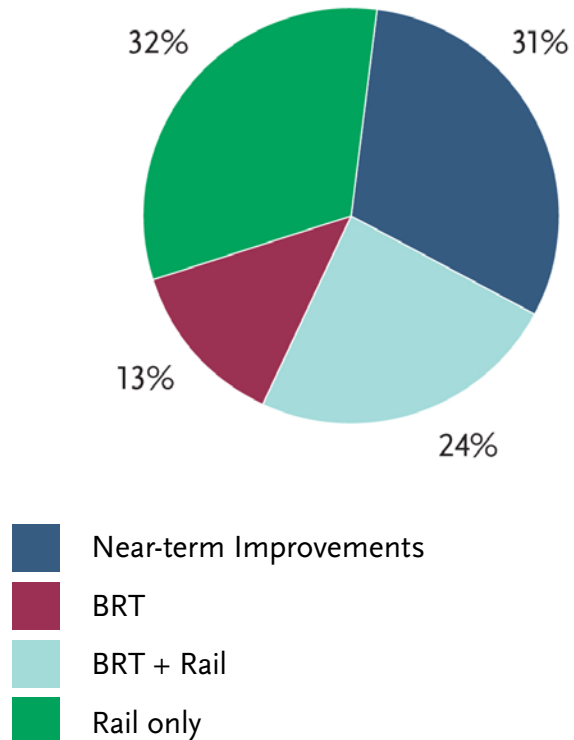
During the focus groups, participants discussed their travel experiences along Vermont (walking, riding, driving), positive and negative aspects of the overall corridor and with Metro service, then participated in a facilitated exercise to discuss transportation options being explored by Metro that include making bus service improvements, adding Bus Rapid Transit and/or a rail project along Vermont. In doing so, various tradeoffs were explored that included available funding, construction length with each transit mode, possible impacts and benefits with each mode.

During the focus groups, participants discussed their travel experiences along Vermont.

Of the focus groups, 32% of participants shared they preferred a rail project, 31% opted to make bus improvements, 24% said to implement bus and rail projects, and 13% opted for a BRT project.

Figure 3

Focus Group Results



Survey

A telephone survey was conducted in March 2022 where 1,137 residents participated reaching them in English, Spanish and Korean. The questions asked of survey participants were similar to those of the focus group participants.

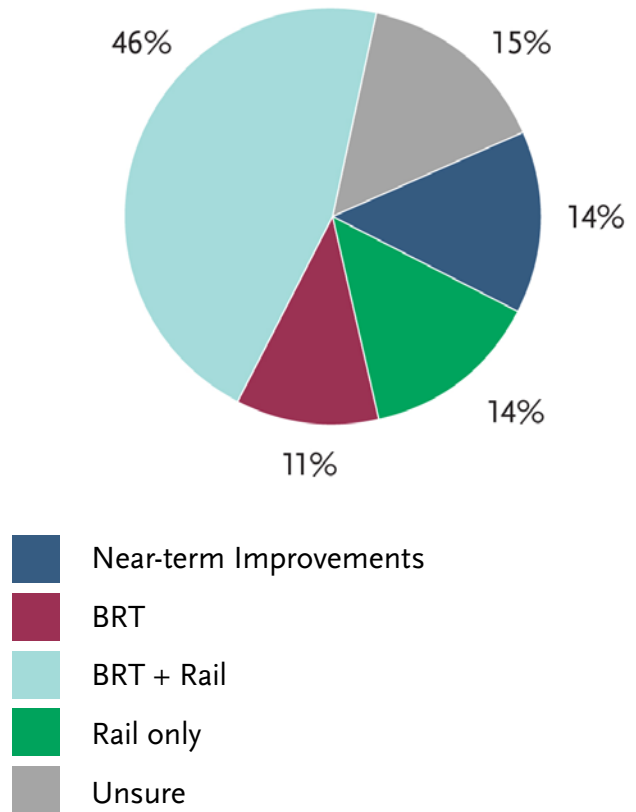
Seven in ten participants felt public transportation improvements along Vermont would benefit their community and over half would prefer a faster route with fewer stops over a slower route with more stops. Overall, the sentiment from the survey was that BRT should be built now and rail should be built sooner than 2067 (as projected under Measure M).

Seven in ten participants felt public transportation improvements along Vermont would benefit their community.

Of the survey participants 46% opted for building both a BRT and rail project, 15% were unsure, 14% opted for rail, 14% opted for bus improvements and 11% opted for a BRT project.

Figure 4

Telephone Survey



Community conversations were held in English and Spanish as reflected here.

Transit Rider Intercept Survey

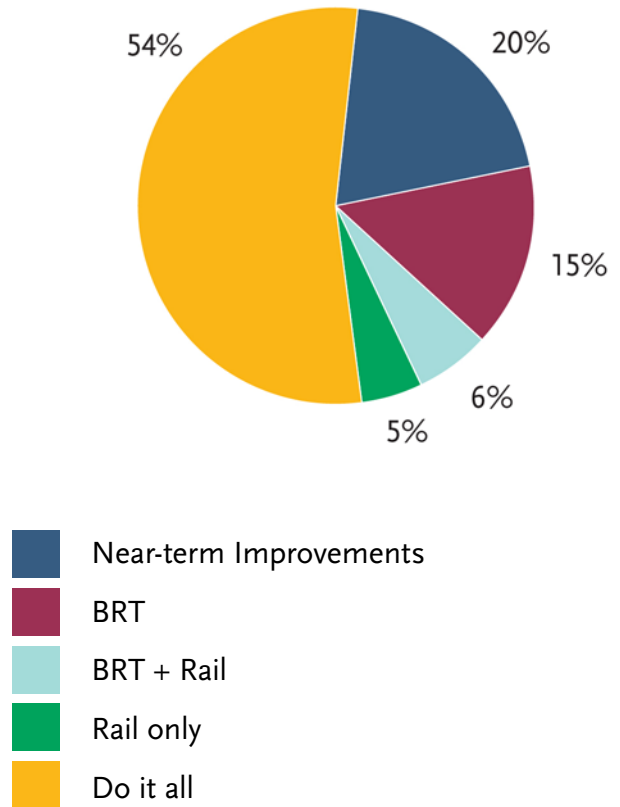
Over 2,250 bus riders along Vermont Avenue responded to the transit rider intercept survey at six of the busiest bus stops both in the morning and afternoon peak travel hours as well as virtually via Metro's Transit app.

Over 2,250 bus riders along Vermont Avenue responded to the transit rider intercept survey.

Of the surveys completed, 54% of respondents urged Metro to do it all (make immediate bus improvements, deliver BRT by 2028 and plan for rail), 20% shared that they preferred immediate bus service improvements, 15% opted for a BRT project, 6% want to see both BRT and a rail project and 5% urged for rail only.

Figure 5

Transit Rider Intercept Survey



The team talked to transit riders about their personal experiences with the services Metro provides.



Discussions were often related to themes of safety and security, equity, customer experience, and traffic.

Community and School Pop Ups

Staff held eight pop up events at various community events and hosted 11 presentations at local schools during December 2021 – May 2022. Approximately 620 community members provided feedback in English, Spanish and Korean.

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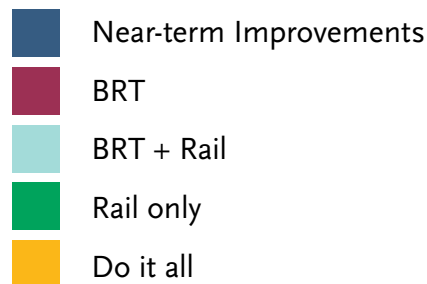
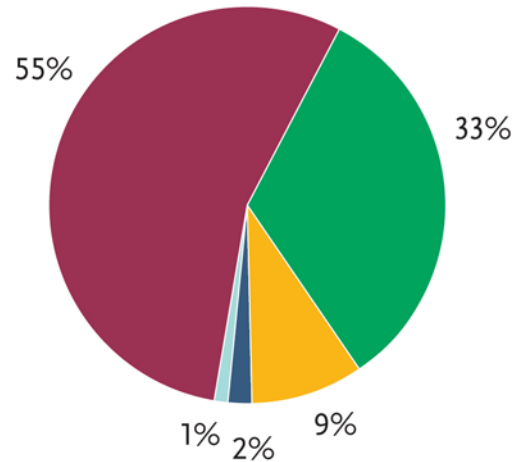
Through these conversations, staff asked stakeholders what their choices for transportation improvements along Vermont would be and 55% opted for a BRT project, 33% chose rail, 9% said to do it all, 2% opted for immediate bus improvements and 1% opted for BRT and rail.



The Metro team engaged the public in one-on-one conversations about their transit needs for the future of Vermont Avenue.

Figure 6

Community and School Pop Up Events



Interpreters were available during the listening sessions to ensure equitable engagement with the local residents.

Community Listening Sessions

Metro hosted four interactive community listening sessions with the intent to get feedback on the proposed options for the future of the VTC. One took place virtually, to ensure that everyone in the corridor could attend and the other three took place in-person:

- > Los Angeles City College
 - Saturday, April 30, 2022
- > Ward African Methodist Episcopal Church
 - Saturday, May 7, 2022
- > Irmas Youth Center
 - Saturday, April 23, 2022
- > Virtual Meeting
 - Wednesday, May 4, 2022

The in-person community listening sessions featured various stations:

Station 1: Registration

Attendees would sign in for the event and to receive project updates, after they registered, they would receive directions on how to take part in the listening session.



Community stakeholders registered to participate.



Station 2: VTC Virtual Reality (VR) Simulation

Attendees wore VR goggles to experience a thrilling virtual tour of Vermont Avenue. The trip started south from 120th Street and took participants on a wild ride north to Hollywood Boulevard, making stops along the way to several historic landmarks and favorite destinations: USC, L.A. Coliseum, Koreatown, museums, churches, and much more.



Community stakeholders experienced a VR tour of Vermont Avenue.

Station 3: Storymap

After learning about the entire VTC in the virtual tour, participants had one more digital exercise. With a touchscreen computer, they identified all the places along Vermont Avenue that they frequent, whether it was for home, work, study, play, worship, or other activities.



Participants identified places along Vermont Avenue that they frequent



Station 4: "Taco About Transportation"

The outreach team had one-on-one conversations with participants, sharing details of the VTC project. In those conversations, the team provided information on the Bus Rapid Transit and Rail alternatives, answered any questions, and asked for feedback from current public transit users about their experience. After the conversation, participants were given a ticket to receive a light snack that included tacos.



The team discussed transit options with public transit riders.



Participants received a light snack after providing feedback.



Station 5: Vote

In the last activity, participants voted on which option they felt would best serve public transit needs. Options included:

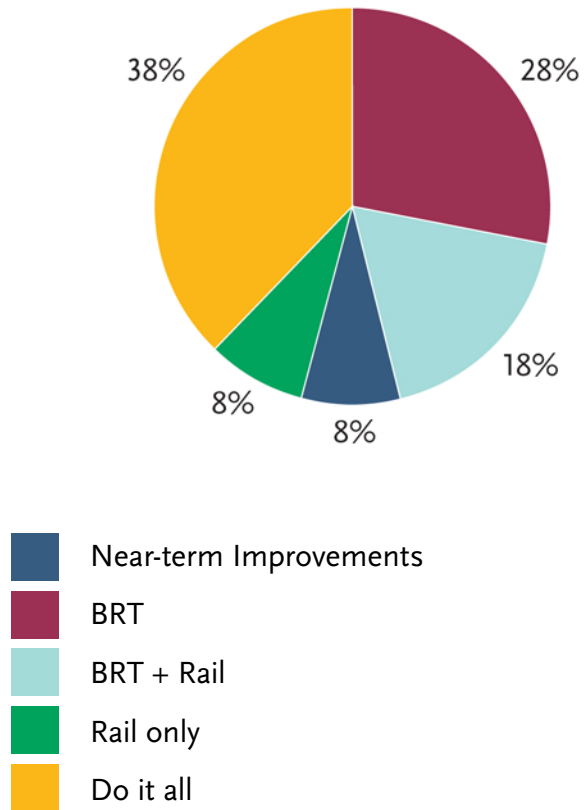
- > Make immediate improvements to the existing bus system along Vermont Avenue
- > Pursue BRT for completion by 2028
- > Pursue BRT and begin planning for rail beyond 2028
- > Pursue rail only
- > Do it all

Over 300 people participated in the community listening sessions. Of the participants, 38% selected to do it all, 28% opted for a BRT project, 18% opted to build both BRT and rail, and 8% shared they would like to see either bus improvements only or a rail project.

Over 300 people participated in the community listening sessions.

Figure 7

Community Listening Sessions



Participants voted for their preferred VTC transit options.



Community Conversations

As a core task of CBOs in their partnership with Metro, community conversations were hosted by the 20 partner groups. Collectively, CBOs hosted 32 virtual and in-person community conversations throughout the entire corridor. The intention of the community conversations was to provide a safe space for members of the community to share opinions and experiences about their transportation needs, the services Metro provides, and the future of the VTC. Through this effort, stakeholders were reached at shelters, rehabilitation centers, churches and via immigrant support, parent and youth groups.

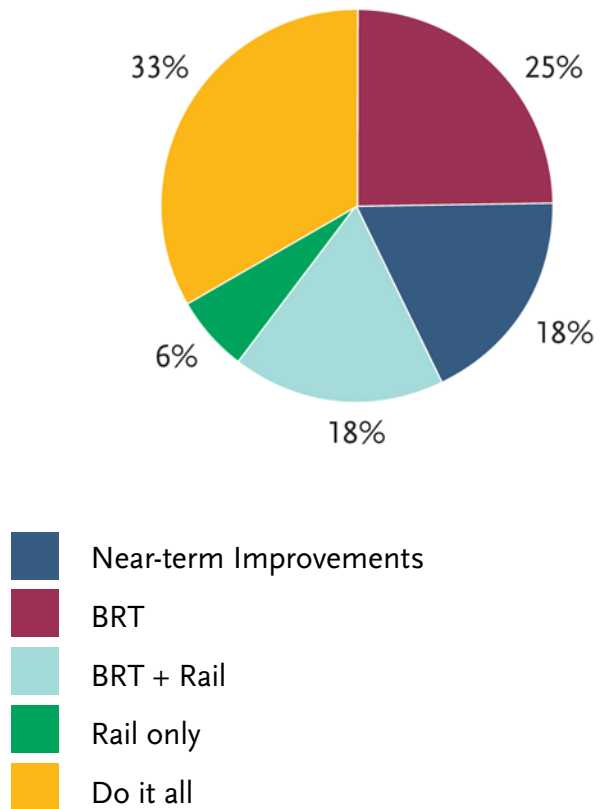
During the conversations, participants shared personal experiences taking bus and trains, as most people who participated use public transportation as their only way to get to their destinations. They also learned about options for potential transportation improvements and provided their choices.

During the conversations, participants shared personal experiences taking bus and trains, as most people who participated use public transportation as their only way to get to their destinations.

Of the 340 people reached through the community conversations, 33% shared that Metro do it all, 25% opted for a BRT project, 18% opted for either BRT and Rail and bus improvements and 6% selected rail only as a choice.

Transit Options on Vermont Avenue

Participants learned about options for potential transportation improvements and provided their choices during Community Conversation events.





Community, policy and business leaders provided insight informed by their deep community ties.

Key Stakeholder Briefings

Metro staff met with 21 community, policy, and business leaders and their teams to provide in-depth presentations and discussions about the VTC that included:

- > American Career College
- > Children's Hospital Los Angeles
- > East Hollywood Business Improvement District
- > Empowerment Congress
- > Exposition Park Leadership Meeting
- > Harbor Gateway North Neighborhood Council
- > Hollywood Presbyterian Medical Center
- > Los Angeles City College
- > Los Angeles Exposition Park Leadership
- > Los Angeles Southwest College
- > Lucas Museum of Narrative Art
- > Neighborhood Council Briefings - Corridor-Wide
- > North Area Neighborhood Development (Empowerment Congress North)
- > Pico-Union Neighborhood Council
- > Rampart Village Neighborhood Council
- > Rampart Village Neighborhood Council Pub Safety, Housing, Transportation Committee

- > University of Southern California (USC)
- > Voices Neighborhood Council
- > West Athens Westmont Task Force
- > West Coast University
- > Wilshire Center Business Improvement District Board

While specific results of their options were not calculated, Appendix B of the full report provides meeting summaries of each meeting where questions and comments are detailed.



Participants learned of community engagement events through community partnerships.

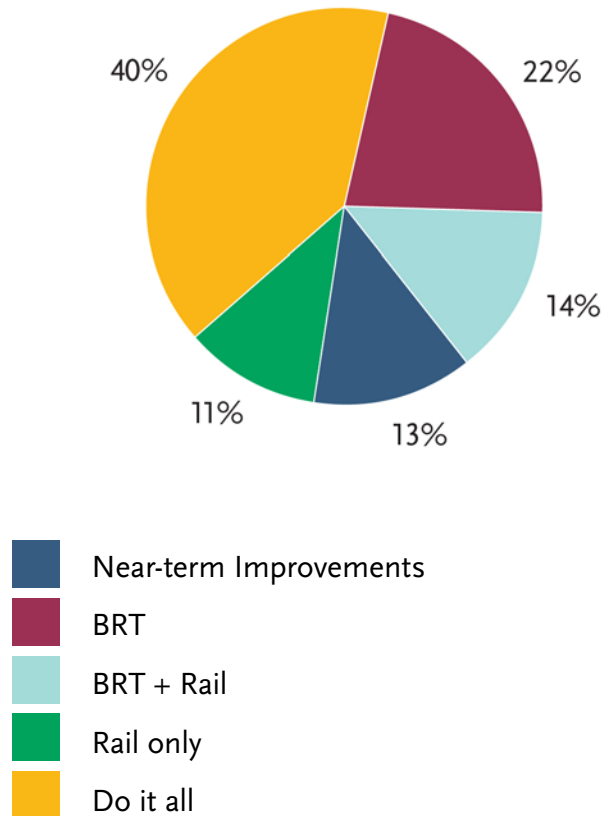
Overall Findings

Based on all the engagement activities completed as part of the Community Based Partnership Program, 40% of all stakeholders prefer that Metro do it all and implement immediate bus improvements, deliver BRT by 2028 and plan for rail as quickly as possible (not waiting until 2067). Further, 22% opted to implement a BRT project. 14% opted for both BRT and rail, 13% would like to see bus service improvements and 11% would like to see rail only.

Combined between doing it all and adding either bus and/or rail, overwhelmingly 76% of stakeholders would like to see major capital improvements along Vermont.

Overall Findings from All Engagement Activities

The majority of participants preferred for Metro to implement major capital improvements along Vermont Avenue.



Participants received Metro swag that included free TAP cards for use on Metro transit.

Context

To fully understand why people selected all viable options available – do it all – one must comprehend their decision in a deeper context. Historically, public agencies and other government institutions representing Vermont Avenue have promised critical infrastructure and quality of life improvements. Unfortunately, many of these promises have not been delivered to date.

Unsure if the improvements promised under Measure M will be implemented, community members have taken a stance to ensure immediate transportation improvements are delivered as quickly as possible and certainly before 2028. Although people like rail, they feel that 25 to 30 years is too long to wait for improvements that are critically needed today. The question becomes, “What can we have now?” BRT, in the near medium term, is more appealing when compared to a thirty–forty-year wait for rail. However, rail is ultimately preferred by the majority of the corridor-wide stakeholders.

When community members opted for immediate improvements, they selected this option as a call to action for Metro to create a safer public transportation experience – where riders feel valued and respected.

When community members opted for immediate improvements, they selected this option as a call to action for Metro to create a safer public transportation experience – where riders feel valued and respected.

Through the engagement activities conducted, various sentiments were expressed by stakeholders that included themes related to safety and security, equity, customer experience, and traffic. These sentiments are detailed in the full report.

Recommendations

Given the context of service on Vermont Avenue, the street conditions, the customer experience, the core issue of equity underlying everything, and more importantly, based on community feedback, the overall recommendations are that Metro:

- > Implement immediate bus improvements to Metro Lines 754 and 204.
- > Deliver a medium-term Bus Rapid Transit Project by 2028, and
- > Begin to plan a rail project as quickly as possible.



Transit rider feedback helps us plan a better transportation experience.



We're planning a new way to ride on Vermont.



VERMONT TRANSIT CORRIDOR

Background

- > Fall 2021: Staff implements Community-Based Partnership (CBP) Program to inform next phase of planning for Vermont Transit Corridor Project
 - CBP developed in collaboration with Office of Equity and Race utilizing Community-Based Organization Partnering Strategy
 - CBP Program launched with interest form sent to over 400 CBOs who serve stakeholders within Vermont corridor areas
- > January 2022: Interested CBOs are convened to learn more about CBP Program and invited to submit partnership plans
- > February 2022: Partnership agreements formalized with 20 CBOs who serve stakeholders within Vermont Transit Corridor communities
- > February – June 2022: Community engagement activities implemented

Outreach Activities



Corridor-Wide
Survey

1



Community
Partnerships

20



Bus
Intercepts

12



Focus
Groups

9

Over 6,000 people participated



Interactive
Community
Listening Sessions

4



Community
Conversations

32



Pop-ups

11



Institutional
Briefings

21

Outreach Goal and Objectives

Determine how best to move forward with the project through a community partnership program that:



Collaborates with organizations with deep roots within the Vermont Transit Corridor



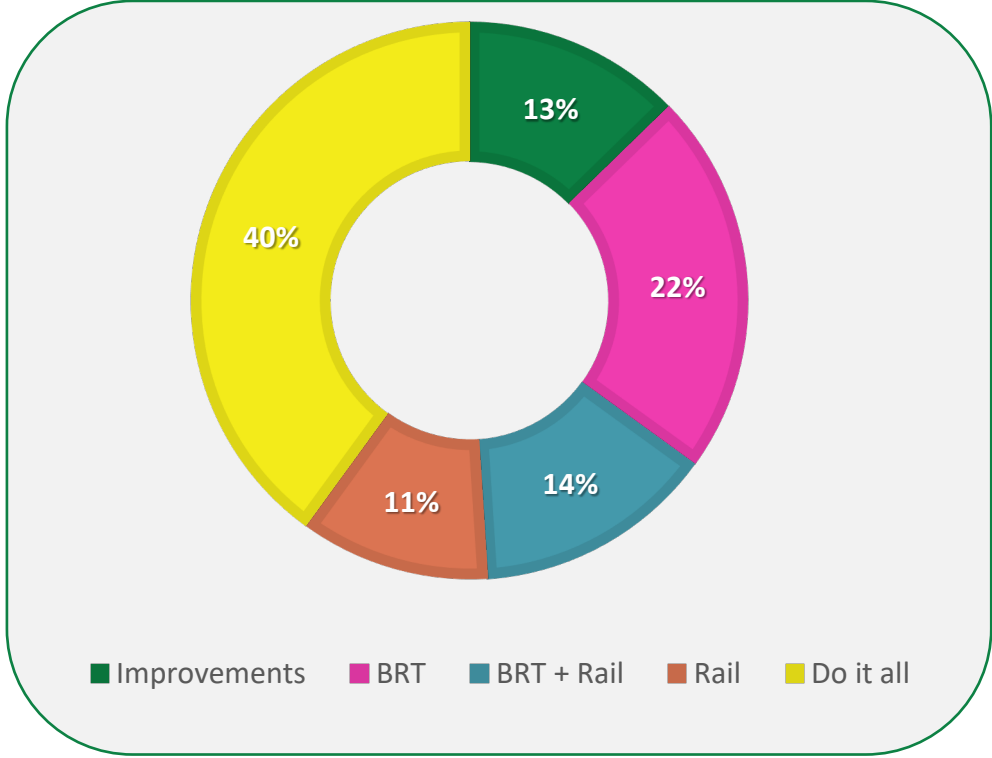
Establishes a vision for the corridor



Identifies near-, mid-, and long-term improvements for the corridor.



Overall Findings



Next Steps

Issue RFP for environmental studies

Fall 2022

Initiate near-term bus improvements

Fall/Winter 2022

Begin environmental study for a medium-term BRT Project

Spring 2023

Initiate long-term rail study and identify potential funding sources

As early as 2024

Continued community engagement with CBO Partners