


CITY OF LOS ANGELES
INTER-DEPARTMENTAL MEMORANDUM

Date: September 14, 2021

To: Honorable City Council
c/o City Clerk, Room 395
Attention: Honorable Mike Bonin, Chair, Transportation Committee

From: Seleta J. Reynolds, General Manager 
Department of Transportation

Subject: NextGen Bus Study / Operational and Infrastructure Improvements / Reliable Service

SUMMARY

In response to direction in Council File (CF) 19-0885, this report provides an update on the NextGen Bus Speed Engineering Working Group, a joint effort between the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro). The joint working group has implemented its several dedicated bus lanes on priority corridors and is beginning community engagement on additional corridors.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council RECEIVE and FILE this report.

BACKGROUND

On September 17, 2019, Council directed LADOT to convene a NextGen Bus Working Group with Metro and provide updates to the Transportation Committee, starting in October 2019. The working group is responsible for developing priority bus-supportive infrastructure projects to support Metro's NextGen bus service plan, with an emphasis on near-term improvements implemented concurrently with each phase of NextGen.

Starting in October, 2019, the working group meets regularly to identify and prioritize corridors for infrastructure improvements, develop project scopes, and determine outreach strategies.

In May, 2020, LADOT provided a report to Council outlining community outreach for proposed projects on 5th Street, 6th Street, and Aliso Street in Downtown and identified Olive Street and Grand Avenue as recommended corridors for consideration of dedicated bus lane projects.

In December, 2020, LADOT provided a report to Council outlining completed bus lane implementation along Flower Street, 5th Street, 6th Street, and Aliso Street, as well as planned public outreach for bus lanes on Grand Avenue, Olive Street, and Alvarado Street.

This report provides an update on those projects and identifies the next corridor proposed for feasibility assessment and community outreach.

DISCUSSION

Competitive and convenient mobility options, including fast and reliable bus service, are critical to achieve the City's Green New Deal goals. Bus speed and reliability remains especially important during the Safer at Home order as more frequent service and shorter travel times can accommodate better social distancing for essential workers who rely on transit to connect them to jobs and services.

Our primary tool to improve bus speed and reliability is dedicated bus lanes that allow buses to transport their passengers (average 80 per vehicle) free of congestion (average one per vehicle). To implement initial projects quickly with low capital costs, the working group has focused on corridors with existing peak-hour travel lanes that can be converted to part-time dedicated bus lanes.

Initial bus speed improvement infrastructure prioritized Downtown Los Angeles, where a significant portion of bus routes begin and end, demand is highest, and service is most frequent. Phase 1 improvements focused on Downtown LA are still underway, but LADOT, in partnership with Metro, has successfully implemented dedicated bus lanes on 5th Street, 6th Street, and Aliso Street. An existing pilot bus lane on Flower Street saw bus speed, reliability, and ridership improve, and Metro subsequently filed a Notice of Exemption to make the bus lane permanent.

Since the December 2020 report, the following projects are on-going:

Phase 1: Downtown Los Angeles

5th Street Bus Queue Jumper

In coordination with the Bureau of Street Services (StreetsLA) ADAPT resurfacing program, LADOT installed the bus and bike lanes on 5th and 6th streets in June, 2020. To further the improvements of the 5th Street dedicated bus lane, the technical working group identified the intersection at Flower Street and 5th Street for a bus queue jumper to provide buses a dedicated signal phase to safely and efficiently merge to the left ahead of freeway traffic to make their way towards Westlake and Koreatown. Although initially expected in Spring 2021, the queue jumper will be implemented in 2022 in coordination with on-going construction associated with the Regional Connector.

Olive Street and Grand Avenue

In May 2020, LADOT reported that the Working Group identified Olive Street and Grand Street as high bus frequency corridors that would benefit from a dedicated bus lane. In coordination with StreetsLA's ADAPT resurfacing program, LADOT designed and relocated the existing bike lanes on Olive and Grand streets to the left side of the roadway to reduce conflicts with transit and allow for future bus lanes. The joint working group has since conducted outreach to affected stakeholders and anticipates implementing this bus lane couplet by November 2021. Additional detail about this project is in the attached Metro report.

Phase 2: Citywide bus speed and reliability improvements

Alvarado Street

The working group assessed the feasibility of bus lanes on Alvarado Street between 7th Street and Sunset Boulevard and conducted outreach related to converting existing peak hour travel lanes to dedicated bus lanes that operate Monday - Friday from 7:00 - 10:00 am Southbound and 3:00 - 7:00 pm Northbound. LADOT implemented the bus lanes on Alvarado Street between 7th Street and the 101 Freeway in June 2021. Before extending the bus lanes further north, Metro submitted an encroachment permit to Caltrans

to allow bus lane striping along Caltrans right-of-way. Installation of the northern segment is expected in November 2021.

La Brea Avenue

The technical working group will study the feasibility of dedicated bus lanes on La Brea Avenue between Sunset Boulevard and Coliseum Street. This is the working group's longest proposed project to date, spanning nearly six miles of La Brea that crosses three Council Districts and the City of West Hollywood.

The proposed project converts existing peak hour travel lanes to dedicated bus lanes that operate Monday - Friday from 7:00 - 10:00 am and 3:00 - 7:00 pm. Converting the existing peak-hour lanes on La Brea will double the frequency of bus arrivals and provide significant time savings on every trip. It will better connect residents to the Metro E (Expo) Line, the eventual Metro D (Purple) Line, and services along La Brea. In addition to improving bus service for riders, dedicated bus lanes reduce conflicts between vehicles and improve pedestrian safety.

Based on sociodemographic ridership information collected by Metro along the corridor, nine in ten riders on La Brea are people of color, three in four do not own a car and rely on bus service, and four in ten live below the poverty line. Improved service is critical to serve the city in an equitable way.

The proposed project extends existing no parking limits by one hour and maintains loading zones, existing parking, and ADA parking throughout the rest of the day and on weekends. The working group anticipates beginning community outreach for the proposed La Brea dedicated bus lanes in October 2021. Throughout the project design and community outreach process, the working group will identify opportunities to further improve pedestrian safety, lighting, and mobility for all road users and will coordinate with the Complete Streets Program. Additional detail about this project is available in the attached Metro report.

Next Steps

The Working Group will continue meeting to identify the next phase of corridors and appropriate treatments based on bus service frequency, demand, and existing traffic volumes, and identify the next phase of priority corridors and treatments in its next report.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

SJR:mr
attachment



Board Report

File #: 2021-0539, File Type: Informational Report

Agenda Number: 26.

OPERATIONS, SAFETY, AND CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE COMMITTEE SEPTEMBER 16, 2021

SUBJECT: MOTION 22.1: NEXTGEN BUS SPEED ENGINEERING WORKING GROUP STATUS UPDATE

ACTION: RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION

RECEIVE AND FILE the status report in response to Motion 22.1 entitled NextGen Bus Speed Engineering Working Group (July 2019). This update provides details regarding a technical working group appointed by Metro and its efforts to coordinate with a complementary group from the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) to develop a work program to improve bus priority and assess the need to coordinate with other jurisdictions and municipal operators.

ISSUE

In July 2019, the Board approved Motion 22.1 entitled NextGen Bus Speed Engineering Working Group as part of the NextGen Service Concept. This motion requests the following:

- A. Develop a list of priority bus supportive infrastructure projects needed to support the NextGen bus service plan, with an emphasis on near-term improvements that can be implemented concurrently with each phase of NextGen;
- B. Form a NextGen Bus Speed Engineering Working Group co-chaired by the Metro CEO and the General Manager (GM) of the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), or their designees, and establish a regular meeting schedule, at least monthly;
- C. Assess the need for coordination with additional local jurisdictions and municipal operators where bus delay hotspots exist; and
- D. Report back to the Operations, Safety and Customer Experience Committee on the above in April 2020, and quarterly thereafter.

This report provides a status update as of FY22 Q1 on the response to Motion 22.1.

BACKGROUND

In July 2018, the Board adopted Motion 38.1, endorsing travel speed, service frequency, and system reliability as the highest priority service design objectives for the NextGen Bus Study. These

objectives were incorporated into the NextGen Regional Service Concept (Attachment A) approved by the Board in July 2019, which provides the framework for restructuring Metro's bus routes and schedules.

Concurrent to the approval of the NextGen Regional Service Concept, the Board also approved Motion 22.1: Engineering Working Group (Attachment A), which provides direction to staff to establish a partnership between Metro and LADOT to identify, design, fund and implement transit supportive infrastructure to speed up transit service as part of the NextGen Bus Plan.

The Metro CEO appointed a Technical Working Group focused on identifying, planning, designing and implementing bus speed and reliability improvements. Metro Service Planning, in close partnership with LADOT's equivalent technical team, consisting of Traffic Operations, Active Transportation, Vision Zero, and Transportation Planning Groups, has been meeting regularly (every 2-4 weeks) to ensure ongoing coordination and advancement of the program. Additional Metro departments (e.g. Communications, Planning, OMB, OEI, Program Management, Security), as well as other municipal traffic departments and transit operators, will be engaged as needed when specific projects have been defined and advanced towards design and implementation.

An External Affairs Working Group was also established as a subcommittee of the Technical Working Group. It is comprised of staff from Metro Community Relations, LADOT External Affairs, StreetsLA, the Los Angeles Mayor's Office, Metro Board Staff, and Metro Service Planning. Their work focuses on coordinating to communicate with and prepare communities for coming improvements, including identifying and addressing potential impacts, and coordinating outreach and engagement efforts for these projects.

At major milestones and as needed, the Technical Working Group will report on progress to the Metro CEO and LADOT's GM, and/or their designees, to seek direction on goals and objectives of the Technical Working Group, as well as policy guidance on balancing priorities for roadway and curb space.

DISCUSSION

Since the last update provided to the Board on January 21, 2021, the Technical Working Group has met regularly on the following:

Alvarado Street Bus Priority Lane

In partnership with LADOT and Caltrans, the Technical Working Group began repurposing the peak hour, curbside mixed flow lane into a bus priority lane on Alvarado Street from 7th Street to Sunset Boulevard.

- LADOT segment between Westlake/MacArthur Park B/D Line (Red/Purple) Station and US-101 Freeway was completed in June 2021
- Remaining Caltrans segment between US-101 Freeway and Sunset Boulevard is expected to be completed by October 2021, pending Caltrans approval of the projects encroachment permit application

- Community outreach was conducted from January through June 2021, including a rider engagement effort on Line 200 and at the Westlake/MacArthur Park Station in early March, a virtual community meeting held on March 17, 2021, an additional round of rider engagement on Line 200 and at the Westlake/MacArthur Park Station in late May, and construction outreach to area businesses and stakeholders in June
- Significant equity benefits for transit riders on Alvarado Street (includes data from the Fall 2019 Customer Survey for Line 200 riders)
 - Over 12,000 boardings per weekday (pre-COVID) on Alvarado
 - 94% of bus riders on Alvarado do not own or have access to a car and therefore rely on Metro bus service
 - 77% of bus riders on Alvarado use Metro bus service at least five days per week
 - 63% of bus riders on Alvarado are below the poverty line
 - 96% of bus riders on Alvarado are people of color (POC)
- Metro will be evaluating benefits and tradeoffs of this project once the remaining Caltrans segment is completed
- There are no significant issues to report following the installation of the current segment

Grand Avenue & Olive Street Bus Priority Lanes

In May 2020, LADOT reported that the Working Group identified Grand Avenue (southbound) and Olive Street (northbound) as high frequency bus corridors that would benefit from bus priority lanes. In coordination with StreetsLA's ADAPT resurfacing program, LADOT designed and relocated the existing bike lanes on both one-way corridors to the left side of the roadway to reduce conflicts with transit and allow for future bus priority lanes.

- Project expected to be completed by December 2021
- Community outreach began in early August 2021, and included a rider engagement and survey effort on various high-ridership bus lines along Grand Av and Olive St during the week of August 23rd, a virtual community meeting held on August 31, 2021, and continued outreach to key stakeholders and bus riders in preparation of project installation
 - Strong support from 328 in-person surveyed Metro bus riders along these corridors:
 - 86% ride a bus along this corridor regularly (at least weekly or daily)
 - 7 in 10 riders experience traffic delays on Grand Av or Olive St
 - Nearly every rider stated that having a more reliable trip time along this corridor would encourage them to use the bus more
- Proposed hours are weekdays between 7:00 AM - 7:00 PM
- Typically, over 60 buses per hour use either Grand Avenue or Olive Street, which equates to one bus every minute
- Significant equity benefits for transit riders on Grand Avenue and Olive Street (includes data from the Fall 2019 Customer Survey for riders on bus lines that use Grand Av and Olive St)
 - Over 120,000 boardings per weekday (pre-COVID) on Metro lines that serve Grand Ave and Olive St
 - 51% of bus riders on Grand/Olive are below the poverty line
 - 80% of bus riders on Grand/Olive are people of color (POC)

- Benefits to bus riders using routes from South LA, San Gabriel Valley and Gateway Cities
- Benefits to municipal transit operators including LADOT DASH, Foothill Transit Commuter Express and Torrance Transit 4X

La Brea Avenue Bus Priority Lanes

Further, the Technical Working Group identified La Brea Avenue, from Sunset Boulevard to Coliseum Street, as the next corridor to study for bus priority lanes. This six-mile-long corridor has a high weekday ridership of 12,500 boardings. With the NextGen Bus Plan service improvements, Line 212 on La Brea Av would see a doubling of peak-hour weekday service from every 15 minutes to every 7 ½ minutes. The existing peak hour, curbside mixed flow lanes would be converted into peak-hour bus priority lanes to support the increased service levels.

- Proposed hours on weekdays between 7:00 AM - 10:00 AM, 3:00 PM - 7:00 PM
- Under NextGen Bus Plan improvements, 8 buses per hour would use La Brea Avenue per direction, which equates to one bus every 7 ½ minutes per direction
- Significant equity benefits for transit riders on La Brea Avenue (includes data from the Fall 2019 Customer Survey for Line 212 riders)
 - Over 12,500 boardings per weekday (pre-COVID) on La Brea Avenue
 - 76% of bus riders on La Brea Avenue do not own or have access to a car and therefore rely on Metro bus service
 - 76% of bus riders on La Brea Avenue use Metro bus service at least five days per week
 - 90% of bus riders on La Brea Avenue are people of color (POC)
- Benefits to riders accessing jobs, residences, and businesses along the La Brea Avenue corridor
 - Over 100,000 residents and nearly 40,000 jobs within a 10-minute walk of proposed bus priority lanes
- Provides direct connections to E Line (Expo) and future D Line (Purple) extension

Community outreach for the La Brea Avenue Bus Priority Lanes will begin in Fall 2021. Implementation is expected in Winter/Spring of 2022.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

This quarterly update does not have a financial impact to report.

EQUITY PLATFORM

Improving transit service by reallocating priority for single occupant motorists and renewing focus on transit riders increases access to opportunity for groups who may not have those opportunities today.

Since Metro's adoption of the Metro Equity Platform Framework in February 2018, various community-based organizations have expressed the community's desire for equity to be integrated into the community outreach and engagement process. As such, Metro will ensure an open and transparent public participation process that empowers low-income communities and communities of

color, by removing barriers to participation in decision-making that affects these communities.

Given the COVID-19 pandemic, it is anticipated that future community outreach and engagement will incorporate both significant virtual and traditional methods. Metro recognizes that there are many communities without equal, daily access to the range of social media sites in use. Therefore, the development of each specific community outreach and engagement plan includes the assessment of how best to effectively communicate with technology within low-income, Limited English Proficiency and communities of color, coupled with outreach methods to engage people with disabilities, historically excluded communities, and general population stakeholders. This combined approach provides meaningful and broad public access to the public process. Strategies for public participation will vary depending on the scope and breadth of the project and on what is known to be familiar and accessible locations, forms, and forums for communication.

IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIC PLAN GOALS

The recommendation supports strategic plans:

Goal #1: Provide high quality mobility options that enable people to spend less time traveling. Improving the speed and reliability of the bus network will reduce transit travel times, and improve competitiveness with other transportation options.

Goal #2: Deliver outstanding trip experiences for all users of the transportation system. These initiatives help move more people within the same street capacity, where transit users currently suffer service delays and reliability issues because of single occupant drivers.

Goal #3: Enhance communities and lives through mobility and access to opportunity. With faster transit service and improved reliability, residents have increased access to education and employment, with greater confidence that they will reach their destination on time.

Goal #4: Transform Los Angeles County through regional collaboration and national leadership. Because Metro does not have jurisdiction over local streets and arterials, collaboration with other partner agencies such as LADOT, Caltrans, City and County of Los Angeles are necessary to ensure these speed and reliability improvements are successfully implemented.

NEXT STEPS

The NextGen Bus Speed Engineering Working Group will continue to discuss and analyze future corridors along key arterials for equitable opportunities and are actively collaborating with partner agencies and stakeholders. Staff plans to provide further details about these corridors in the next quarterly update in November/December 2021.

Additionally, Metro continues working with LADOT to improve existing Transit Signal Priority (TSP) and expand TSP to more buses and along non-TSP Tier 1 corridors under the NextGen Bus Plan. Today, only Metro Rapid (Red) buses receive TSP, which can extend green lights to prioritize certain buses. Given the NextGen Bus Plan to combine the best of Metro Rapid priority attributes with Metro Local access for all riders, Metro is exploring the viability to enable TSP on its entire 2,300 bus fleet

and work with LADOT to increase opportunities for Metro buses to receive signal prioritization along Metro Tier 1 bus routes.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A - Motion 22.1

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