



Date: February 26, 2014
Current Meeting: March 6, 2014
Board Meeting: March 6, 2014

BOARD MEMORANDUM

TO: Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority
Board of Directors

THROUGH: General Manager, Nuria I. Fernandez

FROM: Chief CMA Officer, John Ristow

SUBJECT: Certification of Vasona Corridor Supplemental EIR

Policy-Related Action: No

Government Code Section 84308 Applies: No

ACTION ITEM

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1) Certify that the Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) for the Vasona Corridor Light Rail Transit Extension Project:
 - a) Meets the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA);
 - b) Represents the independent judgment of the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) as the Lead Agency; and
 - c) Was presented to the VTA Board of Directors for review and consideration.
- 2) Adopt the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program.
- 3) Adopt the Recommended Project Description.

BACKGROUND:

The Vasona Corridor Light Rail Transit Project was a 6.8-mile extension of Santa Clara County's light rail transit (LRT) system from downtown San José through the City of Campbell and into the Town of Los Gatos. The project was analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Environmental Impact Report (EIR), which were approved in 2000 by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA), respectively. Subsequent to its approval, the project was constructed between downtown San José and the Winchester Station in Campbell. The southernmost portion of the project (i.e., the 1.6-mile segment between the Winchester Station and the Vasona Junction Station in Los Gatos) was not constructed due to lack of sufficient funding.

The proposed Vasona Corridor LRT Extension Project would complete the originally planned Vasona Corridor with a 1.6-mile extension of the Vasona LRT Line. The extension would begin

at the existing Winchester Station in Campbell and continue within the VTA right-of-way to the Town of Los Gatos. A number of design changes to the approved project are included in the Project, as follows:

- Construction of a double set of LRT tracks from Winchester Station to Vasona Junction Station and relocating the existing freight track east of the new LRT tracks within the existing right-of-way;
- Expansion of the park-and-ride lot and bus transit center at the Winchester Station;
- Installation of an electrical power substation at the southeast corner of the expanded Winchester Station park-and-ride lot;
- Construction of an at-grade pedestrian crossing east of the Winchester Station to provide access to the station from the adjacent Avalon Campbell Apartments;
- Construction of the Hacienda Station in the originally identified location with an optional park-and-ride lot at the northeast corner of Winchester Boulevard and Hacienda Avenue;
- Construction of the Vasona Junction Station in the originally identified location and construction of a park-and-ride lot with two alternate configurations on an adjacent parcel currently owned by the Santa Clara Valley Water District;
- Installation of an electrical power substation either on the west side of Winchester Boulevard, immediately south of the State Route 85 on-ramp, or in the southeast corner of the park-and-ride lot; and
- Extension of six of the eight existing LRT station platforms along the Vasona Corridor (Winchester, Campbell, Hamilton, Bascom, Fruitdale and Race Street) to 280 feet to accommodate three-car trains.

The Project alignment and design features are included as Attachment A.

The Vasona Corridor LRT Extension Project would be implemented in two phases based on funding and projected ridership. Phase 1 would include all project features listed above except the Hacienda Station and optional Hacienda park-and-ride lot. The Hacienda Station (with or without the park-and-ride lot) would be constructed in Phase 2, contingent on sufficient funding and ridership. The station platform extensions may also be deferred to Phase 2.

DISCUSSION:

Supplemental Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Assessment

VTA prepared a SEIR as the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). An Environmental Assessment (EA) was also prepared in cooperation with FTA. The joint SEIR/EA document evaluates the environmental impacts of the Vasona Corridor LRT Extension Project. The Executive Summary from the Final SEIR/EA is included as Attachment B.

The Draft SEIR/EA was available for public review and comment from November 20, 2012 to

January 7, 2013, with a public hearing held at the Campbell Public Library on December 4, 2012. During the public review period, written submissions were received from federal, state and local agencies or organizations, as well as comments from the public. Many of the comments focused on project costs and funding, projected ridership, and tree removal and replacement. Three Master Responses were written to respond to these concerns (see Attachment C; also see the SEIR/EA, Chapter 9, *Responses to Comments*, for individual comments and responses). VTA responded to all comments in the Final SEIR/EA and distributed to those who submitted comments on the Draft SEIR/EA, as well as other interested stakeholders.

The proposed Project would not result in any significant unavoidable impacts.

Recommended Project Description

The Vasona Corridor LRT Extension Project includes options at the Vasona Junction Station: 1) the design of the park-and-ride lot, and 2) the location of the electrical substation.

Vasona Junction Station Park-and-Ride Lot

The Vasona Junction Station includes construction of a park-and-ride lot on a vacant parcel currently owned by the Santa Clara Valley Water District. The design of the park-and-ride lot included in the Draft SEIR/EA and circulated for public review period included a bus transit center and 135 parking spaces. To implement this design, eight trees on the vacant parcel would be removed, including two large coast live oaks.

A number of comments on the Draft SEIR/EA inquired if it would be feasible to save some or all of the trees. In response, the park-and-ride lot was redesigned to save two coast live oaks; however, as a result, the number of parking spaces decreased from 135 to 108. (Note that the bus transit center remained in the same location as the original design.)

An analysis was conducted to determine what effect the loss of 27 parking spaces would have on the Project's ridership and parking. Data indicated that the reduction in parking supply would reduce ridership at the Vasona Junction Station; however, that reduction would be offset by a corresponding increase in ridership at the Winchester Station (in 2015 and 2035) and Hacienda Station (in 2035). The net effect on total ridership at the three stations would be zero. A detailed discussion of the alternate park-and-ride lot design, including an evaluation of the tradeoffs between parking supply and saving trees, is included in Master Response #3 in the Final SEIR/EA (see Attachment C).

Staff recommends the alternative design for the Vasona Junction Station park-and-ride lot that saves the coast live oaks because ridership and parking are offset, as described above and in Master Response #3, and because members of the public and other stakeholders, including the Town of Los Gatos and Santa Clara Valley Water District, expressed concern over the loss of these trees.

Electrical Substation at Vasona Junction Station

There are two alternate locations for the electrical substation at the Vasona Junction Station. The first location is on the west side of Winchester Boulevard, immediately south of the State Route

85 on-ramp, which is within Caltrans right-of-way. The second location is at the southeast corner of the proposed Vasona Junction Station park-and-ride lot, which is part of the vacant parcel to be acquired by VTA from the Santa Clara Valley Water District for the Project. A figure depicting the two alternate locations is included as Attachment D (or see Figure 8 in the Final SEIR/EA). Neither the proposed substations would be located near existing residences or other sensitive receptors to create a noise nuisance or significant noise impact.

Staff recommends that the electrical substation be located within the Vasona Junction Station park-and-ride lot within the footprint of the property to be acquired by VTA for the Project, as this avoids acquiring additional right-of-way or an easement from Caltrans.

Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program

CEQA requires a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) be developed and implemented for the Project to track compliance with the mitigation measures in the Final SEIR. The MMRP is included as Attachment E.

ALTERNATIVES:

The VTA Board could choose not to certify the Final SEIR and approve the Project. In this case, the Project would not go forward. If the Board chooses to certify the Final SEIR, concurrence is being requested on the staff recommendations for the design of the Vasona Junction Station park-and-ride lot and location of the electrical substation. The VTA Board of Directors could adopt none, one, or both of the staff recommendations.

FISCAL IMPACT:

Currently, there is no funding identified to finalize design and construct the project, which totals approximately \$176 million. A Board action to certify the Final SEIR and approve the project does not make any commitment of future funding or result in any additional cost or fiscal impact to the project.

STANDING COMMITTEE DISCUSSION/RECOMMENDATION:

The Transit Planning and Operations Committee heard this item at their February 20, 2014 meeting. Staff responded to questions on the status of funding for the project and the validity (“shelf life”) of the environmental document if the Project does not move forward in a given amount of time. The Committee voted 3-1 to recommend the Board to approve this item. Member Campos voted no.

Prepared by: Ann Calnan
Memo No. 4201