

CITY OF MONTEREY

TO: City Manager
FROM: Elizabeth Caraker, AICP
Principal Planner
DATE: October 20, 2009
SUBJECT: Consider Requesting that the Transportation Agency of Monterey County (TAMC) Conduct Equal Levels of Environmental Analysis on Both Light Rail Transit (LRT) and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Alternatives for the Proposed Monterey Branch Line Corridor.

~~COUNCIL MEETING: Oct. 20, 2009
AGENDA ITEM: 22
SERIES: 1001-03
COUNCIL MEETING: Oct. 27, 2009
AGENDA ITEM: 1
SERIES: 1001-03~~

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that City Council consider requesting that the Transportation Agency of Monterey County (TAMC) conduct equal levels of environmental analysis on both Light Rail Transit (LRT) and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) alternatives for the proposed Monterey Branch Line corridor.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This proposal furthers the City's goals of providing mobility opportunities, assuring a safe, healthy and economically vibrant community, and providing the City of Monterey with multiple modes of transportation that are safe, efficient and effective. This proposal also fulfills the goals of the Caltrans grant that was provided to the City in the 1980s for the purchase of the railroad right-of-way for the development of public transit.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

This project is proposed to be funded by federal grants through TAMC.

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION

TAMC will be conducting the required environmental analysis for the Monterey Branch Transit Line project.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

TAMC is currently evaluating whether to select the LRT or BRT transit system as the preferred alternative for the Monterey Branch Line project. Alternatively, TAMC may conduct the required environmental analysis on both alternatives in equal depth and choose a preferred transit system after the environmental analysis is complete. This approach allows consideration of the environmental impacts associated with each alternative when selecting the preferred transit system.

BACKGROUND

At its Regular Meeting of February 10, 2009, the Planning Commission received a presentation from TAMC on the proposed use by TAMC and Monterey Salinas Transit (MST) of: 1) the Monterey Branch Line Corridor for the Monterey Branch Transit Line; 2) 290 Figueroa (APN No. 001-701-011) for the Monterey Branch Line Station and the MST Transfer Station; and, 3) Portola Plaza for the Monterey Branch Line Terminal Station for the purposes of developing a project description for the required environmental review. Planning Commission comments addressed the need for an alternative that accommodates most commuters, delivers people to designated mixed-use areas, and that can be expanded to accommodate a potential future increase in ridership. Discussion also addressed the feasibility of creating a flexible transit corridor that includes LRT tracks surrounded by pavement, thereby providing the potential to accommodate both LRT and BRT. Other discussion topics included consistency of the corridor with the Harbor Land Use Plan and the Del Monte widening plan, energy consumption comparison between vehicles, vehicle and pedestrian safety, and traffic congestion at the Del Monte Avenue, Lighthouse Avenue, and Washington Street intersection.

On May 14, 2009, City and TAMC staff held a Town Hall Meeting in the Monterey City Hall Council Chambers. Participants discussed the merits of the project as well as concerns regarding traffic, pedestrian safety, parking, and possible impacts to Waterfront businesses and adjacent residential neighborhoods.

At its Regular Meeting of July 21, 2009, the City Council held a study session and received the same presentation from TAMC that was given previously at the Planning Commission and Town Hall meetings. At the time, TAMC did not request a formal recommendation from the City Council on the preferred alternative. Instead, TAMC requested, and the City Council provided, a discussion regarding the BRT and LRT options, and use of the Figueroa Street site as a station for the Monterey Branch Line as well as a transfer hub for MST.

In September, the TAMC Rail Policy Committee recommended that the TAMC Board adopt the LRT option as its Preferred Alternative. At its Regular Meeting of September 23, 2009, the TAMC Board considered selection of the preferred alternative for the environmental analysis. During public comment, Monterey citizens expressed concern that the Monterey citizens and City Council had not been provided enough opportunity for discussion and input, given the magnitude of the project and its implications for the City's waterfront.

After discussion, the TAMC Board requested that the City Council conduct further discussions on the proposed BRT/LRT alternatives and provide more input for the TAMC Board's selection of the preferred alternative.

On October 28, 2009, the TAMC Board will consider selection of LRT or BRT as the preferred alternative for the environmental analysis. The TAMC Board consists of 17 voting members that include 5 County Supervisors and 12 City Council members. The City of Monterey has one vote that will be cast by Councilmember Sollecito, the City's assigned TAMC representative.

The environmental analysis of the Monterey Branch Line project will satisfy the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act and the California Environmental Quality Act. During the environmental review process, the City will have opportunity to comment on the environmental review document during the Notice of Preparation period, scoping meeting, and public review period for the draft document. The City will also provide alternative designs for a MST transfer

station at 290 Figueroa Street to include in the analysis. The alternative designs will address parking and circulations issues and concerns that have been discussed at previous public meetings.

Use of the City's portion of the ROW for the Monterey Branch Line as well as surrounding property, as necessary, for the associated stations and parking lots will require City and/or Coastal Commission approval of a use permit, coastal development permit, design review, and property use agreements between TAMC, MST, and the City as well as the City's certification of the environmental document.

Once the environmental documents are certified and the use permits are approved, TAMC will begin design and construction of the project. Phase 1 service along the Monterey Branch Line between Monterey and North Marina is expected to commence by December 2014.

DISCUSSION

As previously presented, TAMC developed concept plans for the proposed Monterey Branch Line that connects Castroville to downtown Monterey. The proposed project includes the operation of either BRT or LRT vehicles within the Monterey Branch line railroad right-of-way (ROW). The portion of the ROW within the City limits was purchased by the City with a Caltrans grant in the early 1980s. This ROW is separate from parallel mixed traffic operating generally on Del Monte Boulevard in Marina and Seaside, Highway 1, and Del Monte Avenue in Monterey.

The portion of the ROW within the City parallels Del Monte Avenue on its bay side. The ROW is 100-feet wide and is crossed at-grade by two private driveways, a pedestrian/bicycle recreational trail, and three public roadways. The roadway-transit line crossings are located at Casa Verde Way, La Playa Avenue, and Figueroa Street. The recreation trail crossing occurs at Roberts Avenue. South of Roberts Avenue, portions of the recreation trail will be relocated as necessary to remain on the bay side of the transit line. Proposed LRT/BRT station platforms and parking are located at Casa Verde, the Naval Postgraduate School Gate, La Playa Avenue, and Figueroa Street. A possible extension to Portola Plaza is also being considered, which would require an at-grade crossing at Lighthouse Avenue and Tyler Street.

Other Planned Future Transit Lines

MST has identified a BRT corridor that links Lighthouse Avenue with the North Fremont Street neighborhood, Seaside, and the Edgewater shopping center. This proposed BRT Corridor would route through the proposed MST Transfer Station at the 290 Figueroa Street site, thereby providing a link to the Monterey Branch Line. Future BRT links to the Monterey Branch Line would also occur at Reservation Road/Del Monte Boulevard in downtown Marina and Eighth Street near the Dunes development and CSUMB in south Marina.

General Plan Consistency

The City of Monterey General Plan Circulation Element Goal i requires that the City "Support the movement of people, goods, and services by other transportation facilities, such as air, rail, and water." Other Circulation Element policies and programs require that the City support the efforts of TAMC to provide passenger rail service along the TAMC ROW to the urban centers. The Circulation Element also addresses bicycle and pedestrian trail and vehicle crossings along the TAMC ROW to ensure safety.

The General Plan supports the use of public transportation to reduce the impacts of future development on the City's parking and circulation system. Specifically, the downtown, the Lighthouse corridor, and the Cannery Row neighborhoods are designated for mixed-use/transportation oriented development. To meet the intent of this designation, a broad, coordinated planning effort with TAMC and MST is required to ensure that new development would not continue to overburden travel corridors or substantially increase parking demand. Therefore, part of the planning effort for the development of successful mixed-use, transit-oriented neighborhoods requires the availability of convenient public transportation.

Consistent with the General Plan Goals, in December 2007, the City Council authorized the planning and design of the Lighthouse Destination Plan. This plan includes a pedestrian bridge over Lighthouse Avenue at Del Monte Avenue and redesigns a portion of Lighthouse Avenue as a one-way corridor between David Avenue and the Presidio Gate that accommodates a variety of transportation modes, including dedicated lanes for BRT, high occupancy vehicles, and bicycles.

BRT/LRT Pros and Cons

The following outlines considerations of each alternative:

Bus Rapid Transit:

Pros

- Ability to drive buses off of the guide-way onto local streets and connect transit routes without the need for passengers to transfer between vehicles.
- Convenience of a one-seat ride from Salinas to Monterey's waterfront, downtown, New Monterey, and Cannery Row via two routes: Reservation Road and Intergarrison/Eighth Street.
- Convenience of a one-seat ride from Castroville to various Monterey locations prior to construction of Phase 2.
- Less expensive annual operating and maintenance costs.
- MST, as the likely operator, is already familiar and equipped to maintain and repair busses.

Cons

- Limited in capacity due to constraints at Highway 1 and Fremont Avenue.
- May result in delayed time schedules.
- Slower turn-around time.

Light Rail Transit:

Pros

- Appears more permanent than a bus-way.
- Greater ability to expand capacity due to constraints at Highway 1 and Fremont Avenue.
- Greater ability to stay on-schedule.
- Attractiveness of the light rail may attract riders.
- Faster turn-around time.

Cons

- Consistency with General Plan policies would require special attention to creating safe crossings at all intersections, including grade separation across the Washington/Lighthouse/ Del Monte intersection. Alternatively, General Plan amendments would be required.

- Greater up-front costs.

The Monterey Branch Line operating as BRT would provide greater vehicle and route integration with future planning efforts and increase ease of accessibility of the Wharf, downtown, Lighthouse corridor, and Cannery Row neighborhoods by enhancing the convenience of public transit through the "one-seat ride" concept, which increases the viability of using modes of transportation alternative to the automobile.

Another advantage of BRT is its flexibility. BRT can easily accommodate route changes to respond to changes in demand, infrastructure repairs/maintenance, or the occurrence of other environmental factors such as sea level rise.

The TAMC Rail Policy Committee concluded that LRT would be able to meet the transit needs of residents in this corridor on opening day as well as providing a superior transit service in the future once planned developments are completed in Marina, Seaside, and Sand City. This is due to LRT's ability to expand capacity using vehicles that hold 100 riders. The expanded capacity of BRT is limited by vehicles that can only hold 60 passengers. In addition, rail vehicles have the ability to add train cars at a nominal operating cost, which will be beneficial when ridership increases in the future.

The ability to add train cars and achieve higher capacity within a single vehicle is also advantageous due to the planned single lane/track through Monterey. Alternatively, BRT could achieve equal capacity if, when warranted by future demand, a second lane of tracks were to be added within Monterey's portion of the ROW, thereby allowing an increase of BRT vehicles.

However, the primary capacity constraint of the Monterey Branch Line lies at the intersection of Highway 1 with Fremont Boulevard, at Monterey Road at the northern edge of Sand City. This intersection is expected to operate at Level of Service E/D in the future. Because this intersection is so busy, BRT or LRT vehicles would be limited to crossing this intersection no more than six times per direction per hour. Therefore, the LRT could carry up to 600 passengers per direction per hour and BRT's ultimate capacity would be only 360.

While the one-seat ride feature that BRT offers is a benefit for riders, it can also be a detriment. Delays on the guideway could result from buses entering the guideway from local roads. Because buses on surface streets are affected by traffic, schedules can be delayed, which decreases the benefit of the fixed-guideway system. Light rail transit or a BRT line that did not leave the guideway would provide the timeliest service.

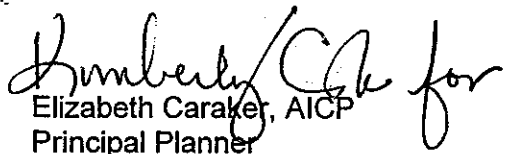
Finally, the TAMC Rail Policy Committee determined that the turnaround time for light rail transit is much faster than bus rapid transit because the train operator merely walks from one end of the vehicle or train to the other end. A train operator compartment is provided at both ends of the vehicle. Bus rapid transit vehicles must negotiate a turnaround with multiple turns using downtown streets.


While the TAMC Rail Policy Committee makes a good case for the selection of LRT over BRT, equal analysis of environmental impacts associated with each option would provide additional information that would enable the TAMC Board, and ultimately the City Council, to make a more informed selection between the two alternatives.

Therefore, TAMC should conduct the required environmental analysis on both alternatives in

equal depth and choose a preferred transit system after the environmental analysis is complete. This approach allows consideration of the environmental impacts associated with each alternative when selecting the preferred transit system, as well as any other new information that may arise.

In conclusion, staff recommends that City Council consider requesting that the Transportation Agency of Monterey County (TAMC) conduct equal levels of environmental analysis on both LRT and BRT alternatives for the proposed Monterey Branch Line corridor.


Elizabeth Caraker, AICP
Principal Planner


Approved by Chip Rerig, AICP
Chief of Planning, Engineering, and Environmental
Compliance

EC:ka

- c: All Neighborhood Associations
All Business Associations
New Monterey Business Association, Rick Johnson, 321 Alvarado Street, Suite G,
Monterey, CA 93940
Cannery Row Business Association, Ken Rauh, 700 Cannery Row, Suite KK, Monterey,
CA 93940
Old Monterey Business Association Rick Johnson, 321 Alvarado Street, Suite G,
Monterey, CA 93940
Old Monterey Business Association, Jerry Anderson, Ventana Asset Management, 156
Bonifacio Place, Monterey, CA 93940
Fisherman's Wharf Association, Jim Gilbert, President, PO Box 3258, Monterey, CA
93942
Fisherman's Wharf Association, Bob Massaro, Administrator, 98 Del Monte Avenue,
#202, Monterey, CA 93940
Kristen Hoschouer, TAMC, 55-B Plaza Circle, Salinas, CA 93901-2902
Hunter Harvath, MST, One Ryan Ranch Road, Monterey, CA 93940
Monterey County Convention & Visitors Bureau, Katie Besmer, P.O. Box 1770,
Monterey, CA 93942
Monterey County Hospitality Association, Steve Wille, 765 Wave Street, Monterey, CA
93940

COUNCIL MEETING: 10/20/09
AGENDA ITEM: 22

From: Fred Meurer
To: City Council Group; sandfc@aol.com; Smith, Craig
Date: 10/19/2009 3:45 PM
Subject: Re: LRT and BRT Alternatives for Proposed Branch Line Corridor--October20, 2009
Council Agenda

Council-fyi.

Fred

Fred Meurer, City Manager
City of Monterey
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Monterey, CA 93940

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(831) 646-3793 FAX

>>> Craig Smith <catsseat@msn.com> 10/19/2009 3:32 PM >>>

October 19, 2009

Dear Fred,

Can you suggest who on the council is the current TAMC rep? It appears to be Frank Sollecito. If that is so, I would like to share with him my opinion of LRT and BR. Please pass this email onto Frank. It appears to be on the agenda for October 20, 2009.

As a long time owner operator of a Monterey motel, here are my thoughts. To me the low ridership on the existing MST creates an obvious condition. Why use more government grants and then our own future tax dollars to unwisely fund the destruction of the "Window on the Bay" as we know it? Is this good stewardship of the natural environment? Would such a system go to Del Monte Center or is this just for the Wharf, Old Town and Cannery Row?

I quote the Council's own shared vision below that states "...mobility opportunities emphasizing pedestrians over vehicles ." Light rail is unnecessary, a view shed blight and a misuse of public dollars.

What is the ridership on MST currently,
up or down?

"The Monterey City Council met to develop a shared vision for the future of Monterey on March 2, 2007. For the first time in 20 years, the Council gathered to capture their snapshot of a future, with a noble purpose that would inspire beyond traditional boundaries. During a five-hour session on March 2, 2007, the Council hammered out its vision for the City. Working in small teams and together, the Council penned a vision that would lay the foundation for their work in the years ahead. At a follow-up meeting March 28, 2007, the Council refined its vision as follows:

Monterey is committed to being a model city for its quality of life driven by responsiveness of local government, historical and cultural preservation, mobility opportunities emphasizing pedestrians over vehicles, economic sustainability, a strong sense of place and good stewardship of the natural environment.

Mayor Chuck Della Sala and Council members Libby Downey, Jeff Haferman, Nancy Selfridge and Frank Sollecito created a new vision for the City. Their vision projects Monterey as a "model city" with a "quality of life" defined by specific objectives."

In light of this I ask the Mayor and Council to think twice about what certain agencies, non-profits and business owners think is a good idea based on agency funding of expensive surveys to give them the answers they want. This just does not make sense. But in the name of open-mindedness, tell me in plain English why logically-minded Montereyans should consider this TAMC proposal.
Sincerely,

Craig Smith Monterey Downtown Travelodge 675 Munras Ave. Monterey, CA 93940 Office:(831) 373-1876 Fax: (831) 373-8693 Cell: (831)277-2651 email: catsseat@msn.com

COUNCIL MEETING: 10/20/09
AGENDA ITEM: # 22

Arthur James "A.J." Farrar, M.S.

AJF & Associates

P.O. Box 1548

Monterey, CA 93942-1548

831-632-2176 - Voice/fax

October 10, 2009

Mayor Chuck Della Sala
City of Monterey
580 Pacific Street
Monterey, CA 93940

Dear Mayor Della Sala and City Council Members:

I want to take this opportunity to write and tell you that I fully and enthusiastically support the return of rail service to the City of Monterey.

I have resided and worked in the Monterey community since August of 2001.

I have seen traffic congestion steadily worsen over the years, particularly along Highway 1 and I fully support the proposal to provide additional transportation options including the return of passenger rail service into the downtown area of Monterey.

I'm certain that the option to drive a vehicle or take a train trip to Monterey will be important to the future vitality of the city.

Please consider my opinion when discussing this topic in the near future.

Thank you.

Sincerely,



Arthur James "A.J." Farrar, M.S.
AjfCityofMontereyRailDiscltr-10-10-09

OCT 15 2009
MAYOR'S OFFICE

COUNCIL MEETING: 10/20/09
AGENDA ITEM: #22

Rick Heuer
33 Alta Mesa Cir
Monterey, CA 93940

October 16, 2009

RE: Agenda Item 22

Mayor & City Council
City of Monterey
Monterey, CA 93940

Honorable Mayor and City Council:

Unfortunately I will be in Sacramento at the SWRCB hearings on Tuesday, but wanted to let you know my extreme concerns regarding even considering running a train through the Window on the Bay park. I am very aware of the proposed TAMC projects and have reviewed them in depth both from a hospitality perspective as well as a taxpayer perspective. I have yet to see a credible study showing that train service would be self supporting, my question is how will pay the subsidy. The best solution to address commute needs and traffic improvement would be the rapid bus scenarios. The idea of there being tourist usage at any level for a train, is a figment of the imagination.

The City of Monterey spent millions of dollars to create the Window on the Bay, and further money on the Catellus parcels. To wall off coastal access with train tracks is crazy. The idea of children playing next to working train tracks is even crazier. This project needs to die a quick death or at a very minimum the train terminates in Seaside.

Sincerely,



Rick Heuer