



September 10, 2023

VIA EMAIL

Mr. Michael Schneider
Streets For All
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Re: Response to Letter regarding Regional Connector First-Last Mile Connections

Dear Mr. Schneider:

Thank you for your letter and questions regarding the First and Last Mile (FLM) infrastructure around LA Metro's Regional Connector Transit Corridor Project (Project). Metro shares your passion for – and consistently advocates for – improving mobility options throughout our County.

Over the past several years, Metro has committed to an ambitious program that improves mobility through first/last mile improvements and active transportation improvements. This includes a planning and policy framework in the Active Transportation Strategic Plan and projects such as the LA River Path Project and Rail to Rail Active Transportation Corridor. Still, our agency's ability to construct certain bike lane improvements as a part of the Project is constrained by several factors, including the following:

1. Public streets and sidewalks along the Project corridor are owned, maintained, and under the jurisdiction of the City of Los Angeles (City). Changes impacting vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic are the responsibility of the LA Department of Transportation (LADOT). While design recommendations are often made by Metro, we cannot dictate to the City which street and sidewalk improvements are, or are not, to be implemented.
2. Design elements for the Project must comply with the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) included in the Project's environmental clearances permits – issued by the State of California under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These environmental documents and the associated MMRP limit where reductions to roadway vehicle capacities are allowed.
3. Funding rules from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) for the Project do not allow for reimbursement for the construction of betterments. The FTA defines betterments as those elements that do not directly contribute to the delivery of the transit guideway and

related systems. Funds are only to be expended on light rail infrastructure items and on the replacement of street elements, in-kind, disturbed during construction.

4. Metro's FLM Program did not exist when the Project was issued for construction bidding in 2013. The scope of the construction work was completed and frozen at the time of bidding and did not include the implementation of the City's downtown-wide bike lane plans.

Notwithstanding the constraints described above, Metro and LADOT did decide to work together to pursue the construction of some bike lanes to meet the spirit of the City's 2008 bike lane plans – at least where it was feasible to do so and while balancing the parking and traffic maintenance priorities of the Little Tokyo Business Improvement District (BID) and other stakeholders. Where it was not feasible to implement features of the City's 2008 bike lanes plans under the Project or other Metro work, LADOT agreed to investigate incorporating these features into other upcoming projects.

Following the decision to pursue the construction of some bike lanes, Metro secured over \$29.7M in funding to construct FLM and related biking improvements near the Project stations. The funding included an \$11.8M TIGER grant from the federal government. These FLM and associated other improvements were constructed under the Regional Connector and Eastside Access projects and included: dedicated and shared bike lanes along 1st, Sante Fe, Center, Spring, and 2nd Streets; new bikeway and pedestrian crossing signals; street and walkway lighting enhancements; and new landscaping and hardscaping. While these arrangements pre-date Metro's current FLM planning program, they are similar to the approach now underway for future projects whereby we lead planning and community engagement for FLM improvements. We follow up our planning activities by facilitating and assisting our local partners in securing funding and implementing projects, as we have done in the improvements highlighted above.

Some design features in the City's 2008 bikeway plans could not be accommodated due to the constraints explained above, and because of current right-of-way limitations or community opposition. Per LADOT, LA Council District 14, and Metro public outreach staff, examples, and reasons for certain elements of the City's 2008 plans not yet being implemented include the following:

- Traction Avenue Pedestrian Plaza – Construction of the proposed pedestrian plaza was indefinitely postponed due to public opposition. In late 2016, the Little Tokyo BID and leadership councils asked the City and Metro to remove the plaza from Metro's scope of work. Arts District leadership also rejected a closure of the street, stating the roadway was a necessary gateway to their district. Instead, this area was improved by the LADOT and the Bureau of Engineering (BOE) under their Active Transportation Project (ATP), which included the construction of new sidewalks, ADA ramps, and landscaping features.

- Little Tokyo bikeways along Central Avenue and Judge John Aliso Streets – Construction of bike lanes was postponed at the request of community leaders. The current rights-of-way are not wide enough to accommodate dedicated bike lanes without removing parking spaces, vehicular traffic lane and/or passenger drop-off zones – none of which the Little Tokyo leadership was willing to accept at this time. However, as part of the City’s master redevelopment planning efforts around the old Parker Center site and along San Pedro Street, options for widening the rights-of-way are being explored with the goal of accommodating full dedicated bike lanes.
- Little Tokyo bikeways along 1st Street – Little Tokyo leadership and Council District 14 requested that the Al Fresco outdoor dining spaces set up during the COVID outbreak, along with the adjacent street parking and drop-off zones, permanently remain in place. Although dedicated bike lanes were able to be installed here, protective bollards could not be installed due to space and access limitations.
- Bike lanes along the 1st Street Bridge over the LA River – Although a dedicated eastbound lane was installed, the existing bridge deck is not currently wide enough to make this a protected lane without removing a critical turn and/or thru-traffic lane. Given this important connection to the 101 freeway, LADOT and Council District 14 determined that the current configuration is the most prudent at this time.
- Flower Street from 1st Street to 3rd Street – LADOT and other City departments are planning significant traffic pattern changes to Flower Street, including changing to bi-directional traffic through downtown. The installation of bike lanes will be addressed as the Flower Street engineering designs are developed and the associated vehicle lanes and signal alignments are more clearly defined. Bikeway profile grade and sight distance issues north of 3rd Street will also be addressed.
- 2nd Street between Spring Street and Broadway – Sidewalk widths along this block are currently substandard and the right-of-way is insufficient to accommodate two-way protected bike lanes. Shared westbound vehicle and bike lanes were installed as an interim condition. Large redevelopments along the north and south sides of 2nd Street are planned to be constructed in the next few years; however, City staff are exploring various sidewalk and roadway/bikeway improvements fronting these projects.
- Los Angeles Street between 1st and 2nd Streets – A lane of vehicular traffic would be lost in each direction to accommodate protected bike lanes. LADOT determined that the vehicular traffic volumes here were too great to remove the vehicle lanes. Right-of-way constraints also prevented dedicated lanes from being constructed.
- Ramirez Street/Center Street between Commercial Street and Vignes Street – Dedicated bike lanes exist here are partially buffered in some locations with bollards. Additional bikeway improvements in this area are being considered as a part of Link US and other projects.

Although not all bike lanes in the City's 2008 plan were constructed by Metro due to the constraints explained above, several bikeways and associated FLM infrastructure were constructed to greatly enhance the areas around the Project stations. These locations are much improved from conditions that existed prior to the start of construction in 2013. But we'd like to do more, so Metro will continue to work with the LADOT and other City departments to identify opportunities for further FLM and mobility enhancements in the station areas.

Thanks again for writing, and for your continued advocacy for improved mobility in Los Angeles.



Stephanie Wiggins
Chief Executive Officer
LA Metro

cc: Carter Rubin, NRDC
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Metro Board of Directors