

PREFACE

Overview

The Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority (Expo Authority) is the lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the preparation of this Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to extend high-capacity, high-frequency transit service from the Westside of Los Angeles to Santa Monica. This document serves as the environmental review for the Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase 2 (Expo Phase 2), which would improve transportation mobility and connectivity for residents and commuters in the project study area; provide faster, more reliable public transportation services; increase the capacity of the transportation system; and provide more travel choices. The study area is currently underserved by mass transit.

The Expo Phase 2 project is located in the Westside of Los Angeles, extending approximately 7 to 8 miles from the Expo Phase 1 terminus at the Venice/Robertson Station in Culver City to Santa Monica. The study area is generally bounded by Santa Monica and Pico Boulevards on the north, La Cienega Boulevard on the east, Washington Boulevard on the south and the Pacific Ocean on the west. Major freeways present in the study area include Interstate 10 (I-10) running east to west and Interstate 405 (I-405) crossing north to south through the corridor. Major east/west arterials include Santa Monica, Olympic, Pico, Venice and Washington Boulevards; and Overland Avenue, Sepulveda Boulevard, Bundy Drive, Lincoln Boulevard, and Ocean Avenue traversing north to south. Transit in the corridor includes bus service by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro), Culver City, Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT), and Santa Monica, with only the eastern portion of the corridor served by the Expo Phase 1 rail system.

Purpose of this Environmental Impact Report

This Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) has been prepared in compliance with CEQA Guidelines to disclose the environmental impacts associated with the proposed Expo Phase 2 project to public agency decision-makers and the general public, including the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of construction and operation. As provided by CEQA Guidelines, public agencies are charged with the responsibility to avoid or substantially reduce significant environmental effects where feasible. The public agency has an obligation to balance a variety of public objectives, taking into account economic, environmental, and social issues. An EIR must identify possible means to minimize the significant effects and describe reasonable alternatives to the Expo Phase 2 project.

As lead agency, the Expo Authority is required to consider the information in this FEIR, along with any other available information in making a final decision on the proposed Expo Phase 2 project. The basic informational requirements for an FEIR include discussions of the project alternatives, environmental setting, environmental impacts, mitigation measures, significant irreversible changes, growth-inducing impacts, and cumulative impacts.

Environmental Impact Report Process

Initiating the Environmental Review Process

The Expo Authority distributed a Notice of Preparation (NOP) on February 12, 2007, announcing its intent to prepare and distribute a DEIR. With the issuance of the NOP, the scoping period commenced on February 12, 2007, and concluded on April 2, 2007. During that timeframe, four public scoping meetings and one agency scoping meeting were held. In total, over 1,800 scoping comments were received from a number of public agencies and individuals. All comments received were considered in the development of the project design and preparation of the EIR. More detailed information on the scoping process and comments received can be found in the *Scoping Report* (May 2007).

Draft Environmental Impact Report

The primary purpose of the DEIR was to assist decision-makers and the public in assessing the impacts associated with the implementation of the Expo Phase 2 project. Where significant impacts were identified, the DEIR recommended mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate the potentially significant impacts and identified which significant impacts were unavoidable. Alternatives to the proposed Expo Phase 2 project were also presented. The DEIR document was considered a draft under CEQA until it had been reviewed and commented upon by public agencies, organizations, and individuals.

Public Review

The DEIR was circulated to the public over a 60-day review and comment period that concluded on March 27, 2009. Interested parties included private citizens, community groups, businesses, elected officials, and public agencies. Readers were invited to submit comments on the adequacy of the document relative to the identification and analysis of the possible environmental impacts and appropriate mitigation measures. A total of 3,569 pieces of written correspondence were received by the Expo Authority on the DEIR. Further, 173 people commented on the DEIR at three public hearings that were held during the public review and comment period. In total, over 8,979 written and oral comments were received on the DEIR.

Final Environmental Impact Report

Following the public review and comment period, written responses were prepared that addressed all substantive written and oral comments received on the DEIR. This FEIR consists of the DEIR, comments received during the public review period, responses to the comments, revisions to the DEIR that resulted from the comments, and minor staff-initiated text changes. These revisions are indicated in this FEIR as double underline for added text and ~~strikethrough~~ for deleted text. In addition, a vertical line appears in the margin next to the revised text.

In response to comments on the DEIR, the Expo Authority continued extensive agency coordination and community outreach and conducted additional technical and environmental analysis during the preparation of the FEIR. These efforts resulted in changes to the LRT Alternatives and new design options that are included the FEIR. The decision-makers will consider this information in any approval of the Expo Phase 2 project.

Project Review and Approval

The Expo Authority Board of Directors must ultimately certify that it has reviewed and considered the information in the EIR and that the EIR has been completed in conformity with the requirements of CEQA before any decision can be made regarding the proposed Expo Phase 2 project. Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15091, no public agency shall approve or carry out a project for which an EIR has been certified that identifies one or more significant effects of the proposed project unless the public agency makes one or more of the following findings, which would need to be supported by substantial evidence in the record:

- Changes or alterations have been required in, or incorporated into, the proposed project that avoid or substantially lessen the significant environmental effects as identified in the FEIR.
- Such changes or alterations are within the responsibility and jurisdiction of another public agency and not the agency making the finding. Such changes have been adopted by such other agency or can and should be adopted by such other agency.
- Specific economic, legal, social, technological, or other considerations, including provision of employment opportunities for highly trained workers, make infeasible the mitigation measures or project alternatives identified in the FEIR.

Statement of Overriding Considerations

If the Expo Authority decides to approve the proposed Expo Phase 2 project with the significant effects that are identified in this FEIR, but which is not avoided or substantially lessened, the Expo Authority must indicate that these significant and unavoidable effects are acceptable due to overriding considerations, as described in the CEQA Guidelines Section 15093. This is known as a “Statement of Overriding Considerations.” In preparing this statement, CEQA requires the Expo Authority to balance the prescribed types of benefits of the proposed project against its unavoidable environmental risk. If the benefits of a proposed project outweigh the unavoidable adverse environmental effect, the adverse environmental effect may be considered acceptable (CEQA Guidelines Section 15093). The Statement of Overriding Considerations shall be included in the record of the proposed Expo Phase 2 project approval. Even if the Expo Authority decides to approve the proposed project and a Statement of Overriding Considerations is adopted, mitigation measures and a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP) would be adopted for other project impacts. The Expo Authority would use the MMRP as a mechanism to control project impacts during and after construction.

Use of this Report

An EIR is an informational document, whose purpose is to make the public and decision-makers aware of the environmental consequences of a project. As noted earlier, the Expo Authority is the lead agency for the EIR. Thus, the Expo Authority Board of Directors will review this report and weigh its contents against other economic, social, neighborhood, and other considerations to determine whether the proposed project should be approved as proposed, approved with conditions (inclusive of mitigations proposed in this EIR), or disapproved. Other public agencies besides the lead agency also have discretionary approval over the proposed project. These agencies, known as “Responsible Agencies,” have reviewed the DEIR and commented during the public review period.

Report Organization

This Preface provides an overview of the FEIR, its purpose, and its intended uses. The FEIR is organized into two volumes. Volume I (Main Text and Appendices) is the main text of the FEIR, including the appendices. Volume II (Comments and Responses) contains all comments received on the DEIR during the public review period, as well as the Expo Authority's responses to these comments.

Following this Preface, the chapters for Volume I of the FEIR include:

- Executive Summary—Highlights the contents and findings of the Expo Phase 2 FEIR.
- Chapter 1 (Introduction)—Discusses the project history and explains the purpose of and need for the Expo Phase 2 project.
- Chapter 2 (Project Alternatives)—Describes the physical and operating characteristics of the alternatives evaluated in this document, as well as the alternatives that were previously considered but withdrawn from further consideration; other related studies and projects are also included.
- Chapter 3 (Environmental Analysis)—Assesses the existing environment of the study area and how the different alternatives would affect that environment; discusses each environmental study topic for long-term or operational impacts of the alternatives.
- Chapter 4 (Construction Impacts)—Evaluates temporary, short-term impacts to each study topic area that would occur during the construction period of the alternatives.
- Chapter 5 (Other CEQA Considerations)—Addresses additional requirements that must be considered to satisfy CEQA.
- Chapter 6 (Financial Considerations)—Presents cost and funding information for the alternatives evaluated in the FEIR.
- Chapter 7 (Comparison of the Alternatives)—Compares the performance of the alternatives with respect to environmental considerations, cost effectiveness, and achievement of project goals; identified Recommended Preferred Alternative.
- Chapter 8 (Community Participation and Public Engagement)—Details the community and agency participation and public engagement effort that the Expo Authority implemented throughout the development of the EIR.

This FEIR has been prepared in accordance with the requirements set forth in CEQA and its applicable regulatory guidance.