

Los Angeles Metro Community Listening Session Gave The Public A Voice in Decision-Making Process

By Edward Locke

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Los Angeles Metro held a Community Listening Session today (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.), in the Gallery and the adjacent courtyard, on the first floor, at the north-west corner of Da Vinci Hall, to collect public opinion on its plan to build the Vermont Transit Corridor Project.

Metro is currently conducting a pre-environmental community engagement program for the Project, which will serve the urgent needs of the low-income multicultural communities in Central Los Angeles for high-quality and rapid transit. In partnership with Community-Based Organizations, Metro is holding four Community Listening Sessions in April and May, which features animated, three-dimensional and panoramic videos on the new transit system and the civic communities and educational institutions it shall connect, including Hollywood, Silver Lake, Echo Park, Koreatown, West Adams, Crenshaw, Florence and Hyde Park areas, as well as Los Angeles City College, the Central Los Angeles Area High School No. 9 for the Visual and Performing Arts, the University of Southern California, and many others. The Corridor will extend between Hollywood Boulevard (on the north) and 120th Street (on the south).

Metro's goal for this project is to create an equitable mobility solution. The project could enhance connections to the Metro B, C, D, and E subway and light rail lines. Short and long-term options are being considered for this corridor, including improved bus service, Bus Rapid Transit, Light Rail Transit, and Heavy Rail Transit.

The Metro Community Listening Session included four stages. Participants first registered with the Metro system with their identity and contact information and got the first punch on their registration cards by the Registration Desk in the courtyard; next, they were guided to the Gallery where they watched an animated three-dimensional and panoramic information video wearing a special head screen made by Tech Row and an earphone set and got the second punch on their Registration Card; next, they got additional information from the poster stands inside the Gallery and got the third punch on their Registration Card; finally, they exited the Gallery into the courtyard and conducted one-to-one opinion session with Metro personnel, and then casted votes for their choices in the Voting Desk, and got the fourth punch on their Registration Card. After completing the above four stages, the participants received gifts from the Metro, such as plastic drinking cups, I Love Metro buttons, notebooks, and keychains, and food (a box of taco with beef, chicken or pork) and drink (water or coke bottles).

Lilian De Loza-Gutierrez, Director of Community Relations (delozagutierrezl@metro.net) gave the Collegian reporter a briefing on the project and collected some personal opinion. "Today we are having a Community Listening Session for a Metro initiative under Measure M," Said De Loza-Gutierrez, "you recall that Measure M was passed by the voters in 2016 [...] that money is going towards various improvement of transportation system throughout the entire LA County.

Vermont Transit Corridor is one of the projects to be funded by Measure M; and we are looking for investment in public transportation. Vermont Corridor is among the most used bus routes to serve from north to south in the Metro System and is one of the most important throughout the LA County with the greatest number of people who use it. [...] it runs about 14 miles.” She explained different options available, such as light rails, rapid buses, and others; the project could be completed by 2028; and she said that before the Board of Directors made a final decision, the Metro would collect opinion from the public.

The Metro is currently gathering public opinion to help with decision-making, conduct environmental impact studies, and relies on Measure M money for the projects, but it will look into the possibility of getting funding from the Federal Government, under President Biden’s infrastructure reconstruction plan.

Participants voiced their opinions or gave suggestions to Metro personnel for the improvement of public transit services in the area, including those in the areas covered by the Vermont Transit Corridor in particular, and in the entire Los Angeles and adjacent counties in general. These include making bus services more frequent, building light rail above the ground instead of subway underground in order to save money and to achieve similar results, designating special bus-only lanes in the freeway to make riding public vehicles as fast as driving private cars, using smaller vans instead of big bus on less frequently used routes to save money on vehicle acquisition and on energy. Some participants suggest that LA’s public transit could learn from the good example of New York, where most of bus lines serve the riders with a 5-minutes or less waiting time, CEOs of big corporations ride public transit to work on weekdays and drive only on weekends. They complained that unlike in New York where only 30% of families (middle-class and up) own private cars, in Los Angeles, due to poor service quality from public transit system, 70% of residents including low-income people have no choice but to buy a car; this contributes to traffic congestion, such that in rush hours, driving on freeway could be slower than driving on plain roads

A dozen people from the Metro system came to organize the event. Placing colored Easter eggshells into transparent plastic bowls, a total of 142 residents from local area showed up at the event and voted for their different choices; 19 people voted for Option 1 (make immediate improvements to existing bus service); 33 people voted for Option 2 (plan for BRT or Rapid Transit Buses or faster bus lines to open by 2028); 38 people voted for Option 3 (plan for BRT to open in 2028 and move forward on the rail plans sooner even though funding for rail is not currently available); 8 people voted for Option 4 (plan for rail only even though funding for rail is not currently available); and 64 people voted for Option 5 (do it all; immediate bus improvements; implement medium-term BRT; and plan for future rail). The outcomes of voting indicate the preference of residents for a comprehensive solution to problems of public transit system.

The Metro Listening Session today is a great success.