



U.S. Department
of Transportation
**Federal Transit
Administration**

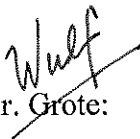
REGION IX
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JUL 8 2011

Mr. Wulf Grote
Director of Planning and Development
Valley Metro Rail
101 N. 1st Avenue, Suite 1300
Phoenix, AZ 85003

Re: Finding of No Significant Impact
Central Mesa Light Rail Transit (LRT)
Extension Project


Dear Mr. Grote:

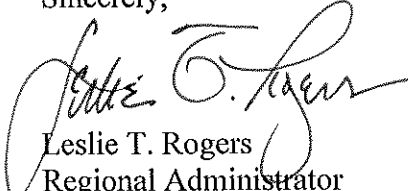
Based on our review of the Final Environmental Assessment dated May 2011, we have issued a Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for the Central Mesa Light Rail Transit (LRT) Extension Project.

A copy of the FONSI is enclosed. Copies of the FONSI and any supporting assessment information should be made available to affected units of government and to the public. Notice of this availability should be published in local newspapers and provided directly by you to affected units of Federal, State and Local governments as well as the State intergovernmental review contact established under Executive Order 12372.

Please note, the standard terms and conditions of the grant contract will require Valley Metro Rail to undertake any mitigation actions as identified in the FONSI and the Environmental Assessment.

Thank you for your cooperation in meeting the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act. If you have any questions, please contact, Paul Page, at (415) 744-2734.

Sincerely,


Leslie T. Rogers
Regional Administrator

Finding of No Significant Impact

Project: Central Mesa Light Rail Transit Extension

Project Location: Mesa, Maricopa County, Arizona

Sponsor: Valley Metro Rail, Inc. (METRO), sub-recipient to the City of Phoenix

Location: Mesa, Maricopa County, Arizona

Description

The proposed Central Mesa LRT Extension project will extend the existing METRO light rail 20-mile system a distance of 3.1 miles from the current end-of-line station in West Mesa through downtown and into Central Mesa. The extension, which begins at Sycamore/Main Street and ends at Hobson/Main Street (just east of Mesa Drive), will serve downtown Mesa government offices, museums, Mesa Convention Center, Mesa Public Library, Mesa Arts Center, Mesa Arizona Temple, the Northern Arizona University (NAU) East Valley Campus and the East Valley Institute of Technology (EVIT). In addition, the extension will connect citizens of Mesa to the region's largest employment centers and attractions along the METRO light rail system, such as: Phoenix Convention Center, Chase Field (ballpark), US Airways Center (arena), Sky Harbor International Airport, Arizona State University (main and downtown campuses), University of Arizona College of Medicine, Gateway Community College, and several other major cultural facilities.

The total capital cost of the Central Mesa LRT Extension project is estimated to be approximately \$198.5 million (in year of expenditure dollars), with a proposed \$75 million or 37.8 percent of the total capital cost being derived from the FTA New Starts program, specifically the Small Starts portion of the program. In addition, a proposed \$44.6 million or 22.5 percent of the total capital cost is estimated to be derived from federal Congestion Management Air Quality (CMAQ) funds. The remaining \$78.8 million (39.7 percent) of the total capital cost will be derived from the Public Transportation Fund (PTF), a regional ½-cent sales tax approved by the voters in Maricopa County in 2004.

The Central Mesa LRT Extension project will provide a seamless connection (no transfer required) along an at-grade double-track guideway from the current terminus METRO light rail system to a station east of Mesa Drive. Operations will use existing light rail vehicles and will include a traffic signal priority system (predictive priority), to allow for faster travel times. East of Centennial Way, the existing Valley Metro LINK Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) will connect to LRT at the new terminus and operate in mixed traffic as it does today as a skip-stop express service to Superstition Springs Transit Center (near Power Road and US 60). As a result of the project, Valley Metro LINK BRT service will be discontinued along Main Street between Sycamore and Centennial Way to eliminate service duplication.

The Central Mesa LRT Extension project will include stations in the center of the roadway that are level with the vehicle to facilitate boardings and alightings. The platforms will include shelter canopies, benches, trash receptacles, and real-time transit information. A total of four stations will be constructed. A new park-and-ride facility will be built near the Mesa Drive/Main Street end-of-line LRT station on the northeast corner of Main Street/Mesa Drive. Each LRT station will serve one or more existing or planned bus routes in the area.

Alternatives Considered

METRO completed a Tier 1 analysis in 2007 to identify potential transit alternatives to connect major activity centers in the Central Mesa study area. Options included three BRT alternatives and five LRT alternatives. All alternatives began at the existing METRO light rail end-of-line station at Sycamore and Main Street in Mesa and had the Downtown Mesa area as a major destination. Following considerable public and stakeholder input on the findings of Tier 1, the alternatives that remained were further refined. The Tier 2 analysis was performed for two BRT alternatives and four LRT alternatives. All Tier 2 LRT and BRT alternatives would operate from Sycamore to Horne and include stations in the same general locations.

As a result of the Tier 2 evaluation and continued public input, the locally preferred alternative (LPA) was selected to include a light rail extension on Main Street east to an interim end-of-the-line east of Mesa Drive as Phase 1. Two traffic design options were also identified for Main Street in the downtown portion of the project. One option evaluated a traffic configuration with the current four travel lanes (two lanes in each direction) while the other option considered reducing the numbers of travel lanes to two (one lane in each direction). As a result of the findings of the Draft EA and considerable public input received, the recommendation is to implement the two-lane configuration through the downtown area. The roadway would be constructed to allow for future conversion to a four-lane traffic operation utilizing a split phase traffic signal operation with no dedicated left turn lanes in the future if desired.

The LPA recommendation was adopted by Mesa City Council, the METRO Board of Directors and the Maricopa Association of Governments in 2009. The Central Mesa LRT Extension is part of the Regional Transportation Plan's (RTP's) concept to build 57 miles of LRT/high capacity transit improvements in the Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) region. The local funding for this plan stems from the voter approved Proposition 400 regional sales tax revenue passed in November 2004. The Central Mesa LRT Extension is planned to begin operations in 2016.

METRO estimates that the service will attract over 9,700 daily trips in the opening year of service, with trains running every 10 minutes during the day and every 20 minutes during late evening hours.

Agency Coordination and Public Opportunity to Comment

METRO conducted public and agency scoping at the initiation of the project. Public involvement is documented in Section 4.0 of the Final EA. The Draft EA was made available for public and agency comment from November 24, 2010 to January 7, 2011. Hard copies were made available for viewing at the METRO office and the City of Mesa Main Library. The Draft EA was also available on the METRO website at www.metrolightrail.org/centralmesa.

Comments on the Environmental Assessment

A list of comments received during the public comment period for the Draft Environmental Assessment and responses to those comments are included as Appendix O of the Final EA.

Two comments were received during the public availability period for the Final EA. A telephone comment from the owner of Quality Bumper (southwest corner of Mesa Drive and Main Street) asked whether METRO had determined the location of the park-and-ride facility at Mesa Drive and if METRO was still planning on splitting the park-and-ride facility to include his property. METRO's response is that both the Draft and Final EA only included a park-and-ride facility on the northeast corner of Mesa Drive and Main Street which would leave the southwest corner of Mesa Drive and Main Street unaffected.

A written comment expressed concern that the proposed project is not servicing young families, the working middle class and college students by going down Main Street in Mesa. The commenter states that light rail should be routed south from the Sycamore station to the Fiesta Mall, Banner Desert Hospital, Mesa Community College, through the Town of Gilbert, and out to Phoenix/Mesa Gateway Airport and San Tan Village. This comment is similar to a comment received during the Draft EA about the location of the alignment which has an extensive planning history. This comment has been addressed and is included in the Final Environmental Assessment in Appendix O.

Mitigation Measures to Minimize Harm

METRO has adopted specific environmental commitments and standard construction practices as part of the project description to address typical short term impacts that occur from construction. METRO has incorporated mitigation measures into the project to reduce or eliminate potentially adverse environmental impacts specifically pertaining to acquisition/relocation of properties; removal of bicycle lanes along a segment of the alignment; and typical impacts of LRT project elements on visual and aesthetics and water quality. The measures and commitments are listed in Figure 8 in the Executive Summary of the Final EA and also discussed by environmental category in Chapter 3 of the Final EA.

With regard to property acquisitions, METRO will further refine property acquisition requirements during final design.

Determinations and Findings

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) Finding

FTA served as the lead agency and METRO served as a joint-lead agency in the preparation of the EA in compliance with NEPA, 42 U.S. C. Section 4321 et. seq. and with FTA's regulations, 23 CFR Part 771. The EA analyzes and describes the project's potential significant impacts. The EA was issued in March 2011. The EA found that the project's construction and operation would cause no significant adverse environmental effects that would not be mitigated.

After considering the EA, its supporting documents, public comments, and responses, FTA finds under 23 CFR 771.121 that the proposed project with the mitigation to which METRO has committed, will have no significant adverse impacts on the environment. The record provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an EIS is not required.

Air Quality Conformity

The Clean Air Act (CAA) requires that Federal agencies and Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) not approve any transportation project, program, or plan which does not conform to the approved State Implementation Plan (SIP). The Federal Transportation Conformity Rule requires that FTA projects must be found to conform before they are adopted, accepted, approved, or funded.

This project, including the park-and-ride facility, is included in the latest Maricopa Association of Governments (MAG) Transportation Improvement Program (TIP), Regional Transportation Plan and corresponding Conformity Analysis. The project completed both regional and hot-spot analyses in compliance with the Federal Transportation Rule, and the Air Quality Technical Report is included as Appendix D to the EA. These analyses indicate that the Central Mesa LRT Extension project will not 1) cause or contribute to any new violation of any standard in any area; 2) increase the frequency or severity of any existing violation of any standard in any area, or 3) delay timely attainment of any standard or any required interim emission reductions or other milestones in any area.

FTA finds the proposed project in air quality conformity with the approved State Implementation Plan.

Ecologically Sensitive Areas/Threatened and Endangered Species Findings

There are no ecologically sensitive areas within or immediately adjacent to the project area. The Central Mesa LRT extension is located within an urban setting that does not contain suitable

habitat for any threatened, endangered, or candidate species. Therefore, the proposed project will not affect any ecologically sensitive areas or threatened, endangered, or candidate species.

FTA finds that the proposed project will have no effect on these resources.

Wetlands/Flooding/Navigable Waterways and Coastal Zones Findings

No wetlands, floodplains, navigable waterways or coastal zones occur in the project area. Therefore, the project will not have any effect on these resources.

FTA finds that the proposed project will have no effect on these resources.

Section 106 Compliance

In accordance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, technical analysis of cultural resources has been completed. The evaluation of historic resources identified one building and one historic district currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP). In addition, 24 buildings and 10 objects (signs) were also determined to be eligible. Review of these properties determined that the project would have no adverse effect on any historic properties within the Area of Potential Effect (APE).

Section 106 consultation was initiated in August 2007 when preparation of the Alternatives Analysis (AA) phase of this process began, and the process is continuing. Consulted agencies include the Arizona State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and City of Mesa Historic Preservation Office and the Curator of Anthropology. Several Native American tribes were identified as potentially interested parties and were also contacted. The technical report (Appendix F-1 of the Final EA) contains the determinations of resource eligibility for NRHP listing and the findings of effect, and the archaeological technical report (Appendix G) contains the evaluation of the project's potential effect on archaeological resources. Both reports were submitted to the Arizona SHPO for review and concurrence (Appendix F-2). The federal regulatory-determined consultation period expired without comment from the Arizona SHPO. Per 36 CFR 800.3 (regulations for implementing provisions of the National Historic Preservation Act), if SHPO fails to respond, FTA may proceed based on the findings and determinations contained in the technical reports. Because the project has no adverse effect on historic and archaeological resources, no Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with the SHPO and other parties will be required. Should design refinements occur during final design or subsequent phases of project implementation that could result in an adverse effect, a MOA may need to be developed which would define specific procedures for continued consideration and treatment of historic resources.

Environmental Justice Findings

Executive Order 12898 provides that “each Federal agency shall make achieving environmental justice part of its mission by identifying and addressing, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations.”

METRO performed an environmental justice analysis as part of the EA. Based on that analysis, FTA finds that the proposed project would not have disproportionately high and adverse effects on minority or low-income populations.

Section 4(f) Finding

The Department of Transportation Act of 1966 (as amended) established Section 4(f) as a national policy which states that the Secretary of Transportation may not approve transportation projects that use publicly owned parks, recreation areas, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, or any significant historic site unless a determination is made that there is no prudent and feasible alternative to using that land, and that all possible planning has been done to minimize harm.

There are two city-owned parks within the project corridor: Gateway Park and Pioneer Park. However, only Pioneer Park qualifies as a Section 4(f) resource. Analysis of Gateway Park determined that this public open space is close to other public open spaces, and the City of Mesa Parks, Recreation and Commercial Facilities Department determined that Gateway Park does not meet the Section 4(f) definition of being locally significant and is therefore not considered a Section 4(f) resource.

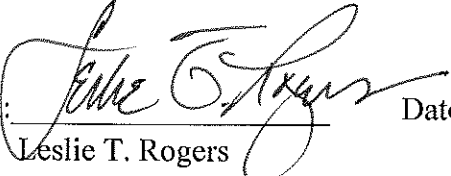
The project would be located entirely within the Main Street roadway prism and would not result in the acquisition or conversion of any portion of Pioneer Park into the transit facility or for a non-recreational use. Therefore, the project would not result in a “direct use” of Pioneer Park. The proposed project would not incorporate any historic property into this transit facility; therefore, the project would not result in a “direct use” of land from any historic property. The project also does not result in a “constructive use” or “temporary use” of Section 4(f) properties.

FTA has determined that the proposed project has included all measures to minimize harm and that there is no potential for impacts to Section 4(f) resources.

Environmental Findings

The Final Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Central Mesa Light Rail Transit (LRT) Extension project was prepared by METRO in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, §102 (42 U.S. §4332); Federal Transit Laws (49 U.S.C. §5301 [e], §5323[b], and §5324[b]); Title 49 U.S.C. §303 (formerly Department of Transportation Act of 1966, §4[f]; and Executive Order 12898 (Environmental Justice).

Based on the Environmental Assessment and its associated supporting documents, the Federal Transit Administration finds pursuant to 23 CFR 771.121 that there are no significant impacts on the environment associated with the construction and operation of the proposed Central Mesa LRT Extension.

Approved:  Date: JUL 8 2011
Leslie T. Rogers
Regional Administrator
Federal Transit Administration, Region IX