



CIRCULATION ELEMENT WHITE PAPER NO. 3

SANTA MONICA BOULEVARD CORRIDOR

INTRODUCTION

From the 1930s to the beginning of Los Angeles' freeway era, Santa Monica Boulevard, (previously Route 66, the Beverly Hills Freeway and State Route 2) was of national significance since it represented the primary gateway for travelers from the east destined for Southern California and the Pacific Ocean. As the Westside has continued to develop and intensify, the importance of the Santa Monica Boulevard corridor, while no longer of national significance, has become even more significant for cities in the western part of Los Angeles County.

Santa Monica Boulevard serves as a major regional conduit, by virtue of its connection to West Hollywood, Hollywood, the San Fernando Valley (via the Cahuenga Pass), and West Los Angeles and Santa Monica, with major connections at Beverly Boulevard, Burton Way and Wilshire Boulevard. The north roadway (known locally as "Big" Santa Monica Boulevard) was only recently abandoned by the State to the City's control. Santa Monica Boulevard is complicated by the presence of a parallel south roadway between the western city limit and Rexford Drive (known as "Little Santa Monica Boulevard"). Both Santa Monica Boulevards form a double roadway with travel in both directions on each street. A former railroad right-of-way with some commercial development is located between the north and south roadways. Some of the former railroad right-of-way is in City ownership and some is in private ownership. Running along the length of the north side of the north roadway between Doheny Drive and Wilshire Boulevard is a historically significant park (Beverly Gardens). The north roadway right-of-way extends 20 feet into this park. In addition to connections with other major roadways, Santa Monica Boulevard has a series of tightly spaced signalized intersections located at the ends of blocks of streets that form the north-south streets of the downtown business district to the south, and residential areas to the north. Commuter traffic from the north flows onto Santa Monica Boulevard and across it through these intersections.

BACKGROUND

Currently, the average daily traffic volume on North Santa Monica Boulevard ranges from 39,000 at Doheny Drive at the eastern city limit to 54,000 east of Wilshire Boulevard, and dropping to 49,000 west of Wilshire Boulevard. South Santa Monica Boulevard's volume at Wilshire Boulevard is almost 27,000, so the combined volume is greater than 80,000 vehicles per day. Santa Monica Boulevard also functions as a key travel corridor today, with about 1,400 morning and 1,700 evening peak hour bus passengers at Canon Drive and 5,200 morning and 4,900 evening peak hour bus passengers at Wilshire Boulevard. As part of the City's transit system priority installation, nine signals along Santa Monica Boulevard will be a part of an upgraded signal system to improve traffic flow.

To the east and west of Beverly Hills, in the Cities of West Hollywood and Los Angeles, Santa Monica Boulevard is undergoing a transformation by virtue of the streetscape/urban design enhancements completed in West Hollywood and the Santa Monica Boulevard Transit Parkway now under construction in West Los Angeles from Moreno Drive to the I-405 freeway¹. A study² commissioned by the City concluded that the Santa Monica Boulevard Transit Parkway would not negatively impact the City from a traffic flow perspective. The proposed interface or “join” at Moreno Drive was reviewed and when completed, the number and direction of lanes on Big and Little Santa Monica Boulevards will be the same at the border as currently exist in Beverly Hills although there is room to accommodate an additional westbound lane from Beverly Hills on Big Santa Monica.

Upon completion of the Santa Monica Boulevard Transit Parkway (slated for February 2007), Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) will institute a new Metro Rapid service route (Line 704) connecting the Vermont/Santa Monica Boulevard Metro Red Line Station to Santa Monica. This will supplement the current Metro Rapid Line 714 serving Beverly and Santa Monica Boulevards through Beverly Hills.

As part of the expanding Metro Rapid program, MTA and Beverly Hills are jointly installing transit signal priority throughout the City to be completed by May 2006. Transit signal priority will speed bus service along Wilshire, Olympic, La Cienega and Santa Monica Boulevards. The only major Metro Rapid intersection without transit signal priority will be at Santa Monica and Wilshire Boulevard, since there will be Metro Rapid bus service on both Wilshire and Santa Monica Boulevards.

In April 2004, as part of a land use study of the former railroad rights of way parcels immediately east and west of the Santa Monica/Wilshire to explore their potential for development, a City-sponsored report entitled *Santa Monica Boulevard/Wilshire Boulevard Land Use Study – Phase I* was completed. The study included alternative concepts to improve the intersection of Santa Monica and Wilshire Boulevards in the City of Beverly Hills and analyzed each in terms of traffic operations and the potential right of way footprints. The alternative intersection concepts included the following:

- Concept 1 – At-grade Widening
- Concept 2 – Pedestrian Grade Separation
- Concept 3 – Santa Monica Boulevard Grade Separation
- Concept 4 – Grade Separate Eastbound Left Turns and Southbound Right Turns
- Concept 5 – Minimal Widening

In August 2004, the City Council selected Concepts 1, 3 and 5 to represent a range of minimum and maximum improvements to the intersection and to be evaluated as part of the potential development scenarios. The City Council is scheduled to review the final recommendations of the land use study in 2006.

¹ The Santa Monica Boulevard Transit Parkway combines Big and Little Santa Monica Boulevards into a “grand boulevard” with frontage roads on the north and south (west of Beverly Glen Boulevard).

² Parsons Transportation Group analysis.

SIGNIFICANCE TO BEVERLY HILLS

Santa Monica Boulevard is as significant as Wilshire Boulevard to the City, serving as the gateway to Beverly Hills from the I-405 on the west through the Wilshire/Santa Monica Boulevard intersection. It is also the gateway from West Hollywood on the east, as well as a leg in forming the Business Triangle along with Wilshire Boulevard and North Canon Drive. Currently, Big Santa Monica Boulevard serves regional through traffic, while Little Santa Monica Boulevard serves local traffic.

As discussed above, Santa Monica Boulevard is a complicated double roadway and in Beverly Hills these roadways have a different character and function. In the Business Triangle, Little Santa Monica is a local street developed with direct access to retail shopping and offices. At the same time, some traffic seeking to bypass congestion on Big Santa Monica adjacent to the Business Triangle also uses Little Santa Monica Boulevard. Any improvements to Little Santa Monica Boulevard intended to reinforce its local-serving purpose that shift traffic to Big Santa Monica Boulevard would need to be considered simultaneously with improvements for Big Santa Monica Boulevard.

Big Santa Monica is designed and functions as a through traffic corridor with no businesses having direct access from the street east of Wilshire Boulevard. Informally, Santa Monica Boulevard has been considered as the primary route for vehicular traffic relative to Wilshire Boulevard, which has generally been considered as the optimal route for vehicular and mass transit alternatives. The broader long-term role and function of this roadway must be decided so that appropriate improvements to facilitate its ultimate function can be made as part of the updated Circulation Element.

TRAVEL FORECASTS

As part of the MTA's Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Major Investment Study (MIS) effort, 'sketch plan' modeling was performed to show the travel demand between key destinations on the Westside. This analysis indicated that travel demand along the Santa Monica Boulevard Corridor is even greater than along the Wilshire Corridor. Additional modeling by MTA has indicated that 40 percent of residents of the San Fernando Valley commuting through the canyons are destined to the Westside.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

It is clear that Santa Monica Boulevard is a regionally significant travel corridor. Upon completion of the Santa Monica Boulevard Transit Parkway and improvements to the I-405, and with ongoing growth and development throughout the Westside, Beverly Hills will experience a growth in traffic on Santa Monica Boulevard from the western gateway at Moreno Drive to the other areas of the City. Developments in Hollywood and West Hollywood will add further pressure on traffic impacts from the east. To address this emerging situation, the following are the major issues relative to the General Plan Update:

- Determine the long-term role and function of Santa Monica Boulevard. This determination could lead to the best options for roadway improvements (e.g., an additional westbound lane, bike paths, bus transit improvements, etc.) to interface with the Santa Monica Boulevard Transit Parkway on the west and West Hollywood

improvements on the east. To achieve optimal functioning of the Santa Monica Boulevard corridor, consideration of any improvements along the corridor must be done in the context of the impact for the entire corridor.

- Evaluate improvements to the Wilshire/Santa Monica Boulevard intersection within the context of the local and regional transportation system. For example, a grade separation involving a sunken roadway may affect future subway construction and station location.

Determine the City's potential need for the former railroad right-of-way along Santa Monica Boulevard for transportation purposes and compare with alternate uses of the property. Further, if the Santa Monica 5 parking structures, originally intended to provide temporary replacement parking during construction of the "D Lot" structure between North Canon and North Beverly Drives and currently located on this former right-of-way are removed, replacement parking should be provided in the area to service the businesses that have come to rely on these public parking structures.

- The series of tightly spaced signalized intersections east of the Wilshire intersection overlap with north-south traffic discussion and impact of trying to improve Santa Monica Boulevard flow by reducing or reconfiguring these intersections or their signal timing.
- The Metro Rapid Lines 704 and 714 and other bus services will continue as the only viable public transit service for the foreseeable future. Consider the possibility of dedicated Metro Rapid lanes during morning and evening peak hours, like Metro Rapid Line 720 on Wilshire Boulevard in West Los Angeles from Federal Avenue to Centinela Avenue. Should potential transit improvements be limited to existing bus and planned Metro Rapid service?
- Determine what improvements are necessary to improve the transition/flow of through traffic carried on Burton Way to Big Santa Monica Boulevard.



Be Part of the **PLAN!**
Participation **L**eadership **A**ction **N**ow
The Beverly Hills General Plan Update



REFERENCES

Final General Plan Circulation Committee Report and Recommendations, January 2004.

Future Subway Won't Unblock Today's Tie-Up, Howard Fine, Los Angeles Business Journal, July 18, 2005.

Gephardt, Rex, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority Metro Rapid Program Director, September 2005.

Hidden in Plain Sight: Capturing the Demand for Housing Near Transit, Reconnecting America's Center for Transit-Oriented Development, September 2004.

Metro Rapid Implementation Plan, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, July 2003.

Mid-City/Westside Transit Corridor Study, Re-Evaluation/Major Investment Study Report, Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, February 24, 2000.

Research Results Digest Number 52, October 2002 – Transit-Oriented Development and Joint Development in the United States: A Literature Review, Transportation Research Board, 2002.

Smart Growth Transportation Guidelines, and ITE Proposed Recommended Practice, Institute of Transportation Engineers Smart Growth Task Force, 2003.

Westside Mobility Study Final Report, Kaku Associates, Inc., October 2003.