

# West Santa Ana ROW Project Highlighted

By Numan Parada

Philip Law presented information on the West Santa Ana Branch right-of-way transit project at The Transit Coalition September dinner meeting. Law is the Acting Manager of the of Southern California Association of Governments Transit & Rail Department, Transit Planning Division.

Law provided details on the corridor, which runs from Santa Ana to Watts in a diagonal direction.

Pacific Electric interurban trains once ran on this right-of-way from Santa Ana to Los Angeles, serving what today are known as the Gateway Cities, such as Bellflower and Lynwood.

With an allocation in Measure R, Metro has the funds to pursue developing this project. The agency and the Orange County Transportation Authority are now able to look at this corridor to evaluate potential reuse for transit purposes. Because the project straddles two counties, SCAG is the lead agency studying the project.

However, the right-of-way north of Paramount has been reused to house the 105 Freeway through Lynwood (itself carrying the Metro Green Line) and a park in Watts. Thus, the study focuses solely on the remaining and largely untouched 20 miles from Paramount southward.

The alternatives analysis study is considering several modes of travel that can be used on the former railway, with the intent of connecting to Los Angeles Union Station and the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center.

The study aims to discern the best mode to serve the region and select it for environmental review.

SCAG has already completed initial meetings with both elected officials and residents along the route, according to Law. The transit project is seen as a way to address existing and future highway and freeway congestion. Additionally, attendees of these meetings made no qualms about the lack of alternatives to the automobile and connections to the regional transit system.

As a historically transit-poor region, the Gateway Cities and northwest Orange County face serious challenges to transit usage. Other attendees noted the need for improved bicycle and pedestrian facilities for the area.



**Philip Law of SCAG discusses West Santa Ana Branch Project.** Photo by Tony Waree

People have repeatedly supported a rail alternative for the right-of-way. There has also been interest in building a parallel bicycle and pedestrian path, as well as opportunities for economic development and revitalization.

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The study reviewed four technologies for the project: light rail, streetcar, bus rapid transit and maglev. All intend to use the 20 miles of right-of-way available. No-build and transportation demand management options are also under discussion.

For the bus rapid transit (BRT) option, two routes are under consideration, with both exiting the right-of-way at Lakewood Boulevard. One would use the carpool lanes on the 105 and 110 Freeways, while the other would run on city streets in Downey, South Gate and Huntington Park.

A streetcar option would be similar to that in Portland and what is separately proposed in Santa Ana: At-grade, in street, mixed with auto traffic. Light rail would look much like the Metro Blue, Green, Gold, and Expo Lines of today, which mostly run in their own right-of-way. A low-speed maglev option would closely resemble the Linimo line in Nagoya, Japan, but must be fully grade-separated.

All rail options would use the West Santa Ana branch north to a different railway, which heads north towards Los Angeles. Several options exist for the rail route to follow city streets through Huntington Park and Vernon.

Some options would connect to the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center via city streets.

For a project of this scale, challenges are inevitable. On the portion north of the ROW, traffic impacts are a notable concern. There are also issues regarding how the line will ultimately connect with Union Station and affect its operations. All options call for a new Green Line station where patrons can transfer between the two services.

As for the area adjacent to the right-of-way, the numerous diagonal crossings will have their own traffic and safety issues. For the southern, street-running segment, any alternative chosen must address impacts on historical structures and other sensitive land uses.

As for cost, a BRT option would cost a little more than \$1 billion. A streetcar would cost from \$2.6 billion to \$2.9 billion. Light rail alternatives would range between \$3 billion and \$3.2 billion, while a maglev option would cost as much as \$7.5 billion. Of these options, light rail would bring the most patrons, at more than 80,000 daily boardings, of which 50,000 of those would be new to transit.

Those in charge of the alternatives analysis study will present its findings and recommendations to the SCAG Transportation Committee on November 1. The group will recommend three options to carry forward for environmental review: no-build, transportation demand management and light rail.

For the northern segment, a path following the east bank of the Los Angeles River north of Vernon and another path entering Huntington Park, Vernon and using Alameda Street in Los Angeles will be recommended. For the southern end, the group recommends street running on Harbor and 1st St in Santa Ana. The Los Angeles County segment will have priority over the Orange County segment in terms of what will be built first.

The Metro Board will decide on moving forward with an environmental review sometime in early 2013, while the OCTA Board will follow suit in the summer.