

Little Tokyo Stakeholders Call for Underground Rail, Station

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Shared from the 1/29/2022 The Rafu Shimpō eEdition

Lynn Nakamura of St. Francis Japanese Catholic Center provides comments during the L.A. Metro board meeting.

The Los Angeles Metro Board of Directors laid the groundwork Thursday to advance the timetable for a new light rail system that, subject to securing adequate funding, could reach from Artesia to Union Station, travel along Alameda Street, and potentially include a station in Little Tokyo.

Voting unanimously in favor of a motion co-authored by Metro Board President Hilda L. Solis and directors Janice Hahn, Holly Mitchell, Fernando Dutra, and Eric Garcetti, the board took a step closer to ensuring that the 19.3-mile West Santa Ana Branch (WSAB) light rail project will provide a single-seat ride connecting the city of Artesia to L.A. Union Station. Solis, Hahn and Mitchell are also members of the L.A. County Board of Supervisors and Garcetti is also mayor of Los Angeles.

Japanese American National Museum Chief Executive Officer Ann Burroughs was among Little Tokyo stakeholders who commented during the Metro board meeting. She expressed support for the alignment along Alameda to Union Station but cautioned against choosing to build an above-ground rail line.

Burroughs' comments were echoed by other Little Tokyo stakeholders who concurred that the new line could benefit the community so long as it was built as a subway and included a stop in Little Tokyo. Future development is being considered by the City of L.A. for the Mangrove lot on the east side of Alameda across from the museum.

JANM Trustee William T. Fujioka pointed out that an above-ground alignment would impede access to and from Little Tokyo institutions such as Nishi Hongwanji, Little Tokyo's largest Buddhist temple, and St. Francis Japanese Catholic Center. Fujioka is a retired L.A. County CEO and former L.A. City chief administrative officer.

James Okazaki, former L.A. Department of Transportation assistant general manager, reminded the Metro board that, beginning with the Gold Line station and continuing with the Regional Connector, Little Tokyo has been promised that rail transit lines would remain underground.

Additional comments were provided by David Ikegami, Little Tokyo Business Association president, and Jan Fukuhara, resident and property owner, among others.

Hahn thanked the Metro staff for their work in recommending the shorter Artesia-to-Slauson segment as the locally preferred alternative (LPA), but added, "It wasn't long enough."

Hahn pledged to continue efforts to make certain WSAB "will only be considered complete once the entire alignment reaches Union Station." Her position is supported by elected

officials and stakeholders from Southeast L.A. and the Gateway Cities, including Artesia, Cerritos, Bellflower, Cudahy, Downey, Huntington Park, Bell, Paramount, South Gate, and Vernon.

Garcetti thanked those present during the virtual meeting for their advocacy. "This project is about working together."

"Approving this first segment is big," added Hahn, "but it is not enough. Our communities deserve the project that was promised to them, and that is a one-seat-ride from Artesia to Downtown Los Angeles, and what we made clear today is that we are all going to keep fighting for that."

As part of the motion, the board directed Metro Chief Executive Officer Stephanie Wiggins to identify ways, such as public-private partnerships, to accelerate funding to complete the new alignment into Downtown L.A. before 2033.

Denny Zane of Move LA said, "The West Santa Ana Branch alignment will serve so many underserved and environmental justice communities. The people who live and work in this corridor need a transit option to access living wage jobs.

"And we must accelerate the project so we can ride it during our lifetimes."