ATTACHMENT TWO

Agenda Item #8

MARICOPA ASSOCIATION OF GOVERNMENTS INFORMATION SUMMARY... for your review

DATE:
February 15, 2011

SUBJECT:
Phoenix West Alternatives Analysis Update

SUMMARY:
Valley Metro Rail (METRO), in cooperation with the City of Phoenix and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), has been conducting a study to analyze potential high-capacity transit improvements in the Phoenix West study area that encompasses portions of western Phoenix and Tolleson. The study area is bounded by 7th Street to the east, the Loop 101 (Agua Fria) Freeway to the west, Thomas Road to the north, and Buckeye Road to the south. High-capacity transit improvements in this study area would be funded by the Proposition 400 half-cent transportation sales tax extension approved by Maricopa County voters in 2004 and are contained in the Regional Transportation Plan as part of 57 miles of high-capacity transit corridors to be implemented by 2031.

Alternatives Analysis Process
As part of the process to request funding from FTA, the project underwent an Alternatives Analysis (AA) that involved a two-tiered technical evaluation with input from project stakeholders and the general public. Mode options for all alignments include Light Rail Transit (LRT) and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). The Alternatives Analysis resulted in a preliminary METRO recommendation known as the "Locally Preferred Alternative" and includes specifics regarding the preferred alignment and transit mode.

Through the results of the AA study process, METRO recommends that LRT technology be selected for the Phoenix West corridor. It was concluded that LRT would best meet the purpose and need for the project, meeting the travel demands of increased riders anticipated within and from areas outlying the Phoenix West study area. In addition, the LRT fixed guideway investment has the potential to promote economic development opportunities in coordination with transit-supportive policies and investments by the City of Phoenix.

Based on land uses within the study area, the Phoenix West Corridor was categorized into two distinct areas: west of I-17 and east of I-17. The section west of I-17, known as the Mainline Section, serves as the east-west connection from the west valley to downtown Phoenix. The section east of I-17, the downtown section, serves as the connection between the mainline section, downtown Phoenix, and the METRO starter line. For the portion of the study area that includes downtown and the connection to the existing LRT system, access to corridor destinations and a connection to the existing LRT Alignment on Central Avenue are high priority goals. From I-17 west to the Agua Fria Freeway, mobility is a primary goal due to the high current and expected future travel demand in this corridor and significant congestion on I-10.

A key decision that resulted from the preliminary screening phases was the selection of the I-10 freeway right-of-way (ROW) as the recommended option within the mainline section of the Phoenix West corridor, since the freeway ROW clearly achieved the study goals. In July 2008, the MAG

Regional Council endorsed this recommendation west of I-17. Since then METRO has been working with Arizona Department of Transportation (ADOT) on the location of the alignment within the freeway ROW. Based on preliminary conceptual designs, the alignment west of I-17 will be within the freeway median until approximately 47th Avenue. From this point west it will transition out of the freeway median and continue westward on the north side of I-10 until the existing 79th Avenue park-and-ride. Stations are tentatively recommended on 79th Avenue, 67th Avenue, 59th Avenue, 51st Avenue and 35th Avenue with a park-and-ride facility on 79th Avenue and 59th Avenue stations. Figure 1 shows the preferred mainline alignment and station locations.

METRO's staff recommendation for the downtown section includes a 3-mile LRT extension directly west of the 20-mile starter LRT alignment. The alignment runs along Washington (westbound) and Jefferson (eastbound) streets for approximately one-half mile to 7th Avenue. Just west of 7th Avenue, the westbound LRT guideway would transition from Washington Street to Jefferson Street which would effectively create a double-track, two-way operation along Jefferson Street. The two-way LRT guideway would continue west along Jefferson Street serving the State and County offices and St. Matthew's neighborhood. The alignment will require a grade separation near 19th Avenue to cross the railroad track that parallels 19th Avenue.

As the LRT alternative heads west of downtown Phoenix, the two-way LRT guideway would cross over I-17 along Jefferson Street and continue north along the I-17 Southbound Frontage Road before transitioning to the I-10 median. The I-17 southbound frontage road would be modified to accommodate the LRT guideway. Station locations for the downtown section will be analyzed in more detail in the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) phase. Figure 2 shows the preferred downtown alignment alternative.

Figure 3 shows the preliminary METRO staff recommendation for the alignment for both downtown and Mainline section. METRO recommends that LRT technology is selected as the transit mode for the Phoenix West extension. LRT presents a favorable option over BRT based on cost per boarding, ridership potential, travel times and economic development potential.

Preliminary Study Recommendations

The recommendations mentioned below are preliminary and for information and discussion only. After the local approval process, METRO will to come back to MAG for formal action on the recommendations. The preliminary METRO staff recommendations include:

1. A Locally Preferred Alternative for the Phoenix West project, including a Light Rail alignment along I-10 from 79th Avenue to I-17; southbound along I-17 Southbound Frontage Road and east to downtown Phoenix along Jefferson Street;
2. Inclusion of a potential early action bus program (Figure 4) that consists of near term improvements and investments to improve existing mobility, enhance transit service and lay the groundwork for future HCT service within the study area. The set of proposed projects includes:
    a. Construction of a direct HCT access ramp from I-10 to I-17
    b. Expansion of the existing 79th Avenue park-and-ride
    c. Identification and development of new park and ride station at 59th Avenue and I-10
    d. Construction of direct connection I-10 high occupancy vehicle (HOV) ramps on the west side of 79th Avenue
3. Future consideration for increased transit service for areas within and west of the study area, per the long range transit needs identified in MAG's Regional Transit Framework Study, through the regional transportation system planning process.

PUBLIC INPUT:
METRO has conducted an extensive public input process during the three year Alternatives Analysis study process.

PROS & CONS:
PROS: The preliminary recommendation to construct light rail transit (LRT) along this corridor would meet the travel demands of increased riders anticipated within and from areas outlying the Phoenix West study area. In addition, the LRT investment has the potential to promote economic development opportunities in coordination with transit-supportive policies and investments by the City of Phoenix.

CONS: None.

TECHNICAL & POLICY IMPLICATIONS:
TECHNICAL: The corridor is currently identified in the Transit Life Cycle Program (TLCP) and Regional Transportation Plan to open for service in 2021.

POLICY: At a future date, the MAG Regional Council will be asked to approve the Phoenix West Alternatives Analysis and Locally Preferred Alternative. This approval will be necessary for METRO to initiate the Draft Environmental Impact Statement and to initiate preliminary engineering.

ACTION NEEDED:
Information and discussion.

PRIOR COMMITTEE ACTIONS:
This item was presented to the MAG Transit Committee for informational purposes on March 11, 2010, and December 10, 2010.

CONTACT PERSON:
Kevin Wallace, MAG Transit Program Manager, (602) 254-6300.

Figure 1. Phoenix West AA/EIS Mainline Staff Recommended Alternative

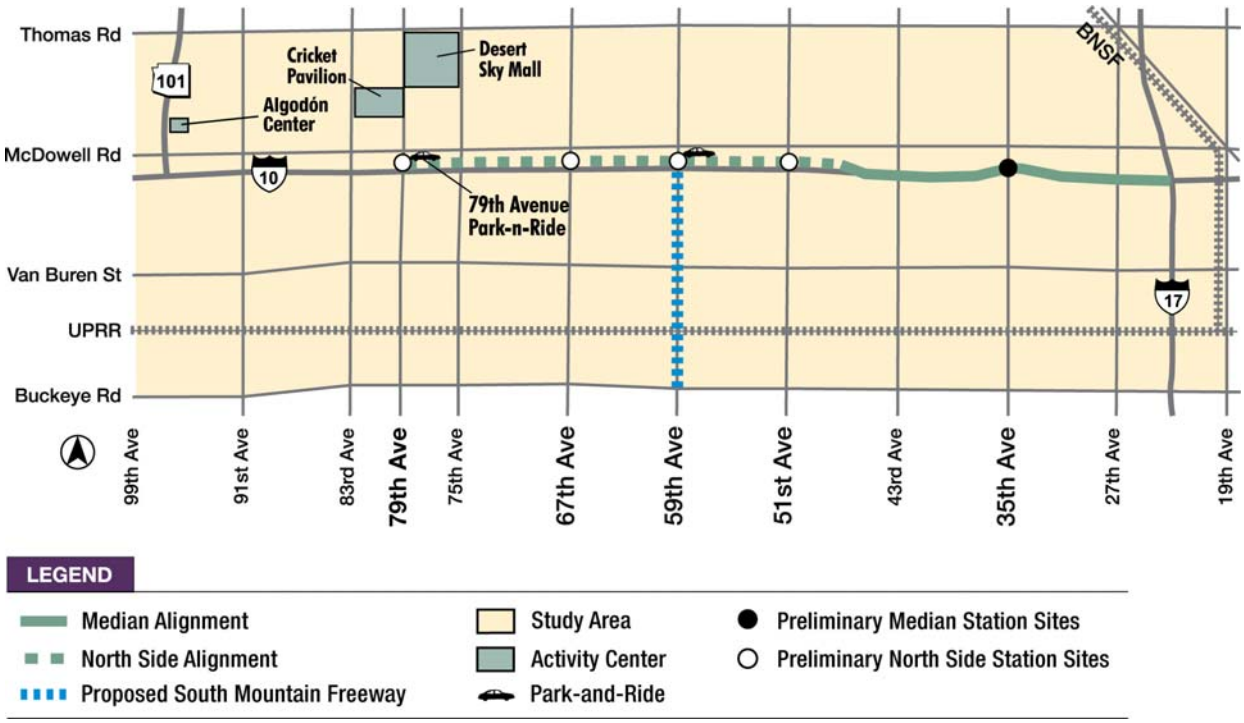

Figure 2. Phoenix West AA/EIS Downtown Staff Recommended Alternative

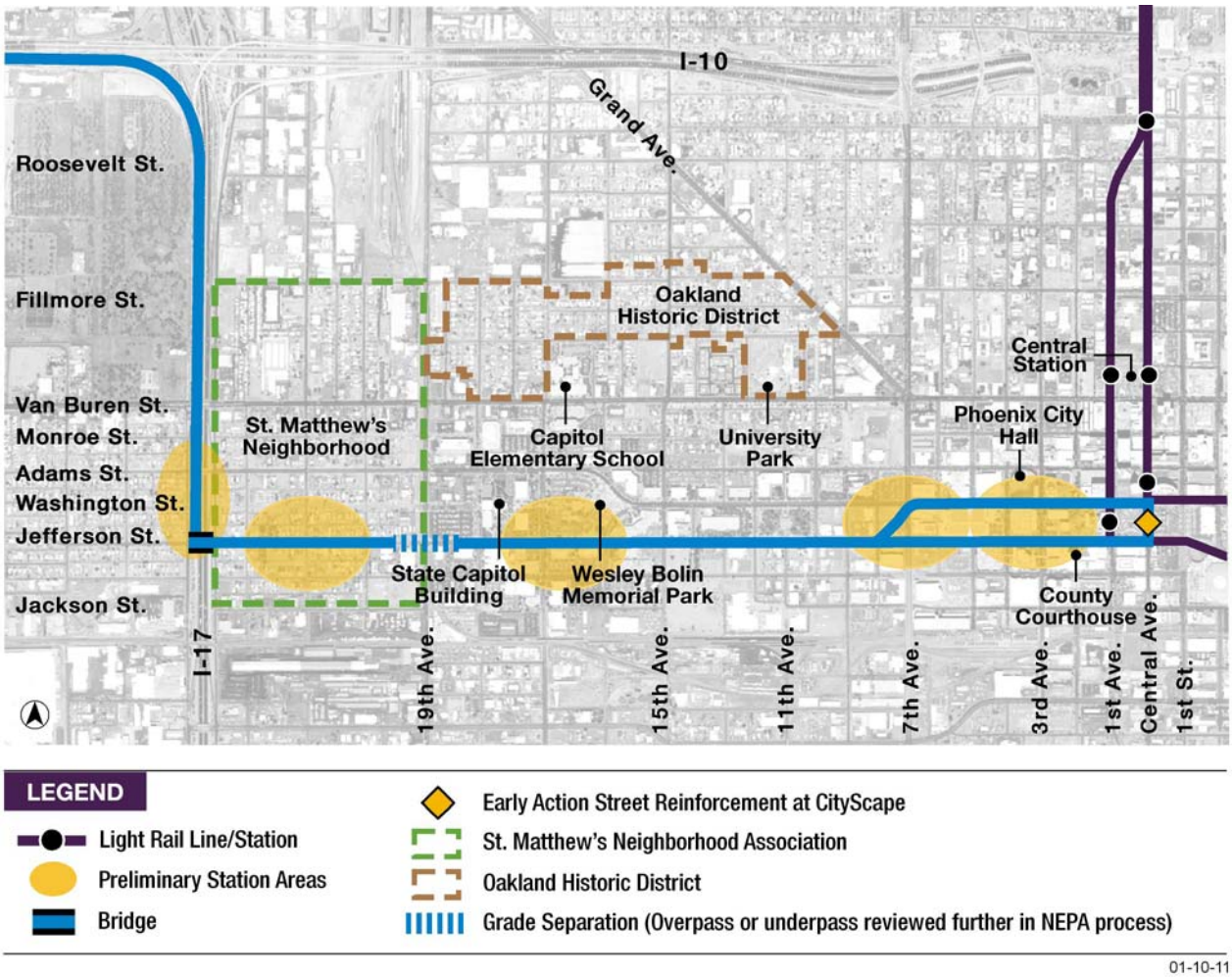

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Figure 3. Phoenix West Preliminary Staff Recommendation

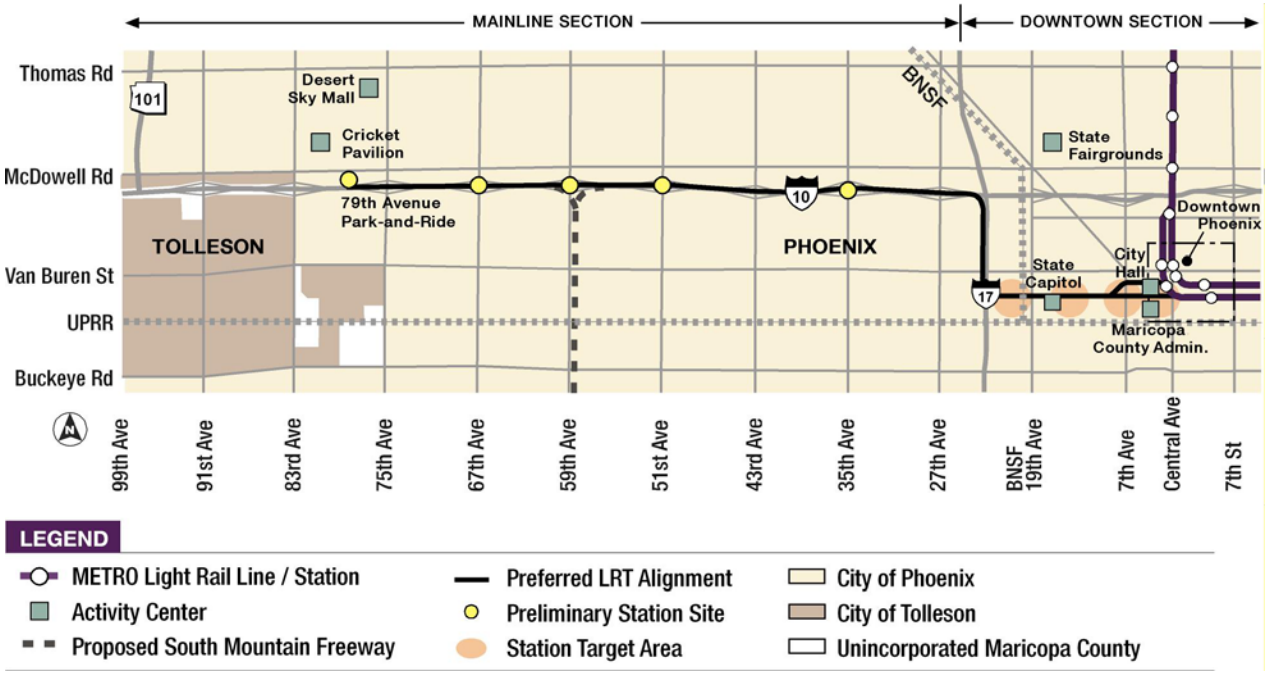
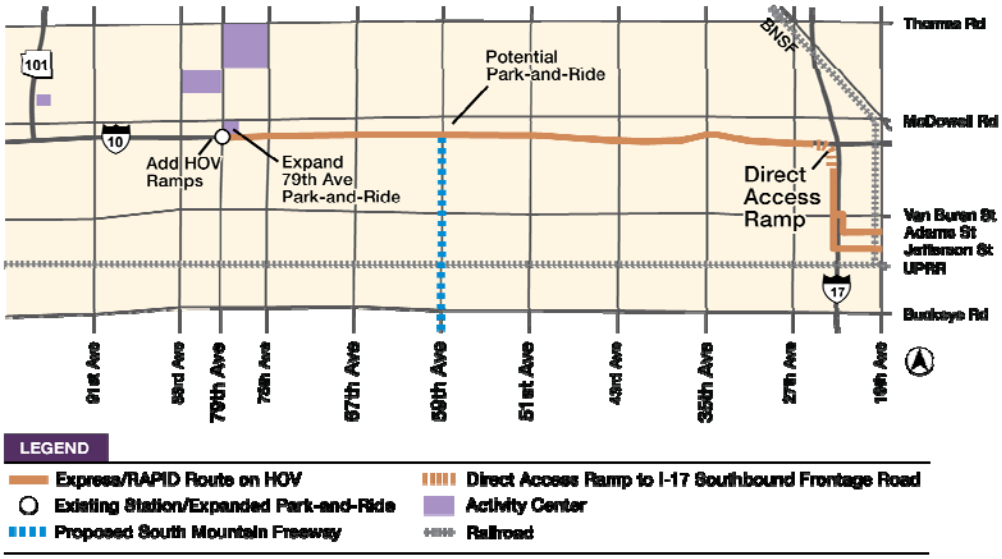
Figure 4. Early Action Bus Program