

**NOTICE OF PREPARATION (NOP)
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT (EIR)
SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY:
VAN NESS AVENUE BUS RAPID TRANSIT (BRT) PROJECT**

Date: September 13, 2007
To: Responsible Agencies, Interested Parties, and Organizations
From: Tilly Chang – Deputy Director for Planning *Tilly Chang*
Subject: **Notice of Preparation (NOP) of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Van Ness Avenue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project**

The San Francisco County Transportation Authority (Authority) proposes to implement, with the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (MTA), transit improvements along the Van Ness Avenue Corridor, from approximately Mission Street (south) to Lombard Street (north), and is preparing an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) under the provision of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed action. The project involves a federal action and is therefore also subject to review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The environmental document will be a combined environmental impact statement EIS/EIR and is hereinafter referred to as the EIS/EIR

The Authority is the Lead Agency under CEQA and the Federal Transit Administration is the Lead Agency under NEPA. On behalf of the FTA, the Authority will direct preparation of the EIS/EIR and requests your input regarding the scope and content of environmental analysis that is relevant to your agency's statutory/regulatory responsibilities in order to ascertain potential impacts of the proposed program of projects. The project description is provided on the following pages. An initial study is not attached, and is not required.

CEQA Guidelines Section 15082(b) mandates each Responsible Agency to respond to a NOP within thirty days (30) after receipt. The review period will extend from September 18 through October 18, 2007. Please send your written response, with the name of your agency contact person, to the following address:

Rachel Hiatt, Senior Transportation Planner
San Francisco County Transportation Authority
100 Van Ness Avenue, 26th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94102

Your views and comments on how the project may affect the environment are welcomed. Please contact Ms. Hiatt at (415) 522-4809 if you have any questions.

Tilly Chang

Tilly Chang, Deputy Director for Planning Date
San Francisco County Transportation Authority



Moving the City.

COMMISSIONERS

Jake McGoldrick
CHAIR

Ed Jew
VICE CHAIR

Michela Alioto-Pier

Tom Ammiano

Chris Daly

Bevan Duffy

Sean Elsbernd

Sophie Maxwell

Ross Mirkarimi

Aaron Peskin

Gerardo Sandoval

José Luis Moscovich
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

September 13, 2007

SUBJECT: NOTICE OF PREPARATION/NOTICE THAT AN EIR IS REQUIRED
Van Ness Avenue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) Project
Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR)

The San Francisco County Transportation Authority (SFCTA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA), as joint lead agencies, will prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the following proposed project:

PROJECT TITLE: Van Ness Avenue Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

The Authority requests the views of your agency on the scope and content of the environmental information relevant to your agency's jurisdictional or regulatory responsibilities. If your agency is a responsible agency or trustee agency as defined by State California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Sections 15381 and 15386), your agency will need to use the EIS/EIR prepared for this project when considering your permit or other approval for the project. If your agency is not a responsible or trustee agency as defined by CEQA guidelines, or if you are an interested individual or organization, we would still appreciate your views on the scope of the environmental document for this project.

The project description, location, and probable environmental effects are described herein, along with dates, times, and locations of project scoping meetings. The project has the potential to have a significant effect on the environment, and therefore an EIS/EIR is required pursuant to State CEQA Guidelines 15060(d). No initial study has been prepared. Due to the time limits mandated by state law, your response must be sent at the earliest possible date, but no later than 30 days after the receipt of this notice, or October 18, whichever is later. Please send your responses no later than October 18, 2007 to **Rachel Hiatt, Senior Transportation Planner; San Francisco County Transportation Authority; 100 Van Ness Avenue, 26th Floor; San Francisco, CA 94102**. Phone: (415) 522-4809. Fax: (415) 522-4829. E-mail: Rachel.Hiatt@sfcta.org. Please include the name of an appropriate contact person in your agency for continued EIS/EIR coordination.

BACKGROUND/PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The proposed project would be located in a key north-south transportation corridor in the heart of the City and County of San Francisco. Van Ness Avenue is an important roadway and transit route serving high density commercial, residential, and civic/institutional areas along its length from the U.S. and State Highway Route 101 freeway on the south to San Francisco Bay on the north. It is an at-grade continuation of U.S. and State Highway Route 101 from the freeway to Lombard Street, which continues west to Doyle Drive and the Golden Gate Bridge. The roadway serves as a major thoroughfare for local traffic as well as through traffic, carrying over 50,000 people in cars per day and about 4000 people in vehicles during the pm peak hour. Transit service is provided by Muni routes 47 and 49 (see Figure 1), and by Golden Gate Transit (based in Marin County), which operates commute service and limited all-day service into San Francisco

on Van Ness Avenue. About 43,000 passengers use Muni Routes 47 and 49 and the Golden Gate Transit Van Ness routes daily, with approximately 15,000 passengers riding daily within the Van Ness Avenue segment of service. A number of major east-west transit routes cross Van Ness Avenue and generate major bus-to-bus and bus-to-rail transfers with Van Ness Avenue services, including the Muni Metro lines and the Muni lines 38 (Geary) and 38L (Geary Limited).

Traffic congestion in mixed-flow traffic lanes and transit overcrowding result in poor transit service reliability and low average bus speeds, currently just 5 to 7 miles per hour during commute periods. Bus reliability is poor, with high variation in headways and bus bunching. Transit mode shares are low relative to the potential transit market along this corridor, where housing densities within one-quarter mile of Van Ness Avenue average over 90 units per acre, where 46% of households do not own a car (relative to 29% citywide), and where the city expects to add about 3,800 new housing units and 8,500 new jobs by 2025.

Van Ness Avenue has been identified as a high priority transit improvement corridor in a number of planning studies and funding actions by the City. The Authority's Four Corridors Plan (1995) and Muni's Vision for Rapid Transit (2000) identified Van Ness as a priority corridor for rapid transit improvements. Along with two other key transit corridors, Van Ness Avenue was designated for BRT improvements in the New Expenditure Plan for San Francisco, approved by voters as Proposition K, the reauthorization of the City's ½ cent transportation sales tax measure, in November 2003. The Expenditure Plan is the investment component of the 2004 San Francisco Countywide Transportation Plan, which sets forth the city's "blueprint to guide the development of transportation funding priorities and policy" with a key objective being the promotion and implementation of San Francisco's transit first policy through the development of a network of fast, reliable transit including bus rapid transit (see Figure 2).

The Van Ness Avenue BRT Feasibility Study was initiated in 2004, completed in 2006, and evaluated the feasibility of four BRT design options on Van Ness Avenue, relative to a No Project scenario, through a comprehensive public and agency participation program. The Feasibility Study found that all four BRT configurations are feasible on Van Ness and recommended an environmental analysis to identify a preferred configuration. The alternatives form the foundation for the BRT improvements to be evaluated in the proposed project EIS/EIR.

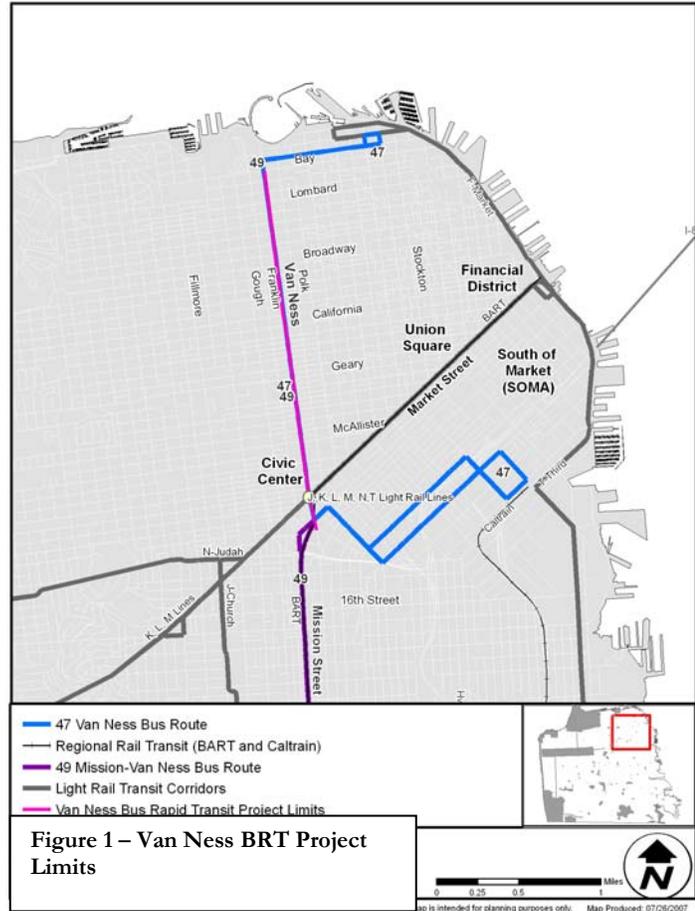


Figure 1 – Van Ness BRT Project Limits

Map is intended for planning purposes only. Map Produced: 07/26/2007

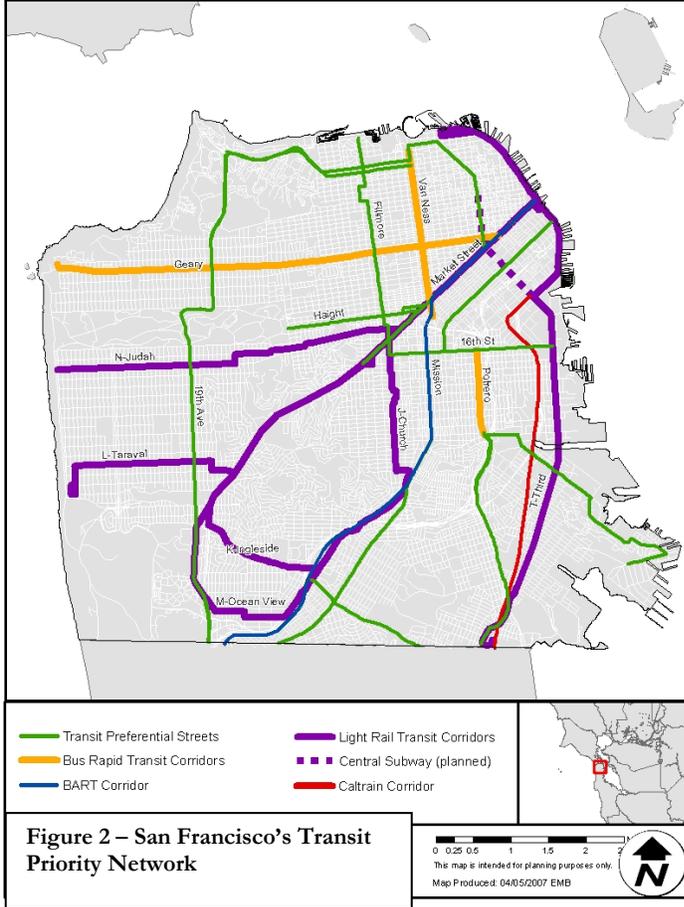


Figure 2 – San Francisco’s Transit Priority Network

Previous studies and documents relevant to this action include the recently completed *Van Ness Avenue BRT Feasibility Study* (December 2006); *2005 Prop K Strategic Plan* (March 2005); *2004 San Francisco Countywide Transportation Plan* (adopted July 20, 2004), and the *New Transportation Expenditure Plan for San Francisco* (Proposition K, approved November 4, 2003). These documents describe the planning and funding for transportation improvements in San Francisco, including BRT in major bus corridors.

EIS/EIR preparation will be initiated through a formal CEQA/NEPA scoping process, which solicits input on the range of alternative to be analyzed and potential project impacts to consider in the environmental studies. Scoping will be accomplished through meetings and correspondence with interested persons, organizations, the general public, and federal, state, and local agencies, including public scoping meetings to be held on:

Tuesday October 2nd
 Holiday Inn Golden Gateway – Crystal Room
 1500 Van Ness Avenue (at Pine)
 6-8 pm

Thursday October 4th
 San Francisco County Transportation Authority
 100 Van Ness Avenue, 26th Floor (at Fell)
 6-8 pm

An agency scoping meeting will be held on:

Thursday October 4th
 San Francisco County Transportation Authority
 100 Van Ness Avenue, 26th Floor (at Fell)
 1-3 pm

Comments on issues and impacts to be considered in preparation of the EIS/EIR will be recorded.

Purpose of and Need for the Project

The San Francisco County Transportation Authority adopted as part of the 2004 Countywide Transportation Plan and its investment component, the New Expenditure Plan for San Francisco, a BRT strategy for expanding rapid transit service in San Francisco. The BRT network is intended to address the following purpose:

1. Support the city's growth and development needs
2. Better serve existing transit riders and stem and reverse the trend toward transit mode share loss
3. Improve the operational efficiency and cost effectiveness of the transportation system.

A BRT network can meet those goals by:—

- Improving transit levels of service cost effectively;
- Strengthening rapid transit services;
- Raising the cost effectiveness of Muni service and operational efficiency of transit preferential streets; and
- Contributing to livability of BRT corridors.

The Project and Project Alternatives

Alternatives to be reviewed in the EIS/EIR include a (1) combined No-Project Systems Management / Baseline Alternative, which would propose improvements to corridor bus services, such as fare prepayment / proof of payment and limited transit signal priority; (2) Van Ness Avenue BRT Project, which would expand upon the No Project/TSM/Baseline to provide a full complement of BRT improvements in two or more cross-sectional configurations for Van Ness Avenue between approximately Mission Street and Lombard Street; and (3) any other service, alignment or cross-sectional alternatives that emerge from the scoping and alternatives analysis processes.

The No-Project/TSM/Baseline Alternative assumes a 2030 condition of land use and transit capital and service improvements that are programmed or planned to be implemented by the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (MTA, which includes San Francisco Muni and the Department of Parking and Traffic) and other transit providers in the study area (e.g., Golden Gate Transit, Caltrain, the commuter rail service between San Francisco and San Jose, and the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, or BART, a regional rail service provider). For transit, these include upgraded bus stops and passenger information/communication systems. Other transportation system improvements, such roadway traffic management measures, street lighting upgrades, and street resurfacing/landscaping projects that would be the responsibility of the San Francisco Department of Public Works (DPW), the Public Utilities Commission (PUC), or the California State Department of Transportation (Caltrans), will be included in the 2030 No-Project network. This network will also form the background network for the build alternatives.

No Project/TSM/Baseline Alternative would provide additional expected, low capital cost service enhancements, but not dedicated transit lanes. Low cost improvements would include

such elements as modern traffic signals with the capability of providing transit signal priority and upgraded bus stops and passenger information/communication systems.

The Van Ness Avenue BRT Project would include, among other features:

- Dedicated transit lanes within the existing Van Ness Avenue right-of-way;
- Sheltered, low-platform passenger stations with real-time bus arrival passenger information signs, lighting, and fare ticketing machines;
- Off-vehicle self-service fare vending and on-board proof-of-payment verification; and
- Advanced transit traffic signal priority and traffic management systems to reduce bus delays at signalized intersections yet maintain acceptable traffic flow.

Passenger stations would be spaced on average every 940 feet with local bus service one block to the east. BRT transitway and station improvements would be made entirely within existing public rights-of-way; improvements outside of existing public-rights of way are not anticipated with the possible exception of required improvements to existing Muni bus storage and maintenance facilities and to off-alignment intersections for mitigation of project impacts. Variations in the cross-section for the BRT transitway and the locations of stations are anticipated and would comprise design options for the basic BRT alignment. A two-way transitway either in the median of Van Ness Avenue or along the outside curbs (one northbound BRT lane along the east curb/parking lane; one southbound BRT lane along the west curb/parking lane) and, correspondingly, stations in the median or as extensions of the sidewalk were considered in the Van Ness Avenue BRT Feasibility Study and warrant further evaluation as part of the EIS/EIR and alternatives analysis.

The Authority, in association with SFMTA, will evaluate the procurement of modern low-floor high-capacity vehicles that would be assigned to the BRT service and have added features, such as two-sided, multidoor access, passenger station docking assist, and other amenities. Streetscape improvements, such as enhanced landscaping and pedestrian access along Van Ness Avenue, are also included in the proposed BRT project.

THE EIS/EIR PROCESS AND THE ROLE OF PARTICIPATING AGENCIES AND THE PUBLIC

The purpose of the EIS/EIR process is to explore in a public setting potentially significant effects of implementing the proposed action and alternatives on the physical, human, and natural environment. Areas of investigation include, but are not limited to, land use, development potential, land acquisition and displacements, historic resources, visual and aesthetic qualities, air quality, noise and vibration, energy use, safety and security, and ecosystems, including threatened and endangered species. Measures to avoid, minimize, or mitigate any significant adverse impacts will be identified.

Regulations implementing NEPA and CEQA, as well as provisions of the recently enacted Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU), call for public involvement in the EIS/EIR process. Section 6002 of SAFETEA-LU requires that FTA and the Authority do the following: (1) extend an invitation to other Federal and non-Federal agencies and Indian tribes that may have an interest in the proposed project to become “participating agencies,” (2) provide an opportunity for involvement by participating agencies and the public in helping to define the purpose and need for a proposed project, as well as the range of alternatives for consideration in the impact statement, and (3) establish a plan for coordinating

public and agency participation in and comment on the environmental review process. An invitation to become a participating agency, with the scoping information packet appended, will be extended to other Federal and non-Federal agencies and Indian tribes that may have an interest in the proposed project. It is possible that we may not be able to identify all Federal and non-Federal agencies and Indian tribes that may have such an interest. Any Federal or non-Federal agency or Indian tribe interested in the proposed project that does not receive an invitation to become a participating agency should notify at the earliest opportunity Rachel Hiatt at the contact numbers identified above.

A comprehensive public and agency involvement program is under development. The program includes a project Web site (www.vannessbrt.org); outreach to local and county officials and community and civic groups; a public scoping process to define the issues of concern among all parties interested in the project; establishment of a citizens advisory committee and organizing periodic meetings with that committee; a public hearing on release of the draft EIS/EIR; and development and distribution of project Fact Sheets.

The purpose of and need for the proposed project has been preliminarily identified in this notice. We invite the public and participating agencies to consider the preliminary statement of purpose of and need for the proposed project, as well as the alternatives proposed for consideration. Suggestions for modifications to the statement of purpose of and need for the proposed project and any other alternatives that meet the purpose of and need for the proposed project are welcomed and will be given serious consideration. Comments on potentially significant environmental impacts that may be associated with the proposed project and alternatives are also welcomed. There will be additional opportunities to participate in the scoping process at the public meetings announced below.

In accordance with 23 CFR 771.105(a) and 771.133 and with CEQA and the implementing regulations, FTA and SFCTA will comply with all Federal and state environmental laws, regulations, and federal executive orders applicable to the proposed project during the environmental review process to the maximum extent practicable. These requirements include, but are not limited to, the regulations of the Council on Environmental Quality and FTA implementing NEPA (40 CFR parts 1500-1508, and 23 CFR Part 771), the project-level air quality conformity regulation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (40 CFR part 93), the Section 404(b)(1) guidelines of EPA (40 CFR part 230), the regulation implementing Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (36 CFR Part 800), the regulation implementing section 7 of the Endangered Species Act (50 CFR part 402), Section 4(f) of the DOT Act (23 CFR 771.135), federal Executive Orders 12898 on environmental justice, 11988 on floodplain management, and 11990 on wetlands, and the CEQA laws and regulations.

The Authority intends to request FTA approval to enter Project Development and secure funding under the Small Starts program (SAFETEA-LU amended 49 U.S.C. 5309) prior to initiating further engineering (e.g., preliminary engineering) and preparing the Final EIS/EIR.

To ensure that the full range of issues related to this proposed action will be addressed and all significant issues identified, comments and suggestions are invited from all interested parties. Comments or questions concerning this proposed action and the EIS/EIR should be directed to Rachel Hiatt, as noted above.

INITIATION OF STUDIES/SCOPING MEETINGS

To assure public involvement at the initiation of studies on this project, public scoping meetings are scheduled as follows:

October 2, 2007 Holiday Inn Golden Gateway Crystal Room 1500 Van Ness Avenue San Francisco, CA 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.	October 4, 2007 San Francisco County Transportation Authority 100 Van Ness Avenue, 26th Floor San Francisco, CA 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.
--	--

The first 30 minutes of the meeting will be an open house and a viewing of exhibits. A brief presentation of the project purpose and alternatives will follow, with meeting participants provided the opportunity to comment on issues of interest. The open house will resume after the presentation and comment period. Project staff will be present to receive formal public input regarding the scope of the environmental studies, key issues, and other suggestions. Opportunities will be offered during the scoping meeting for comments to be provided either orally or in writing during the entire scoping comment period.

The meeting room is accessible to persons with disabilities. Any individual with a disability who requires special assistance, such as a sign language interpreter, or any individual who requires English language interpretation should contact the Authority at 415-522-4809 at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting in order for the Authority to make necessary arrangements.

An agency scoping meeting will also be held:

October 4, 2007 San Francisco County Transportation Authority 100 Van Ness Avenue, 26th Floor San Francisco, CA 1 p.m. to 3 p.m.
--

ADDRESSES/CONTACT LIST/FURTHER INFORMATION

Written comments during scoping or on the proposed project in general should be sent to: Rachel Hiatt, Senior Transportation Planner, San Francisco County Transportation Authority; 100 Van Ness Avenue, 26th Floor; San Francisco, CA 94102. Phone: 415-593-1423 or (e-mail) Rachel.Hiatt@sfcta.org. To be added to the mailing list for the Van Ness Avenue BRT Project, contact Ms. Hiatt at the address listed above.

Additional information on the Van Ness Avenue BRT Project can also be found on the SFCTA project web site at: www.vannessbrt.org.