

#BS125233

TENTATIVE ORDER

NEIGHBORS FOR SMART RAIL's petition for writ of mandate is **DENIED**.
CCP §§ 1085, 1094.5(f), PRC § 21168.5.

Petitioner's request for judicial notice is **GRANTED** in part. EC §§ 452, 453. The court takes judicial notice of the Framework element of the general plan (Exhibit A). The request is otherwise **DENIED**. Extra record evidence cannot be considered. Western States Petroleum Ass'n v. Superior Court (1995) 9 Cal. 4th 559, 578. There is no evidence that the exhibits were before the decision making body at the time the decision was made. They are not part of the administrative record. Declaration of Valk.

Project Description

The project is an extension of a high capacity, high-frequency transit service from the westside of Los Angeles to Santa Monica, known as the Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase 2. The project generally follows the Exposition right of way from downtown Los Angeles to Santa Monica. This phase will be about 7-8 miles from the terminus of Phase 1 at Venice and Robertson in Culver City to Santa Monica. The project has several at grade crossings of major north-south streets.

Standard of Review

A challenge to an EIR is reviewed for an abuse of discretion. PRC § 21168.5. "Abuse of discretion is established if the agency has not proceeded in a manner required by law or if the determination or decision is not supported by substantial evidence." Id. The court must uphold a decision if there is substantial evidence in the record to support the agency's decision. PRC § 21168; Laurel Heights Improvement Ass'n v. Regents of the Univ. of California (1988) 47 Cal. 3d 376, 392. Substantial evidence is "enough relevant information and reasonable inferences from this information that a fair argument can be made to support a conclusion, even though other conclusions might also be reached. Id., 14 CCR § 15384(a). Petitioner bears the burden of presenting credible evidence that the agency's findings and conclusions are not supported by "substantial evidence." Jacobson v. County of Los Angeles (1977) 69 Cal. App. 3d 374, 388. The question under the substantial evidence test is not whether there is substantial evidence to support the conclusions of the opponents of a project; the question is only whether

there is substantial evidence to support the decision of the agency approving the project. Laurel Heights Improvement Ass'n v. Regents of the Univ. of California (1988) 47 Cal. 3d 376, 407. A challenge to an EIR must lay out the evidence favorable to the other side and show why it is lacking. Sierra Club v. City of Orange (2008) 163 Cal. App 3d 523, 541.

The purpose of an EIR is "to inform the public and its responsible officials of the environmental consequences of their decisions before they are made." Laurel Heights Improvement Ass'n v. Regents of the Univ. of California (1993) 6 Cal. 4th 1112, 1123. In determining the adequacy of the environmental analysis, the court does not "pass on the correctness of the report's environmental conclusions, but only on its sufficiency as an informative document." Laurel Heights Improvement Ass'n v. Regents of University of California (1988) 47 Cal. 3d 376, 392. An EIR is presumed adequate. . . , and the petitioner has the burden of proving otherwise. Barthelmey v. Chino Basin Mun. Water Dist. (1995) 38 Cal. App. 4th 1609, 1617.

Baseline

The FEIR explains the methodology used to evaluate traffic impacts. The impact threshold for intersections used in this FEIR utilizes the Highway Capacity Manual (HCP) operations methodology to quantify existing and future condition at all intersections with and without the proposed project. AR 350, 1055. The existing and future air quality conditions were evaluated using methods and significance levels recommended by the SCAQMD. AR 504 15310-12, 15352-54. CEQA requires evaluation of the project's effects on both existing and future conditions. 14 CCR § 15126.6(e)(3)(b). Because a "No Project" will not preserve the existing physical conditions, it is not only reasonable, but necessary, to take this dynamic approach of determining impact and significance over time. See Save Our Peninsula Committee v. Monterey County (2001) 87 Cal. App. 4th 99, 125 ("in some cases it is necessary to consider conditions over a range of time.") By analyzing delay as a result of the project at a higher number of congested intersection in year 2030, the FEIR adopted a more rigorous test for identifying significant traffic impacts. AR 17, 218-34, 350. To analyze the project's effects on transportation assuming that the project's operation is the only change that will occur, is absurd. The very reason for the project is to address long term transportation concerns. Substantial evidence supports the use of this baseline.

Traffic Impacts

The methodology used to evaluate traffic impacts is based on the High Capacity Manual approved by the Federal Transit Administration. AR 10718. The Traffic Study evaluated 90 intersections on the Westside. AR 336-340. The study included all of the intersections adjacent to at grade crossings and nearby intersections that could be affected. AR 10704-09. The analyses showed that there would be no significant effects to any impacted intersection as a result of the project. AR 10724-30, 10754-62. CEQA does not require an analysis to be exhaustive. Dry Creek Citizens Coalition v. County of Tulare (1999) 70 Cal. App. 4th 20, 26. It requires only that an EIR reflect good faith effort at full disclosure. 14 CCR § 15151. There is no evidence that the traffic analysis is inadequate. As to petitioner's argument that the study ignored Sepulveda Blvd as a recognized alternate to the 405, the LADOT confirmed that project operations at Sepulveda Blvd. "would not impact the operation at adjacent signalized intersections." AR 38391.

Growth Inducing Impacts

Two mixed use developments along the route of the proposed project are not indirect effects of the project. At the time the EIR was prepared, no application had been filed on one of the projects and thus it could not be considered. Although, there was some indication that the second project was proposed during the preparation of the EIR, no formal application was on file until after the NOP for the project was filed. CEQA does not require analysis of hypothetical projects. 14 CCR § 15064(d). Even so, "lead agencies may limit discussion on effect to a brief explanation as to why those effects are not potentially significant. PRC §§ 21002.1(e), 21100(c). The EIR explains that the project will not result in any significant growth inducing impact. AR 861-862. The EIR also discloses land use plans that support transit oriented development within 0.5 miles of proposed stations. AR 619, 10117-9, Table 2-2. The project is compatible and consistent with existing and future land uses. AR 616-21, 10101, see also 218, Table 1.2-1, AR 219-22, 345, 616, 10126-29. In light of the all the local and regional plans, EXPO found that the project will not have any significant growth inducing impacts.

Notwithstanding petitioner's argument, transit oriented development will have beneficial effects through reduced vehicle moles, fewer air emissions, and reduced energy consumption. The record supports this conclusion throughout. See, e.g., AR 506-510, 866-7, 8278-9487, 353-54, 861-62, 106-107.

Cumulative Impacts

A cumulative impact must be analyzed in an EIR only if: (1) the combined impact of the project and other projects is significant and (2) the project's incremental effect is cumulatively considerable. 14 CCR §§ 15064, 15126(a). The adequacy of cumulative impact analysis is also reviewed under the substantial evidence test. San Joaquin Raptor/Wildlife Rescue Center v. County of Stanislaus (1994) 27 Cal. App. 4th 713, 726-27. If the lead agency determines that a project's incremental effect is not cumulatively considerable, the EIR need only briefly describe the basis for its findings. City of Long Beach v. LAUSD (2009) 176 Cal. App. 4th 899, 909. Furthermore, petitioner has raised the issue of traffic generated by future developments for the first time in its opening brief, despite several long comment letters addressing other alleged defects. 1568, 1783-90, 46957, 46971, 46972-74. Nevertheless, the EIR discusses why the project's contribution to air quality is not cumulatively considerable. AR 866. It will have beneficial air quality effect. *Id.* No further explanation is needed but the FEIR goes on to explain that the project is fully conforming to the 2007 Air Quality Management Plan, the State Implementation Plan and that all pollutant levels would be below the SCAQMD localized significance thresholds. AR 867.

The FEIR may and did rely on a summary of projections rather than address each and every one of the 24 projects listed in table 5.4-1. AR 866, 331-438, 10693-12247. The same holds true for the FEIR's discussion of cumulative impacts for traffic and other categories. AR 866-872. There is no requirement that the FEIR cumulative impact analysis use both the "summary of projections" and the "list of projects approach." 14 CCR §§ 15130 (b)(1)(A), (B).

Mitigation Measures

The FEIR evaluated the effect of the project on parking in the Project area. AR 10777-95. It concluded that the proposed parking for the project may be less than peak period demand at four of the proposed stations. Mitigation Measures were adopted. AR 54-55, 413-14. The measure adopts a monitoring program, a performance standard and requirement to work with local agencies to develop a permit program. AR 113, 1063, 1064. The FEIR explains the parking supply situation and its plan to deal with physical and design constraints unique to each station. AR 1186, 411, 10793-95. METRO has agreed to reimburse local jurisdictions for the costs associated with permit parking. AR 113, 1769. Courts have upheld as adequate a deferred mitigation measure to meet a performance standard. Sacramento Old City Association v. City Council (1991) 229 Cal. App

3d 1011, 1029. Mitigation measure MM TR-4 is a viable solution in neighborhoods which may experience parking impacts. AR 1768.

Thirty-five parking spaces are slated for elimination on the south side Colorado Ave. AR 14. Replacement parking is proposed to offset this loss. AR 431-32, 1062. CEQA does not require an EIR to evaluate how a mitigation measure will be funded. Additionally, design options are suggested which will retain the on street parking on Colorado. AR 432.

Noise impacts will be reduced below the moderate impact level at all identified receptors. AR 6742, 19-120. Sound walls, berms, low impact frogs and insulation are options which EXPO will implement to ensure that noise levels are reduced to less than significant. AR 120-121, 675-683. The FEIR outlines the method of accomplishing these options. AR 675. The EIR identifies the parties responsible for implementing, monitoring and enforcing the mitigation measures.

Safety impacts are discussed in the EIR and the document acknowledges that emergency vehicles traveling on streets that intersect the projects at grade crossings may experience some additional delay. Measure MM SAF-1 was adopted ensuring that METRO will work with the cities to develop emergency response routes. AR 123. EXPO found that this would reduce impact to the delivery of community safety services to less than significant level. AR 727, 69-70.

In response to comments, EXPO undertook additional studies of the at grade crossings at Overland Ave, Westwood Blvd, Sepulveda Blvd, Barrington Ave, and Centinella Ave. AR 0723-724. The report confirmed that at-grade crossings would be operated in a safe manner. AR 12099-12137. LADOT concurred in that conclusion. AR 38386-93.

Eighteen mitigation measures are identified to reduce construction impacts. AR 123-31. These include keeping at least one lane open in each direction; detours, if necessary, ; traffic circulation plans; and major highways to remain open. AR 123-124, 823-24, 1072, 1796. EXPO found that these mitigation measures would reduce the impact of construction to less than significant. Regulatory approval is an adequate performance standard. Endangered Habitats League v. County of Orange (2005) 131 Cal. App. 4th 777, 794. Further, EXPO revised the mitigation

measures to incorporate comments from LADOT. AR 823-24, 70-72. Multiple layers of criteria must be met before highways can be closed during construction. The court finds that EXPO fully complied with the requirements of CEQA as it relates to mitigation measures.

Alternatives

“An EIR need not consider every conceivable alternative to a project.” 14 CCR § 15126.6. “The level of specificity of an EIR is determined by the nature of the project and the ‘rule of reason’ rather than any semantic label accorded to the EIR.” Friends of Mammoth v. Town of Mammoth Lakes Redevelopment Agency (2000) 82 Cal. App. 4th 511, 533. Absolute perfection is not required. Concerned Citizens of South Central L. A. v. LAUSD (1994) 24 Cal. App. 4th 826, 839. The EIR considered nine alternatives in addition to the “No Build” and “TSM” alternatives and conducted detailed analysis of six alternatives on the FEIR. AR 288-301. These included alternative modes and alternative routes. Petitioner claims that EXPO manipulated the alternatives and arbitrarily chose a narrow range of alternatives so that the project would appear to be better form a cost and environmental standpoint than the other choices. Plaintiff has not produced any evidence to support his theory and the record contradicts this theory.

Alternatives LRT 3 and LRT 4 (the Venice /Sepulveda alignments) were included in response to and as a result of comments from opponents of LRT 1 and LRT 2. The No Build alternative is required and the TSM (Traffic System Management) alternative (which would combine bus and other improvements without significant capital improvements) provided the decisionmakers with a “No Build Plus” option. The fact that EXPO did not pursue petitioner’s selection of alternatives is not the requirement of CEQA. In fact, EXPO did evaluate those alternatives and decided to eliminate them from the detailed analysis because they would not generate the enough boardings to meet the projects objectives.

Petitioner’s argument that an alternative with grade separation crossings in segment one was not considered is untrue because every at-grade crossing was evaluated. AR 346, 12033-12137, 1058-60, 12099-137, 303-306. Additionally, it was found that grade separations would not reduce any significant impacts and each would cause potentially significant impacts. These impacts include disruption of gravity fed storm drains, potential flooding of underground stations, increased construction impacts, increase haul loads and routes, etc, and finally considerable increase in costs (\$224.3 million). AR 304-5 The aerial structure

design option would result in creating a large physical barrier bisecting the neighborhood, create construction impacts similar to the trench option and increase costs (\$65.9 million) without significant reduction of other impacts. Accordingly, these two options for segment one were not retained for further detailed analysis. AR 306, 91. The record supports that EXPO evaluated a reasonable range of alternatives.

Recirculation

Recirculation is required when “any significant new information is added to the EIR after notice ...of the availability of the draft EIR... but before certification.” 14 CCR § 15088.5(a). New information includes changes in the project and in the environmental setting as well as additional data or other information. 14 CCR § 15088.5(a). If the new data, information or alternative is significant, then Recirculation is required. *Id.*, see also PRC § 21092.1. The information provided in response to comments did not require re-circulation. The information did not identify any new impacts or a substantial increase in the severity of an impact. CCR § 15088.5(a)(1),(2). If anything, the information added (five additional sound walls, signal phasing, and parking surveys) served to lessen the severity of an impact. The recalculation of GHG emissions, although representing a net annual increase in greenhouse emissions, did not exceed the threshold of significance adopted by regulatory agencies and therefore does not represent a substantial increase in the severity of an impact. AR 527-528.

Petitioner’s “South Star Report” does not constitute significant new information because, as discussed above, the at grade crossings at Overland Ave and Westwood Blvd will not have any significant impacts.

Findings

In light of the goals and objectives of the project and the larger regional and sub-regional planning goals, EXPO determined that the Light Rail Transit (LRT) alternatives all provided substantial benefits over the “No Build” and TSM alternatives. AR 92. The adopted alternative (LRT 2) was determined to have environmental benefits, performance efficiency and cost effectiveness benefits superior to the other LRT alternatives. AR 92-95, 95-96, 106-109, 88. These factors were considered in selecting it as the only project which would achieve most of the project alternatives. AR 96.

It is presumed that public entities have complied with the law, and petitioners bear the burden of proving otherwise. Al Larson Boat Shop, inc. v. Board of Harbor Commissioners (1993) 18 Cal. App. 4th 729, 740. EXPO carefully made its decision concerning the project with its environmental consequences in mind. Petitioner has not established that there was any prejudicial abuse of discretion. Accordingly, the respondent's decision should be upheld. The petition is denied.