



# BOARD OF SUPERVISORS COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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**MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS**  
SUPERVISOR, SECOND DISTRICT

April 27, 2011

Mr. Arthur T. Leahy  
Chief Executive Officer  
Metro  
One Gateway Plaza  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

**RE: Crenshaw/LAX Transit Corridor**

Dear Mr. Leahy:

This letter explains why my motion is necessary and how we achieve its goal. The significance of the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Corridor is that it connects to the Los Angeles International Airport (LAX) through a culturally rich community which benefits all of Los Angeles County. Crenshaw is the cultural heart of African-American Los Angeles. LAX is our gateway to the world.

As final approvals of the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Corridor approach us, two important questions remain:

- Will there be a station at Leimert Park Village?
- Can Metro place the tracks safely underground in a tunnel through Park Mesa Heights?

**Historical Significance of the Crenshaw Corridor**

A transit corridor through the historic Crenshaw community has been an active vision among community leaders for almost three decades. Mayor Tom Bradley, Congressional Representatives Julian Dixon, Henry Waxman and Diane Watson, as well as others, have advocated for this line.

Two years ago, the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Corridor was still a distant dream, perhaps a dedicated bus line with completion as late as year 2029.

Together, the members of the Metro Board of Directors and Metro staff have resurrected the project and imbued it with new vitality. Today, we are on the verge of approving a first-class light rail system that will connect with the existing Metro network at both the Expo and Green Lines, and provide a convenient access point for connection into the airport. Station area planning is underway at a half dozen sites along the alignment. Critically sensitive portions of the project,

near Exposition Boulevard, north of Park Mesa Heights, and through Hyde Park, immediately to the south, are slated for construction underground. For this considerable progress we, and the constituents we represent, are deeply grateful.

At the same time, Metro staff has been working diligently to keep the project within its approved Measure R and Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) budget. We continue to work closely with your staff to ensure that both budget and schedule are maintained as planned.

### **The Crenshaw Community Expects Accountability and Responsible Transportation Planning**

Nonetheless, we hear and have heard since the inception of this project, strong community—and transportation planning—reasons for including a Leimert Park Village Station at Vernon and a tunnel through Park Mesa Heights.

Board certification of the Final Environmental Impact Statement and Final Environmental Impact Report for the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Corridor is scheduled for July 2011. Therefore, it is critical that the two remaining decisions be addressed now.

As you know, we have only one opportunity to construct this line properly - to “do it right.” Future generations will hold us accountable for the decisions we make today.

The significance of these decisions will be apparent, not just to commuters on the Crenshaw/LAX Line, but to everyone who enters our community through its preeminent portal at LAX. Representative John Mica (R-FL, Chairman of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure) and many others have noted that the LAX connection is a significant “missing link” in our transit network. The quality of this connection will leave first and lasting impressions on the numerous visitors, including congressional leaders, for which it may be their first “taste of LA.”

The quality of this line will also provide a discernable measure of appreciation to a community that has waited patiently for rail transit service and has consistently supported Measure R and other region-wide transit financing initiatives.

We recognize the extreme sensitivity that is attached to Metro funding decisions. Our office, after all, was a primary influence in crafting the unanimously accepted LRTP which carefully allocates Measure R and other Metro funds to a broad range of region-wide investments. The notion of “Regional Equity” is paramount in our minds and must be kept in constant consideration as decisions for Crenshaw/LAX and other projects are resolved.

In this spirit, we would like to address six issues that bear on the Leimert Park Village Station and Park Mesa Heights tunnel discussions. Several of these issues were addressed in detail in Metro's own "Park Mesa Heights Grade Separation Analysis," prepared in June 2010. Each of these considerations, we believe, mitigates strongly in favor of a Leimert Park Village Station and a tunnel through Park Mesa Heights.

1. **Leimert Park Village: A Destination Point**

Leimert Park is the undisputed cultural and commercial center of the Crenshaw Corridor. It is the location of the Corridor's preeminent small business community and its regionally-noted cultural and entertainment venues. It is also home to many prominent institutions, such as the Urban League and Tavis Smiley Studios, as well as a broadly-appreciated public park and the New Vision Theater. As such, Leimert Park Village is probably *the* most appropriate place to have a station on the entire Crenshaw Corridor. Omitting a station at this location would be like building the Red Line without a stop in Hollywood, the Purple Line without Century City, or the Gold Line without Mariachi Plaza.

The outpouring of letters and public comments in Metro meetings strongly reinforces the widely-held perception that Leimert Park Village is a primary transit destination on the Crenshaw Corridor and must have a dedicated transit access portal.

2. **Commuting: Tunneling Saves Travel Time**

Metro's Grade Separation Analysis documents the impact of a Park Mesa Heights tunnel and notes that an underground profile will reduce travel time on the Corridor from 18 minutes, without a tunnel, to 16.9 minutes with a tunnel and station at Crenshaw/Slauson, or 15.9 minutes without the Slauson station (pg. 43). The latter represents a 2.1 minute travel time improvement per trip, effectively a 12% reduction in commuting time for regular transit patrons, and for those entering our community from LAX.

Mode choice among potential transit users is largely influenced by speed of travel. These travel time improvements should significantly enhance utilization of the Metro system, with attendant collateral benefits in safety, air quality improvement, congestion relief and local economic growth.

3. **Ridership: Tunneling Boosts Usage**

The Metro study further notes that a tunnel through Park Mesa Heights will increase ridership by about 700 transit patrons per day in year 2035, from 20,210 to 20,970 if a Slauson station is included (pg. 44). This represents a 4% increase in ridership and fare revenue.

The Leimert Park Village Station will also increase ridership, although this increase is not acknowledged in the June 2010 study.

#### **4. Safety: Tunneling Saves Lives**

A primary reason for providing a tunnel through Park Mesa Heights is to promote public safety.

Astonishingly, Metro's Grade Separation Analysis concludes that "the determination of safety impact for both options (at-grade and below-grade) is the same" (pg. 49).

This illogical assertion cannot go unchallenged. No rational analysis can possibly conclude that there is no safety difference between at-grade and grade-separated rail lines. It does not flatter anyone associated with Metro to proffer such double-speak, especially to this neighborhood with its unique streetscape.

Metro has been down this path before. The "ghost" of Dorsey High School, with lingering public dissatisfaction over at-grade rail crossings, expensive and after-the-fact remediation measures, and long and expensive delays through the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and other legal appeal processes, portends a similar fate for Park Mesa Heights. The proximity of Crenshaw High School, Park View Preparatory School and several senior housing projects, as well as an active retail environment with far more foot traffic than exists at Dorsey or Foshay Learning Center, all suggest that Metro might want to take a more respectful approach towards grade separation at this site.

This is an issue that simply will not rest in the local community. Given our experiences with the Blue Line and recently with the Expo Line, only a decision to grade separate would represent the "highest and best" rail line.

#### **5. Economic Development: Positive Impact on Local Business**

Metro's Grade Separation Analysis includes no consideration of potential disruptions to local businesses. As you know, there is a unique community of generally small and locally-owned businesses that thrives on the Crenshaw Corridor today. These businesses will suffer serious disruptions to patron access patterns during construction and, even worse, may face crippling disadvantages when the project is complete.

Automobile traffic patterns on Crenshaw Boulevard will be disrupted by vaguely referenced mitigations, such as permanent closure of cross streets, elimination of automobile turning movements and reductions in the number of on-street business patron parking stalls. Local businesses are already extremely concerned.



In addition to its impacts on existing businesses, an at-grade alignment will thwart one of Metro's most important long-term goals: economic development in transit-served communities.

The Metro Grade Separation Analysis gives short shrift to this issue, concluding that "the intensity of development planned for this section of the Corridor is of low to medium density in scale" (pg. 38). This dismissive remark is not just a casual rebuke to our community's aspirations -- it is a consignment of our community to permanent economic disparity, a subtle but effective form of lasting financial subjugation. "Streetcar suburbs" do not become commercial centers. Installing a light rail line at grade will limit future growth potential and very likely form a debilitating constraint on a community that seriously wants to grow. This is the same bias that we detected in our review of the Federal New Starts evaluation process last year.

An at-grade profile may be adequate for a community that wants to retain its current low-density character. Only a subway, however, will allow a community to achieve substantial new economic growth.

#### 6. **Traffic: Congestion Reduced**

The Metro study of Park Mesa Heights, as is typical of Metro grade separation analyses, focuses inordinately on the issue of automobile traffic flow.

Ironically, it is in this realm that some of the strongest arguments for grade separation occur.

Metro notes early in the study (pg. 10) that an at-grade alignment would cause "potential traffic impacts" at three out of seven major intersections in Park Mesa Heights. In each case, the level of service drops to D or F, and the Metro analysis shows a "significant impact" in the environmental review.

Metro blithely wishes this problem away by proposing to "eliminate outer parking lanes" (pg. 11) and restrict turning motions for automobiles traversing Park Mesa Heights. The ramification of these interventions on local commerce is not discussed, nor is the effect that they are likely to have on surrounding neighborhoods by diverting traffic onto local residential streets addressed. Most astonishing of all, the Metro report does not describe what the Level of Service (LOS) might be after these "mitigation measures" are installed. The report simply says that there will be "no significant impact on traffic."

On a rating scale from A to F with F being the worst, what the Metro report conceals is that the LOS at Crenshaw and 54<sup>th</sup> Street will drop to D with an at-grade alignment and the LOS at Slauson will remain at F. This is hardly "mitigation." Nor does it amount to "no significant impact." Quite the contrary, it smacks of deception and concealment of a material fact. Leaving this neighborhood with a D and an F for local traffic is not only unacceptable, it is unconscionable.

In summary, elimination of business patron parking, added to the elimination of cross streets and the elimination of turning movements, together with the installation of a light rail line in the middle of the Boulevard, will result in a traffic Level of Service permanently rated F at the most important intersection in Park Mesa Heights. This is an inadequate plan to put forth, far beneath the quality of work that we expect from your staff. To label it as "no significant impact" is egregious and disturbing at best.

Each of the technical considerations noted above, drawing heavily on analyses prepared by the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Corridor team at Metro, militate strongly in favor of a station at Leimert Park Village and a tunnel profile through Park Mesa Heights.

#### **Equitable Funding Preserves Options**

As with every Metro project decision, good planning requires an equally good financing plan. The financing ideas do not "*rob Peter to pay Paul*." This is to say, they do not come at the expense of other existing projects.

We appreciate that your staff has developed a solid financing plan for the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Corridor Base Project, with an estimated cost of \$1.715 billion. This plan relies almost exclusively on locally-generated funds, including Measure R, Prop A and Prop C. This self-reliant budget sufficiently impressed our Federal government colleagues that they offered an unprecedented (before and since) Transit Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan to advance funds for this project. The current financing plan for the Crenshaw/LAX Transit Corridor is rational and secure.

We further appreciate that your project team is working effectively to "value engineer" the Base Project into conformance with the project budget, even as inflationary fluctuations are beginning to appear in the construction world.

Our office is cooperating with their review of alignment reconfigurations, reduced right-of-way requirements, aerial structure changes, station location decisions, ventilation and open air station configurations and other technical modifications that will help keep this project on budget. Paramount among these is our ongoing discussion with the Federal Aviation Administration about the "trench" profile where the light rail line passes runways 25 L and 25 R at LAX.

Also significant to these discussions are calculations of appropriate cost-sharing formulas for the Southwestern Maintenance Yard, which will also serve two legs of the Green Line, and for portions of the Measure R Green Line to LAX project, which will be constructed as part of Crenshaw/LAX.

Please be assured that we will continue to cooperate with your office to make the value engineering adjustments that are necessary to keep the project "on track."

The two project features requested in this letter, a Leimert Park Village Station and a Park Mesa Heights tunnel, are expected to require additional expenditures in the range of \$120 million and \$219 million, respectively, both in current, 2010 dollars.

Obviously, additional funds will need to be identified for these purposes. My motion merely directs Metro staff to identify funding options. In fact, Measure R expressly states that "Metro may expend additional funds from other sources other than the Sales Tax imposed pursuant to the Ordinance . . ." (pg. 9).

By way of illustration, we suggest consideration of the following possible sources of funds. At the same time, we recognize that project funding is a fluid process. We have continuing confidence that your staff will find an appropriate mix of sources to match these compelling needs.

1. **Surplus Property Sales**

Metro typically acquires properties during light rail installation that are used for temporary construction purposes. These properties can be declared surplus at the end of construction work. Typically, sale or leasing proceeds from surplus properties have reverted to Metro's General Fund. In the case of Crenshaw/LAX, and perhaps for other projects as well, we urge Metro to consider using these funds to defray the costs of the line itself. Perhaps as much as \$10 or \$15 million for Crenshaw/LAX can be generated from this source.

2. **Arbor Vitae Ramps**

Included in the LRTP is a long-standing allocation for construction of new ramps on the I-405 freeway at Arbor Vitae Street. There are existing ramps at Manchester and Century, and there is relatively little public demand for additional ramps in the vicinity. Because the Crenshaw/LAX line is located only a half mile west of the freeway, runs parallel to it, and is intended to relieve traffic on the I-405, we suggest that the \$31 million in this line item be reallocated to Crenshaw/LAX.

3. **Green Line to LAX**

Also in Measure R and the LRTP is a \$200 million line item for a project called "Green Line to LAX." This money was never intended to fully fund the project, but represents a partial contribution to the costs of connecting the existing Green Line directly into the Central Terminal Area of the airport. In fact, the Crenshaw/LAX Line will be constructing the first, southern-most mile of the Green Line to LAX, from the existing Green Line station at Imperial/Aviation to Century Boulevard, at a cost (Year of Expenditure) of \$172.6 million. The Crenshaw/LAX project will also acquire land and construct a station at Aviation/Century for \$89 million. This station will be shared with the Green Line to LAX. All of the costs of the Green Line extension and approximately one half of the costs of the Century/Aviation Station should be charged to the Green Line to LAX project.

In addition, as noted above, the Crenshaw/LAX project will construct a \$285 million Maintenance Yard which will also be shared with the Green Line to LAX.

It is, therefore, fully appropriate that the Green Line to LAX project pay its fair share of these common costs.

4. **Other Highway Funds**

Our conversations with Metro staff indicate that it may be possible to identify other funds, such as highway-related funds, that could be suitable for reallocation to Crenshaw/LAX. This is particularly appropriate if these funds were directed to local roads that will be relieved by the installation of light rail.

5. **Expo Line Surplus Funds**

Measure R and the LRTP contain a "third decade" allocation of \$111.3 million for an "unspecified project" related to the Expo Line. The current LRTP budget contains full appropriations for Expo Phase I and Expo Phase II, including money for all direct and indirect costs and a contingency. The "unspecified project" in Measure R and the LRTP must, therefore, represent funds that are either an additional contingency for Expo cost overruns or a surplus that will be available for other projects, including Crenshaw/LAX.

Because Crenshaw/LAX will serve the Central Sector (Expo serves both the Central and Western Sectors of Metro), and because the need exists today for augmentation of the Crenshaw/LAX budget, it is appropriate to consider reallocation of a portion of these Expo surplus to Crenshaw/LAX.



We face historic decisions at the Metro Board.

As we all know, the decisions we make today will have lasting ramifications. These ramifications will affect transit utilization and all of the collateral benefits that mode shift can provide. Beyond that, they will serve our communities in many less tangible ways, including the inspiration of economic development, hope and prosperity, and the restoration of optimism to the California economy, and to the businesses and households that we serve.

The decisions that face us today are not just about transit-funding. They reflect a "compact" with our constituents who have voted repeatedly to tax themselves for transit improvements, and have waited long for the results of that vote. It is essential that Metro serve all members of its wide-ranging communities, from the farthest reaches of the County to the historic heart of our urban realm. Budget decisions are inevitably difficult; that is the assignment we are tasked to solve.

It is not by what we build, or by how fast or even how safely we operate it, it is by the meaning of our work for the people that we serve, that we must ultimately be judged.

With hope,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mark Ridley-Thomas", followed by a horizontal line.

**MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS**  
Supervisor, Second District