



October 12, 2023

To: Transit Committee

From: Darrell E. Johnson, Chief Executive Officer

Subject: Adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration Finding for the Orange County Maintenance Facility Project

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Overview

The Orange County Transportation Authority, in partnership with the Southern California Regional Rail Authority, is planning to construct the Metrolink Orange County Maintenance Facility to enhance current public transit operations and allow for long-term expansion of rail service, advancing both local and regional efforts to provide efficient travel options and support environmental initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In coordination with the City of Irvine, the facility has been planned for 20 years. The now-completed state and federally required environmental analysis for the facility has determined that with appropriate mitigations where necessary, there will be no significant impacts to the surrounding community. The Board of Directors' adoption of the Mitigated Negative Declaration along with the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program is needed to enable the Metrolink Orange County Maintenance Facility project to proceed to the next phase in the project development process.

Recommendations

- A. Approve Resolution No. 2023-057 to adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program, pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act, for the Metrolink Orange County Maintenance Facility.
- B. Approve the Metrolink Orange County Maintenance Facility.
- C. Authorize the Chief Executive Officer to direct staff to implement the Metrolink Orange County Maintenance Facility consistent with the 2015 Purchase and Sale Agreement between the City of Irvine and Orange County Transportation Authority.

Background

The Metrolink Orange County Maintenance Facility (OCMF) project (Project) is located on a 21.3-acre parcel of land purchased by the Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA) from the City of Irvine (City) on March 9, 2015. The Purchase and Sale Agreement states, "...that the basis for the sale by City and purchase by OCTA of the Property is OCTA's use of the Property for a commuter rail maintenance facility."

The OCMF is part of Metrolink's Southern California Optimized Rail Expansion (SCORE) capital improvement program, which is primarily funded by the State of California's Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program. The Project is also included in the Federal Transportation Improvement Program (FTIP) as ORA210601.

The Project will construct a rail maintenance facility that will allow Metrolink to service and store locomotives and passenger railcars for Metrolink trains. The Project will improve Metrolink's operational efficiency and overall system performance, providing both short-term benefits and allowing for long-term expansion of regional rail service. Metrolink currently operates three maintenance facilities across its service area:

- Central Maintenance Facility in Los Angeles County,
- Eastern Maintenance Facility in San Bernadino County, and
- Through an agreement with the North County Transit District, the Stuart Mesa Facility in northern San Diego County.

These existing facilities are near or at capacity to maintain the existing rolling stock fleet, and they range from nearly 40 to 60 miles away from the project site. A facility in Orange County will allow for more efficient train movements, increase systemwide maintenance capacity, and accommodate Metrolink's plan to provide future 30-minute regional rail service in both directions.

The Project will include the construction of a new rail yard, a new rail bridge over the Bee Canyon Channel, lead tracks and yard tracks, storage, operations and maintenance buildings, train wash, ancillary structures, landscape improvements, and safety and security features (Attachment A). The Project also includes the construction of street and traffic signal improvements to the extension of the existing Ridge Valley south of Marine Way to allow access to the project site.

Adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration Finding for the Orange County Maintenance Facility Project *Page 3*

The Project requires state and federal environmental compliance. OCTA is the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) lead agency, and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is the National Environmental Policy Act lead agency.

In 2022, OCTA prepared an Initial Study (IS) and the resulting Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) as the appropriate environmental document for the Project. The document was made available to the public for comments. On June 13, 2022, staff requested the Board of Directors (Board) adopt the MND finding and the Mitigation and Monitoring Reporting Program (MMRP) for the Project. Following discussion and public comment, the Board directed staff to analyze whether an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Project would be an appropriate document to complete and return at a future date.

OCTA has been working with FTA to determine and reconfirm the appropriate National Environmental Policy Act documentation. Following additional analysis and consultation with FTA, staff and legal counsel have determined a Categorical Exclusion would most likely be the appropriate level of environmental review for the Project.

Discussion

The City's Great Park Master Plan identified and designated land for the future OCMF in 2003. The City updated its General Plan in 2015, and the proposed Project is located within the Great Park Planning Area 51, which includes permitted use of a public maintenance facility and structures. In coordination with City staff regarding the project permitting and approvals, the City noted the OCMF is conditionally allowable under the existing zoning, subject to a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) per the City's zoning ordinance. The City is currently processing the CUP approval for the Project, which will include public hearings at the City's Transportation Commission and Planning Commission.

Preliminary plans have been completed to 30 percent design, and an IS was prepared with site-specific analysis to address potential environmental impacts associated with the Project. The IS findings determined that the Project would not have a significant impact on the environment with the implementation of mitigation measures during construction or operations of the Project. Therefore, an MND is the appropriate resulting environmental document for the Project. The final IS/MND is comprised of the environmental analysis and findings and a discussion on public outreach efforts for the Project (Attachment B). The IS/MND appendices include technical data and reports in support of the findings, including responses to comments during the public circulation period as Appendix J, and the MMRP as Appendix K.

Adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration Finding for the Orange County Maintenance Facility Project *Page 4*

The discussion below summarizes the findings in the MND supporting the conclusion that the proposed Project would not result in significant environmental effects with the implementation of mitigation measures.

The IS/MND was prepared in accordance with CEQA guidelines, and the proposed Project was evaluated for its effect on 21 environmental factors. The results of this evaluation showed that the Project would have no impact, or less than significant impact, on 13 of 21 environmental factors, including aesthetics, hydrology/water quality, recreation, utilities/services systems, agriculture and forestry resources, greenhouse gas emissions, land use/planning, population/housing, transportation, wildfire, energy, mineral resources, and public services.

The analysis showed the Project could result in potentially significant environmental impacts for the remaining eight environmental factors if mitigation measures are not incorporated. These include air quality, biological resources, cultural resources, geology/soils (paleontological resources), hazards and hazardous materials, noise, tribal cultural resources, and mandatory findings of significance. The technical studies on these resource areas determined that the implementation of mitigation measures would reduce all impacts to less than significant.

Staff has prepared an MMRP in compliance with Public Resources Code 21081.6 and CEQA Guideline 15097 to ensure compliance with the mitigation measures identified in the final IS/MND during project construction. The MMRP includes measures to address environmental impacts prior to and during construction. In addition, some of the measures will require additional coordination with regulatory agencies that are further detailed in the MND. These measures would reduce the level of impact to less than significant for the Project.

Project public outreach engagement efforts are documented (Attachment C), which includes a public notice of intent to adopt the draft IS/MND that was circulated for public review and various public meetings held to inform the public about the Project. The community's concerns were primarily focused on noise, pollution, traffic, and lighting. The IS/MND has studied these concerns and found them to be less than significant with and without mitigation.

Since June 2022, OCTA has continued to coordinate with the City as well as engaging the public and others. OCTA staff worked with the City to schedule a community open house at Irvine City Hall on September 11, 2023 to share project information with residents and other stakeholders. More than 50 people attended to speak with staff and review materials detailing the project history, site activities, project needs and benefits, environmental study results, and next steps. The community open house was publicized via the City's website and

Adopt the Mitigated Negative Declaration Finding for the Orange County Maintenance Facility Project *Page 5*

online weekly newsletter, a press release, social media, and the Irvine Weekly online publication.

Staff will remain engaged with the City, community, and stakeholders to ensure the Project is designed in a way that continues to take into consideration the sensitivity of the surrounding environment.

The final IS/MND is presented to the Board for adoption as the final environmental document. Should the Board approve the MND through the adoption of Resolution No. 2023-057 (Attachment D), a Notice of Determination will be filed with and posted at the Orange County Clerk's office and the State Clearinghouse. In addition, staff will continue to work with the City in their assessment and consideration of the CUP approval.

Summary

The IS/MND for the OCMF determined the Project would not have a significant effect on the environment with incorporation of the mitigation monitoring and reporting measures. The MND was circulated to allow the public and interested parties an opportunity to provide input on the MND during the public review process. The responses to questions and comments submitted are not part of the CEQA requirements but have been incorporated into the appendices of the MND. Staff recommends the Board approve Resolution No. 2023-057 to adopt the MND and MMRP, pursuant to the CEQA guidelines for the Project.

Attachments

- A. Project Location Map
- B. Metrolink Orange County Maintenance Facility Project, Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration, Dated September 2023
- C. Orange County Maintenance Facility Project, Prior Public Outreach Activities
- D. Resolution No. 2023-057

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