



# MONTHLY SBCCOG TRANSPORTATION REPORT

COVERING MARCH 2023

Edited by Steve Lantz

SBCCOG Transportation Director

# FEDERAL

## **USDOT Announces \$2 Million SMART Grant For Metro Integrated Transit Planning**

The U. S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) on March 21<sup>st</sup> announced its awards for the Strengthening Mobility and Revolutionizing Transportation (SMART) Grants Program. According to the USDOT, 59 projects across the United States received \$94 million in grant funding. Metro received a \$2 million SMART Grant for a new Event Integrated Ticketing platform that will integrate transit ticket purchases with the event ticketing process in anticipation of the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

## **Westside and East San Fernando Valley Metro Rail Projects In Line To Receive Federal Funding**

The U. S. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) on March 9<sup>th</sup> recommended 18 major rail projects to receive a share of \$4.45 billion allocated to public transport construction projects in the Biden administration's fiscal 2024 budget request to Congress. The Los Angeles Westside Subway Section 2 and Section 3 projects together are recommended to receive \$643 million. In addition, the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor Phase I Project is proposed to receive \$167 million through FTA's Expedited Project Delivery Program.

The projects would be funded through the FTA Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program and the Expedited Project Delivery (EPD) Pilot program. The report allocates \$2.85 billion in annual appropriations requested from Congress and \$1.6 billion in FY 2024 funding provided through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

## **U. S. DOT Awards \$185 Million In Reconnecting Communities Grants To 45 Projects**

The Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program aims to restore connections between communities that had been severed by highways and other transportation infrastructure. Grants announced on March 1<sup>st</sup> total \$185 million, part of a \$1 billion investment over five years funded through the 2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

In partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Housing and Urban Development, U. S. DOT gave priority to applications from economically disadvantaged communities that prioritized people instead of cars; created opportunities for new housing, parks, and community space; and ensured residents can more easily access jobs, schools, and the other resources. U. S. DOT also established the Reconnecting Communities Institute to provide technical assistance to build organizational and community capacity available to grant recipients and other eligible entities interested in reconnecting communities.

A \$30 million federal share of a \$69 million Long Beach Shoreline Drive Gateway project was granted to reconfigure West Shoreline Drive to remove a roadway barrier and improve access and connectivity between Downtown Long Beach and public open space, create a new bicycle path and pedestrian amenities, and divert highway traffic from residential streets to major roads. The project's realignment and transformation of Shoreline Drive will convert the urban freeway corridor into a landscaped local roadway, creating approximately 5.5 acres for park space and serving as a gateway to better connect residents, visitors, and workers to the Pacific Ocean, local destinations, and downtown Long Beach.

Pasadena was awarded \$2 million for a \$4.4 million, three-year planning study of transportation and land use needs related to the future redevelopment of Pasadena’s recently relinquished I-710 highway “stub” that will ultimately result in a 710 Northern Stub Site-Specific Plan.

### **Electric Bike Tax Credit Bill Reintroduced, Providing Up To \$1,500 Off New E-Bikes In The U. S.**

A federal incentive for electric bicycle purchases is back on the table after a 2021 bill failed to be enacted. The Electric Bicycle Incentive Kickstart for the Environment (E-BIKE) Act was reintroduced on March 21<sup>st</sup>. The federal tax credit outlined in the E-BIKE Act would cover up to 30% of the cost of a new electric bike, up to a maximum credit of \$1,500 for an e-bike priced at less than \$8,000.

The credit would be allowed once per individual every three years or twice for a joint-return couple buying two electric bicycles. New to this version is this addition of income caps that parallel existing electric vehicle tax credit caps: an annual salary of \$150,000 for single filers, \$225,000 for heads of households, and \$300,000 for those filing jointly.

## **STATE \$2 Public Transportation, Legislators**

### **Californians Driving Bigger Cars Could Be Charged More In Vehicle Registration Fees**

Vehicle registration fees in California are currently based on the value of the car. But big cars and trucks could end up costing California drivers more in vehicle registration fees, if AB 251 is approved. The bill would require the California Transportation Commission to create a task force to look at the possible connection between vehicle weight and injuries. It would also study whether higher fees would affect drivers’ behavior, and how the revenue from the fees could be used to improve safety features on the roads for pedestrians and cyclists. The report would have to be submitted by Jan. 1, 2026.

According to a [2020 study](#) by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, an insurance industry trade group, larger cars like SUVs are “disproportionately likely” to injure or kill pedestrians. The study analyzed 82 crashes with pedestrians and found that while crashes at low and high speeds tended to result in similar injuries with different types of vehicles, crashes at “intermediate speeds” caused more serious injuries.

## **REGION**

### **L. A. Metro’s Regional Connector Project Begins Pre-Revenue Testing in Downtown L. A.**

The Regional Connector will soon enable a one-seat ride between Azusa and Long Beach and between Atlantic in East L. A. and Santa Monica. The new light rail subway segment between L. A. Union Station and the 7<sup>th</sup>/Flower Metro station in Downtown L. A. will eliminate transfers in downtown L. A. for three current disconnected lines and will create two new through lines. Metro will also rename the lines once passenger service opens that allows through trips.

The northern part of the L (Gold) Line from L. A. Union Station through Pasadena that terminates at APU/Citrus College will be known as the A (Blue) Line reflecting the new A (Blue) Line between Long Beach and Azusa. The eastern segment of the current L (Gold) line that terminates at Atlantic Avenue will be renamed as the E (Gold) Line. The E (Expo) Line, currently operating between Downtown L. A. and Downtown Santa Monica, also will become the E (Gold) Line to reflect the new through service between East L. A. and Santa Monica.

Metro is currently running out-of-service test trains through the Regional Connector during regular service hours to meet its testing and safety requirements. The trains participating in pre-revenue service will display signage and messaging that reflects the updated line letters and colors. If passengers happen to be on trains participating in pre-revenue testing through the Regional Connector, they may start to see changed line colors and letters and hear on-board announcements reflecting the changed names. Metro will have extra Metro Ambassadors at 7th/Metro, Pico/Aliso, and Union Station to help people navigate during these periods.

Additional information is available at: <https://thesource.metro.net/2023/03/29/heads-up-regional-connector-train-testing-is-underway-and-you-may-see-hear-some-changes-to-a-e-and-l-line-trains/>

### **Metro To Spend \$8 Million For Six-Month ‘Metro Micro’ Pilot Extension**

On March 23<sup>rd</sup> the L. A. Metro Board approved \$8.3 million for a six-month extension of Metro’s microtransit pilot, branded Metro Micro, an on-demand ride-hail service, like Lyft or Uber.

However, there are a few contrasts between Metro Micro and Lyft or Uber. Metro Micro serves a much more limited service area than the private operators. Metro Micro serves only the following nine communities: LAX/Inglewood, Watts/Compton, NoHo/Burbank, El Monte, Highland Park/Eagle Rock/Glendale, Altadena/Pasadena/Sierra Madre, Northwest San Fernando Valley, and UCLA/Westwood/VA). Metro Micro only operates limited service hours which vary by service area (generally 6 a. m. to 10 p. m.). Metro uses its employees and operates its own fleet rather than contracting for the service. Metro offers new customers two free Metro Micro rides followed by a fare of \$1 per ride. In contrast, Metro bus and rail riders pay up to \$1.75 per ride.

Key performance indicators are not promising. Even with the lower fare and one-seat ride, after two years of pilot operation, Metro is averaging approximately 2,000 riders per day compared to a target ridership of 5,000 weekday riders. Metro Micro’s goal is to serve seven passengers per vehicle per hour, but staff is now projecting about three passengers per vehicle-hour. For the last 18 months, Metro Micro’s per-ride subsidy has fluctuated from \$30-\$60 depending on the service area compared to Metro’s fixed-routes buses, which operate at a cost of approximately \$8 per boarding.

### **Work Begins on 10.3M Front Street Pedestrian, Bike Path In San Pedro**

The City of L. A. formally broke ground on the Front Street Beautification Project on March 9<sup>th</sup>. The project, planned for more than a decade, will include a new landscaped gateway space at the northeast corner of Front Street and Pacific Avenue to the north of the Vincent Thomas Bridge. The new area will include a 22-foot-wide multi-use path, buffered front Front Street by a five-foot strip of landscaping. Plans also call for pedestrian lighting along the corridor. Completion of the project is expected in 2024.

## **FEDERAL, STATE & LOCAL TRENDS / INNOVATION**

### **Riding an E-Trike on the South Bay Local Travel Network**

Communities across the nation are grappling with providing a mobility infrastructure that is updated for a population increasingly unable to use a car but choosing to stay in an environment built for cars, trucks and buses. By 2030, all Boomers will be over 65, and by 2040, one in five adults will find themselves in this age group. And the majority of this generation are intent on aging in place rather than relocating to facilities designed for older people.

The South Bay Local Travel Network (LTN) is being implemented to provide a safe and fun travel network for a wide variety of slow speed electric and human-powered vehicles. It is for all ages but will specifically be a boon for seniors.

Losing the ability to drive to visit friends or run basic errands can be profoundly disruptive, especially for those living in car-dependent communities. Social isolation correlates with heightened medical risk, and the number of isolated adults over 50 is up sharply. If older adults follow through on their desire to age in place, they will need communities that keep them connected — to services, activities, and, most importantly, people. And they will need an appropriate vehicle and infrastructure network for their travel needs.

E--trikes are being positioned by marketers as providing personal transportation for older adults without the stigma of infirmity and old age associated with power wheelchairs or mobility scooters. But for this mode to meet its potential growing demand, the e-trike needs wider space than is available in a traditional bike lane. To provide that capacity, the South Bay Local Travel Network is being implemented on neighborhood streets where slow speed vehicles of all sizes and shapes can safely share the roadway.

Since the e-trike vehicle itself is too bulky for most standard bike racks, the South Bay is also addressing locations on the LTN network for secure space to store and charge the e-trikes at home and at the destination.

In a zero-sum street use environment, local jurisdictions will be looking to the South Bay LTN as a model for re-balancing their street network to accommodate all users, including a growing number of seniors on e-trikes.

Additionally, the SBCCOG is working with micro transit services such as Circuit, which can use the network for a fun way for seniors to get around using local transit.