

Date of Hearing: April 17, 2017

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION  
Jim Frazier, Chair  
AB 287 (Holden) – As Amended April 6, 2017

**SUBJECT:** State Highway Route 710: advisory committee

**SUMMARY:** Directs the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to establish a State Route (SR) 710 Advisory Committee. Specifically, **this bill**:

- 1) Makes legislative findings and declarations regarding the history and current status of the SR 710 North corridor.
- 2) Directs Caltrans, in consultation with the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro), to establish an SR 710 North Advisory Committee.
- 3) Directs the advisory committee to study the alternatives considered in the SR 710 North Draft Environmental Impact Report (draft EIR) and other transit options to improve travel in, and environmental impacts of the SR 710 North project area.
- 4) Prescribes the membership of the advisory committee to include:
  - a) Three representatives of Caltrans;
  - b) Two representatives of LA Metro;
  - c) Two representatives each from the City of Alhambra, the City of Los Angeles City Council District 14, the City of Pasadena, and the City of South Pasadena; and,
  - d) Three members of the Assembly and three members of the Senate that represent the SR 710 project area.
- 5) Directs the advisory committee to, by January 1, 2019, report recommendations to the Legislature, Caltrans, and LA Metro on the most appropriate and feasible alternative for the SR 710 North project area to do all of the following:
  - a) Improve air quality and public health;
  - b) Improve traffic safety;
  - c) Modernize the freeway design;
  - d) Address projected traffic volumes;
  - e) Address projected population and employment growth; and,
  - f) Create jobs.
- 6) Prohibits the advisory committee from considering or recommending the freeway tunnel alternative proposed for implementation in the State Route 710 North draft EIR or a surface

freeway alternative, and prohibits Caltrans from proceeding with implementation of either of these two alternatives.

- 7) Deletes the portion of Route 710 between I-10 and I-210 from the statutorily defined Freeway and Expressway System.
- 8) Specifically prohibits Caltrans from implementing a freeway tunnel or surface freeway for Route 710 between I-10 and I-210.

**EXISTING LAW:**

- 1) Grants Caltrans broad authority to have full possession and control of all state highways and all property and rights in property acquired for state highway purposes. The department is authorized and directed to lay out and construct all state highways between termini designated by law.
- 2) Statutorily defines state highways to be included in the Freeway and Expressway System.

**FISCAL EFFECT:** Unknown

**COMMENTS:** SR 710 is a major north-south interstate running 23 miles through Los Angeles County, from Long Beach in the south to Alhambra in the north, stopping approximately 6 miles short of the originally planned northerly terminus in Pasadena. Efforts to complete the segment between I-10 in Alhambra and I-210 in Pasadena, sometimes dubbed the "freeway gap closure," have started and stalled several times over the past 60 years. In fact, Caltrans owns and still maintains hundreds of homes in the corridor that were bought as far back as the 1960s to preserve the corridor for the freeway long ago proposed but as of yet not delivered.

Many believe that failure to complete the SR 710 North improvement project contributes to traffic congestion in northeastern Los Angeles and the northwestern San Gabriel Valley, as there are no north-south freeways in the heavily populated area between I-5 (Golden State Freeway) and I-605 (San Gabriel River Freeway). Over the past fifty years, alternative concepts have been proposed and evaluated to build the SR 710 freeway between I-10 and I-210. Community members, particularly residents of Pasadena, opposed the freeway project because of concerns about the impact of the freeway on their community.

Within the past ten years, the concept of a tunnel between I-10 and I-210 has been proposed as an alternative to the previously proposed surface freeway. In response, Metro completed a feasibility assessment of a tunnel alternative, and the assessment concluded that the tunnel concept is feasible. Potential environmental impacts were identified but preliminary assessments concluded that these impacts could be minimized, eliminated, or mitigated. The report concluded that no insurmountable environmental issues were identified that would preclude further consideration of the tunnel alternative.

In March 2015, Caltrans and LA Metro released the latest study in this decades-old saga—a draft EIR that evaluates and identifies cost estimates for the following five alternatives to improve transportation in the SR 710 North project area:

- 1) Transportation system management/transportation demand management (TSM/TDM) strategies (estimated to cost \$105 million);
- 2) Light rail transit (estimated to cost \$2.42 billion);
- 3) Bus rapid transit (estimated to cost \$204 million);
- 4) Freeway tunnel (estimated to cost between \$3.15 billion for a single-bore option and \$5.65 billion for a dual-bore option); and,
- 5) No build.

According to the author, "SR 710 has divided communities in the San Gabriel Valley for too long. The well-intentioned proposal to build a freeway 50 years ago has led to a neighborhood deteriorating physically and an ongoing feud that has left both sides with the consequences of inaction." The author asserts that this bill will require these communities to come together to craft a solution that can be constructed in a timely manner and avoid being mired in conflict for years to come. He believes this bill will take the controversial tunnel option off the table and encourage a solution that is community-led and provides the greatest community benefit.

Supporters of this bill assert that the tunnel alternative, included in Caltrans' draft EIR, does not reflect current day community values, environmental policies, or even an understanding of contemporary thinking with regard to the impact that congestion-relieving projects have on inducing travel demand. They suggest that the advisory committee will provide a collaborative forum to address the area's transportation needs in a way that is more reflective of the communities' values. They also support permanently removing a tunnel option from the alternatives to be considered, contending that the option would cost significantly more than others options and result in an increase in the number of vehicle miles traveled.

Opponents, on the other hand, contend that this bill is illogical and unjustifiable given the "countless hours and millions of taxpayer dollars [spent] on the environmental review of the project." They also contend that the tunnel is "the best solution and the only alternative that further reduces air emissions and health risks in lower income, minority areas that have been plagued by poor air quality due to severe congestion and slow traffic on neighborhood streets." They further assert that tunnel opponents "have been relentless in their efforts to stall and disrupt the ongoing environmental review. Further delay will only exacerbate the negative traffic and environmental impacts not just in San Gabriel Valley but throughout the entire region."

*Committee comments:* Although Caltrans and LA Metro are expected to issue a determination on the pending draft EIR in the very near future, the reality is, even if the tunnel alternative is selected as the preferred alternative, it would not be constructed anytime in the near future.

For fifty years, community opposition has successfully kept a freeway gap closure project from going forward. Years of litigation are sure to ensue if the tunnel alternative is chosen. Furthermore, given the preliminary price tag for the tunnel (between \$3.1 billion and \$5.65 billion in 2014 dollars), it is doubtful that funding for the project could materialize any time soon, if at all. The County's Measure R allocated \$750 million to address congestion in the

SR 710 North project area but this would be a drop in the bucket compared to eventual funding needs.

Regarding the advisory committee to be created by this bill, it is questionable whether it will be able to bridge the abyss that exists between the two sides of this issue. Still, after 50 years of a complete, fruitless standoff on this project, a collaborative, community-based approach, rather than the current approach, is more likely to render a menu of solutions that might actually be built.

*Previous legislation:* SB 204 (Liu) of 2012 would have, among other things, authorized LA Metro, in consultation with Caltrans and acting jointly with affected cities, to develop and file with the California Transportation Commission a local alternative transportation improvement program to address transportation problems and opportunities in the SR 710 study area. Governor Brown vetoed SB 204. In his veto message, the Governor declared the bill premature, in part, because LA Metro was conducting the SR 710 North EIR. The Governor further stated, "My administration is committed to... [finding] a solution to the long-standing controversies over closing the 710 freeway gap."

SB 545 (Cedillo) of 2002 would have prohibited the SR 710 freeway gap closure project from being constructed as a surface or above-grade highway. SB 545 was vetoed by Governor Schwarzenegger. In his veto message, the Governor stated, "This bill is unnecessary. The project development process currently being undertaken by [Caltrans] and [LA Metro] is the appropriate vehicle to determine the scope and feasibility of a project to address the transportation needs in the [SR 710] corridor. This process provides ample opportunity for public involvement and input."

## **REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:**

### **Support**

California Bicycle Coalition  
 California Preservation Foundation  
 California Public Interest Research Group  
 City of Glendale  
 City of LaCañada Flintridge  
 City of South Pasadena  
 Connected Cities and Communities  
 East Area Progressive Democrats  
 Five Star Coalition  
 National Trust for Historic Preservation  
 Natural Resources Defense Council  
 NO 710 Action Committee  
 Pasadena Heritage  
 Sequoyah School  
 South Pasadena Chamber of Commerce  
 The Honorable Terry Tornek, Mayor, City of Pasadena  
 The West Pasadena Residents' Association  
 Westridge School  
 10 private citizens

**Opposition**

California State Council of Laborers  
California Teamsters Public Affairs Council  
City of Alhambra  
City of Monterey Park  
City of Rosemead  
City of San Gabriel  
City of San Marino  
International Association of Bridge, Structural, Ornamental and Reinforcing Iron Workers  
International Association of Heat and Frost Insulators and Allied Workers  
International Association of Operative Plasterer's and Cement Mason  
International Association of Sheet Metal Workers  
International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron, Ship Builders, Blacksmiths, Forgers and  
Helpers  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers  
International Union of Elevator Construction  
International Union of Operating Engineers  
International Union of Painters and Allied Trades  
Los Angeles/Orange Counties Building and Construction Trades Council  
State Building and Construction Trades Council of California  
Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers  
United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters  
United Union of Roofers, Waterproofers & Allied Workers

**Analysis Prepared by:** Janet Dawson / TRANS. /