

Santa Monica Boulevard Project Is a Year Over Schedule!

The Santa Monica Blvd. Transit Parkway Project is now expected to be completed in August 2006, well over a year behind schedule.

The MTA regards August 2006 as an unacceptable date. To speed up the work, it intends to do the following:

- 1. Extend construction hours from the current 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. to 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.**
- 2. Add Saturday construction from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.**
- 3. Work at selected locations during peak hours in violation of city guidelines.**
- 4. Make Little Santa Monica Blvd. eastbound only, starting in January 2005.**
- 5. Reduce traffic to two lanes each way between Overland and Beverly Glen for significant periods of time.**

Viability Questioned

The project, whose viability has been questioned by virtually every homeowners organization on the Westside, will reconfigure Santa Monica Boulevard over the 2.3 miles of the boulevard from the San Diego Freeway on the west to the Beverly Hills city limits at Moreno Drive on the east.

Within a few years after the roadway opens, the evidence will show which group, the Metropolitan Transit Authority or the homeowners organizations, is correct.

The MTA argues that the additional twenty per-cent capacity that the reconfiguration will provide will not increase use of the roadway but will merely reduce drive times.

Bottleneck Fears

The homeowners organizations insist that it is absurd to believe that the added capacity to the boulevard will not increase the number of cars that flow through the boulevard. They fear that that added traffic on the boulevard will significantly increase the already existing bottlenecks that tie up traffic at the Beverly Hills city limits and at the San Diego Freeway.

The new boulevard will have three eastbound and three westbound traffic lanes. Neighborhood access roads on portions of the north and south sides of the main road are planned. The project will include a new street lighting and traffic signal system, a landscaped median, bicycle lanes, and bus priority features. Additionally, the on-ramps to the northbound and the southbound San Diego Freeway will be improved by the addition of High Occupancy Vehicle bypass lanes onto the freeway.

The traffic signal system has been criticized by Tract No. 7260. The system is supposed to predict traffic flow and adjust signals accordingly in order to keep traffic moving swiftly. However, the system has not been shown to work in areas such as S. M. Blvd., where the main artery is intersected by other major traffic carriers.

In addition, the smart buses, which are a feature of the project, are likely to interfere with the automated traffic signals. The drivers of the smart buses will have the ability to change the traffic signals at will in order to avoid stops for red lights. However, this ability is likely to disrupt any effectiveness that the automated traffic signals might possess.

Westfield Shoppingtown officials recently approached officers of Tract No. 7260 regarding the trees that the MTA had planned to plant in front of the shopping mall as part of the boulevard project.

The mall owners have offered to pay the MTA the difference between the cost of the trees that the MTA had proposed planting adjacent to the mall and of the more expensive palm trees, which Westfield feels would look better. Westfield asked for Tract No. 7260's approval for the upgrade, which 7260 quickly gave.