

C STREET MASTER PLAN
REAL ESTATE COMMITTEE MEETING
NOVEMBER 7, 2007

BOARD COMMENTS

Fred Maas:

As we look at the growth from 2007, the population has doubled, and then you extrapolate that to another double, from 30,000 to 60,000 people downtown. And you do a straight cost benefit analysis based on just growth parameters and experience over seven years. How do you make the case for potential cost just within the C Street transfer areas? Because where we've identified, I think in our budget, although we've not made a commitment, we've isolated about \$50 million dollars potentially for C Street without making any commitments. It could be based on things received in the Quiet Zone, twice that, three times that, who knows depending on what we find when we get underground. How do we justify? Because, I think ultimately MTS has to justify that because I'm assuming you're going to be dollar partners with us in this as we go through the improvements. How do you make your case to your board and how do you make your case to us that being that's a proved investment in that corridor.

Nancy Graham

Let me just add on that. An earlier estimate for the project was about \$110 million dollars. We just put...

Fred Maas

Whatever the numbers, it's got to be someplace, so it's still a lot of millions last time I checked. How do you help us make the case to the public and you make the same case to your board?

Brandon Farley, MTS Rep

I think the starting point may be the transit intranet ridership projections. The starting point is called the Downtown Community Plan Update Final Environmental Impact Report. It states the transit trips alone will increase 172 percent in peak times. Basically tripling of existing ridership.

Fred Maas

Do you believe it? Based on the growth from 17 to 30,000, do you believe it? This is an awful lot of money to spend on a hope because we'reaccommodations.

Brandon Farley, MTS Rep

I don't have cause not to believe it. It's in the FEIR and that's the planning document that we have to move forward with the trolley improvements downtown. That's our starting point for what we need to argue for on C Street in terms of improving access. When MTS came to the table on this project, we had three things in mind to guide our comments or our thoughts on this and this was providing access and that speaks to length of stations, adequate location of stations, efficiency of service which speaks to getting up and down the corridor in a timely manner, and safety, of course, which includes street traffic, cross traffic and what not.

Now as SANDAG and MTS, there's already been some discussion on the planning side of what improvements need to be done system-wide. Downtown on C Street, the 5th Avenue station and Civic Center Station, these are the only two stations within our system that cannot accommodate four-car trains of the state-of-the-art existing vehicle type, the SD100 and the U2 are 80 feet long. We have talked about this and our leadership says it seems odd that we would design through, to have our whole system dependent on what's occurring at these two stations. One of our main motivations for trying to get a longer station at Sixth and Civic that at a minimum took only three car trains, the S70. We told CCDC that as plans move forward, we don't want to preclude the opportunity to go to four-car trains sometime in the future. We're not pushing for that at the same time, but we think that the design could make it possible to have four-car trains in the future. Our opinion is, we don't know, I think Sachin may have spoken to this. We're not resigned to the belief that you have to close down a street to accommodate four-car trains. It could be that when a train is in the station, it's just creating an extended red time and we would have bulb out on the center of the street, for example, and actually of the last door on the first car and the first door on the second car actually land on the platform outside of where the street and crosswalk are.

Fred Maas

I don't mean to be argumentative because I'm not sure you really answered my question and I don't want to believe this, but I think it's just important to, at least know where my head's at, and maybe the rest of us. I mean if you truly believe in the increase in ridership numbers, it requires a suspension of disbelief, suspension of belief of what the numbers were from 2000 – 2007 in terms of the growth. And, in terms of your organization, you base your expenditure of dollars, both in terms of operation and construction based on your belief of what ridership and the revenue you can generate from the expansion of drivers. So, either you believe the numbers were sufficient to say "I'm going to put our money where our FEIR is, or not" and we have to make the same calculation here. So, I think that, at least from my perspective, that relationship of what we've seen in terms of growth in ridership and our expenditure of dollars is going to have to be demonstrated, both to us to everyone out there.

Brandon Farley, MTS Rep

If I can add to that, right now we have a very successful system. We're in the top five for system patronage for the light rail systems across the country. We're probably tops in a number of measures, whether it's passengersThere's really not much more we could do to increase capacity. Right now we have a feeling we're full. We see additional ridership right now, we need to add additional cars to our system. We could go to more frequent service, but we can't really go much beyond what we are today. So our only other option is to go to longer trains.

Teddy Cruz

I think it would be important to insert the C Street corridor as we speak of it in future meetings as the study develops. I would also like to congratulate you with the presentation as always. But, just conceptually, I think the issues are obvious to me and one of them is that as we review our infrastructure public space at least we conceded that some of the spaces have been over-utilized; could have the potential to be reinserted into our idea of public realm in downtown and I think that this possibility of C Street to be conceptualized, at least to be understood as such is important more than just the efficiency of vehicular and trolley flow. Most of the presentation was focused on that. I think that it is important to speak of the character of and potential of the space to become a linear public space of sorts, really ultimately giving priority to the presence of the pedestrian and the kind of space that benefits that, supports them. At some point it was decided that pedestrian malls are not good for business, will not work for business. I feel that that's not the case and I feel that we will have to send a message to the general public that other examples across the nation and the world and one that comes to mind is Third Street Promenade in Los Angeles. It is not that, in the case here, I understand that in some cases on C Street there were areas that were good in terms of their size for pedestrians. The problem with those areas is that they were badly designed, there was not the intention to support the pedestrian, to support this kind of activity. Not only that, in terms of surface treatment and landscape, I really understand the Third Street Promenade and if you pull it apart you will see the very interesting logic about parking lots framing the whole project with a diversity of business. Infrastructure supports small and large businesses, that the pavilions on the promenade to support small economies of sorts. There is a larger set of issues that support that we have to consider as part of supporting this kind of activity. First of all I would like to say that there are some are buying these I think business ...better and that leads me to the next comment or point is that as the study develops, we need to see it not only as a kind of top down kind of design because everything was as usual. It is a surface treatment and then the rest is white. In other words, I think these need to be a content of this study by a very subtle study of treatment. In other words, the treatments, the storefronts, the existing land use. I think the fragmentation of C Street is not only the fragmentation of its surface and the logic of vehicular activity there, but is a fragmentation of land use. So, access from parking lots is from there, large, entire blocks emulate a kind of philosophy. So, the study of the land use, because then we can really begin to improve the character of this street. We can invent maybe

incentives for land use particularly, or we find accessibility. I think that there needs to be all our issues other than the trolley to benefit the pedestrian. It worries me, that section, because at some point to where two cars, trolley, palm trees and very narrow sidewalks and I think that... One thing I want to say is let's be more specific about the length of that experience, if I could call it right, and the character of those trolley stops. In your master plan diagram, C Street ends at the North Embarcadero Vision Study and begins at City College, of course. Let's address that the first stop is really related to the student community to the park. The civic center has the character in terms the character and at the other end we have an amazing potential with the Museum of Contemporary Art, the new San Diego State University Gallery, the Center for the Arts, so let's understand the character of the spaces because that may be what allows to inject into the plan more fine grain condition of experience. Therefore, maybe it will influence the type of landscape that is planted. I think that the palm tree situation is kind of a one liner usually for these types of situations. I think that palm trees are the most selfish trees in my mind. They improvise shade and are good for the renderings. I think that the most specific distinction when it comes to surface and landscape, land use, all the conditions that frame this. I'm worried that this is just all about the trolley, all about the cars again, and we are missing an opportunity of making this a convenient public space. Of course the discussion about the size of the trolley I agree with your decision. I think we need to study more options, types of cars that do not really encroach into the street and sidewalk.

Jennifer LeSar

Let me just try and focus my comments on a couple of key areas. One is, just to start with the obvious one, planning perspective. Sachin, all along I think even before you've come, staff has talked about the ULI studies and the best and most economically viable promenades being one that transportation could go through. I think at some point we do need to be able to make the case for that given that the Santa Monica Promenade is just up the coast and it's such a common experience for people in San Diego and it doesn't have transportation cutting through the long way, just through the blocks. I think we need to really be able to nail that one on the head, why that one works and around the country it doesn't work in any other places.

Sachin Kalbag

We actually talked to some people up in Santa Monica. Santa Monica has a tourist destination element with a lot of hotel uses there and more residential that surrounds it. The transit malls that have failed have been in the office cores, primarily. The transit malls that have worked have either been in college towns or a lot of tourist and hotel elements on that street and being adjacent to the pier.

Jennifer LeSar

Are you sure that downtown isn't going to become more and more of the tourist destination with the convention center?

Sachin Kalbag

Perhaps in the future, that lane that we're proposing can be paved over. But, the most important thing is the utilities, quite frankly. Because with that structure in place, we can always go back and change that lane to pedestrian-oriented walkway, so that we would first have to start with the link first to realign the tracks and put the utilities in the right location. Perhaps in the future that could be a future phase.

Jennifer LeSar

I just think that at some point you're almost going to need a page of talking points on that issue alone. It's just a very common part of our city vernacular here in Southern California.

The second issue, and I'm not a transportation planner, I think you've done a great job and the issues here are incredibly complex. That ongoing question seems to be this three-car vs four-cars and I think Mr. Summer you raise a good point for us lay people. I guess I'm trying to understand what point are we just going to put to bed the conversation about four cars? And, then, second, are there alternatives to put together a three-car integration that would involve a shorter car? Again, I know this is about frequency and about ridership, but I'm kind of keying off what Fred said. Ultimately, we need to be able to make the business case for this huge public expenditure, which means that we as the city team of agencies, need to be pretty sure about the ridership projections; awfully sure about the car configurations and if there are alternatives, especially if the technology is going to continue to change, and we're going to continue to grapple with a changing car configuration even based on this car you're talking about. I always think about transportation. Infrastructure is such a big expenditure and technology changes so quickly, but then ultimately we're going to have to ask would it be cheaper to go with a less optimal car configuration so we don't have to realign all these curbs, cut outs, pop outs and all these things that you describe so well. I think at some point, and Nancy, if this is us okay, but we're talking about all these different agencies and a very, very big budget, and I think of North Embarcadero and how badly really that turn out from a budget perspective of agencies being at the table, and not being at the table, and I guess the older I get and the longer I sit here, I just think that identifying the sort of champion of this project right now beginning with an MOU, beginning to talk about cost sharing, even in this preliminary stage of all these. Because if you can't work out the cost sharing right now from all these reports, we're never going to get the cost sharing as it comes... lay concrete, and do the really expensive part. I think that this is the time actually to try and almost write out the business case, even if it's incredibly unclear at this point, so that what we don't do is some agencies can talk louder than another and we're all going to wear out and next thing you know is we're going to have four cars, or we're going to have three cars, and we haven't really, and I don't mean this about us, but somewhere along the line the discipline gets lost and keep focused on taking the time to really cut the issues that have to do with flexibility and less spending in the short run. I guess I'm just not clear if

we are appointed as the lead, and yet not given all the resources and the right amount of responsibility and authority. I guess I want to sort back to some of the basics and make sure that the Board here at least understands what we're getting into so we can help drive the process responsibly and not get stuck with the bill at the end of the day.

Nancy Graham

We have been kind of proceeding as the lead in the development of the plan, but not the responsible agency to fund it. I will tell you that it's been a challenge. On a couple of occasions we have put everybody in the room. At one time we hosted a lunch, we put everyone in there, and I was pretty blunt and said "okay guys, you know we have a problem here, we all have to kind of get together and try and figure out how to solve it and everyone has to give a little." And, I'll be real honest with you, I didn't get very far on that issue, so it's just something that we're going to have to keep working on because everyone is going to have to give a little to make this work.

Jennifer LeSar

I guess what I hope at least is that we write down on a piece of paper, for us, to come before this Board exactly what we're doing and what we're not doing. Almost summarized down to a page or two, so that as time evolves that this Board knows what we bought into organizationally and what we did not. Sachin, I think you've done a phenomenal job pointing out these issues, which I'm sure there's lots of dialogue on, but I don't hear any movement on three-cars vs. four-cars.

Nancy LeSar

We did take it to LU&H partly for that reason. They wanted to look at it and it was their consensus although they didn't take a technical vote because Kevin wanted them to wait until the Loop Study was done. They said "if we were going to take a vote, we would not vote for two and we would not vote for four, we would vote for three." And, they're going to be the ultimate decision-maker really, the City Council. So, that's kind of the direction we got from LU&H at this point.

Jennifer LeSar

And, at this point, our responsibility is simply to fund the planning efforts and some of the studies. And, some of these studies with your CAD drawings of how the cars fit in the blocks, are we paying for all that?

Nancy Graham

Yes

Jennifer LeSar

Or is MTS sharing with us?

Nancy – ...they're paying for all the planning and all the studies.

Jennifer LeSar

I guess I'll just leave it at that.

Bob McNeely

First of all, I agree with what my colleagues are saying and I do think we have to have a position paper in terms of where we are on this where we are on this issue. I think fundamentally I have a problem with trying to readjust infrastructure to fit a trolley car. It just seems to me that they make trolley cars in a lot of different sizes and it's just a matter of time before they come up with maybe a double-decker or something like that. I just am not on the side of wanting to spend the resources to reconfigure the streets. I think it's probably necessary that we have realignment with the tracks to fix what's broken there. But, I would think that we need to consider some of the comments that were made earlier by both Gary and also by Gordon, and I think it's a pretty unique idea to think about the existing trolley cars, but coming up with something smaller that would be sandwiched between existing trolley cars that would fit the blocks. That seems to me to be a fairly simple solution to the problem that we currently have. I also think that the comment made about clickers that change lights and what have you, that's a very simple solution they can fix. Maybe you can comment on that, but that seems to be a simple solution to fix what's wrong right now.

Sachin Kalbag

That's very different from having two lines of trolleys on a street. When you have trolleys going east and westbound, you're clicking between each station, that's five blocks, that all has to be a green band. Then you have another trolley behind it and a trolley going eastbound, so what happens is working with the people developing the technology, you would have, could have, trained bunches, you can't leave that station and the other train can't leave the station, and they start stacking essentially. There are ways to mitigate that, but it hasn't been proven because there's no other city in the country, other than Sacramento, (with two stations) that have actually built a light-rail system larger than a block. That's why it's very different from a fire engine saying "we need green lights to help me get through," this is different.

Bob McNeely

Ok, well one of the things that seems to be... I was on Amtrak Monday, and they have a single track and somehow they are able to get two trains going in opposite directions to pass one another using a sign and it's about planning, it's about knowing when one train

is going to leave, how long it takes to get from point A to point B and so on and with the trolley system it seems we can use the same kind of planning. We know where the train is supposed to be, it stops at a station for a certain period of time, brings on passengers, lets passengers off, and so forth. But, I mean within certain tolerances, we should be able to mitigate against that as a concern, I would think.

Sachin Kalbag

And, the way is, it would have to stay in the station much longer until the other one clears.

Bob McNeely

If it was within the block, then it wouldn't be a problem. So, I think that's part of the issue. We've got to come up with a way to get the trolley to fit within the existing block. If we do that, then I think we're okay. In terms of looking at all of the different options, certainly I do think that going to a four-car trolley is just unreasonable. You'd have to do a lot of infrastructure to prepare, change, an adjustment to make that happen and I'm not so sure what trolley ridership is going to be in the future anyway. I think one of the things we've done, and these are decisions we're making everyday and we've reviewed for design purposes buildings that are being constructed, especially new residential buildings, we are encouraging the use of automobiles with all the parking that we put in these buildings. And, now we're starting to go in an opposite direction by saying we really want people to ride on these trolleys. So, we've got to be consistent with our behavior, I think. That's another issue, I think, that we need to consider. But, anyway, that's the direction that I think I'm willing to take.

Fred Maas

First of all I want to echo Jennifer's comments and the rest of the Board about the incredible job you've done Sachin. This makes the Quiet Zone look like a day at the beach. ... I don't think we've found all of them unfortunately. Over on top of all these issues is the undeniable fact that C Street is an abomination. It's an embarrassment to downtown. It's an incredible asset that we all should need to take responsibility for at some time and doing something about it. I think we're on the path by doing things like the civic center plaza and the effect that C Street is going to have on that for good or bad, as well as C Street plans, but I fear we're on a one-way train to nowhere with what's going on with C Street because the enormous undertakings of what's going to have to be done without any demonstration that at the end of the day the expenditure of funds are going to be worth it. So whether it's a white paper or whatever it is, we're going to need to really understand both for our Board and ultimately the City Council/ Redevelopment Agency and the MTS Board, it's premature and I need to clearly think these things out, but this doesn't seem complicated to me, honestly, without making a lot of changes. If you view C Street as an essential link and think of it of getting from City College on one end to the eastern end of C Street (India) as getting from one terminal to another in at airport, which everybody's familiar with, I think there are

different vehicles available to you that can accommodate our street without spending enormous funds that will be required to completely change C Street. I think we ought to be at least thinking in those directions and I realize all the transfer issues. I've certainly been involved in all kinds of transit issues that help fund the transit advocacy group here in town, so I've spent a lot of time thinking of these things. I think one of the problems of the trolley is transfers are more difficult here. I mean, I use mass transit all the time, from the subways in New York, to the T in Boston, Bart in San Francisco, I've used them all. But, I think this system to infrequent user can be intimidating at times, how it works and how you make the changes. At the extent we can make that easier and we live up C Street, we could make a transfer experience from one end of C Street to the other as something that is fun and maybe it's pedestrian. I've spent a lot of time, as you guys have, up at Third Street and I've also spent times at others that have failed, but I think one of the things that we need to keep available is the opportunity to make C Street really live up to its potential and have it be lively so that it becomes experience of someone who wants to get from City College to the other end of C. And, if we're successful at our job, I think we can do that. But, I think we're going to have to look at other alternatives here because it's this location's involved, I don't think we've begun to scratch the surface about that or anything.

Nancy Graham

I would add that even though the emphasis of the presentation is really related to trolley that the actual work itself in the plan is very much related holistically to all the issues on C Street and what kind of façade improvements you need to make to make it walkable, what public improvements. So, it lends itself mostly to the problems of the trolley, but we're looking at it from a holistic picture.

Jennifer LeSar

And, you know, I guess I'll just sort of again, following Fred, sort of rise back up to the highest level, which is to say I'm wholly in support of our plan of C Street. I really like the illustrations of getting the traffic to move all the way through. I absolutely think that C Street will be one of the gems downtown. I don't want us to not think that it won't become a tourist destination, it's not that far from the coast. San Diego's increasingly a tourist destination, especially for those that drive. And I think the Santa Monica Promenade is an example that exceeded everybody's wildest expectations. And so it will be both a local and probably a regional destination if we can do it right, might take 15-20 years.

Jennifer LeSar

I want to again say that we have again and again endorsed the planning efforts here. Sachin you've done a great job of laying out some of the responsibilities for the decisioning and I guess where I want to try and go is to make sure that Nancy re-lay out clearly, begin to lay out some of the budget responsibilities because I think we're perceived as having a lot of money, we're a shining star in the City, but again, we've got

MTS, which has a big budget and other people need to pony up on some of the specifics related to the transportation component.

Nancy Graham

I think if I've tried to do anything in the last year, it's bring the financial reality of the organization home.

Kim Kilkenny

I just want to echo some of the comments that I've heard. Excellent staff report, really good work of valuable information that I've found that I think is moving this forward. I am concerned that we're in the role of paying, it doesn't make any sense, the amenity ... the planning is not responsible for the financing. What my colleagues said relative to identifying the cost and who at the end of the day is going to be paying the capital cost, who at the end of the day is going to pay the operating cost, I think might put us closer together and state the obvious, but for every dollar we put into C Street won't be a dollar that's going to go to North Embarcadero, won't be a dollar that's going to go in the Library, won't be a dollar that's going to go in the parks, not going to be a dollar that's going to go in the Quiet Zone, not going to be a dollar that goes into the minor improvements made all over downtown that Gary reminds us of. So, we have finite resources in the interest of priorities. I think that in the business case, or whatever happens on C Street is an important consideration. We have a source that that was going to give us \$150 million dollars for the underground work on C Street. That would be a different conversation and no longer I hear happening. My second sense is that because we have a system here where you have one entity potentially responsible for capital costs and another entity for operating costs and another entity responsible for planning systemwide and us responsible for C Street, is people are stuck in their own turf and as long as that occurs, I don't think we're going to have the solution that best benefits all parties. I don't know how we get past that, perhaps, I know ULI comes in and brings in experts that look at a problem and bring in their expertise, and maybe that will enhance the dialogue, but I think we've got to get past everybody's entranced interest if we're going to solve the problem. It is an extraordinary difficult problem. Finally, like Fred said, I'm more than a little concerned if we're moving forward with potentially huge capital operating costs, mammoth land use ramifications based upon ridership projections in a program MEIR for downtown San Diego that may or may not be accurate. So, I don't know to the extent in terms of our settlement of our EIR litigation we're going to do, we address the issue of ridership, but it certainly would be folly to make these kinds of decisions based on ridership estimates that perhaps are suspect. So, I hope that we, and correct me if I'm wrong, are we in the position to start to lay out some of these capital costs, compare them to operating costs, compare those to ridership, give everyone who's interested in the process information so that we can make some intelligent decisions?

Nancy Graham

We are starting to do this. And I would add, we are also starting to look at, and are talking to SANDAG and other folks about what kind of grant monies there are out there and get our name on the list because it takes a long time to get this project on the list. So we are already trying to look at other alternative sources of funds, we just don't have a total plan yet.

Kim Kilkenny

And, just one last, sort of technical question. I heard in passing that you have Portland. Portland is somewhat successful system in the downtown and you have Portland pier review. Is that Portland operators? Is that Portland consultants? Is that Portland planners?

Sachin Kalbag

The pier review for the Loop is both. It's the president of the street car there that manages the private company (that manages the street car), that's one person. And the person that actually designed it as well is reviewing our Loop study as well. So there's someone who's actually done a very good job with that. They are different in certain ways -- that's a street car, this is a light rail. But I think they provide a very good insight on how to design a system within that 200-foot block.

Nancy Graham

Harry Mathis of MTS had an idea to repair these old trolley cars and run them in off-peak hours, which are smaller and which you could do two in off-peak hours. They don't have the money or have the money to repair the cars. Maybe we should give them the \$25,000 and finish buying them. Maybe that's something they need to go back to because it's really a peak hour problem and they shouldn't have to design a system and have all those impacts just for peak hour that is an hour here and an hour there. So we need to figure out something that works the bulk of the time. Maybe we should go back and talk to them about their own historic cars.

Teddy Cruz

As we put to rest this issue, the four cars vs. the other options, one question that continues to come back to me is the issue of frequency that was mentioned earlier. Because in reality, the kind of logical situation everywhere in the world is not larger size but higher frequency. Has that been studied?

Nancy Graham

It is being studied and it's part of the issues coming back. The practical problem with that in certain places is that the more frequent you run the cars, it does cause a back up. It causes arms to come down in other locations and the more back up of the cars and, so it has traffic implications. It is being studied and looked at.

Teddy Cruz

A final comment was this issue was looked holistically at this opportunity we have in some sort of transformation of the C Street corridor into this public linear place. More than just the treatment of landscaping that I was suggesting be more specifically looked at, I was actually thinking in the context of also the Third Street Promenade of all their instruments for revenue. Possibly I'm thinking that many of them also exist for linear parks or promenades beginning with a to Third Street Promenade. They have an amazing amount of micro-businesses that are essential to the as well and in my mind it would be great not to really have the vehicular line there on C Street, but to widen of course the space. But in certain instances of land use and the business are maybe there is a kind of insertion of small buildings that can accommodate small businesses. I'm thinking of Third Street Promenade as well. But, anyway, the issue of the economy, the issue of small businesses as part of the vitality spaces would continue to be....