

**7260 News, Spring 1998**

## **MTA Would Kill Little Santa Monica Boulevard**

The full Environmental Impact Report for the proposed Santa Monica Blvd. street widening project will not be issued until sometime this summer. However, some information from the report has been allowed to trickle through.

In meetings with homeowners— most of whom oppose the project— and with business groups, Metropolitan Transit Authority representatives have released some EIR findings about traffic impacts, parking problems, and design goals.

Besides facing intense opposition from Westside residents, the project also suffered a severe blow when Congress lopped off from the pending federal highway bill \$15 million that was intended for the project.

MTA officials have made it clear that of the three proposals studied in the EIR, they favor only the proposal that would eliminate little Santa Monica Blvd. in order to create three east bound lanes on one side of the median and three west bound lanes on the other side. They have apparently rejected the proposal that would make no changes to the boulevard as well as the proposal that would retain little Santa Monica while making modest improvements to the boulevard.

According to preliminary traffic studies, the favored proposal would decrease traffic on Beverly Glen but would add 450+ cars an hour during peak periods to Overland. The studies indicate that the Overland surge would spill over onto four adjacent north-south residential streets: Pros-ser, Pelham, Manning, and Parnell.

The MTA hopes to mitigate some of the problem by instituting traffic calming measures. A median could be placed on Overland adjacent to the Westwood Charter School in order to slow down traffic. Speed humps and chokers might be installed on adjacent streets also to slow traffic.

If construction goes according to plan, MTA officials believe traffic delays, if any, would be minimal. Cars passing through any section that is being worked on would be rerouted onto temporary roads on the median rather than be forced to slow down or to stop.

Most or all of the off street park-ing spaces on the south side that would be lost to the project would be replaced. The MTA hopes to replace ninety of the lost spaces at a cost of \$3 million. The money would be used to purchase land for the parking and to compensate residents of some homes as well as to pay for their moving expenses.

How much the MTA currently has available to finance the \$70 million project, which would extend 2.3 miles from the 405 to the Beverly Hills City limits is uncertain. Two-thirds of the money had been allocated, but then the MTA was struck a potentially

mortal blow. Congress chopped off the \$15 million Santa Monica Blvd. appropriation that was expected to be part the national transportation bill.

The MTA has responded with a lobbying effort in an attempt to have the \$15 million restored to the bill before before it is sent to the President for his signature. At the same time Tract No. 7260 and other project opponents have sent letters to congressional Transportation Committee members urging them not to restore the funds.

Opponents argue that by increasing the boulevard's capacity by 20, the project will add to the gridlock that already exists going east into Beverly Hills, where waits of three and four signals changes at Wilshire and Santa Monica already are common. And they say that the situation is equally bad driving west past the 405, where the number of lanes available decreases.

The \$15 million is critical because if the Santa Monica Boulevard project is not fully funded within the next few years, it will lose some of its current funding due to sunset provisions attached to that funding.

This summer, the MTA plans to hold numerous community meetings to explain the implications of the EIR.