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7260 Continues Fight Against MTA Santa Monica Blvd. Project

The Metropolitan Transit Authority has narrowed down its Santa Monica Boulevard expansion plans to two separate designs.

Both designs would eliminate lit-tie Santa Monica Boulevard as a two way access road.

Both designs are vigorously op-posed by Tract No. 7260.

One design calls for a six lane highway. The MTA says this design would not increase vehicular capacity on the Boulevard. It insists the other design, an eight lane arterial highway, would increase traffic by only twelve per-cent.

Opponents of the plan, however, scoff at the MTA claim. They say that since the second plan would increase the size of the boulevard by close to a third, it would increase traffic anywhere from 20 per-cent to thirty-three per-cent.

The MTA representatives say that both Beverly Hills and the MTA have studied traffic flow in Beverly Hills, and both groups concluded that the additional traffic on Santa Monica Boulevard would not add significantly to the traffic congestion in Beverly Hills nor to the long delays at the signal at Wilshire and Santa Monica.

Opponents respond that the MTA's claims fly in the face of common sense. They say that if traffic capacity is increased, it is impossible not to worsen already existing traffic nightmares.

The MTA also denies that either plan would lead to further congestion when cars driving west pass under the San Diego Freeway. Nevertheless, it does not explain how it would be possible to avoid huge bottlenecks when the four lanes of the reconfigured boulevard narrow down to three lanes during the rush hour and into just two lanes during the rest of the day.

Opponents of the MTA's plans are wary of MTA pronouncements.

They point to the MTA's claims that tunneling for the red line would not cause damage to adjacent residences and businesses Those claims proved to be wildly inaccurate. Opponents of the Santa Monica Boulevard arterial highway insist that the MTA's traffic claims also are wildly inaccurate.

Currently, the 7260 Board has been circulating petitions opposed to the MTA's Santa Monica Boulevard plans. Board members say that ninety-five per-cent of the residents they approach sign the petitions and appear to be well informed about the project. The

other five per-cent, the board members say, has no opinion on the subject and know little if anything about the MTA project.

Earlier this year, the MTA had gone a long way towards addressing the needs of Tract 7260. It had added an overpass at Beverly Glen and Santa Monica so that little Santa Monica from Fox Hills to Overland could be saved.

However, in October, the MTA eliminated the overpass from its plans. As a result, tract residents moving west would no longer be able to use little Santa Monica to enter the tract. Instead, they would have to turn left at the signal at Beverly Glen and drive south. Then they would have to make what could be a dangerous left turn against oncoming traffic at La Grange or Mississippi, in order gain entrance to the tract.

Some of the difficulty could be eliminated if a traffic light were put at one of those streets at Beverly Glen. However, the residents of either street would op-pose the light because it would attract much additional traffic to their street.

Business people along the boulevard also appear overwhelmingly opposed to the project. Many say that their businesses could not survive the construction period. They also fear that the MTA's street parking plans would wreak havoc on their establishments.

The MTA, however, contends that the project during construction would not hurt the businesses because the MTA would keep traffic moving along the boulevard by using the median to detour traffic around the construction.

Opponents say they fear that the median plan would clog traffic and say they are wary about any promises made by the MTA because of the MTA's record of broken promises.

The MTA expects to have its final plan ready for a vote by the MTA board in January. If the Board accepts the plan, it would take almost all of 1997 to complete an Environmental Impact Report.

Should the EIR be approved, 1998 would be spent on the design of the project. Construction would commence in 1999. If the MTA projections are correct, the Santa Monica Boulevard arterial highway would be completed in the year 2000, the year which some predict will also see the end of the world.

(Other organizations opposed to the MTA's plan include Westwood South of Santa Monica, Friends of Westwood, Westwood-Holmby, and the Westside Civic Federation, a consortium of seven-teen homeowners organizations.)