



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: APRIL 11, 2017**

FROM: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT **WARDS: 1, 2, 3, 4, AND 5**

SUBJECT: REVIEW AND PRIORITIZATION OF POTENTIAL RAILROAD GRADE SEPARATIONS ALONG THE BURLINGTON NORTHERN SANTA FE RAILROAD AT JACKSON STREET, MARY STREET, SPRUCE STREET, AND THIRD STREET

ISSUES:

Review of the concept designs and prioritization of the Jackson Street, Mary Street, Spruce Street, and Third Street railroad grade separations along the Burlington Northern Santa Fe line.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. Approve the Third Street/ Burlington Northern Santa Fe line as the top priority railroad grade separation; and
2. Direct the Public Works Department to issue a Request for Proposals to complete the Project Approval and Environmental Document phase of the Third Street grade separation.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On February 9, 2017, the Transportation Committee, with Vice Chair Mac Arthur, and Member Melendrez present and Chair Davis absent, received a report to review and prioritize of potential railroad grade separations (Attachment 1 - Map) along the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railroad (BNSF) at Jackson Street, Mary Street, Spruce Street, and Third Street. The Committee unanimously voted to recommend that the City Council:

1. Approve Third Street along the BNSF line as the top priority railroad grade separation;
2. Adopt a priority for the three remaining grade separations, Spruce Street, Mary Street, and Jackson Street; and
3. Direct the Public Works Department to issue a Request for Proposals to complete the Project Approval and Environmental Document phase of the Third Street grade separation.

BACKGROUND:

Transportation Committee

On June 12, 2014, the Transportation Committee received a report on the prioritization of grade separation projects and unanimously recommended that the City Council prioritize Madison Street, Third Street, Spruce Street, and Jackson Street rail crossings for conceptual grade separation design and future funding opportunities including providing alternative options for Madison Street and noting the importance of gathering input from all Councilmembers.

City Council

On March 17, 2015, the City Council received a report on the prioritization of grade separation projects and continued discussion of the Madison Street, Third Street, Spruce Street and Jackson Street rail crossings and requested staff return with data on all locations including pedestrian, bicycle, and commercial traffic counts.

On May 5, 2015, the City Council received an updated report including the results of the vehicle classification, pedestrian, and bicycle counts and approved the Jackson Street, Mary Street, Spruce Street and Third Street rail crossings for conceptual grade separation design and future funding opportunities.

DISCUSSION:

Jackson Street/BNSF

Two alternatives are presented for a grade separation at Jackson Street (Attachments 2 and 3). Both alternatives are for an underpass and propose to lower Jackson Street below the railroad tracks.

Alternative 1 maintains a straight alignment on Jackson Street (similar to the Streeter Avenue underpass); and

Alternative 2 realigns Jackson Street to the south (similar to the Magnolia Avenue underpass).

Both alternatives will be evaluated in detail during the next phase of engineering design, Project Approval and Environmental Documents (PA&ED). The estimated cost for a railroad grade separation at Jackson Street is \$35 million.

Mary Street/BNSF

Two alternatives are presented for a grade separation at Mary Street (Attachments 4 and 5). Both alternatives are for an underpass and propose to lower Mary Street below the railroad tracks.

Alternative 1 maintains a straight alignment; and

Alternative 2 will realign Mary Street to the north.

Both alternatives will be evaluated in detail during a subsequent PA&ED phase. The estimated cost for a railroad grade separation at Mary Street is \$35 million.

Spruce Street/BNSF

Two alternatives are presented for a grade separation at Spruce Street (Attachments 6 and 7).

Alternative 1 is for a railroad overpass with Spruce Street being raised to go over the railroad tracks. Frontage roads (similar to Columbia Avenue overpass) will be required to maintain access to Kansas Avenue (east). Through traffic on E. La Cadena Drive and Kansas Avenue (west) will be maintained under the proposed overpass, however access to Spruce Street will be eliminated; and

Alternative 2 is for a railroad underpass with Spruce Street being lowered to go under the railroad tracks.

Both alternatives will be evaluated in detail during a subsequent PA&ED phase. The estimated cost for a railroad grade separation at Spruce Street is \$50 million.

Third Street/BNSF

In 2006, the Public Works Department began the preliminary engineering for the Third Street grade separation project. In 2007, the State allocated \$17.5 million in Proposition 1B funding under the Trade Corridor Improvement Fund for the project. Also, in the same year, the City through Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC) secured \$7 million in federal funds for the project.

By February of 2011, the design of the project had been narrowed to one alternative (Attachment 8). However, the project had become increasingly costly due to the railroad's need to maintain full track capacity during construction, impacts on adjacent properties and proximity to the Riverside Canal and 91 Freeway. Additionally, due to the poor economy, the likelihood of securing the \$15.7 million in unsecured funds to complete construction and meet the Trade Corridor Improvement Fund deadline of December 2013 had become extremely unlikely. Therefore, on February 15, 2011, the City Council approved placing the project on-hold and redirecting financial and personnel resources allocated to the Third Street grade separation to the BNSF quiet zone project.

Subsequently, RCTC reprogrammed the \$7 million in federal funds for the Third Street grade separation project to the BNSF quiet zone. Additionally, RCTC reprogrammed \$7.7 million in unused 1988 Measure A Highway and Commuter Rail funds from the La Sierra Avenue/State Route 91 and Van Buren Boulevard/State Route 91 Interchange projects to the BNSF quiet zone project, making the latter project fully funded.

The estimated cost for a railroad grade separation at Third Street is \$45 million.

Staff Analysis

Based on a review of past City Council actions; at-grade crossing data such as train counts, traffic counts including school and transit buses, traffic delays, and accidents history; RCTC ranking; freeway access; cost; and funding potential; the Public Works Department recommends Third Street as the top ranked grade separation.

Funding

Although funding for additional grade separations is now very limited, it remains a top legislative priority for the City and RCTC. In April 2016, RCTC submitted an application to the California State Transportation Agency Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program for Cap and Trade grant funding to implement RCTC's Metrolink and Amtrak Grade Separations project, which included the Third Street grade crossing. A total of 41 applications for funding from around the State were submitted for consideration. In August 2016, the California State Transportation Agency announced 14 recipients for the Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program grants which did not include RCTC. Currently, RCTC is working with the Southern California Association of Governments to prioritize critical urban freight corridors, including grade separations. Priority projects that are identified, which includes Third Street, may be submitted for future funding opportunities.

Currently, Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG) is in the process of updating the Transportation Uniform Mitigation Fee (TUMF) Nexus Study which is expected to be completed and approved by June 2017. The TUMF Network (which is a component of the Nexus Study) includes the Adams Street, Madison Street, and Chicago Avenue grade separations. Per discussions with staff from WRCOG if none of the aforementioned grade separations are top City priorities, they can be removed from the existing TUMF Network and replaced with other City top priorities provided they meet the inclusion criteria outlined in the TUMF Nexus Study. The Third Street rail crossing is the only location that meets this criteria since the rail crossing is located on an arterial road that is already in the existing TUMF Network.

Late last year, the Public Works Department requested WRCOG to replace the Chicago Avenue grade separation with the Third Street grade separation, due to completion of Columbia and Iowa Avenue grade separations in recent years, both of which provide direct freeway access. In addition, WRCOG has programmed \$1.5 million in TUMF funds into the draft 2017 Northwest Zone 5-Year Transportation Improvement Program to complete the preliminary engineering and environmental clearance of Third Street grade separation as well as an additional \$2.5 million for final engineering. The 2017 Northwest Zone 5-Year Transportation Improvement Program is expected to be approved by WRCOG's Executive Committee by June 2017.

Since the great recession, much emphasis has been placed on funding projects that are "shovel ready". Although a significant investment in engineering design fees and right-of-way acquisition costs are required to make a project shovel ready, the City's strategy of prioritizing and designing projects has in the past proven effective in securing funding for these projects.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no impact to the General Fund associated with this report. With the anticipated allocation of the TUMF funds, sufficient funds will be available to complete the PA&ED phase of the Third Street grade separation.

Prepared by: Kris Martinez, Public Works Director
Certified as to
availability of funds: Scott G. Miller, PhD, Chief Financial Officer/City Treasurer
Approved by: Al Zelinka, FAICP, Assistant City Manager
Approved as to form: Gary G. Geuss, City Attorney

Concurs with:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Chris MacArthur", written in black ink. The signature is positioned above a horizontal line.

Chris MacArthur, Vice Chair
Transportation Committee

Attachments:

1. Grade Separation Map
2. Jackson Street/BNSF Alternative 1
3. Jackson Street/BNSF Alternative 2
4. Mary Street/BNSF Alternative 1
5. Mary Street/BNSF Alternative 2
6. Spruce Street/BNSF Alternative 1
7. Spruce Street/BNSF Alternative 2
8. Third Street/BNSF Preferred Alternative
9. Presentation