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## NEWS

### Speaking Out on the Streetcar

#### *Metro Hears Ideas and Concerns About Project at Downtown Meeting*

by **Richard Guzmán**, City Editor

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DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES - While Downtown denizens won't ride a \$125 million streetcar for at least four years, plenty of people already have an opinion about where it should go and who should pay for it. Not surprisingly, they are ready to share their thoughts.

On Tuesday, May 17, about 150 people showed up for a public meeting to discuss possible routes, the price tag and other issues of the project proposed by 14th District City Councilman José Huizar. The event, organized by Metro, took place at Broadway's Los Angeles Theatre.

"The big thing is that there was a lot of positive support for this project," said Metro Planning Director Robin Blair after the evening event. "For the most part people raised pretty legitimate issues."

Metro officials did not answer questions during the public comment portion of the meeting, which followed a one-hour open house. Instead, they heard the opinions from about 10 people who filled out speaker cards.

Metro representatives were scattered throughout the theater during the open house segment, answering questions from those who attended (Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard, a crucial ally for federal funding, was in the crowd). Blair said that after another meeting in June, Metro officials will consider the public input as they bring a suggested final route to the Metro Board. That is expected to occur in July.

Tracey Chavira, director of government and member relations for the Central City Association, which represents hundreds of Downtown businesses, spoke during the public comment period. She said that while the CCA supports the concept of a streetcar, they have concerns about the route and costs.

Officials with Los Angeles Streetcar Inc., the nonprofit Huizar established to oversee the project, are currently exploring a proposal to have Downtown residential and commercial property owners along the route pay for more than half of the project via a special tax.

"Our concern is the assessment," Chavira said. "Given the economic climate, more attention should be given to a balanced assessment formula that does not place most of the financial burden on property owners."

#### Map Check

The streetcar was first announced about three years ago as the lynchpin of Huizar's Bringing Back Broadway initiative. Current plans call for the project to open in 2015.

The Los Angeles Theatre meeting is one of several steps that Metro, which is leading the project's environmental analysis, is taking in order to qualify the streetcar for federal funding. LASI officials hope the federal government will cover about half of the cost.

LASI staff initially anticipated the project connecting the Music Center on Grand Avenue with the Convention Center and L.A. Live, and having Broadway as the principal southbound spine. Recently, Metro has indicated that the route may have to be expanded so that the project can include a maintenance facility. Blair has said the streetcar would likely have to extend north through Chinatown or south toward Washington Boulevard.

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Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard checks out a map of a possible route for the Downtown streetcar. She attended a meeting on the project this week at the Los Angeles Theatre. Photo by Gary Leonard.

On Tuesday, the various route options were placed on large maps throughout the lobby. They were broken down into three segments with several alignment possibilities in each.

Segment A consists of routes north of Fifth Street. Concerns identified with the path include the steep grade on Grand Avenue and First Street and how the streetcar would coordinate with the Regional Connector, a \$1.4 billion Metro project that will link several light rail lines.

In Segment B, between Fifth and Ninth streets, Broadway is the assumed southbound track, while Hill and Olive streets are primary options for going north.

In Segment C, which covers the area south of Ninth Street, a main question is whether to extend the route to 11th Street or all the way to Pico Boulevard.

Those who would use the project had plenty to say.

"The main thing I'm concerned about is on the A segment," said Nathan Griffin, a Boyle Heights resident. "It needs to go all the way to Union Station and Olvera Street."

Downtown resident Joe Barber, an economist, said that while he is concerned about the cost, he is satisfied with many of the route options. However, he believes including Union Station is crucial in getting people from outside of Downtown to use the streetcar.

"I think that Union Station is important if you're going to get people coming in from the suburbs," he said. "I think it shouldn't be ignored and I think the Convention Center should be included as well."

Hollywood resident Alexander Friedman said that the costs of the streetcar are worth it, and noted how similar projects have spurred development in other cities.

"Streetcars bring people together," he said. "You can go to Portland or Seattle and you'll see how these downtown areas have been revitalized thanks to the streetcar service."

The date and location of the next meeting will be announced shortly.

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