



DESIGN OF THE MARMION WAY CORRIDOR - METRO GOLD LINE LIGHT RAIL PROJECT

LOS ANGELES COUNTY METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION AUTHORITY

Objective

During the 1990s, the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) was faced with the challenge of helping an urban, residential community plan for the addition of light rail transit through their neighborhood. The planned mile-long Marmion Way Corridor segment of the Metro Gold Line Light Rail Transit Project was to be located in the City of Los Angeles' Historic Preservation Overlay Zone within Highland Park. The area was contained within a narrow, 60-foot right-of-way and posed seemingly insurmountable engineering and implementation challenges. The area consisted of alleyways at mid-block, close proximity between the rail line and homes, garages at the right-of-way line, kids playing, and narrow driveways. The initial design project contained features that clearly would have had negative impacts on the community. However, Metro recognized that it was essential to the fabric of the community that any design result in a safe, historically compatible, and neighborhood-friendly environment that also would ensure the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and motor vehicles.



Before Project



After Project

Approach

Metro responded by implementing an urban-design-focused community involvement process for the purpose of bringing the community and agency to a common understanding and shared vision of the proposed transitway. This cooperative, partnership-based approach allowed Metro to overcome both the design and social challenges while protecting the safety and character of the community. General consensus among the Highland Park community, Metro, and the City of Los Angeles was achieved. This cooperative relationship has spanned several years and has resulted in many positive impacts on the community. Innovative approaches included:

- Recognizing the importance of the community's concerns, including those of low-income residents, in the face of original Gold Line design features that clearly impacted the community;
- Creating a street-running system through a residential neighborhood, rather than a walled transitway that would have physically divided the community;
- Working with the neighborhood to provide high-quality and safe pedestrian and bicycle facilities along the corridor;
- Developing a transitway design responsive to the neighborhood's historical Arts and Crafts Era architectural character; and
- Allowing both the civil and system designs of the transitway to become compatible with these other human and neighborhood needs, rather than simply focusing on engineering efficiency.

Human and neighborhood needs were a significant issue in the development of this project. The original operating speed proposed for the light rail vehicles would have required street closures, increased property taxes, railroad crossing gates with at-grade crossings, increased noise impacts resulting from train horns and bells, and a completely walled-off transitway. Metro, the California Public Utility Commission, and the City of Los Angeles worked together and agreed to reduce the light rail vehicle operating speed from a maximum speed of 40 mph to 20 mph. The reduced speed allowed for system features that were more compatible with the safety needs of the neighborhood's residents, such as clear pedestrian crossings and signal pre-emption at all existing at-grade crossings.

Outcome

There are now facilities for pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobiles. Emergency vehicles can access all residences and other buildings along Marmion Way. Mid-block alleyway access has been maintained through the right-of-way acquisition and construction processes. The transitway is no longer an exclusive right-of-way (as originally designed), but is now street-running, allowing for shared use by motor vehicles as necessary. Additionally, the Marmion Way Corridor has new sidewalks where none were present prior to the Gold Line's construction. Lighting along Marmion Way, located on the Gold Line's catenary poles, has been added, with features that adequately illuminate the transitway, street, and sidewalks while protecting private residences from nighttime glare.

The new transitway, in operation since July 2003, has become an integral part of the local historic district and the residential neighborhood. The manner in which the public agencies responsible for the Gold Line's planning, design, and operation responded to the community's concerns and efforts to preserve the integrity of this historic neighborhood without compromising safety is commendable.

