

Chapter 2 Project Description

2.1 Introduction

This section presents the description of the proposed Wilshire Bus Rapid Transit Project (proposed project), the objectives of the proposed project, a description of the existing environment within the proposed project, a description of surrounding land uses, and an estimated time line for construction of the project.

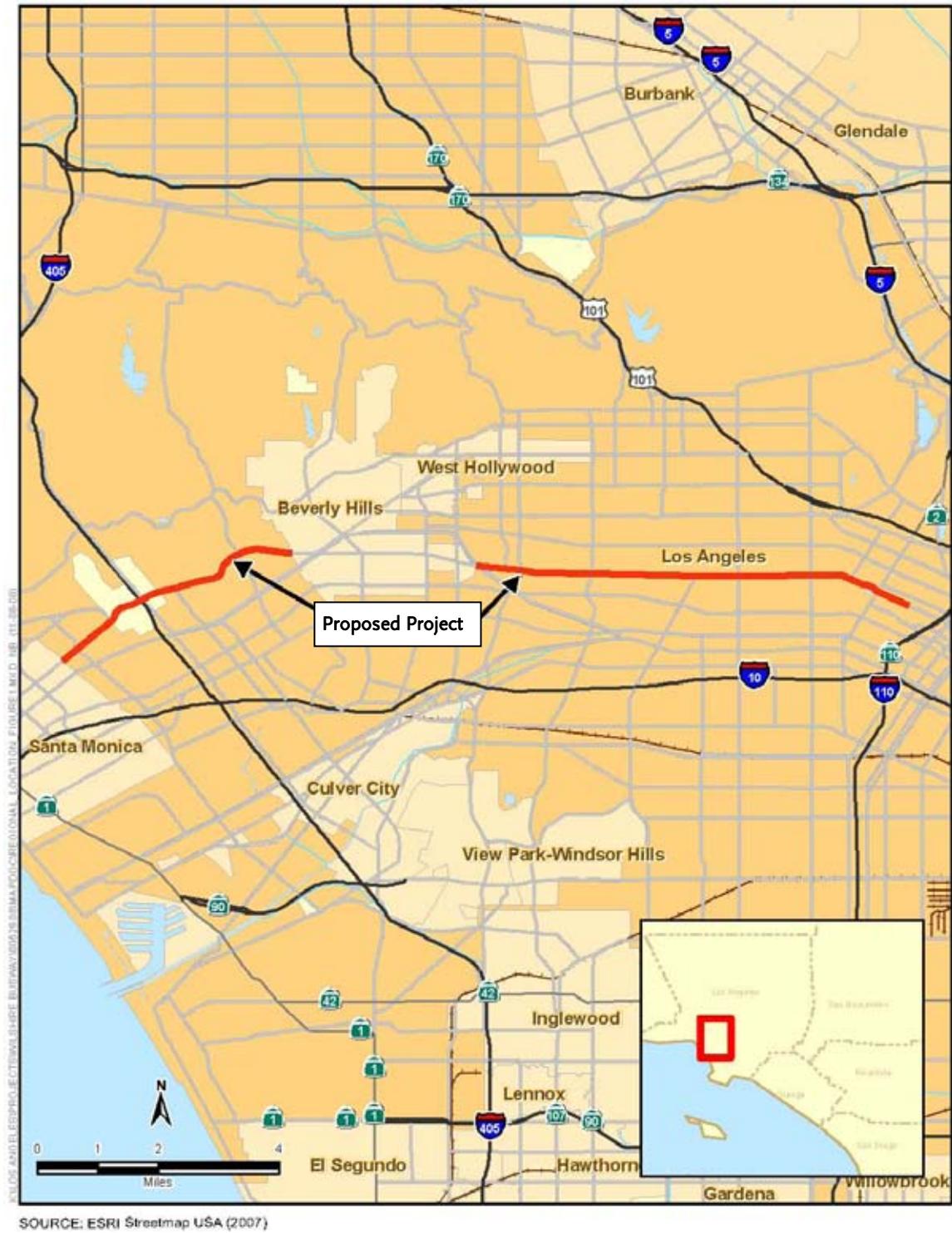
2.2 Project Location

Wilshire Boulevard, the proposed project corridor, traverses five community plan areas within the City of Los Angeles. The community plan areas that encompass the proposed project include Westlake, Wilshire, Westwood, West Los Angeles, and Brentwood-Pacific Palisades. The proposed project runs through the densely populated mid-western portion of the City of Los Angeles, from the western edge of downtown at Valencia Street to the east, and to the eastern boundary of the City of Santa Monica at Centinela Avenue to the west (Figure 2-1). The proposed project spans approximately 9.9 miles, excluding the City of Beverly Hills. The Wilshire corridor is a densely populated, highly developed inner urban region with extensive commercial and nearby residential uses. Regional access to the Wilshire corridor is provided by a large number of intersecting streets including Alvarado Street, Hoover Street, Vermont Avenue, Western Avenue, Crenshaw Boulevard, Highland Avenue, La Brea Avenue, Fairfax Avenue, San Vicente Boulevard, La Cienega Boulevard, Robertson Boulevard, Santa Monica Boulevard, Beverly Glen Boulevard, Westwood Boulevard, Overland Avenue, Sepulveda Boulevard, the San Diego Freeway (Interstate 405), and Centinela Avenue.

2.3 Project History and Background

In March 2004, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT) and LACMTA implemented peak period bus lanes along a one-mile segment of Wilshire Boulevard between Centinela Avenue and Federal Avenue in West Los Angeles, as part of a Bus Lane Demonstration Project. The purpose of this demonstration project was to test whether curbside, exclusive bus lanes operating in the a.m. and p.m. peak periods would significantly improve bus travel speeds and service on Wilshire Boulevard. This demonstration project resulted in improvements in bus speeds and reliability through the one-mile segment. Before and after data analysis indicated that this demonstration project resulted in a 14 percent bus speed improvement and up to a 32 percent improvement in bus schedule reliability.

Figure 2-1. Regional Location



In November 2006, LACMTA and LADOT began studying the feasibility of implementing end-to-end bus lanes on Wilshire Boulevard between downtown Los Angeles and the City of Santa Monica. The City of Los Angeles and LACMTA began the Wilshire Bus Speed Improvement Study. Three options were developed by LADOT, which are as follows:

- Peak period end-to-end bus lanes, which consists of the conversion of Wilshire Boulevard curb lanes from mixed flow to bus and right-turn only, and implementation of a number of engineering enhancements, including increased bus signal priority, bus stop relocations, pavement repair, and minor on-street parking space removal to improve bus speeds, schedule reliability, and overall bus travel times.
- All day mini bus lanes, which consist of implementation of “mini” bus lanes in selected segments, construction of a number of minor street improvements, and implementation of the engineering enhancements identified above.
- Implementation of engineering enhancements (e.g., traffic signal modifications/Transit Priority System) only.

In May 2007, the Los Angeles City Council was presented with the above options and made a decision to pursue the first option of constructing peak period end-to-end bus lanes, which clearly met the corridor objectives to reduce bus congestion, improve passenger travel times and average bus speeds, minimize parking space removal, and improve the mode shift from automobile to bus.

In August 2007, the demonstration project was temporarily suspended by the Los Angeles City Council until the one-mile segment could be integrated into a larger bus lane project, such as the proposed project or Alternative A.

In September 2007, LACMTA and the City of Los Angeles submitted a “Very Small Starts” funding application to the FTA for the Wilshire BRT Project. Subsequently, in December 2007, FTA approved LACMTA’s request to initiate Project Development activities for the proposed project.

2.4 Project Goals and Objectives/Purpose and Need

Wilshire Boulevard is the most heavily used transit corridor in the County of Los Angeles, with over 80,000 bus boardings taking place along the corridor each weekday. In addition to being the most heavily used transit corridor in the County, Wilshire Boulevard has the distinction of having some of the highest average daily traffic (ADT) volumes in the City of Los Angeles. Approximately 110,000 automobiles pass through the intersections of Westwood Boulevard, Gayley Avenue, and Veteran Avenue each weekday in the Westwood area. While ADT volumes are lower along the eastern portion of the project area (e.g., the ADT volume at Fairfax Avenue is 62,000), the corridor’s average ADT volume is estimated at 80,000. Moreover, Wilshire Boulevard is an important strategic BRT corridor due to the following: (1) the

Mid-City/Westside segment of Wilshire Boulevard is a highly significant origin and/or destination point for trips in southern California, especially for transit trips, over 41% of which either originate or terminate in the Wilshire corridor; (2) the Wilshire corridor has a significantly higher transit mode split (20%) than the City of Los Angeles as a whole (8%), and the trend is expected to increase from nearly 2.5 to 2.8 times the City mode split; and (3) the Wilshire corridor currently has very high internal trip retention (over half of all trips begin and end in the corridor), and despite growth in regional trips, the corridor is expected to maintain these high internal trip retention percentages.

With increasing ADT volumes on Wilshire Boulevard, demands for viable alternatives to the automobile have increased as congestion continues to slow automobile travel. This same congestion also slows buses, increasing travel time, and reducing schedule reliability for transit customers, while increasing operating costs for Metro. Average bus speeds, along with automobile speeds, have declined steadily over the past 20 years. The Wilshire BRT Project is intended to further improve bus passenger travel times, service reliability, ridership of the existing Wilshire BRT system, and encourage a shift from automobile use to public transit.

Metro's Metro Rapid Program provides fast, frequent regional bus service throughout Los Angeles County. Key features of Metro Rapid include simple route layouts, frequent service, fewer stops, low-floor buses to facilitate boarding and alighting, color-coded buses and stations, and traffic signal priority

The program's success has garnered national acclaim from both the federal government and major transit providers. Launched in June 2000, the Wilshire/Whittier Metro Rapid Line 720 was one of the first two Metro Rapid Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines to be implemented in Los Angeles County. It demonstrated that by implementing a few key attributes as mentioned above, passenger travel times could be reduced by as much as 29% and ridership increased by as much as 40%.

Metro Rapid Line 720 currently serves Wilshire Boulevard from 4:00 a.m. to 1:00 a.m. weekdays, with service every 3 to 4 minutes during the peak hours. There are currently 51 buses operating during the peak periods on Metro Rapid Line 720. Wilshire Boulevard is also served by Local Line 20 and Metro Rapid Express Line 920. Local Line 20 operates 24 hours a day with service every 6 minutes during the peak hours, and up to 29 peak buses. Metro Rapid Express Line 920 operates every 6 to 7 minutes during the weekday peak hours only. The same level of service along Wilshire Boulevard is planned post implementation of the Wilshire BRT project.

Construction of the proposed Wilshire BRT project would not only assure the corridor's immediate and long-term success as a BRT facility but would further enhance all transit services along Wilshire Boulevard. When implemented, bus passenger travel times are expected to further improve by an average of 24%. Average Metro Rapid bus speeds are projected to increase by an average of nearly 32%. Up to a 10% mode shift from mixed flow to bus use is projected.

The goals and objectives for the project have been developed from the transportation and land use goals and objectives of local and regional agencies, including the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), who serves as the regional Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), and are consistent with the other transit improvements currently planned in Los Angeles County. The following is a list of general project goals and objectives that have been developed for the proposed project:

- Improve bus passenger travel times by allowing buses to travel in dedicated peak-period bus lanes for the majority of the alignment between Valencia Street to the east and Centinela Avenue to the west;
- Improve bus service reliability by separating buses from the already high levels of corridor traffic congestion;
- Improve traffic flow along Wilshire Boulevard;
- Repave the curb lanes along damaged portions of Wilshire Boulevard to allow their effective use by buses during peak periods and by both buses and automobiles during non-peak periods;
- Encourage shift from automobile use to public transit by continuing to attract new transit riders;
- Improve air quality in Los Angeles County with the reduction in mobile source emissions resulting from a mode shift from automobile use to bus use; and
- Minimize impacts to existing on-street parking.

2.5 Overview of Surrounding Land Uses and Environmental Setting

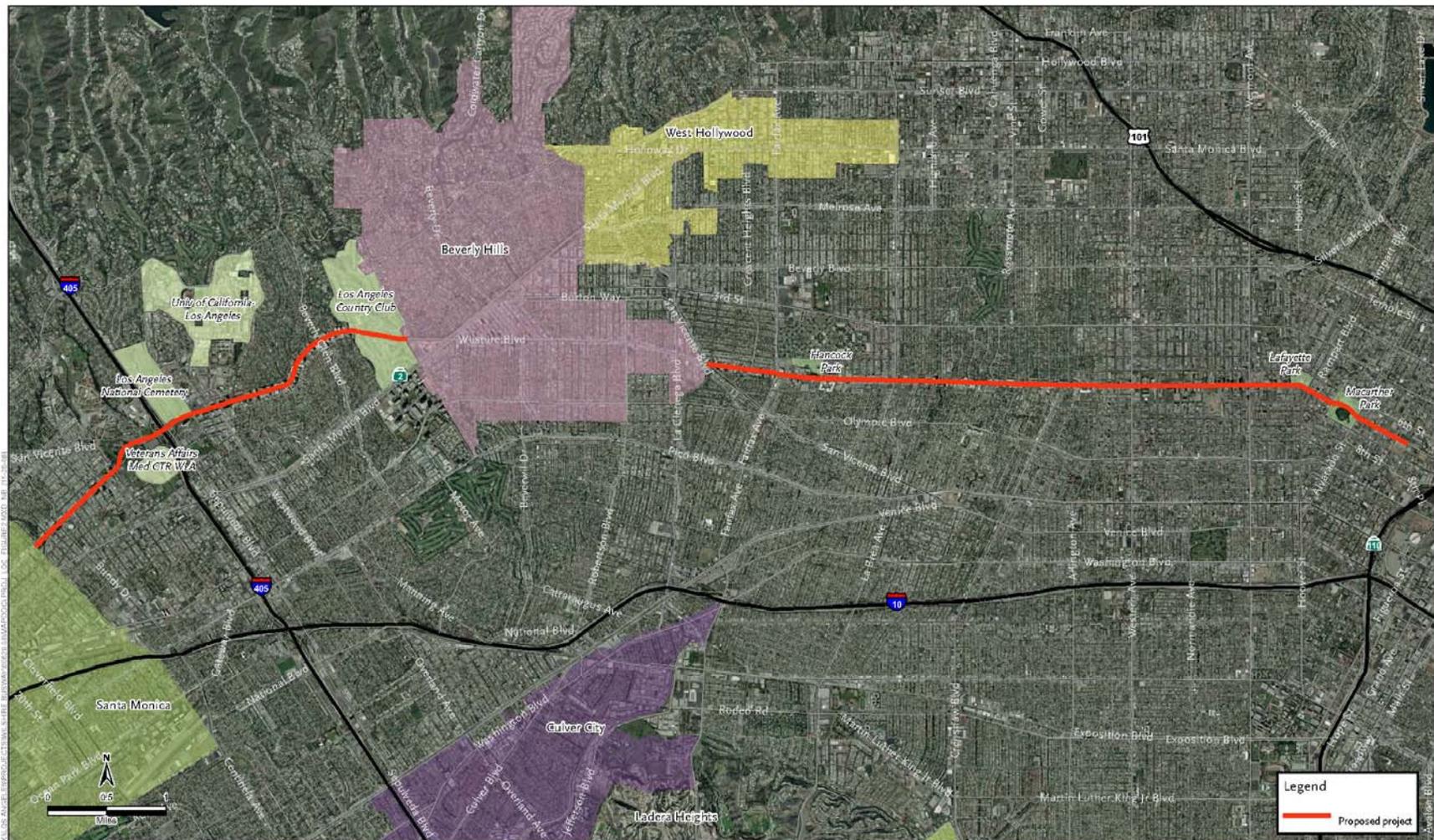
2.5.1 Project Corridor

Wilshire Boulevard is a densely developed corridor with commercial and residential development along both sides of the street. Figure 2-2 shows the project alignment from Valencia Street on the east to Centinela Avenue on the west. Figure 2-3 presents the community plan area boundaries along the proposed project.

The segment of the Wilshire corridor within the Westlake Community Plan Area is mainly commercial and includes office and retail (small businesses and strip malls), interspersed with some residential uses, parking lots and community facilities, including MacArthur Park and Lafayette Park. This segment also consists of a mix of mid-rise (8-10 stories) and low-rise buildings.

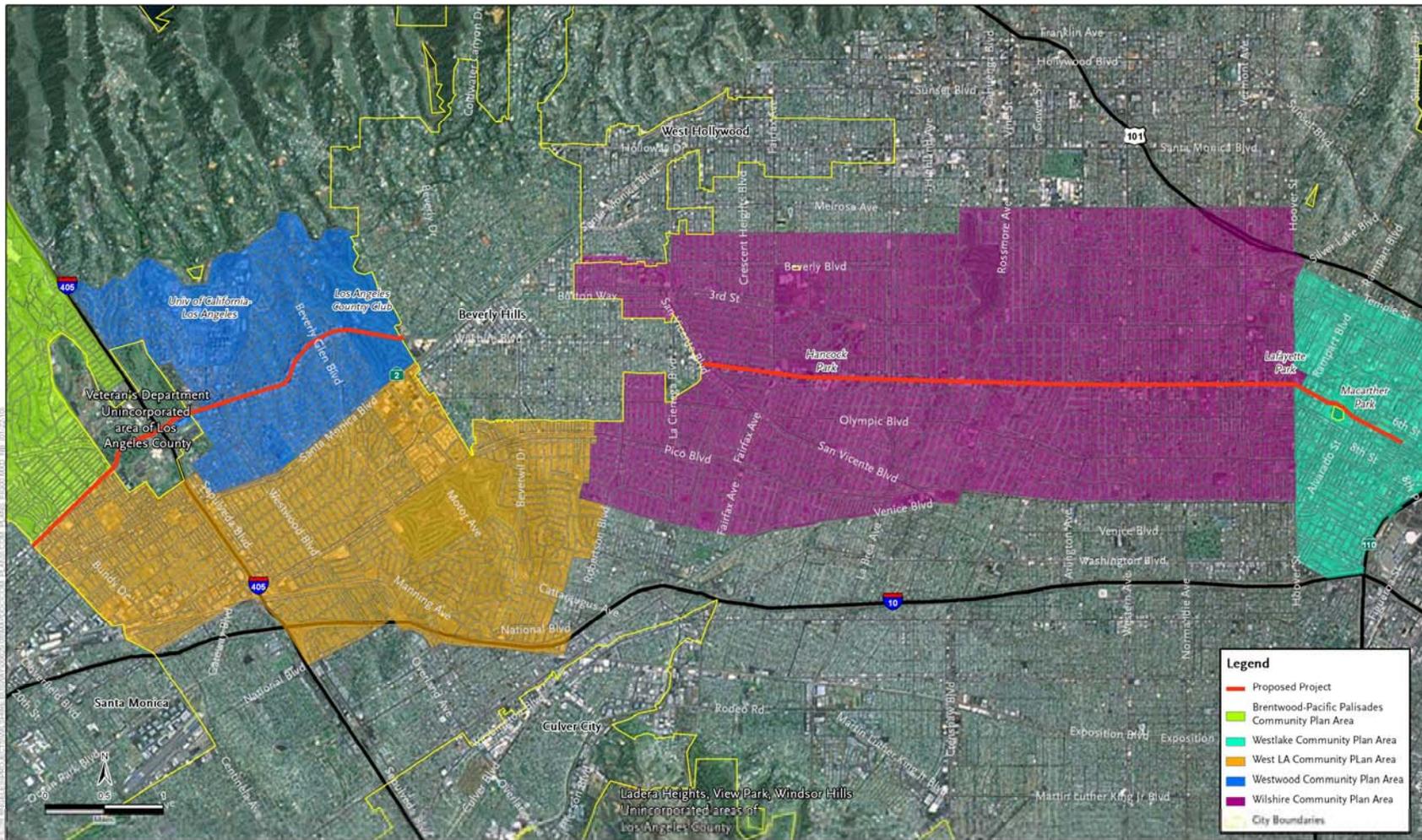
In the Wilshire Community Plan Area, a long, narrow corridor of commercial activity exists along Wilshire Boulevard. The commercial activities along this corridor are comprised of professional offices and retail (strip mall and small

Figure 2-2. Project Vicinity



SOURCE: ESRI Streetmap USA (2007), ESRI USA Imagery (2006)

Figure 2-3. Jurisdictional Boundaries of Community Planning Areas



SOURCE: ESRI (2000), City of LA GIS (2010)

businesses), interspersed with a few multi-family residential areas. Additionally, the corridor includes public attractions such as Museum Row, Hancock Park, and the La Brea Tar Pits. The structures fronting Wilshire Boulevard contain numerous high-rise (20 stories) and mid-rise (8-10 stories) office buildings.

The segment of the Wilshire corridor within the Westwood Community Plan Area consists of multiple-family housing, both high-medium and medium density residential. High-rise condominium towers are located along Wilshire Boulevard between the Los Angeles Country Club and Malcolm Avenue along Wilshire Boulevard. Near Westwood Boulevard, the high-rise office corridor along Wilshire Boulevard serves as a regional business center with financial institutions and corporate headquarters.

The segment of the Wilshire corridor within the West Los Angeles Community Plan Area consists of commercial land uses, primarily strip mall development. The majority of commercial facilities are either small-scale and free standing or mini-mall type buildings designed to primarily serve local neighborhoods. The Los Angeles Veterans Administration and Hospital Complex and the Los Angeles National Cemetery are located to the south and north of this segment of the corridor, respectively.

Wilshire Boulevard is under the jurisdiction of the City of Los Angeles throughout most of the corridor (approximately 9.1 miles). Adjacent to the Veteran's Administration facilities between Veteran Avenue and Federal Avenue (approximately 0.8 mile), Wilshire Boulevard is under the jurisdiction of Los Angeles County. Approximately 2.6 miles of Wilshire Boulevard are under the jurisdiction of the City of Beverly Hills, between San Vicente Boulevard and just to the west of North Whittier Drive. This portion of Wilshire Boulevard is not part of the project. Similarly, the proposed project ends at the eastern edge of the City of Santa Monica and does not include any portion of Wilshire Boulevard west of Centinela Avenue.

2.6 Project Description

A number of general improvements are required as part of the proposed project. These general improvements include restriping of traffic lanes, as necessary; conversion of existing curb lanes to bus lanes in each direction during peak periods; upgrade of the existing transit signal priority system; selective street widening; reconstruction/resurfacing of curb lanes in select areas; and, installation of traffic/transit signage and pavement markings, as necessary, to implement dedicated peak period bus lanes.

A variety of activities are proposed along the entire length of the proposed project within the City's boundaries (approximately 9.1 miles). Most of the existing curb lanes on Wilshire Boulevard in the City of Los Angeles would be "converted" to a bus and right-turn only operation in the peak periods (7 a.m. to 9 a.m. and 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.) on weekdays. In these segments, the curb lanes would be repaired or reconstructed, where necessary, and restriped and signed as peak period bus lanes. In other areas, curbside bus lanes would be added as new lanes to Wilshire Boulevard by widening or with the removal of jut-outs.

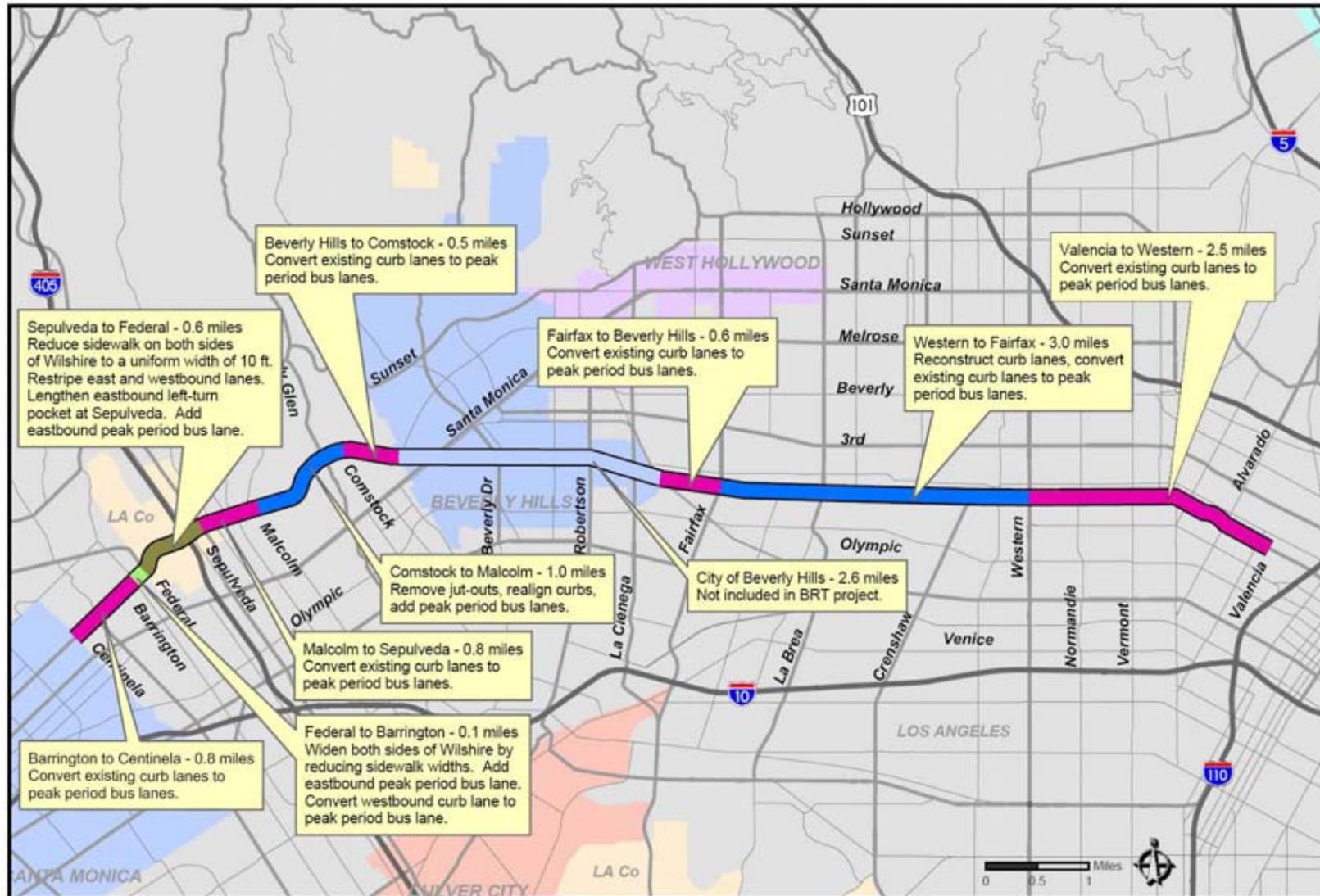
Upgrades to the transit signal priority system would also be implemented, including (1) addition of bus signal priority at intersections with near-side bus stops (a recently developed and successfully tested concept), (2) increase in maximum available time for transit signal priority from 10 percent to 15 percent of the traffic signal cycle at minor intersections, and (3) reduction in the number of traffic signal recovery cycles from two to one at key intersections along the corridor.

A portion of the proposed project is under County jurisdiction, between Veteran Avenue and Federal Avenue (approximately 0.8 mile) near the Veterans Administration facilities. Key elements of the County's project scope include widening Wilshire Boulevard between Bonsall Avenue and Federal Avenue, reduction of adjacent sidewalks to a uniform width, traffic lane restriping, adjustments to geometrics and traffic signals, signage and markings, and a 470-foot extension of an eastbound left-turn pocket at Sepulveda Boulevard.

Geographically, the key elements of the proposed project can be discussed based upon specific segments of the 9.9-mile Wilshire Boulevard corridor under consideration. These improvements are presented in Figure 2-4, which shows the different segments of Wilshire Boulevard between Valencia Street to the east and Centinela Avenue to the west, excluding the portion in the City of Beverly Hills. Proposed in both the eastbound and westbound directions, from east to west, these project segments can be summarized as follows:

- From Valencia Street to Western Avenue (approximately 2.5 miles), existing curb lanes would be converted to peak period bus lanes.
- From Western Avenue to Fairfax Avenue (approximately 3.0 miles), curb lanes would be reconstructed/resurfaced and converted to peak period bus lanes. The curb lanes in this segment have deteriorated to the point that both buses and vehicles seldom use the lanes because of extreme rough and uneven pavement conditions. Reconstruction of the roadway base (below the pavement surface) and curb and gutters, where damaged, would not only allow buses to consistently use the curb lanes but also improve the traffic capacity of the two adjacent lanes (in each direction) by moving buses from the curb-adjacent lanes to the curb lanes, thereby improving both the vehicular and transit levels of service in this segment.
- From Fairfax Avenue to the Beverly Hills city limits at the intersection of San Vicente Boulevard and Wilshire Boulevard (approximately 0.6 mile), existing curb lanes would be converted to peak period bus lanes. The lanes in this segment need only minor surface repairs.
- Within the Beverly Hills city limits (2.6 miles), no bus lanes would be implemented.
- From the Beverly Hills city limits, west of the intersection of Wilshire Boulevard and Santa Monica Boulevard, to Comstock Avenue (approximately 0.5 mile), existing curb lanes would be converted to peak period bus lanes.

Figure 2-4. Proposed Project Plan



Source: LACMTA, 2010.

- From Comstock Avenue to Malcolm Avenue (approximately 1.0 mile), various curb improvements, including jut-out removal and realignment of curbs, would be necessary. This would allow the realignment of curbs to create new curb lanes, thereby adding peak period bus lanes. A number of parking spaces would be removed in this segment as a result of the removal of the curb jut-outs.
- From Malcolm Avenue to Sepulveda Boulevard (approximately 0.8 mile), existing curb lanes would be converted to peak period bus lanes.
- From Sepulveda Boulevard to Bonsall Avenue (approximately 0.2 mile), no bus lanes would be implemented. However, at Sepulveda Boulevard, the eastbound left-turn pocket would be lengthened by approximately 470 feet to accommodate a greater number of vehicles that are currently queued in the No. 1 eastbound traffic lane, resulting in full use of the No. 1 lane for through traffic movements.
- From Bonsall Avenue to Federal Avenue (approximately 0.4 mile), in order to accommodate an eastbound peak period bus lane, the sidewalk widths on both sides of Wilshire Boulevard would be reduced to a uniform width. Both eastbound and westbound lanes would be restriped. Wilshire Boulevard between Interstate 405 and Federal Avenue is bordered by the Veterans Administration (VA) property. The sidewalk widths on both sides of Wilshire Boulevard in this segment vary between 10 and 15 feet.
- From Federal Avenue to Barrington Avenue (approximately 0.1 mile), both sides of Wilshire Boulevard would be widened by reducing the sidewalk widths on the north and south sides, allowing restriping of the street and creation of a new eastbound peak period bus lane and conversion of the existing westbound curb lane to a peak period bus lane. The intersection of Wilshire Boulevard and Federal Avenue is extremely congested in the eastbound direction. The widening of this two-block segment would allow buses to pass safely and quickly through the intersection of Wilshire Boulevard and Federal Avenue and provide a contiguous eastbound bus lane from Centinela Avenue to Bonsall Avenue.
- From Barrington Avenue to Centinela Avenue (approximately 0.8 mile), existing curb lanes would be converted to peak period bus lanes.

2.7 Estimated Construction Schedule

Construction of the proposed project could possibly begin in early 2011 and take approximately two years to implement all the proposed improvements.

2.8 Approvals

The proposed project would need certification of this EIR by LACMTA's Board of Directors, and issuance of a Finding of No Significant Impact by the FTA. Final design plans would require approval by the following agencies:

- Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority – Approval of project scope and funding;
- City of Los Angeles Department of Transportation – Approval of traffic signal/transit priority system improvements and street restriping plans;
- City of Los Angeles Bureau of Engineering (LABOE) – Approval of all engineering drawings and street widening plans;
- City of Los Angeles Bureau of Street Services (LABOS) – Approval of street reconstruction plans;
- Los Angeles County Department of Public Works – Approval of all engineering drawings and street widening plans; and
- Other ancillary approvals and permits as may be required.