

Decision 98-12-020 December 3, 1998

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION OF THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA

In the Matter of the Application of the City of)
 Los Angeles to construct one public at-grade)
 railroad crossing at Mason Avenue across the)
 Los Angeles County Metropolitan)
 Transportation Authority (LACMTA)/Amtrak/)
 Union Pacific (UP) track and right-of-way; in)
 support of the application, to make safety)
 improvements at five adjacent crossings and)
 physically vacate a street and close the)
 existing public at-grade crossing at Doran)
 Street across the LACMTA / Amtrak / UP)
 track in the City of Los Angeles, County of)
Los Angeles, California.)

ORIGINAL

Application 98-06-054
(Filed June 22, 1998)

OPINION

As part of the City of Los Angeles's (City) Capital Improvements Program, City requests authority to (a) construct Mason Avenue at-grade across the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) / Amtrak / Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP) track and right-of-way, (b) make safety improvements at five adjacent crossings, namely Devonshire Street, De Soto Avenue, Winnetka Avenue, Corbin Avenue and Tampa Avenue Crossings, and (c) physically close and vacate the existing public at-grade crossing at Doran Street in the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County.

The proposed Mason Avenue Crossing would facilitate improved access between Warner Center, the major employment center in the area, and the Chatsworth and Porter Ranch communities, including the opening of the Winnetka Avenue off-ramp of the 118 Freeway, by providing additional link to the West San Fernando Valley circulation system as envisioned in City's Porter Ranch Specific Plan (PRSP), which was adopted in July 1990.

The gap closure, which would also provide additional access to the light industrial businesses adjacent to the proposed crossing, is particularly important to the communities of Chatsworth and Porter Ranch, who view Mason Avenue as a vital link to the Warner Center and the industrial commerce located in the northwest portion of the San Fernando Valley.

The Mason Avenue Crossing would enable the extension of Mason Avenue between Nordhoff and Plummer Streets across the railroad tracks thereby providing needed additional capacity for north-south traffic in the West San Fernando Valley. The crossing will serve as an alternate route and congestion relief to major parallel arterials, such as Winnetka Avenue, Corbin Avenue, Tampa Avenue, De Soto Avenue, and Topanga Canyon Boulevard State Route (SR 27), which is part to the Los Angeles County's Congestion Management Programs' (CMP) Highway and Roadway System. Forecasts of future traffic growth on Topanga Canyon Boulevard and De Soto Avenue are an increase of more than 20% over the next 10 years, resulting in severe congestion.

To mitigate this future traffic impact, the City has proposed the Mason Avenue at-grade crossing in its Capital Improvements Program for several years, believing it critical to maintain an effective roadway network in the West San Fernando Valley. The reduced congestion to the surrounding street system from the new crossing of Mason Avenue would result in overall reductions in fuel consumption and air pollution.

City also proposes to expend approximately \$100,000 and make safety improvements at crossings adjacent to the proposed Mason Avenue crossing. It will install up to 100-foot long raised median islands in approach of the automatic crossing gates to minimize the ability of vehicles to go around the gates. Striping modification, and signage installation at the Devonshire Street, De Soto Avenue, Winnetka Avenue, Corbin Avenue and Tampa Avenue Crossings will be part of the improvements, in order to neutralize the impact of the proposed new at-grade crossing.

In addition, City plans to expend approximately \$100,000 to physically close and vacate the existing public at-grade crossing of MTA / Amtrak / UP track at existing Doran Street, located on the west side of San Fernando Road. Closing the Doran Street Crossing would mitigate the impacts of a proposed new at-grade crossing by keeping the number of crossings to the same level as before the Mason Street crossing is constructed.

City is the lead agency for this project under the California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA), as amended, Public Resources (PR) Code Sections 21000, et. seq. An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared and has been officially approved and adopted. After preparation and review of an Initial Study, City filed a Notice of Exemption with the City and County Clerk offices on May 20, 1998, which determined that minor alteration of existing streets and railroad tracks would be exempt from CEQA guidelines. The project will not have a significant effect on the environment and is in conformance with environmental goals and objectives of the City of Los Angeles.

The Commission is a responsible agency for this project under CEQA and has reviewed and considered the lead agency's environmental documentation. The site of the project has been inspected by the Commission's Rail Safety and Carrier Division staff - Rail Crossings Engineering Section. Staff has also conducted a careful evaluation of the City's proposal with respect to the construction of the Mason Avenue at-grade crossing and the closure of the existing Doran Street crossing. Since this does not result in a net increase in the number of at-grade crossings in the San Fernando Valley area, staff recommends that the construction project be approved.

The application was found to be in compliance under the Commission's filing requirements, including Rule 38 of the Rules of Practice and Procedure. A location map and details from the project plans are shown in Appendix A.

In Resolution ALJ-176-2988 dated March 12, 1998, the Commission preliminarily categorized this application as ratesetting, and preliminarily determined that hearings were not necessary. No protests have been received. The Commission's Rail Safety and Carriers Division recommends that this application be granted. Given these developments, a public hearing is not necessary, and it is not necessary to disturb the preliminary determinations made in Resolution ALJ 176-2988.

Findings of Fact

1. Notice of the application was published in the Commission Daily Calendar on July 8, 1998. No protests have been received. A public hearing is not necessary.

2. City requests authority, under Public Utilities Code Sections 1201-1205, to (a) construct the Mason Avenue Crossing across the MTA / Amtrak / UP tracks and rights-of-way, (b) make safety improvements at five adjacent crossings, namely Devonshire Street, De Soto Avenue, Winnetka Avenue, Corbin Avenue and Tampa Avenue Crossings, and (c) physically close and vacate the existing public at-grade crossing at Doran Street in the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, as set forth in Appendix "A".

3. Construction of the grade crossing is required for improved traffic flow between the Warner Center, a major employment center in the area, and nearby Chatsworth and Porter Ranch communities.

4. Public convenience and necessity require construction of the grade crossing.

5. Public safety requires that the grade crossing be protected by two Standard No. 9 automatic gate-type signals, and two median-mounted Standard No. 9 automatic gate-type signals (General Order (GO) 75-C). Signs, markings and signals will be installed at this railroad crossing in accordance with Commission's standards, as well as raised median islands to minimize the ability of vehicles to run around the gates, as indicated by plans attached to the application.

6. Public safety also requires safety improvements at five crossings in the vicinity of Mason Avenue, as well as the closure of Doran Street, as more fully described in the application.

7. City is the lead agency for this project under CEQA, as amended.

8. The Commission is a responsible agency for this project and has reviewed and considered the lead agency's Initial Study and Notice of Exemption.

Conclusion of Law

The application should be granted as set forth in the following order.

ORDER

IT IS ORDERED that:

1. City of Los Angeles (City) is authorized to construct the Mason Avenue Crossing across the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) / Amtrak / Union Pacific Railroad Company (UP) tracks and rights-of-way in the City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, to be identified as Crossing No. E - 447.30. The proposed crossing project is at the location and substantially as shown by the plans attached to the application and Appendix A of this order.

2. City is also authorized to make safety improvements at five adjacent crossings, namely Devonshire Street, De Soto Avenue, Winnetka Avenue, Corbin Avenue and Tampa Avenue Crossings in Los Angeles, Los Angeles County, as more fully described and indicated by text and drawings attached to the application.

3. Upon opening of the Mason Avenue Crossing, the existing Doran Street Crossing 101VY-7.99 (formerly B-474.8) shall be permanently closed and physically removed.

4. Walkways shall conform to General Order (GO) 118 and clearances shall be in accordance with GO 26-D.

5. Construction of the grade crossing shall be equal or superior to Standard No. 8 concrete panels of GO 72-B. Maintenance of the crossing shall conform to GO 72-B.

6. Protection at the crossing shall be four Standard No. 9 automatic gate-type signals (GO 75-C).

7. Construction expense of the crossing and installation of the automatic protection shall be borne by City.

8. Maintenance costs of the automatic protection shall be borne by City under Section 1202.2 of the CPUC Code.

9. A copy of the crossing plans approved by MTA shall be filed with the Rail Safety and Carriers Division of the Public Utilities Commission prior to commencing construction.

10. Within 30 days after completion of the work under this order, City shall notify the Commission in writing that the authorized work was completed.

11. This authorization shall expire if not exercised within two years unless time is extended or if the above conditions are not complied with. Authorization may be revoked or modified if public convenience, necessity, or safety so require.

12. The application is granted as set forth above.

13. Application 98-06-054 is closed.

This order is effective 30 days from today.

Dated December 3, 1998, at San Francisco, California.

RICHARD A. BILAS

President

P. GREGORY CONLON

JESSIE J. KNIGHT, JR.

HENRY M. DUQUE

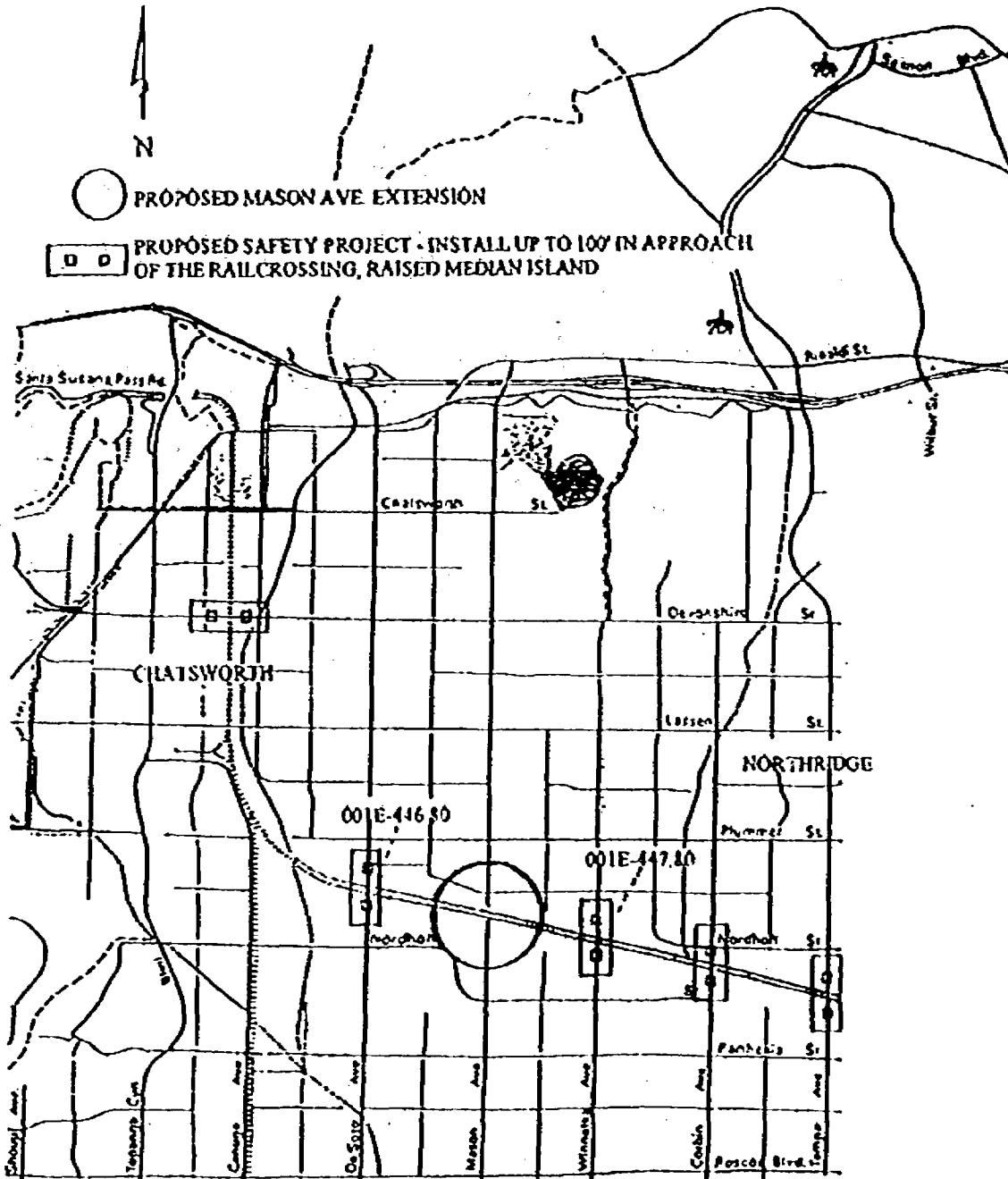
JOSIAH L. NEEPER

Commissioners

EXHIBIT A

VICINITY MAP

MASON AVE AT-GRADE EXTENSION ACROSS IACMTA-SOUTHERN
PACIFIC RAILROAD VENTURA LINE-COAST LINE TRACKS



PARK-WINNETKA-WOODLAND HILLS

See Next Page

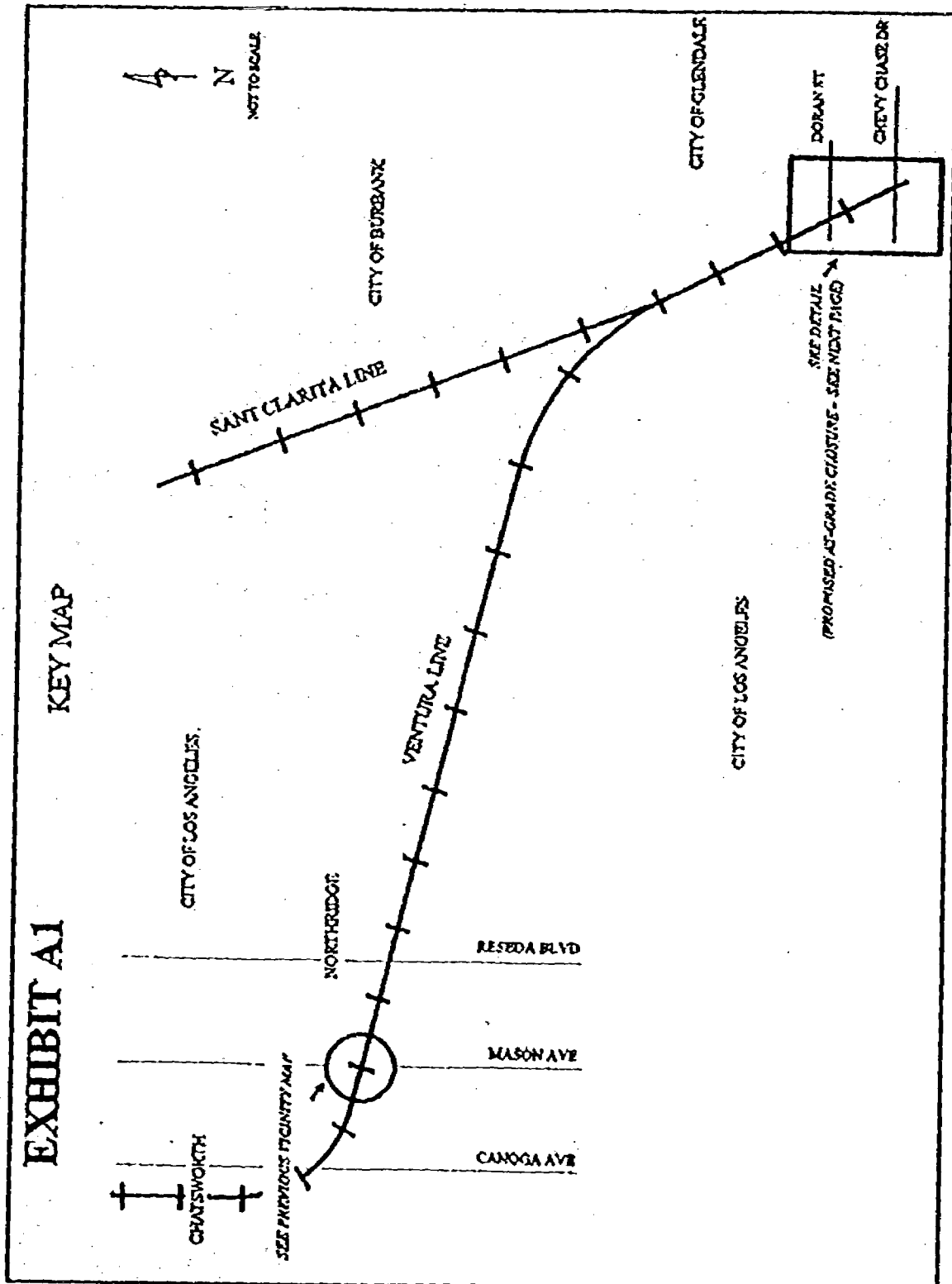


EXHIBIT A2 PROPOSED AT-GRADE CROSSING CLOSURE IN SUPPORT OF THE MASON AVENUE AT-GRADE EXTENSION

