

# Wilshire Corridor Transit Alternatives Health Impact Assessment

## Policy Brief

Health Impact Assessment Project

Center for Health Advancement

UCLA Fielding School of Public Health

in collaboration with The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

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## Summary of findings

Proposed transit projects in the Wilshire Corridor, especially the proposed subway with integrated improvements to pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, are likely to benefit the public's health by improving transportation choices, reducing travel times and reducing dependence on automobile travel. Over time, expanded transit is likely to bring about changes in land-use and economic activity. These changes have the potential to increase the availability of affordable housing, access to healthy food and community connectivity/social capital. Realizing these benefits, however, will require supportive city and county policies to ensure that land-use and economic changes do not unduly burden low-income residents and other vulnerable populations. Based on emerging public health research, potential health effects associated with construction, such as noise and air pollution, can be reduced beyond what is legally mandated through strict adherence to recommended guidelines and best management practices and adoption of best available technologies.

## Proposed transit projects in the Wilshire Corridor

This health impact assessment (HIA) examines transit alternatives along the densely populated, highly congested Wilshire Corridor from mid-town Los Angeles to Santa Monica, eight and a half miles away. Among the alternatives are a proposed subway, the "Westside Subway Extension," proposed bus rapid transit lanes that would be reserved for buses and bicycles, and improved bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure that would tie into transit.

## Scope of the HIA

This HIA builds on the project team's public health-focused review of the Draft Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (DEIR/EIS) of the proposed Westside Subway Extension, released by Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority in August 2010. It incorporates additional analysis of the May 2012 Final EIS/EIR, along with assessment of proposed bus rapid transit (BRT) lanes for Wilshire Boulevard, and local bicycle and active transportation plans as they relate to the subway and BRT projects. Potential health impacts addressed in this HIA are not limited to those examined in the EIR/EIS documents. The HIA assesses potentially beneficial as well as harmful impacts tied to transit construction and operation, as well as impacts arising from changes in land-use and economic activity that would likely occur as a result of improved transit in the Corridor. Recommendations are made for minimizing potential harm and maximizing potential benefits to the public's health.

## Potential health impacts

The potential health-related impacts of the proposed projects flow from: (1) construction activities, (2) changes in traffic and travel patterns, and (3) changes in land-use resulting from transit operations. These impacts include:

### Construction-related

- Air quality
- Water quality
- Noise and vibration
- Worker safety

### Travel-related

- Physical activity
- Mental health
- Safety and security
- Access to health-related goods/services
- Household finances

### Related to secondary land-use effects

- Housing
- Parks and greenspace
- Retail food environment
- Community/neighborhood social capital

## Project Team

### UCLA HIA Project

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## Setting

8½-mile section of the Wilshire Corridor from Koreatown in mid-city Los Angeles through Beverly Hills and Century City to Westwood.

- Some of the highest population densities in the U.S.;
- Severe traffic congestion: Rush hour traffic typically under 10 mph;
- Extreme income disparities: 30% poverty in Koreatown vs. Beverly Hills and nearby Bel Air on the west where over 50% of households report incomes over \$100,000/yr;
- Fast food restaurants are ubiquitous, but access to fresh produce, i.e. supermarket density, is low in the mid-city area;
- A deficit of parks and greenspace with many neighborhoods rated as high-/very high need by the Trust for Public Lands ParkScore.

## Affected populations

From project construction to operation, impacts will evolve, as will the population due to demographic trends and social and economic factors. Current, potentially affected, overlapping populations include:

- Residents (~300,000)
- Transit users (~60,000/day)
- Non-resident commuters (~138,000/day)
- Area employees (~105,000)
- Property owners (~105,000)
- Site construction workers (~2,100)

## Vulnerable groups

These groups are particularly vulnerable to certain health impacts:

- Young children (*air pollution, noise, nutrition*)
- Older children/youth (*physical activity, personal security*)
- Elderly (*nutrition, social isolation, personal security and mobility*)
- Women (*personal security*)
- Low income groups (*nutrition, mobility, personal security*)
- Homeless individuals (*nutrition, mobility, personal security*)
- People with disabilities or chronic health conditions (*mobility, noise, air pollution*)
- Groups at higher actual or perceived risk of violent crime victimization, i.e. young, African Am. males, school-age children, women, elderly (*personal security*)

## Selected Recommendations *(see full report for all 60 recommendations)*

1. **Complete Streets:** Design transportation infrastructure around transit using a "complete streets" approach.
2. **Walkability/Bikeability:** Assess and improve walkability/bikeability in one-mile radius around stations. Include sidewalk quality, lighting, safety patrols, bus service, signage.
3. **Barriers to bicycling:** Assess and address barriers to bicycling to transit among women, youth and seniors.
4. **Paratransit/shuttle drop-off:** Provide space for universally accessible paratransit/shuttle drop-off at stations.
5. **Modify fare structure** so that accessing the subway by bus is cheaper than by car.
6. **Incentivize car-free travel:** Consider a parking tax surcharge in transit-/pedestrian-oriented development areas to encourage car-free travel.
7. **Affordable housing:** Maintain or increase supply of affordable housing, including mixed income housing in transit-oriented development.
8. **Amenities for residents:** Use development incentives to attract a full complement of amenities near stations (e.g. grocers, entertainment, childcare) important to residents.
9. **Renters Rights/Gentrification:** Assure safe, healthful living conditions and discourage displacement through enhanced enforcement of renter protections, rental property inspections, tenant rights education.
10. **Trees/Greenspace:** Plant trees for shade and greenspace around stations and along streets. Include shade in species selection criteria.
11. **Healthy food retail:** Anchor TODs with food markets, avoiding high-end food retailers if likely to displace more affordable healthy food retail.
12. **Farmers' markets/Food Vendors:** Allow farmers' markets and mobile food vendors to use appropriate station-adjacent space.
13. **Public space:** Integrate space for public use into TOD designs, e.g. meeting space, sitting areas and farmers' market space.
14. **Secure, inviting space:** Create secure, inviting public space in station-adjacent areas, as well as in stations, with lighting and design, including acoustic design, and patrols.

## What is Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

Health impact assessment (HIA) is a systematic process that uses an array of data sources and analytic methods, along with stakeholder input to determine the potential effects of a proposed policy, plan, program, or project on the health of a population and the distribution of those effects. within the population. The aim is not to make decisions about which alternative is best, but rather to provide sound, evidence-based, actionable information about how a proposal is likely to affect the public's health; information that might not have otherwise been fully considered without an HIA.

For a given project or policy proposal, an HIA will attempt to determine:

1. Potential health affects;
2. Affected populations;
3. Significance of potential health effects;
4. Distribution of potential health effects
5. Effects on existing health disparities;
6. Steps to maximize potential benefits and minimize potential harm to the health of affected populations.

HIAs typically focus on projects and policies outside the purview of public health and health care, such as transportation, land-use planning, and economic policy, to highlight unrecognized or under-appreciated health effects.

\* National Research Council, Improving Health in the United States: The Role of Health Impact Assessment, 2011.