

Doug Failing
Executive Director, Highway Programs
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transit Authority
One Gateway Plaza
Mail Stop 99-25-1
Los Angeles, CA 90012-2952

Oct. 24, 2010

Dear Mr. Failing:

The purpose of this letter is to express our dissatisfaction with the public participation component of the 710 Tunnel Geotechnical Feasibility project. In addition, we are writing to urge MTA to cooperate with the No 710 Action Committee in formulating a new public participation program for the upcoming scoping and environmental impact studies.

The volunteers on the No 710 Action Committee come from diverse backgrounds and communities. These highly-qualified and dedicated individuals – community organizers and activists, engineers, elected officials, scientists, economists, physicians and other health care professionals, public relations and media experts – many of whom hold advanced degrees – have years of experience in their respective areas of expertise. Collectively they represent decades of involvement in 710-related issues and have exhaustively researched multiple aspects of our region's transportation issues including pollution and health concerns, contemporary advances in freight movement, mass transit, traffic calming strategies and more. Through their decades-long involvement, they have forged solid relationships and are well-connected with government agencies on local, state and even national levels.

At the May 27, 2010 meeting of the MTA Board of Directors, it was proposed that the public participation component of the scoping and environmental study phase be modeled after the Steering and Technical Advisory Committees formed for the Geotechnical Feasibility Study. Those committees were comprised primarily of elected officials from various communities, and did not include the stakeholders with the most at risk -- members of the general public. Having read the minutes of many meetings of those committees and attended the final meeting of the Steering and the Technical Advisory Committees, I was surprised at how few committee members actively participated with meaningful input. In truth, I was appalled at the lack of participation by most of them.

A series of meetings was organized and conducted by a public relations firm under contract to Caltrans to first inform communities about the Geotechnical Feasibility Study and later to present the results of that study. Those meetings left most of the public who attended frustrated and annoyed. The public was patronized during that process, and quite frankly, those meetings proved to be a public relations nightmare for Caltrans and MTA. At those meetings, intelligent suggestions for tunnel alternatives were offered and penetrating questions were asked by members of the public. However, these inquiries and suggestions were met with the same pat answers at meeting after meeting in community after community – either “This study did not address that issue.”, or “That will be addressed during the Environmental Impact Study process.” One has only to read the summaries of those meetings to substantiate these facts.

In fact, it was the dissatisfaction with the process that caused members of multiple communities to unite to form the No 710 Action Committee. Communities represented by this committee include Glendale, La Crescenta, Sunland-Tujunga, Pasadena, Montrose, South Pasadena, La Cañada Flintridge and Los Angeles (Highland Park, Eagle Rock, Glassell Park, Mount Washington, and El Sereno).

The inability of MTA and Caltrans to provide substantive answers to the public's questions as well as the public's dissatisfaction with the flawed process was not lost on elected officials. The failure of MTA to address the same issues and concerns prior to initiating the environmental impact process has been raised by Congressman Adam Schiff in his letter of July 16, 2009 to MTA and to Caltrans on April 20, 2010; Assemblyman Anthony Portantino in his letter of April 22, 2010 to MTA; as well as four mayors of

affected cities -- La Cañada Mayor Donald Voss, South Pasadena Mayor Richard Schneider, Pasadena Mayor Bill Bogaard and Glendale Mayor Ara Najarian in their joint commentary in the Pasadena Star News on June 17, 2010. Additionally, Portantino summarized his frustrations with the process and loss of trust in MTA in his commentaries of Sept. 1, 2010 in the South Pasadena Review and Sept. 29, 2010 in the Valley Sun.

It should be noted that the public was given the opportunity to submit written comments for inclusion in the final version of the Geotechnical Feasibility Study. Believing that their concerns would be addressed in the final report, many members of the public put countless hours of careful thought and effort into the letters submitted, only to have their comments placed in the appendix of a more than one-thousand page report -- without a single response to any of the issues raised.

We urge you and the MTA Board of Directors to work with the No 710 Action Committee on behalf of your constituents to help formulate a plan for open, fair and direct public participation that is proactive rather than reactive -- a plan that gives all stakeholders a voice beginning with the scoping process and, if it continues past scoping, throughout the environmental review process. A transparent process in which all stakeholders are actively involved can only result in a better outcome for this complex, controversial and costly project. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Jan SooHoo
No 710 Action Committee

Cc: The Honorable Don Knabe
MTA Board Members
Lynda Bybee
Michelle Smith
Congressman Adam Schiff
Assemblyman Anthony Portantino
Mayor Bill Bogaard and the City Council of Pasadena
Mayor Ara Najarian and the City Council of Glendale
Mayor Richard Schneider and the City Council of South Pasadena
Mayor Don Voss and the City Council of La Cañada Flintridge