

# The Battle over the 710 Freeway (Q & A)

by Bill Urban, President of the West Pasadena Residents' Association

The WPRA board, along with many area city governments and elected officials, opposes LA Metro's plan to dig two double-decker, 4.5-mile, freeway tunnels that would extend the 710 Freeway from I-10 in El Sereno to the 710 stump in Pasadena. The following Q&A's provide additional insight into why the WPRA and so many others oppose the 710 Freeway tunnels.



## Q. What problem is Metro trying to solve?

A. Good question. Metro's stated objective is to "improve mobility and relieve congestion between SR-2, I-5, I-10, I-210 and I-605 in Northeast Los Angeles and San Gabriel Valley."

## Q. What are Metro's proposed solutions?

A. In addition to the tunnels option (F-7), Metro is studying the following alternatives:

- Expanding existing freeways, arterial and transit systems (no build)
- Enhancing operations management and demand management activities (TSM/TDM)
- Developing a rapid-transit bus alternative (BRT 6)
- Developing a light-rail transit alternative (LRT 4)

While the tunnels idea is only one of five alternatives, Metro appears to favor it because it would "complete the natural goods movement corridor" and best serve long-haul trucks.

## Q. What's wrong with the tunnels?

A. Let us count the ways:

- All the pollution from the north end of the tunnels would be expelled into Pasadena. This would be the first attempt to filter vehicle exhaust in the U.S. Worse, we have no current technology to effectively filter out the dangerous fine particulates. Exhaust portals would be erected near Huntington Hospital, one of the largest hospitals in the region, and three schools. Air pollution would be trapped in foothill communities by the mountains and an atmospheric inversion layer.



An artist's cross-section of the 710 Freeway tunnels

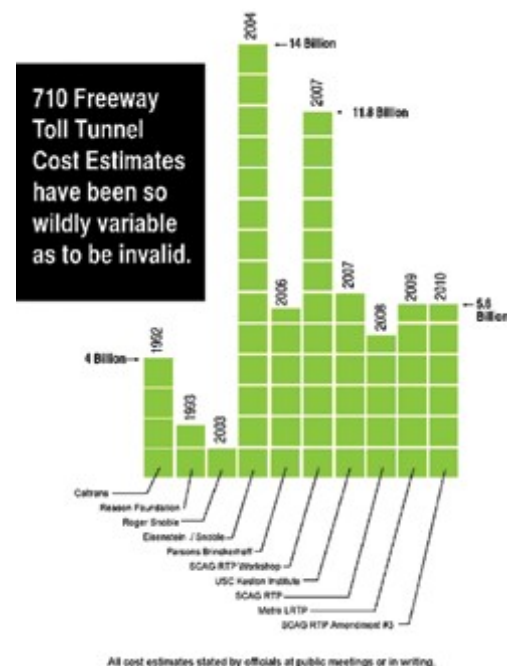
- The tunnels would be hazardous to build and operate. The tunnels would cross four known earthquake faults and punch through two major aquifers. They would be more than twice as long as the longest current double-decker tunnels in the U.S. Construction would take up to 12 years [Metro 2006 PB Study], giving rise to a continuous stream of trucks moving hundreds of thousands of tons of dirt and construction materials that will disrupt mobility, force street closures and interrupt access to downtown businesses.
- The project will be extremely expensive. Official estimates of the cost of the tunnels range from \$1 billion to \$14 billion. Additionally, because of the many technical unknowns, the risk of cost overrun is very high. To put it into perspective, the higher ranges of tunnel cost estimates are comparable to ALL the rail-freight improvements identified by Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) for the next 15 years.

- Financing and construction of the tunnels would be highly risky. Metro plans to use a Public Private Partnership (PPP) to finance the highly risky construction and operation. The private companies would require public guarantees to minimize their risk. In other words, cost overruns could be borne by the public, and the tolls would be set by the PPP to ensure a profit.

- The tunnels will attract up to 200,000 cars and trucks every day. Metro originally reported that the 710 extension was essential to complete a truck corridor. Lately, however, the story has changed. Now Metro says it doesn't expect many trucks to use the tunnel — an odd pronouncement considering that cargo volume moving through the LA basin is projected to double over the next 20 years.

- The tunnels would not ease traffic congestion. Many of us recall that closing the “gap” between I-210 and I-15, also billed as a way to ease traffic congestion, resulted in quite the reverse for both the freeways and surface streets along the route.

- Tunnel traffic would bypass Pasadena's businesses. The first northern exits would be on Lake and Mountain, well past Pasadena's business center.



## Q. What should be done instead?

A. Metro is discounting (or simply choosing not to consider) 21st-century solutions to the issue. Just a few of the smart alternatives (using existing technology and available for far less cost) include:

- For people — Metro light-rail expansion and improvements, grade separations, express- train passing tracks, light-rail extensions
- For cargo — A completed Alameda (rail) Corridor and other port and rail projects
- Other low-build alternatives in the SR-710 study — dedicated bus rapid-transit routes, intersection/turning traffic improvements, park/ride/express facilities, transportation demand management and transportation systems management along the corridor between I-10 and I-210.

The WPRA believes that every dollar spent analyzing and promoting traffic tunnels is wasted. That money — \$700,000 thus far to “study” the issue — would be better spent on worthwhile projects.

The WPRA looks forward to collaborating with Metro on transportation solutions that truly address our shared regional traffic needs in a fiscally and environmentally responsible manner. For more information, visit [wpra.net](http://wpra.net).