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Title: Authorize the Public Works Director to enter into a Cooperative Project Agreement (Agreement) in the form presented totaling \$6,000,000.00 with the Fresno County Transportation Authority (FCTA); and adopt a Statutory Environmental Exemption per Sections 21080.13(a) of the California Public Resources Code, and 15282(g) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines for the Blackstone McKinley BNSF Grade Separation Project. (Council Districts 1 and 7)

Sponsors: Public Works Department

Indexes:

Code sections:

Attachments: 1. 20-00707 Blackstone McKinley Cooperative Project Agreement, 2. 20-00707 Statutory Exemption, 3. 20-00707 VICINITY MAP

Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
6/25/2020	1	City Council	approved	

REPORT TO THE CITY COUNCIL

June 25, 2020

FROM: SCOTT L. MOZIER, PE, Director
Public Works Department

THROUGH: ANDREW J. BENELLI, PE, City Engineer/Assistant Director
Public Works Department, Traffic Operations and Planning Division

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SUBJECT

Authorize the Public Works Director to enter into a Cooperative Project Agreement (Agreement) in the form presented totaling \$6,000,000.00 with the Fresno County Transportation Authority (FCTA); and adopt a Statutory Environmental Exemption per Sections 21080.13(a) of the California Public Resources Code, and 15282(g) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines for the Blackstone McKinley BNSF Grade Separation Project. (Council Districts 1 and 7)

RECOMMENDATIONS

Staff recommends that the Council adopt the following recommendations:

1. Adopt a Statutory Environmental Exemption per Sections 21080.13(a) of the California Public Resources Code, and 15282(g) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines for the Blackstone McKinley BNSF Grade Separation Project.
2. Approve the attached Agreement in the form presented between the City of Fresno and FCTA for \$6,000,000.00 for the Plans, Specifications & Engineering (PS&E) Phase of the Blackstone McKinley BNSF Grade Separation Project, and authorize the Public Works Director to execute the agreement.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On April 22, 2020, the FCTA Board approved the conversion of the Measure “C” Alternative Transportation Program into a Grade Separation Program (GSP), consistent with provisions of the 2006 Measure “C” Expenditure Plan, and selected the Blackstone McKinley BNSF grade separation project for funding through the GSP. The Blackstone McKinley BNSF Grade Separation project will eliminate two existing at-grade crossings by grade separating N. Blackstone Avenue and E. McKinley Avenue under the BNSF Mainline Track. The Blackstone and McKinley project location has experienced the highest traffic volumes and number of accidents of any at-grade crossing on the BNSF corridor, and has been deemed the highest priority location for Measure “C” grade separation funding. The project will require right-of-way acquisition and utility relocation prior to grade separation construction. The project will also be compatible and complementary to the “Better Blackstone” Initiative, and the South Blackstone Smart Mobility Strategy. On-time service performance for the City’s Bus Rapid Transit Service and circulation near Fresno City College will be dramatically improved by eliminating delays due to train blockage. Sounding of train horns will also be unnecessary in the future with construction of the grade separation. Approval of the Agreement will allow reimbursement for eligible project costs by the FCTA.

BACKGROUND

The City has long-planned for future grade separations at locations with high traffic volumes, such as the BNSF crossing at Shaw Avenue which was grade-separated nearly 20 years ago. In the early 1970s, the City prepared a grade separation study including many citywide locations such as Blackstone Avenue and McKinley Avenue. In FY2020, staff completed an update of the Blackstone and McKinley grade separation feasibility study.

The 2006 Measure “C” Expenditure Plan included a percentage of the transportation sales tax revenue to be dedicated to Rail Consolidation, under the Alternative Transportation Program, created to provide funding toward the relocation of the BNSF Railroad from its existing alignment to the Union Pacific Railroad alignment located near Golden State Boulevard. The 2006 Expenditure Plan expressly provided that if Rail Consolidation proved infeasible, ATP funding was to be utilized to construct grade separations that coordinated with transit, and provided the greatest public benefit in terms of improvement to air quality and reduction in traffic congestion.

At their April 22, 2020 meeting, the FCTA Board approved the conversion of the Measure “C” ATP Rail Consolidation Program to a Measure “C” Grade Separation Program and selected the Blackstone McKinley BNSF grade separation project as the highest priority project. The FCTA Board approved the award of funding, but a Cooperative Project Agreement is necessary for the City to receive reimbursement of eligible project costs. Council approval will in turn allow the FCTA and the City to execute the Agreement. The project benefits are significant due to the high traffic volumes at these locations:

- Blackstone Avenue weekday Average Daily Traffic (ADT) is 17,283, including 221 passenger buses and 21 school buses.
- McKinley Avenue weekday ADT is 13,440, including 65 passenger buses and 47 school buses.
- Blackstone and McKinley Avenue weekday average train crossings are 39.

The high passenger bus count on the Blackstone Avenue Corridor is attributed to the City's Bus Rapid Transit system, which provides services every 10 minutes to accommodate the public's need to move between Downtown Fresno and North Fresno. The Blackstone Avenue Corridor is also part of the Smart Mobility Plan providing Class IV protected bike lanes along Blackstone Avenue through the project area. The school bus count along McKinley Avenue is attributed to the three high schools, and two elementary schools within a half-mile radius of the at grade crossings. In addition to having numerous entrances to local streets, there are multiple parking lot entrances to support Fresno City College adjacent to the BNSF Mainline, and McKinley/SR41 interchange one mile east of the at grade crossings.

Additionally, Blackstone Avenue and McKinley Avenue serve as primary routes by emergency vehicles, and future in-route delays are expected due to the increased traffic and housing development taking place in the vicinity. The closest grade separation, Wishon Avenue, creates a rerouting of traffic by at least 1.5 miles and does not have the capacity to serve the public need for first responders, pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicle traffic. Alternative routes along Clinton Avenue and Shields Avenue currently function as existing at-grade crossings.

The City Attorney's Office has reviewed the Agreement as to form.

ENVIRONMENTAL FINDINGS

This project is statutorily exempt per Sections 21080.13(a) of the California Public Resources Code, and 15282(g) of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines.

LOCAL PREFERENCE

Local preference is not applicable because the Cooperative Project Agreement does not include a bid or award of a construction or service contract.

FISCAL IMPACT

This request will have no impact to the General Fund. All project costs for the engineering design phase will be paid by Measure "C" Grade Separation Program funds.

Attachments:

Blackstone McKinley Project Cooperative Agreement
Statutory Exemption
Vicinity Map