

Third Party Enhancement challenges managed through excellent relationships between the project and the community

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Project Name: Central Mesa Light Rail Extension (CME)

Abstract: When a large multi-modal transportation project such as the CME passes through a municipality, the project impacts the surrounding community's infrastructure. Impacted third parties have a justifiable interest in these infrastructure projects. Requests for third party enhancements will arise. These third parties may also be responsible for issuing permits, relocating facilities that are key elements of the project scope, or may be future partners for similar projects. Consequently, working with third parties was a very important aspect of the CME project.

The divergence of goals between a major infrastructure project and an affected third party could impact the budget and schedule if not addressed properly. The Valley Metro Rail (VMR) team and the City of Mesa (COM) team worked to develop an excellent relationship between the project and the community. Delivering the CME project on-time and within budget was a compatible goal of VMR and the COM. This was achieved by fostering good relationships, planning, coordination and cooperation; and resulted in the successful completion of the project seven months early.

Project Phase(s): Engineering and Construction

Category: Management

1. Background

The CME Project is a 3.10-mile double track, center of roadway, light rail project located in the City of Mesa (COM), Arizona. This is a Small Starts project that was awarded the Project Construction Grant Agreement (PCGA) in October 2012. The project Grantee is the City of Phoenix and the Project Sponsor is VMR.

The CME project extends VMR's existing Central Phoenix/East Valley (CP/EV) light rail system, from its current terminus at the approximate intersection of Sycamore Street and Main Street to Downtown Mesa. Four (4) stations have been constructed: Alma School Road, Country Club Drive, Center Street, and Mesa Drive. A Park-and-

Ride (PNR) lot has been constructed at the Mesa Drive Station. The Operations Control Center (OCC) was upgraded with additional equipment and work stations to support the light rail extension. No additional transit vehicles were required as part of the CME Project.

The contracting approach for the project was a DB procurement. VMR awarded the DB contract to Valley Transit Constructors (VTC) in April 2012. The project opened for Revenue Service on August 22, 2015.

2. The Lesson

The CME project is fully within one municipality, the COM. The third party enhancements requested by the City were few in number and were managed by VMR as Concurrent Non-Project Activities that were constructed with the CME project.

Multi-modal transportation projects such as the CME can significantly improve an area's transportation infrastructure. Construction activities may also impact the community's infrastructure, traffic, emergency response requirements, as well as neighborhood aesthetics. Impacted third parties have a justifiable interest in these projects affecting their community, and are also often responsible for issuing key permits and relocating facilities for the project. Requests for third party enhancements may be beyond the scope of the project which was defined in the Environmental Assessment stage. Consequently, working with third parties, especially the COM, was a very important aspect of the CME project.

Some of the specific lessons learned during this process were:

- Prior to awarding the DB contract, VMR developed a Design and Construction Agreement (DCA) with the City of Mesa detailing the procedures for change requests, enhancements, and other pertinent issues. The main role of such an agreement was to address funding commitments from third parties.
- Although the DCA was very beneficial to the project, it could be further improved by adding definition and detail in areas such as 1) the process for acquiring project permits; 2) the submittal review process to be followed by the City; 3) and the Design Review Board process to acquire approval for Traction Power Substation (TPSS) and Signal Building site designs.
- VMR provided the COM an opportunity to fund betterment/enhancements that could be incorporated into the project. As such enhancements could impact the project budget and schedule, the VMR CME project staff had to thoroughly evaluate each request before making a decision if it could be implemented. VMR worked with the affected third parties to review the requests in terms of cost and

benefit to VMR, the City, and stakeholders. Requests not implemented were reviewed with the affected third party and alternatives were developed. VMR staff had the critical support of their Executive Management in their decisions on these enhancement requests.

- VMR worked diligently with the community to facilitate positive relationships, including frequent meetings with elected officials, and regular budget reviews with the COM staff to understand the basis for implementing an enhancement.
- Assigning the responsibility for obtaining permits to the DB contractor worked well on the CME project. However, VMR staff maintained frequent interaction with the City staff to achieve project goals.

The COM issued permits as needed for the CME project and did not prioritize third party enhancements over the base project scope of work. The substantial effort on the part of VMR and the COM team fostered an excellent relationship between the project and the community, and was a key to the successful completion of the project.

3. Applicability

This lesson is applicable to all transit projects, especially on larger capital improvements projects which may have a significant impact on the community. Fostering relationships between an agency and community third parties is key to a successful project.

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