

L.A. Gets Serious on ExpoRail

BOTH MTA AND A FUTURE CONSTRUCTION JPA MOVE FORWARD

by Roger Christensen

Despite evaporating State funding and an hysterical headline about it being turned into a busway, progress continues to be moving forward for a light rail project from downtown Los Angeles to the Westside. "The project is going along well," noted MTA CEO Roger Snoble at a May 14 MTA meeting, "very rapidly in fact."

There has also been considerable progress in Sacramento to create a separate construction authority—modeled after Pasadena—called the Exposition Metro Construction Authority (EMCA). On May 6, the State's Senate Transportation Committee overwhelmingly approved State Senator Sheila Kuehl's SB504 creating the Authority.

On the MTA front (and responding to the grade crossing drama that the Pasadena project had with the California Public Utilities Commission) the MTA currently has a team working with the CPUC staff to develop criteria for grade separations for evaluating their need on Expo's 31 crossings. The staff is also working with the American Public Transit Association to create a Peer Review Panel that would also evaluate all design issues. Preparation is underway for the Final EIR with MTA Board Certification projected at August of 2004. This might also be the last work the MTA does on the project until operations if EMCA takes over final design and construction.

At a MTA Citizen's Advisory Council meeting, MTA's Government Affairs spokesman Michael Turner stated that SB504 originated from "a bad article in the Los Angeles Times" that distorted the MTA's projections for costs on Exposition. He also remarked that "there are inherent difficulties in comparing it to the Pasadena authority" which started with identified funds. Not so for Expo which, unlike Pasadena, will need to seek Federal Funds. Roger Snoble states emphatically that "the critical path to Exposition is funding" and doubted that an infant JPA could come up with a Full Funding Agreement with the FTA.

Nonetheless, as Pasadena opens this summer, the new Exposition Metro Construction Authority, remains a popular notion that appears to be able to sail through both houses of the State Legislature. It appears to have the support of the MTA Board of Directors. The LA City Council is vying for more power on the EMCA Board and wants more than equal power with Culver City and Santa Monica since the majority of the line is in LA. Senator Kuehl's deputy Laurie Newman has assured them that the Senator is open to "consider amend-

ments about governance." Newman suggests that the largest future question will be "at what point does this take effect?" and in light of Roger Snoble's remark about funding, many believe that it won't happen until after the MTA has received a Full Funding Agreement from the FTA.

On May 8, Southern California rail advocates got a jolt when they saw the LA Times headline "MTA Seeks Busway Instead of Rail to Westside." The Kurt Streeter article (he did not write the misleading headline) was based on remarks made by Roger Snoble at a Friends4expo meeting in which he speculated on a new "grooved busway" technology in which tracks could be added to the existing cement for easy conversion to rail. Watching the former Southern Pacific

Burbank Branch being converted to a busway across the Valley and in an atmosphere where rail projects are hyper-scrutinized and every bus project canonized, rail advocates in Los Angeles work in a jittery environment. Even State Senator Kevin Murray at one point told a local coalition that there was no money for Expo rail and it would have to be a busway. Sen. Murray, chair of the Senate Transportation Committee, however, later proved to be a powerful force in creating EMCA in his Committee.

Ultimately, the MTA Board has remained committed to Exposition as a rail project as does Sen. Sheila Kuehl who stated "the whole point is to get people out of their cars, light rail does that; I'm not sure that the bus does."



Baby Bullet Locomotive Rollout

On April 4, Caltrain ran a publicity special using the first of six new Baby Bullet locomotives, with paint that matches new Bombardier cars that have already been operating on Trains 46 and 67.

A public event at the Caltrain station included a christening of the F-40 Motive Power locomotive by State Senator Jackie Speier, who authored legislation for track and service improvements that funded the new equipment.

Baby Bullet passenger cars began arriving last summer, to provide Baby Bullet express service starting later this year with promised end point trip times of about 50 minutes. "Caltrain is in the process of bringing this railroad into the 21st century. That

means an upgrade to everything from tracks to equipment," said Mike Scanlon, executive director for Caltrain. "Caltrain's new equipment looks and feels different, representing a new era in Peninsula rail service."

The aerodynamic design of the new GM locomotives will set them apart from the rest of Caltrain's fleet. With 3600 horsepower and increased electrical capacity, the engines are able to heat, light and pull longer trains without losing speed. The engine is geared reach 82 miles per hour.

At 293,500 pounds, this is probably the biggest baby the stork's ever delivered. The engine also measures 70 feet long, nearly 11 feet wide, with a rail to roof height of 15 feet, 11 inches.

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