

PUBLIC FORUM

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Many to blame for delays in starting Valley rail line

For today's Public Forum, readers were asked to comment on delays that might stall the start of construction on east-west rail transit in the San Fernando Valley for many years — and who is to blame.

Who is to blame for the San Fernando Valley rail line being in jeopardy of being built? Valley residents need look no further than the nearest mirror to find the culprit.

Squabbles between groups of residents over where to have it run — essentially not in my back yard — forced the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission to place the Pasadena Blue Line ahead of the Valley project. The commission did this in despair that the Valley would ever get its act together and settle on an alignment.

Now a group of business leaders and public officials is forming a coalition to advocate for actions to aid rail in the Valley. This is the first positive step to occur in many years and promises perhaps the best possibility of saving the Valley rail project.

— Dana Gabbard
President
Southern California Transit Advocates
Los Angeles

Complaints that the \$1.3 billion in sales taxes that the residents of the San Fernando Valley have paid the Metropolitan Transportation Authority have not been used to provide the Valley with rail are misdirected.

The MTA's rail plan is unfair, but this unfairness is not restricted to the Valley. The rail plan is unfair because rail is a bad buy regardless of where rail lines are constructed.

National transit statistics from the Public Purpose Urban Transport Fact Book make the case. MTA bus ridership dropped from a peak of 497 million boardings in 1985 to only 343 million boardings in 1995.

A small proportion of these missing 154 million boardings are accounted for by other county transit services that have taken over MTA lines. Only about 21 million boardings per year have showed up on the rail system. The remainder are transit-dependent riders who have been priced or otherwise forced off the system by changes associated with the MTA rail plan.

This trend will continue as long as we allow the MTA to trade large quantities of

bus service for small quantities of rail service. The region would be much better served if the MTA followed the examples provided by Houston or Ottawa and constructed exclusive rights of way for buses instead of trains.

Busways have higher capacities than rail lines because buses can follow each other much more closely than trains can. Also, buses can leave a busway for collection and distribution. The Valley should insist on a busway now instead of a rail line later.

— James E. Moore II
Associate Professor
School of Urban Planning
and Development
University of Southern California
Los Angeles

I am one among the many commuters who commutes on a north-south route to coastal employment centers.

There is very little planned to provide for my group. I suppose it is possible that we will receive indirect benefits from the commuter rail, but any effect will be small.

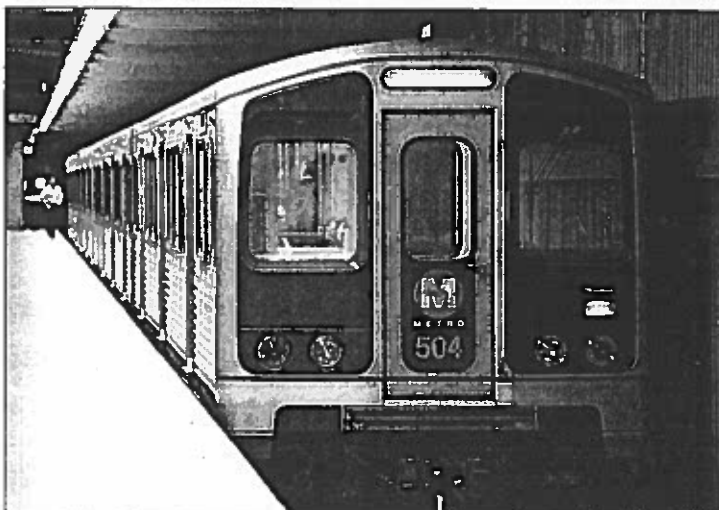
I could be outraged that the Valley will not get its commuter line, but why should I care? My outrage is directed at the overall cost of the project, relative to the likely stream of benefits accruing from it.

Far less costly and more beneficial alternatives exist for providing transportation services. These include peak-load pricing of freeways, the redesign of freeway-to-freeway interchanges to carry higher capacities and the rationalization of surface street transportation corridors to carry a reasonable capacity of traffic at reasonable speeds.

All of these are relatively low-cost, high-benefit opportunities that would yield substantial rates of return. Rationally, investment in these areas should occur first. Yet, nothing is being done.

It was a virtual certainty that the net return to the Metro Rail in its various proposed configurations would be a large negative number. So what is the surprise? This plan came to us from the same people who brought us the freeway information sign, the car-pool lane and now the "smart" highway. These are the same people who think that putting a diesel-belching, traffic-clogging bus out on the road is a good way to reduce air pollution.

— John Daly
Northridge



Metro Rail trains like this one face an uncertain future.

Myung J. Chun/Daily News

L.A. pay raise

PUBLIC FORUM TOPIC

The Los Angeles City Council has agreed to grant pay raises totaling 16 percent over the next four years to most city employees. For the Public Forum for Saturday, June 14, the Daily News invites readers to comment. Are these raises — the average city employee would earn more than \$42,000 after four years — in line with benefits earned by private sector taxpayers? Can the city afford the \$120 million price tag? Are the raises needed to guarantee labor peace? Or do they simply reflect the political clout of unions representing municipal employees? Letters on this subject must reach the Daily News no later than Wednesday.

commuter rail idea and turn toward our future: our children. Spend the money on our school systems; at least we know the money will be put to something useful.

— Rishi Patal
Granada Hills

We in the Valley complain, yet the east side, which has L.A.'s most transit-dependent neighborhoods, and West L.A., which has the most congestion, will have no rail when the Valley gets its first two stations three years from now.

Some perspective is in order. This is the story of every major rapid transit system in America. They are not built in a decade. The 25-year-old BART line has yet to reach San Francisco International Airport, and rail in Atlanta is just starting to reach the northern suburbs. Metro Rail is just 7 years old.

Truthfully, we've been robbed and it's our own fault. The Pasadena Blue Line took money that should have used for the Valley, because Pasadena was focused and unified and we have been squabbling over routes, mainly due to county Supervisor Michael Antonovich's diversionary tactics about monorails. He's no dummy. The Pasadena line is in his district and most of the Valley is not.

Upcoming is the MTA's controversial plan to divert the subway off Wilshire down to an empty lot on Pico Boulevard. The Valley has the Red Line's most cost-effective options, since it will be able to come above ground onto an already purchased right of way.

Since our money has been stolen by other projects leapfrogging ahead of us, perhaps it's time for us to leapfrog in front of the ludicrous Pico extension.

— Roger Christensen
Sherman Oaks

The Rapid Transit District was changed to the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, or MTA. Now I know why. They didn't want to be sued for misrepresentation.

— Gil Wong
Sylmar

Residents of the San Fernando Valley deserve traffic congestion relief now. It is fully within the power of the mayor and the members of the City Council to coordinate the traffic signals here in the San Fernando Valley.

Amid the latest revelations of huge cost overruns, delayed completion dates, and dubious ridership figures at the MTA, it is necessary to alleviate traffic congestion in this Valley now, even as the MTA struggles to get its act together.

— Dolores Bender White
Sherman Oaks

More must be done to improve the priority for funding construction of rapid rail transit in the San Fernando Valley.

I believe trench, cut-and-cover and/or at-grade configurations to be far superior to deep-bore tunneling, which would be far more costly and difficult to construct. A geologist has told me that it would be a nightmare to tunnel through basically a huge flood plain in the southern San Fernando Valley.

— Sheldon H. Walter
Van Nuys

The main thing that should be done for a positive turnaround is to abandon the