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## **Gold Line not a funding priority for regional transportation coalition**

By Dan Abendschein

County transportation officials recommended two Los Angeles rail projects for federal funding Monday but left the Gold Line Foothill Extension off the list.

Metropolitan Transportation Agency officials made the announcement at a transportation conference devoted to highlighting the county's most important transit projects.

The conference, held by Mobility 21, a local transportation coalition, focused on 21 local projects that should be prioritized, including the Gold Line, carpool lanes on the 10 Freeway and grade separation projects related to the Alameda Corridor in the San Gabriel Valley.

But while officials touted the importance of finding federal funds for all 21 projects, they put their immediate focus on just two projects - the so-called "Subway to the Sea," a proposed extension of the Purple Line out to Santa Monica; and a "regional connector" project that would link several rail lines together through downtown Los Angeles.

"We need to use our local funds as a way to leverage federal money for these projects," said Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, an MTA board member.

The MTA board on Thursday is scheduled to consider whether to make a request to federal officials to include the 21 projects in the federal government's New Starts transportation program, which funds public transit projects across the country.

The MTA board has been attempting to come to an agreement on its New Starts priorities for several months. While several board members have been pushing for the Subway to the Sea, county Supervisor Michael Antonovich has been pushing a plan to include the Gold Line.

That may be about to change. Representatives for Antonovich said Monday he would likely not continue to push for the inclusion of the Gold Line in the New Starts program.

"It may not have the consensus for New Starts that the other projects do," said Michael Cano, Antonovich's transportation deputy. "There are traditional enemies of the Gold Line that don't want to see it compete with the Subway to the Sea."

Cano said Antonovich views the regional connector project as a win for the San Gabriel Valley. The line would connect the Gold Line directly to several other lines, making it possible for riders to one day go directly from Pasadena to Long Beach, Santa Monica and Los Angeles International Airport.

"It would eliminate a 15, 20 minute wait between lines for San Gabriel Valley riders, because they won't have to stop at Union Station and switch to other lines," said Cano.

MTA officials have said the connector could cut the commute to Long Beach by as much as 21 minutes by eliminating the need for riders to switch rail lines twice.

It also could mean a one-seat trip from Pasadena to Culver City along the Exposition Line, which is slated to eventually extend to that western Los Angeles city.

Cano said Antonovich still plans to introduce a motion to direct MTA staff to look for other sources of federal money to complete the 24-mile Foothill Extension to Claremont. Currently, there are committed local funds to get the line only as far as the Azusa/Glendora border.

Antonovich may introduce that motion at Thursday's meeting, or wait until next month, when the MTA board discusses the agency's Long Range Transportation Plan once again.

The board has been attempting to make changes to the long-range plan for the last few months. The Gold Line still does not appear in the plan, even though it has committed funds from Measure R, the sales-tax hike voters passed last year to fund local transportation projects.

Local officials have maintained that the Gold Line should be in the front of the line for funding, since the project already has an established right-of-way for the route all the way to Claremont.

"It looks to us like the other projects are 10 years away from needing federal money," said Keith Hanks, an Azusa council member who chairs a local Gold Line board. "We don't believe the Gold Line should be precluded from any discussion of federal funding."