



## Inland Valley cities anticipate extension of Gold Line light rail to area

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Area cities have jumped on the Gold Line bandwagon, but the light-rail train is not likely to pull into Inland Valley stations any time soon - 2017, at best.

"Maybe we'll be dead by then," said Richard Taskesen of La Verne, who drives to Pasadena daily and catches the Gold Line to downtown Los Angeles.

The cities have been planning their land use around the arrival of the Foothill Extension of the Gold Line even though the first segment of the project is yet to be included in the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority's Long Range Transportation Plan.

"It's become a political football," said Steve Lustro, director of community development for Montclair. "We don't have influence that other cities and counties have."



Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension from Sierra Madre Villa Station to Montclair is expected to be completed by 2017 at the earliest. (Mediha Fejzagic DiMartino / Staff Photoarchive)

Metro Gold Line, a 13-mile light-rail line that connects downtown Los Angeles with Pasadena, opened in 2003.

The Foothill Extension would go 24 miles farther east following the old Santa Fe railroad route.

Some of the stations will be in Azusa, Glendora, San Dimas, La Verne, Pomona, Claremont and Montclair.

A further extension to L.A./Ontario International Airport is also in the works.

Freight and Metrolink lines east of Pomona would travel along the same right of way as the light rail but will not share the same tracks.

The light rail would offer increased energy savings - an estimated 1.5 million gallons of gasoline each year - and reduce levels of pollution.

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It would run every 15 to 20 minutes, providing Inland Valley residents with more transit options to the west.

"If you have Gold Line, on weekends you could go to Old Pasadena for dinner," Lustro said. "It would be convenient and nice. The traffic on the 210 (Freeway) is not going to get any better."

The first segment of the extension project, reaching Azusa, is set to open in 2013, funded with \$735million in Measure R money, said Habib Balian, chief executive officer of the Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority.

Measure R was approved by Los Angeles County voters in November. It increases the sales tax to pay for a projected \$40billion for traffic relief and transportation upgrades throughout the county over the next 30 years.

The light rail at the earliest might pull into the Montclair station in 2017, at a cost of an additional \$465million.

Because of its current access to Metrolink and the future arrival of light rail, Montclair has changed land-use designation for 150 acres just north of Montclair Plaza. The North Montclair Downtown Specific Plan envisions higher density of residential development near shops and restaurants.

"The idea is to try to create a downtown feel," Lustro said. "We don't have a true downtown. It would be an attractive place to live with an urban-environment feel. I'm optimistic that it will

eventually get done. We continue to plan around that expectation."

La Verne and Ontario have been also planning for the Gold Line.

Ontario has identified a mixed-use parcel of land on the north side of the airport near Archibald Avenue as able to accommodate a Gold Line station, said Tom Danna, traffic and transportation manager for the city.

La Verne designated an area near First and E streets for mixed-use development and higher-density housing.

"Our community has been anticipating the Gold Line for some time," said Hal Fredericksen, director of community development.

"It's been a frustrating experience. The west side of the L.A. Basin has received a lion's share of benefits. This line is needed and anticipated, and it's ready to be built today. Environmental study and right of way are already in place - it would go with existing railway. That's not the case with other rail projects."

Ellen Taylor, a former mayor of Claremont, echoed Fredericksen's sentiment.

"We've been working on it for years," Taylor said. "We have invested \$60million in infrastructure when we developed the Village Expansion. We are not reinventing the wheel. We are trying to do something that works."

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The real problem is in the politics, Taylor said.

The Metro board is heavily weighed toward west Los Angeles County and is pushing for developing the subway-to-the-sea project, an extension of the subway from Wilshire Boulevard and Western Avenue in Los Angeles to Santa Monica.

"We have two million people but have not gotten two million people worth of projects," Taylor said. "They think (people here) don't matter or need subway. Our regional transportation solutions have been neglected."

Metro is committed to providing funding for the Foothill Extension, even though the recession is impacting sales tax from which Measure R derives its funding, said Carol Inge, Metro chief planning officer.

Metro's board members are expected to vote to add the Foothill Extension to the agency's long-range plan in October.

"In terms of final completion, Measure R shows Foothill Extension to Azusa being finished before the subway to Westwood is completed," Inge said.

Acting on a motion by Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich, Metro board members have already allocated \$10million for the Foothill Extension.

"It sends a message that Foothill Extension is real, that it's going to get built under Measure R," said Michael Cano, transportation deputy for

Antonovich.

"The board is going to have to make it a priority for the first time. The border between the counties is fictional for drivers. San Gabriel Valley is at the crossroads. We need to get this (light rail) to San Bernardino County to (Ontario International)."

Initially, the Foothill Extension was supposed to reach a dead end at the county line in Claremont. But the potential of connecting the Ontario airport with foothill communities prompted San Bernardino County to join in.

The county will foot the bill for the three-mile stretch to Montclair and eventually to the airport using money from its own transportation/sales-tax generator, Measure I, among other funds.

"We are waiting on LA Metro for Gold Line to get moving," said Victoria Baker, senior transit analyst at San Bernardino Associated Governments. "We can't even contemplate what will happen in San Bernardino County until it (the Gold Line) gets here."

Although the environmental-impact study was completed, the second phase of Foothill Extension has yet to be developed.

"You never want to get those plans developed too far ahead of funding because projects can change and plans will be criticized," Balian said.

"It takes 20 to 25 years from the time people think it's a good idea to the time when the

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construction begins. For the Los Angeles-to-Pasadena leg of the Gold Line - it was discussed in the '80s and didn't open until 2003. Be patient."

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