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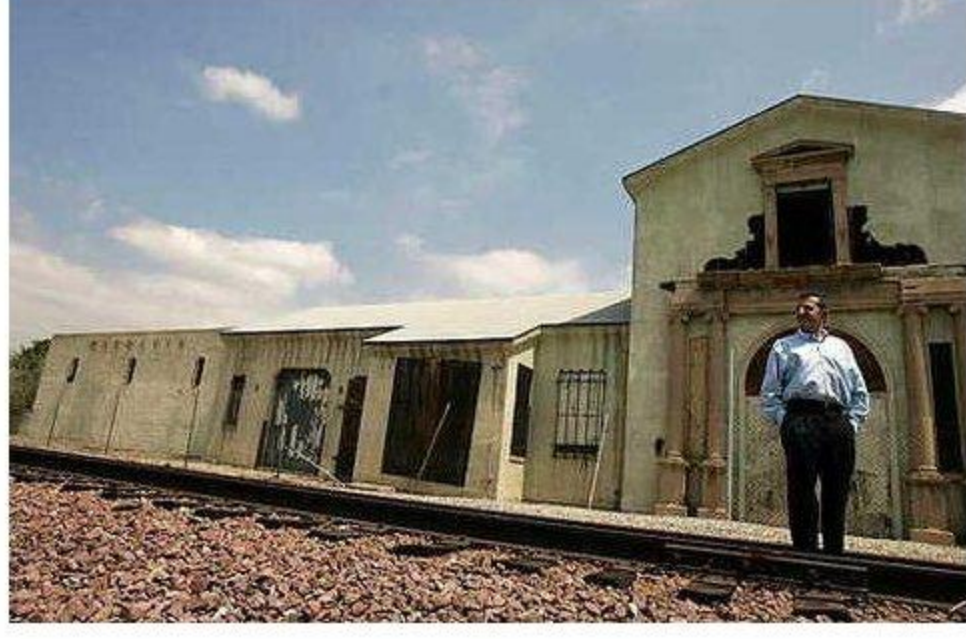
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The Gold Line Foothill Extension*



Across the San Gabriel Valley, cities are drawing up big plans for hundreds of new residences and massive new office buildings -- all for a new train line that may never arrive. Or at least not anytime soon.

So desperate has the campaign become for an extension of the Gold Line that officials in the San Gabriel Valley are treating residents to free transit rides to an MTA board meeting later this month, where a decision on providing \$80 million in funding for the line is expected.

At issue is a proposal to extend the Gold Line 23.9 miles from its current terminus in Pasadena to Montclair in two phases, the first going 11.4 miles to Azusa. The flap -- officials want the money now, not later -- has pitted the San Gabriel Valley against the rest of the county and amounts to one big argument over whose transit project gets funded first.

Habib Balian, the chief executive officer of the **Foothill Extension Construction Authority**, offers a long list of pluses about the Gold Line: It has widespread public support, there's almost no controversy surrounding it, and the line is fairly easy to build because the old freight right-of-way is still there.



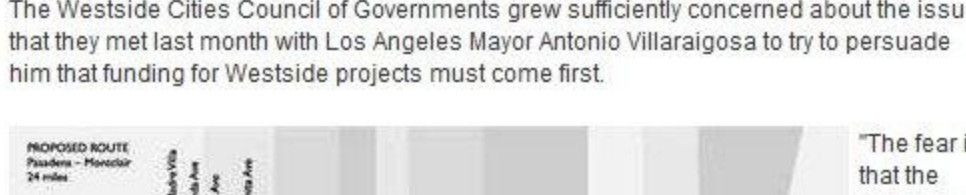
The construction authority has completed most of the preliminary work on the line and says it's nearly ready for construction -- but needs local funds first to secure other state and federal funds. In the meantime, officials in several cities along the route have been preparing development plans around the new stations, the idea being to create new transit villages along the route and channel the valley's growth there.

The train now goes through a mostly industrial area. "Don't look at it as what you see today," Balian said on a recent tour of the corridor. "Look at what it will be in 30 years." (That's Balian, pictured above, at the old Monrovia station, and a rendering of the redevelopment of the site is below).

Trains and Politics

Although the Gold Line may enjoy considerable support in the San Gabriel Valley, it has proven to be a tough sell elsewhere in Los Angeles County, where it is considered a line that will have low ridership that could also bleed money from more worthy projects.

The Westside Cities Council of Governments grew sufficiently concerned about the issue that they met last month with Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa to try to persuade him that funding for Westside projects must come first.



"The fear is that the Gold Line has all its ducks in order and they [the Council of

Governments] were worried that the Gold Line could leapfrog over the Expo Line" for money, said Los Angeles Councilman Bill Rosendahl, who represents the far Westside and attended the meeting. "They wanted to make sure the mayor knew the Gold Line couldn't leapfrog ahead of the Expo Line -- that the Expo Line construction time-line is sacred."

The first phase of the Expo Line is under construction from downtown Los Angeles to Culver City. But the line has run into controversy about street crossings that could delay construction of the first phase and delay the second phase from getting underway. The Expo Line will need federal money for its second phase and officials worry it's hard enough without having to compete with a Gold Line extension.

For more of this story, click below...

San Gabriel Valley officials have long chafed at the structure of the MTA Board, which gives the most political muscle to the city of Los Angeles and the western half of the county. Now those officials want leverage and have privately hinted that if the Gold Line doesn't get money now, they may not support a prospective ballot measure in November that would raise the sales tax in Los Angeles County by a half-penny to pay for a pile of transit projects.

"The San Gabriel Valley is not without its political clout," said Monrovia Mayor Rob Hammond. (*An earlier version of this post incorrectly gave the mayor's last name as Martin.*) "The timing is such that it's all coming to a head right this minute and part of the agreement that is out there is that the San Gabriel Valley, through the foothill extension, will receive favorable support from members of the MTA Board."

That view is somewhat echoed by MTA board member David Fleming, who was appointed to the board by Villaraigosa.

"We've talked to them about this sales tax and told them 'Look, you want our help, we have to have your help,'" Fleming said. "I personally think your extension is a good one and we need it. Part of the consideration for supporting them, they have to support the sales tax, which they agreed to do."

The man in the middle -- both geographically and politically -- is Villaraigosa. His press office declined to say whether he would vote to give the Gold Line money this month, although the mayor has expressed support for the project in the past. At the same time, he is under pressure to provide mass transit for the Westside and likely needs the sales tax increase if the subway-to-the-sea is to become a reality.

There are other concerns about money. Balian has long maintained that if the Construction Authority gets \$80 million, it may be able to get the other \$320-million-plus needed for the project's first phase from the state and federal government.

Although the Federal Transit Administration can fund up to 80% of a project, it rarely does so, said Paul Griffo, a spokesman with the agency. Annual reports from the FTA, available on its [public website](#), indicate that in recent years the FTA has typically provided 25% and 45% of the costs of new light rail lines or subways.

Is the Gold Line a Good Project?

By some measures, the existing Gold Line from downtown Los Angeles to Pasadena has been a disappointment. Of the MTA's four rail lines, it has the lowest ridership although its monthly ridership numbers in May were the highest ever at about 23,000 per weekday.

The extension would initially travel west down the middle of the 210 freeway and then cross to the south side of the freeway on a new bridge. It would stop near downtown Arcadia -- missing both Santa Anita racetrack and the busy Westfield mall -- and then stop a mile south of the gentrified downtown Monrovia.

Officials also point to the fact that the train would connect with Metrolink rail service in the second phase. That would allow riders from the Inland Empire to take a train all the way to Pasadena and provide an alternative to the congested 210. It's also exactly the kind of linkage that Balian and other officials say will grow ridership in future years.

Advocates for the line also point to the abundant amount of land available for development near the tracks, saying that most of the growth in the San Gabriel Valley in coming decades could be put near mass transit -- not the usual way of doing things in Southern California, at least in the past.

Many of the development plans are ambitious and officials want the train project to go forward before those deals go stale. In Monrovia, for example, officials want to build 1,400 residential units, a hotel and more than 850,000-square-feet of office space, transforming a parking lot into a transit village. They also plan to link the station to downtown by greening and reinvigorating a mile-long stretch of Myrtle Avenue between the two.

In Duarte, the train station would be adjacent to the City of Hope hospital. Officials there want to redevelop 19 acres of industrial land into more than 800 residences. Farther east, in Azusa, a station is planned near a massive subdivision that has been proposed for the San Gabriel Mountain foothills.

"You have this opportunity today with these efforts being put toward the stations," said John Fasana, the only MTA board member who lives in the San Gabriel Valley and a Duarte council member. "It sounds great, but if the transit never comes, then you have over development and you've induced gridlock."

--Steve Hyman

Top photo: Gary Friedman / LAT

Station rendering and map: Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority

To readers: What do you think? Should the Foothill Extension go forward now? Or should other projects be built first? Leave a comment.

June 13, 2008 in [Mass Transit](#) | [Permalink](#)

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We have a rare window of opportunity before us. The Foothill Extension is ready to build, and ready to leverage \$320 million in potential Federal Transit Administration funds at a time when no other rail projects in Los Angeles County will be under construction or seeking state or federal funds. Over the last 20 percent, as significantly have increased, ridership on the Gold Line has surged about 20 percent, a gas prices higher increase than any other rail line in the county. This trend will continue into the future. The San Gabriel Valley is expected to generate more than a million peak-period, home-to-work total trips by 2030, the largest in the county. By funding the Gold Line Foothill Extension, we provide drivers with a mass-transit alternative and reduce pollution and congestion, all without diverting funds from any other planned transit project. Including the Foothill Extension in the L RTP is a win for everyone. The article raised the question about whether the FTA would fund 80 percent of the project. The good news is there is a precedent. Recently, the FTA approved a similar arrangement to help build a commuter rail line between Salt Lake City and its suburban communities. This is exactly what we are seeking for the Gold Line.

Habib Balian | CEO, Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority

Posted by: Habib Balian | **June 17, 2008 at 02:54 PM**

The San Gabriel Valley is a community as rich in diversity as it is in potential. When we examine the arguments for funding the Gold Line Foothill Extension, let's not forget the 15 universities and colleges that would be connected along the route, or City of Hope, a leading biomedical research and treatment center and hospital. A mass transit system linking these institutions isn't just serving commuters; it's serving thousands of students, professors, medical workers, patients and others. The Gold Line represents a solution for providing better access to higher education, health care and a brighter future for our community.

Peter Yao,
 Councilmember, City of Claremont

Posted by: Peter Yao | **June 16, 2008 at 03:34 PM**

We all seem to agree that the Gold Line to at least Montclair needs to be built in this decade. The problem seems to be funding not need.

Since cost is the main determining factor that is keeping the line from getting built, lets look at a different way to see the line in operation in two to five years.

If the current rail line was electrified which can be done for well under half a million dollars a mile, add passing sidings, build station platforms and parking. The line can be ready to go for under 100 million dollars. The MTA already has the cars on order so there is little that would stand in the way of getting the line started economically.

San Diego started this way and as ridership grew they were able to double track the line and improve the original track when they could use the second track with out interrupting service.

The BNSF could operate their freight service at night and the LRT service would operate in the daytime hours as is done in San Diego.

This is a quick and easy way to get this much needed line going and a way for it to prove itself.

The line can continue to upgrade as the downtown regional connector gets built and its ridership grows.

Posted by: Alan Fisher | **June 13, 2008 at 05:14 PM**