

MTA Board Gives Green Light to Eastside Light-Rail Project

By ED SCANNELL

(May 24, 2001)The MTA Board adopted a 6-mile, \$760-million light-rail project, Thursday, as the "locally preferred alternative" for LA's Eastside.

Outlined in a draft environmental report released earlier this year, the Eastside Light Rail Transit Project would serve one of the most densely populated and heavily transit-dependent areas in Los Angeles County.

The Eastside rail extension would be linked at Union Station with the 13.7-mile Pasadena Blue Line, which is expected to begin operations in mid-2003. If it receives final environmental approval later this year, construction could begin in mid-2003. Revenue service could start in mid-2007.

The recommended rail alignment would begin at Union Station, head south on Alameda to 1st Street, then bear east to Indiana Street. After a short southerly jog, it would continue east on 3rd Street and end at Beverly Boulevard and Atlantic boulevards.

1.7-mile tunnel segment

The extension would include nine stations and operate at street level with the exception of a 1.7-mile tunnel segment through Boyle Heights where streets are too narrow for a rail line.

In addition to improving access to downtown Los Angeles and communities stretching from downtown to Pasadena, the extension would provide eastside residents with easier access to other cities served by Metro Rail.

Several features make the Eastside an excellent candidate for such a project.

The 40-square-mile Eastside is a densely populated area with a current population of 403,000. That figure is expected to grow 25 percent by the year 2020 and, during the same period, the number of jobs is expected to climb by 30 percent.

Many are transit-dependent

Many Eastside residents are transit dependent. More than 19 percent of workers use the bus system to get to work as compared to 6.8 percent for Los Angeles County as a whole.

As many as 50 percent of the commuter trips in some Eastside

neighborhoods occur on public transit.

The federal government had committed \$495 million toward the cost of extending the Metro Red Line to East LA. The MTA suspended work on the subway in January 1998, but has since determined that a light-rail line can improve mobility on the Eastside while retaining federal funding eligibility.

On the governor's recommendation, the legislature earmarked state surplus funds to fully fund the Eastside alternative. The projected cost of the Eastside Light Rail Transit Project is approximately \$760 million.

Following Board certification and approval by the Federal Transit Administration, the Eastside rail project would be ready for final design and construction.

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