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[Viewpoint](#)
[Classified Ads](#)
[Archives](#)
[Metro.net](#) (web)

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[Safety](#)
[Pressroom](#) (web)

[CEO Hotline](#)
[Metro Projects](#)
[Facts at a Glance](#)  
(web)

[Archives](#)
[Events Calendar](#)
[Research Center/ Library](#)
[Metro Cafe](#) (pdf)

[Metro Classifieds](#)
[Retirement Round-up](#)

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[Training](#)
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Construction Chief Rick Thorpe

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### [Thorpe See Innovative Ways to Build Metro Rail Projects](#)

## Construction Chief Rick Thorpe Looks At Metro Rail's Realities

- Only one major project on the drawing board
- Plans to 'streamline the organization'

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Sept. 28, 2004) Metro Construction is experiencing a sea change. A new way of doing things prompted by two realities: there is only one major transit project – the Exposition Line – on the drawing boards, and the department has a new executive officer who has fresh ideas about how things should be done.

As he looks ahead at the next five or ten years, Construction Chief Rick Thorpe – who joined Metro following a stint as CEO of the Pasadena Blue Line Construction Authority – sees only the Eastside Extension and the Expo Line as near-future construction certainties.

Following the groundbreaking in July, work really is just now beginning on the Eastside Extension, a \$898-million project due to open in 2009. The Exposition Light Rail Project, which will reach from downtown LA to Culver City, is the next priority but most likely will not start construction until at least 2006.

The \$330 million Metro Orange Line, now remobilizing after a 23-day, court-ordered shutdown, is due for completion in the second half of 2005. The proposed extension of the Metro Gold Line to Claremont isn't funded and would be built by an independent construction authority.

### 'Long way from turning dirt'

"Beyond that is the Crenshaw BRT and the downtown connector, both unfunded," he says. "There are other things in the planning stage, but they're a long way from turning dirt."

So as Thorpe, 55, views the future, he sees the need to structure a

department that is flexible, adaptable and willing to do things differently. And is smaller than it is now.

One of his goals for FY 2005 is to "streamline the organization so it matches the work that's coming and, unfortunately, there are fewer and fewer projects."

That means a reduction in force this fiscal year for the 104-member staff of engineers, construction managers, administrative staff and for a support staff that includes auditors, contract managers, public affairs and others.

The Eastside Extension project can support only 25 to 30 employees and the Expo Line "is funded at a level that perhaps will sustain five to ten people," Thorpe says. "The numbers right now don't add up."

### **Prefers to build teams**

Thorpe also is reorienting Metro Construction from what has been a "matrix" organization with "pools" of engineers and others who work on projects only when they are needed. He prefers to build teams whose members are assigned to a project from start to finish.

"I believe you need to have people who are dedicated to a project so they're fully involved," he says. "In my opinion, you don't get that deep-rooted commitment to getting a project done when you're only assigned to it occasionally."

Thorpe notes that CEO Roger Snoble supports his approach, but he acknowledges that it will take time for some Metro Construction employees to make the shift.

"I still see out there a tendency by our staff to want to go back and do things the old way, because that's the way they were taught," he says. "It's going to be important as we go through this transition that we wind up with people who are willing to think out of the box and adjust to a new way of doing things."

At the same time, Thorpe praises the Metro Construction staff. "They're great. We have a lot of talented people. It's a matter of how we utilize those people and their willingness to do things differently."