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Thorpe Sees Innovative Ways to Build Metro Rail Projects

(Sept. 28, 2004) Construction Chief Rick Thorpe is moving away from Metro's former "design-bid-build" method of construction, which was used to build the Metro Red Line.

He's even looking beyond the "design-build" method – a construction technique that established his reputation with rail construction projects in Salt Lake City and as CEO of the Pasadena Blue Line Construction Authority.

The design-build construction method also is now in place on the Eastside Extension and on the Metro Orange Line project.

This method calls for the contractor to both design and build the project. The project owner is responsible for ensuring safety and quality and for making sure the contractor delivers what was promised.

Innovative approach

For the Exposition Light Rail Line, which will connect downtown LA with Culver City, Thorpe is considering a more innovative approach to rail construction.

Under this plan, a team that includes the final contractor will complete the project's preliminary and final engineering. Then, based on the approved design, the project owner and the contractor each will estimate the cost of the project and negotiate the final contract.

"The advantage," says Thorpe, "is that you don't ask the contractor for a cost until all the detailed design is done. The contractor knows exactly how much material he'll need and what his costs are."

And that's an improvement over design-build, which he says doesn't necessarily result in the lowest cost for the project owner. Case in point: the \$898 million Eastside Extension project came in \$113 million over Metro's projected costs.

But Thorpe says design-build does provide the owner with known costs early in the project and results in much faster delivery.

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