


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

Resources

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

[Ask the CEO](#)
[CEO Forum](#)
[Employee Recognition](#)
[Employee Activities](#)
[Metro Projects](#)
[Facts at a Glance](#) (web)

[Archives](#)
[Events Calendar](#)
[Research Center/Library](#)
[Metro Classifieds](#)
[Bazaar](#)

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[30/10 Initiative](#)
[Policies](#)
[Training](#)
[Help Desk](#)
[Intranet Policy](#)

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President's 2008 Budget Includes Eastside Extension, Metro Rapid Funding

- \$80 million for the Eastside, \$16.7 million for Metro Rapid

By DAVE SOTERO

(Feb. 6, 2007) President Bush's proposed budget for Fiscal Year 2008 includes funding for key transportation projects in Los Angeles County, including the Metro Gold Line Light Rail Extension and new Metro Rapid lines.

The new budget calls for \$80 million for the continued construction of the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension, scheduled to open in late 2009. The funding is consistent with the funding outlined in that project's Full Funding Grant Agreement.

"I am pleased that the federal government's budget for next year includes \$80 million for the Eastside Light Rail Project," said Board Chair Gloria Molina. "Metro will put these federal dollars to hard work as we continue to build a much-needed rail link between the Eastside and the rest of Los Angeles County."

Also included in the budget is \$16.7 million for the Metro Rapid Bus System Gap Closure Small Starts project, which seeks to reduce passenger end-to-end trip times along eight new Metro Rapid Corridors.

New Metro Rapid Lines to be established are: West Olympic, Garvey-Chavez, Manchester, Atlantic, San Fernando South, South Sepulveda, Torrance-Long Beach and Central.

The proposed lines have been identified for their potential to reduce travel time throughout the existing Metro Rapid Bus system. The project, which utilizes existing buses, will add 247 new stations along 120 miles of new bus routes. When the project is complete in 2008, it is expected to attract 40,000 new daily riders, and accommodate a total of 123,000 boardings each weekday.

'A vote of confidence'

"Metro's Rapid Program received a big stamp of approval today from Washington, D.C.," said CEO Roger Snoble. "The fact that the President's budget includes over \$16 million for expanding the Metro Rapid system is a vote of confidence that we are building an innovative, user-friendly and rapid bus network in our region."

The President's budget allocates \$175 million for transit security grants nationwide, which is the same amount appropriated by Congress last year, and includes \$12 million for intercity bus security grants. Funding for AMTRAK has been set at \$800 million.

These funding provisions are part of a \$2.9 trillion federal budget that is now under review on Capitol Hill. Congress will deliberate the budget later this spring.

Although the President's budget has good news for Metro, the American Public Transportation Association said it was "extremely disappointed" that the budget request is \$308 million below the amount "authorized and guaranteed" in the FY 2008 SAFETY-LU, the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportatio Equity Act – A Legacy for Users.

APTA is asking Congress to set public transit funding at the \$9.731 billion level authorized under SAFETY-LU in FY 2008.

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