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A weekend celebration in July 1996 welcomed the Wilshire Red Line Extension—and the Wilshire/Western station—to the growing subway.

Happy 12th Birthday to a Pillar of the Metro System

By NED RACINE, Editor

(July 17, 2008) Braving the July heat, an estimated 85,000 people came to celebrate its arrival, in part drawn by free fares and the newness of Los Angeles County rail transit.



This week the Wilshire Red Line Extension—its name in July 1996—turns 12. Open to the public for free rides on July 13 and 14, the new segment began revenue operations on Monday, July 15.

Now, part of the Purple Line, the three Wilshire subway stations – Wilshire/Vermont, Wilshire/Normandie and Wilshire/Western—form a 17.4-mile underground system that features more than 150,000 boardings each weekday.

And, since their opening, the three stations have totaled almost 92 million boardings. How large a number is that? That's approximately the population of California, Texas, New York and Illinois combined.

But in 1996, the opening of the Wilshire Red Line Extension—then the largest public works program in the Western United States—was big news, and Red Line doubters were vocal.

The public still wanted to see it. Potential riders gathered at 5:30 a.m. on

Saturday, July 13 at the Wilshire-Western station, even though rides were offered until 11:30 p.m.

"There were throngs of people; it was standing room only," recalls Fran Curbello, communications manager, who has organized each opening of a Metro line since the Blue Line in 1990. They really enjoyed it. I think trains were so new to people, I think they saw it as an amusement park ride."

Bruce Shelburne, then a schedule planner, remembers the trains running smoothly on their 13-minute round trips, perhaps because the opening had been planned for a year.

"It was another piece in laying the foundation of a first-class transit rail system," said Shelburne, Rail Division Transportation Manager.

Besides adding three stations to the Red Line and adding 50 percent to its length, the new segment added 6,000 daily boardings to the subway, even within a week of its opening.

The segment took \$578 million and five years to build and opened three years after the initial segment of the Red Line began moving people in 1993.

What did Curbello hear most often from the riders that weekend? "This is a great adventure."

With the opening of the Wilshire Red Line Extension, Metro raised the subway fare from a quarter to \$1.35.

In a sign of things to come, four days before the Wilshire Red Line Extension opened, the Los Angeles Times reported that a Pacific Palisades group planned a demonstration to persuade the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to study extending the Red Line subway along Wilshire Boulevard past the Wilshire-Western station.