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Official Metro Gold Line train piloted by Operator Ruben Ramirez breaks through the banner at Union Station to mark the dedication of the 13.7-mile light rail line to Pasadena on July 25, 2003. *Photo by John Weiskopf*

## Gold Line Marks Its Fifth Anniversary as It Sets Ridership Record

By NED RACINE, Editor

(July 24, 2008) Time passes quickly when you're moving millions of riders.

Saturday, July 26 marks the fifth anniversary of the opening of the Metro Gold Line. The nearly 14-mile line was hailed as a historic return of a rail corridor idled for more than 50 years when it opened on July 26, 2003. The last electric trains -- the Pacific Electric "Red Cars" that traveled along the same alignment to Pasadena -- ended in the 1950s.



Metro CEO Roger Snoble and Chief Capital Management Officer Rick Thorpe, then chief executive officer for the Los Angeles to Pasadena Metro Construction Authority, above, were among the officials who lined the stage at Union Station for dedication ceremonies.

The route had been used by Amtrak and Santa Fe railroad for passengers and freight later, but Amtrak passenger service ended in 1994.

Joining downtown Los Angeles and Pasadena, the Metro Gold Line has become increasingly popular—ridership is up 31.8 percent this year over last year.

"The Metro Gold Line has taken its place as a critically important leg of the expanding Metro Rail System that serves the Los Angeles and San Gabriel Valley areas," said Mayor and Metro Board Chair Antonio Villaraigosa. "I look forward to the continued expansion of Gold Line service to



its next destination of East Los Angeles."

In July 2003, anticipation of the line was feverish. The Gold Line has now had more than 27 million boardings, but the first train car—No. 232—carried just 37 passengers. They were train enthusiasts, and they left Union Station at 3:56 a.m. Saturday morning.

That kind of enthusiasm for the \$859-million project carried throughout the opening weekend. More than 160,000 boarding passengers took their first ride on the new line. At times people waited almost two hours to board the latest addition to the 73-mile Metro Rail system.

Metro Public Relations worked to build media buzz by staging several media events prior to the opening, and, in July 2003 alone, 350 stories and articles in print and broadcast touched on the Gold Line Opening. Newspapers were already writing how the new line would change urban planning in the area.

More than 160,000 boarding passengers packed Gold Line trains on opening weekend. *Juan Ocampo photos*



The launch of the rail line was celebrated at seven of the 12 Gold Line Station with unique public festivities from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Hundreds of Metro employees wore gold t-shirts and directed riders to the new P2000 rail cars.



The weekend began with a VIP train bursting through a "Discover Gold" banner on Friday morning. Riding the train, and continuing the "gold" theme of the weekend, were several Olympic Gold Medal winners.

Bursting through the banner, planned smoke bombs were ignited, creating a gold cloud, recalled Fran Curbello, communications manager, who has organized each opening of a Metro line since the Blue Line in 1990. The cloud was not, however, as dramatic as Curbello had planned.



"You always have your drama behind the scene nobody hears about," Curbello said of the Gold Line opening. This was one of those times.

That Friday, the pyrotechnical expert responsible for the gold cloud

disappeared. While looking for her expert, Curbello passed two Sheriff's deputies. She heard one deputy mentioning to the other that they had detained a man after finding bombs in his suitcase. Curbello had found her expert.

Once released, Curbello's pyrotechnical expert could not place all the devices to complete the dramatic smoke effect. The train still broke through the banner, but a spectacular moment was compromised.



The inaugural train seems to disappear in a cloud of gold smoke right before it broke through the banner. *Photo by Juan Ocampo*

Particularly important that weekend was Metro's goal of encouraging attendees to sample the communities along the new line. Curbello wanted to negate any rider thoughts of "I don't want to get off there. I don't know that community."

The Gold Line is now headed east with a six-mile light rail extension to East Los Angeles, scheduled to open next year. Estimated to take 17 minutes to ride between Union Station and the new terminus at Atlantic Station, the line will have eight total new stations.

"The Gold Line is fulfilling its promise as a frequent transit service of choice for cost-conscious commuters," said John Fasana, Metro Board Member and Duarte City Council Member.