

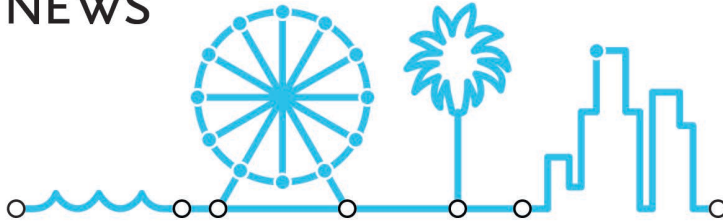


Los Angeles County
Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Metro

Metro Expo Line to Santa Monica

NEWS



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The Expo Line's Earlier Days Recalled by Men Who Worked It

The Expo Line to Santa Monica will be brand new, but passenger rail service to the Westside is nothing Los Angeles hasn't seen before – it's just been a long time, as in half a century ago. The path taken by Phase I of the Expo Line to Culver City and Phase II to Santa Monica was traveled by Pacific Electric's Santa Monica Air Line, a passenger and freight rail service that ran on the same right-of-way. Passenger rail service carried passengers down to Santa Monica until 1953 and freight trains also used the tracks until the late 1980s.

The Air Line was a coveted track to work because it was an easy local run from downtown Los Angeles to the ocean. Only the highest seniority Pacific Electric rail men got the chance to work the Air Line – just ask Larry Fredeen, a former P.E. conductor.

"I was lucky to work the line at all," said Fredeen, who worked the Air Line as a brakeman in the late 1970s. "I was so sad when I heard it was abandoned due to lack of business. I had a lot of good experiences working that track. I'm glad it's returning, although in a different form."

Two of Fredeen's predecessors, conductors Virlon Smoot and Jim Guerin, also worked as brakemen on the Air Line and feel the same about the line's rebirth as the Expo Line. Both men have fond memories of their trips down Exposition Boulevard. When they heard that Expo would be running trains back to the Westside, they were immediately on board.

"I think it's great that transportation has returned to the old Air Line. Hopefully it will remove many vehicles from the gridlocked Westside," said Guerin.

All three men were able to attend Expo Line's opening to Culver City, and they look forward to finally reaching Santa Monica.

The original track itself was built as a steam railroad from Los Angeles to Santa Monica back in the 1870s, and the railroad line became electric by the early 1900s. Pacific Electric consolidated the track in 1911 and called it the Santa Monica Air Line because it was a straight line, traveling almost as a bird flies. As of 1913, hourly service was provided from Main Street Station in Los Angeles to Santa Monica, where cars terminated at Broadway and Ocean, just three blocks from the Expo Line Phase II terminus at 4th Street and Colorado.

The electric line was powered by three substations, one of which can be reached from Culver City Station. The Ivy Substation is listed on the National Historic Register. Renovated in 1992, it is currently home to Actor's Gang Theatre.

In mid-1924 service was greatly reduced, with cars running in morning and evening rush hours only. Sunday service ended around 1926, and by the end of 1931 only a single round trip remained from L.A. to Santa Monica. This continued until 1953, when passenger service was abandoned completely and diesel locomotives took over all freight movements. The line was completely abandoned in 1987 and remained untraveled...until now.

"It was always a wonderful line," said Smoot. "Beautiful weather out there. I always hoped trains would run out that way again. Well, it may not be the Pacific Electric running them, but thank goodness Metro is! This is absolutely fantastic."

About Metro

Metro is a multimodal transportation agency that is really three companies in one: a major operator that transports about 1.4 million boarding passengers on an average weekday on a fleet of 2,000 clean air buses and six rail lines, a major construction agency that oversees many bus, rail, highway and other mobility related building projects, and it is the lead transportation planning and programming agency for Los Angeles County. Overseeing one of the largest public works programs in America, Metro is, literally, changing the urban landscape of the Los Angeles region. Dozens of transit, highway and other mobility projects largely funded by Measure R are under construction or in the planning stages. These include five new rail lines, the I-5 widening and other major projects.

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