

End of the line for Expo legal challenge

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August 7, 2013



Workers construct the Expo Line platform at 26th Street in Santa Monica.

A long-running legal challenge to the Exposition Line light rail project, now under construction from Culver City to Santa Monica, was stopped in its tracks this week by the California Supreme Court.

In a 6-1 decision, the court ruled against the group called Neighbors for Smart Rail, which contended in its lawsuit that the environmental reviews for the second and final phase of the Expo project had been inadequate.

The high court said the environmental information considered was sufficient, although they did agree with the plaintiffs on one point: they found that the project should have considered 2015 conditions—not 2030 conditions—in assessing potential impacts. But even so, the justices found, the process “did not deprive the agency or the public of substantial relevant information on those impacts.”

Expo backers hailed the ruling as the last chapter in a lengthy legal battle and said it clears the way for completion of the project, which will provide a transit alternative on a route that for the most part parallels the heavily-congested 10 Freeway.

“With this litigation now behind us, Westside residents can look forward to an exciting new public transit option when the Expo Line is scheduled to open in 2015,” Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, a member of the [Exposition Light Rail Construction Authority](#) board, said in a statement.

The [high court ruling](#) comes after two lower courts also rejected Neighbors for Smart Rail’s arguments. An injunction that would have stopped work on the project while the Supreme Court considered the group’s appeal was [turned](#)

[down](#) in November, 2012.

Construction has been continuing at a brisk pace since then.

“We were free to move forward, and as a result we were able to construct about almost 50% of the project,” said Samantha Bricker, the construction authority’s chief operating officer. “The contractor is moving full steam ahead.”

“I think it’s a win for future riders,” she added, “as the project will be able to be delivered, as it stands right now, on time and on budget.”

Mike Eveloff, a board member of Neighbors for Smart Rail, said the group is continuing to explore its legal options.

“We’re in the weird position of being right on the law but I really think the court was hesitant to stop a big project,” he said. Meanwhile, he added, the organization “stands ready now, as we always have been, to talk about issues outside the legal process” to address its traffic concerns.

The initial phase of the Expo Line, between downtown Los Angeles and Culver City, opened last year to high ridership. When the second, final phase to Santa Monica is complete, Expo will make it possible to travel between [downtown L.A. and Colorado Avenue and 4th Street in Santa Monica](#) in 46 minutes.

Posted 8/7/13