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A rider gets ready to board the Metro A Line in Downtown Long Beach on Oct. 21, 2019. Photo by Brian Addison.

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Opinion: C'mon, Metro—the LA-to-LB rail line was quicker a century ago than it is now

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Following my last post—[a piece dissecting our self-induced allergy to mass transit](#) despite the fact that California used to have one of the largest railway systems in the world—I continued my nerdy dive into the history of the Pacific Electric Railway.

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Now, I understand that Metro is desperately trying to cut down the travel time on its A Line (formerly the Blue Line), which currently stands at 57 minutes. (More on how they plan on doing that in a second.)

But there is no denying some stark data on how the Pacific Electric Railway's Long Beach line, which stretched directly from Downtown Los Angeles to Downtown Long Beach, was nearly *ten minutes faster* than the current line.

In 1916.

Yes, that's right: Mass transit over a century ago was faster than what we currently have delivering tens of thousands of SoCal riders each day on the A Line.

Courtesy of Metro Los Angeles.

Now onto speeding up what we currently have as far as railways go:

When it was most recently fully operational and since its opening in 1990 as the Blue Line, the A Line has taken 57 minutes to get from Downtown L.A. to Downtown Long Beach. And that is largely because the Long Beach stretch of the light rail hits street signal after street signal, adding on minute after minute for thousands of daily commuters.

The A Line just underwent a massive rehabilitation project and will be [fully operational once again on Nov. 2.](#)

Since re-opening the southern stretch of the line, workers have been fine-tuning the systems attached to create priority for the train to save time for commuters.

“The Blue Line Signal Synchronization Project is saving five minutes of travel time in each direction, between the Willow Street and Downtown Long Beach Stations,” Sharon Weissman, senior advisor to Mayor Robert Garcia, told the Post earlier this year (before the line was renamed). “In addition, Public Works staff are working with the project contractor to implement additional refinements to identify additional travel time savings.”

The project included synchronizing approximately 52 signals, all primarily along Long Beach Boulevard and Pacific Avenue, according to Jennifer Carey of Public Works—and could very well shave off ten minutes, putting it at one minute under the 1916 time.

Light synchronization was first given a call for funding [back in 2013](#). Then it was announced that it would be finished by the fall of 2017:



However, [due to the “fair amount of coordination between the City and Metro,”](#) it was pushed yet again into 2018 due to the procurement process, bidding, fiber cable replacement and more.

The project, grant-funded through Metro in a partnership with the city’s Public Works Department, will not be full preemption of cars—impossible according to traffic engineers for both the city and Metro—but light synchronization.

In fact, the Long Beach stretch of the line is the only stretch that doesn't have a signal preemption or synchronization system—that is, controllers for the movement of traffic that gives preference to Metro trains rather than street traffic (and not to be confused with signal priority technology used for buses).

When the line was first implemented, it had been foreseen that the train would be given priority signalization. In other words, a longer green light. However, the system failed countywide, eventually prompting the city of Los Angeles to score a grant to develop its own traffic-signal priority system.

The Blue Line has faced signal issues in Long Beach along with other lines. Through the previously mentioned grant, LADOT provided signal priority on Washington Boulevard in 2011 after a multitude of complaints and three years of studies. Much to the chiding of public transit commuters, that preemption was not implemented because signal priority attempts to either hold a green light longer or give a green early instead of providing a guaranteed green for trains.

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