

Pasadena Star News:

Our View: Three lines for region

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TRUE regional planning has rarely succeeded in vast Southern California. To build a mass-transit system, for example, will take multiple rail and bus lines that crisscross city and county lines. This isn't New York or Boston, where the home-to-work radius exists in tight, concentric circles. No, in Southern California, 16 million people living in five counties go every which way every day plus Sundays. Though go is a relative term. More like try to go. They mostly sit in traffic.

So, with the bar much higher than in East Coast cities, transportation planners here have tried to build a rail system that will meet the needs of spread-out, car-first Southern California and will offer real alternatives to single-car driving.

Last week, the MTA, the regional agency with the job of doling out federal, state and local dollars for building more mass transit, put off a long-range transportation plan that indeed approached a regional solution.

We're talking about a motion by Los Angeles County Supervisor Mike Antonovich and L.A. City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas to support three light-rail lines with local dollars and then leverage those funds to land matching federal dollars. We're solidly behind the pair's motion, which would allocate - in writing - monies from the recently passed Measure R sales tax to build the first phase of the Gold Line Foothill Extension from Sierra Madre Villa Avenue to Azusa/Glendora near Citrus College, the second phase of the

Eastside Extension from Atlantic Avenue near Monterey Park into or near Whittier and a Crenshaw Line (either light rail or fixed bus) from the Wilshire-Western terminus of the Red Line going south to the Green Line near LAX.

These are three lines that would move people west and south of L.A., east of East L.A. and along the foothill communities of Arcadia, Duarte, Irwindale, Azusa, Glendora, San Dimas, La Verne, Claremont and Montclair. The motion would solidify about \$875 million from Measure R to build the first Foothill extension plus maintenance yard and railcars, then use federal dollars to continue that line as planned to Montclair. San Bernardino County is looking at extending that even further into Ontario International Airport.

The regional approach from Ridley-Thomas and Antonovich came about after the MTA's L.A. representatives moved to apply for federal dollars for only Westside L.A. projects:

the Downtown Regional Connector and the Westside Extension of the Red Line subway (aka "the subway to the sea"). That represents parochial thinking and should be rejected.

Under Obama administration rules, projects must be in construction or ready for construction to receive federal dollars. That would exclude those two projects.

In a not-too-shocking outcome, the MTA decided to postpone all decisions about what projects should be in its long range transportation plan. More importantly, many of the county's 88 cities demanded to know when the funds would be available and when projects would be started and completed.

The Gold Line Foothill and Eastside extensions can be built sooner rather than later. Indeed, the Foothill Gold Line is shovel-ready. It should receive federal funds for the second phase while being assured of Measure R funds for the first phase, not for completion by 2017 but by 2013, the time frame set by the folks who will build the project, the Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority.

The Antonovich-Ridley-Thomas motion will use a 50-50 split of local and federal funds to build these projects. This is a regional solution that needs to be approved as part of the mass transit agency's plan at its next meeting in September.