IT’S OUR LIGHT RAIL LINE!  LET’S MAKE IT BETTER!

- The Expo Light Rail Line is coming to our neighborhood!
- Our politicians are currently studying the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and will vote on a Final EIR in early 2010. The EIR includes Expo’s proposals for the line, but there is still time to contact our elected officials about how to better integrate the line into our residential neighborhoods.

We are Light Rail for Cheviot, a group formed in January of 2007 to support the use of the existing Right of Way (ROW) along the edge of Cheviot Hills; now that the ROW has been chosen, we continue to disseminate information about the features being proposed for this line, one that most of us will appreciate and utilize. We support the Light Rail Line, but feel that its installation can be more neighborhood-friendly than is currently proposed. Below, we discuss some of the issues currently being raised.

Why is the line being proposed to run at-grade at Overland and Westwood? Because the application of the Metro grade-crossing criteria all along the line shows that, with appropriate mitigations, it is not necessary to elevate the line or run it underground along most of the Phase 2 route.

Do Westwood and Overland really need to be widened for a few blocks north and south of the tracks? Will this prevent cars queuing up at the traffic lights and across the tracks? Are there other alternatives that would better preserve the residential character of the neighborhood? A study of alternatives to street widening can be requested. The Expo Authority is meeting the grade crossing criteria by adding traffic lanes for a few blocks north and south of the tracks on Overland, Westwood, and Sepulveda; this was not done in Phase 1. If the traffic on these new lanes were assigned to existing lanes, the grade crossing criteria might not be met in all three intersections. A review of this application of the policy for conformity with its use in Phase 1 can be requested.

What about the loss of mature liquidambar trees along Westwood, necessitated by the mitigations proposed? We can save the liquidambar trees along Westwood and perhaps renegotiate the proposed additional lanes and loss of parking spaces – one option would be to request the traffic lane dimensions found acceptable to Santa Monica rather than the wider lane dimensions used by LADOT. Contact your elected officials about exploring this and other options.

Why can’t the line go underground along Cheviot Hills and possibly further west? It is not feasible to build this line underground now for political, financial, and logistical reasons (the depth and configuration of multiple large box storm drains crossing under the Expo tracks increases the cost). The current cost for building a subway is close to $500 million a mile. Of the many modern U.S. light rail lines, not one has been built underground beneath an existing rail Right of Way. Furthermore, unless the proposed mitigations can be shown to be inadequate, an inequitable application of the Metro grade-crossing policy would invite lawsuits.

Are at-grade lines safe, and what about noise and vibrations? At-grade light rail is the normal, nationwide standard. The Pasadena Gold Line has been operating six years and has an excellent safety record. Noise and vibrations are minimal with modern light rail and mitigations for them are detailed in the DEIR. We must ensure that the highest safety and mitigation standards are implemented as the project goes forward.

Could the line be elevated as it approaches Overland and runs further west? We might be able to justify and get an elevated line at least at Overland. Would this be an eyesore? Would it be unfair to residents along Phase I (the grade crossing policy must be applied equitably along the entire line)? Could it be shown to be the best way to address concerns about present and future north/south traffic? Do we want elevated grade separation to be studied so that we can compare the feasible alternatives, at-grade and elevated?

Do we really want the station proposed at Westwood? Westwood is the station with the highest predicted ridership of the entire line and it has excellent bus connections; it is also the station most residents of Cheviot Hills and Rancho Park are likely to use. Why would we not want it there?
Park not parking? Do we want parking lots or parkland at the Westwood Station between Overland and Westwood? Let your elected officials know how you feel about this. See the website www.expogreenway.org for more information on the park. Or request green, well-landscaped parking lots.

What about Overland School? Overland School has thrived despite the long-standing greater noise and danger of automobile traffic and it will continue to do so; electric light rail lines are quiet and do not cause pollution, although, misleading claims about pollution and vibrations have been made by Expo opponents for some 20 years. Administrators at two schools on the Gold Line, Arroyo Vista Elementary School in South Pasadena and Arroyo Seco Museum Science Magnet (K-8) in Highland Park, reported noise and dust during construction but said they do not notice the light rail at all now; one school uses the Line for field trips. Finally, the LAUSD had no safety issues with schools built next to the Eastside Gold Line (1st and Mission) and Long Beach Blue Line (Santee south of Washington).

Won’t there be crossing hazards in our residential neighborhoods and near our schools? The same safety standards that have given the Pasadena Gold Line an excellent safety record for its six years of operation will be implemented, basically quad gates for cars plus pedestrian gates.

Why not raise money and file court cases to stall or stop the line? We want the line, first of all, and the costs of litigation will be very high. It would not cost just $150,000, as some allege, to take cases to court. It would cost much, much more and most likely achieve nothing. North Hollywood opponents of the now much-applauded Orange Line lost at the trial and appellate levels and only briefly had an injunction. (On the other hand, $150,000 could buy and plant 200 36” box trees; maybe money should be raised for that instead.)

Won’t cross traffic be stopped for up to 58% of the time (28-35 min/hr) on all North-South roadways (Overland, Westwood, Military, Sepulveda, etc.)? No, gates will be down at peak periods 28% of the time, less than any typical traffic signal that is red at least 50% of the time. (Calculation: average crossing gate down time 42 seconds with trains 5 minutes apart in both directions at peak: 42 seconds times 24 trains times 1 minute/60 seconds times l hour/60 minutes = 0.28)

Wouldn’t an at-grade line need to have 8 to 10 foot concrete sound walls running through the neighborhood? The minimal train noise, insignificant compared to background traffic noise, may not necessitate sound walls and certainly not ones that high. Do residents want sound walls? Let’s have the sound wall proposal (8 feet) re-evaluated once the line is in so that neighbors can make an informed decision.

Can we prevent light rail riders from parking in our neighborhoods? There should be a preferential parking system implemented once the line opens to help prevent cars jamming our neighborhoods. Ask for this!

Is the Expo Authority, the responsible agency for the Expo Line Phase 2, complying fully with CEQA (the California Environmental Quality Act) requirements? Yes, it is.

Won’t the Subway to the Sea make the Expo Line irrelevant? No, the two corridors are widely separated and both lines are needed. The Expo Line scheduled completion date is 2015, while the Wilshire subway is projected to reach Westwood only in 2036.

It is our neighborhood, our future transportation, our light rail line. Rather than oppose it in unrealistic ways, let’s work to make it great! Our elected officials are actively reviewing the DEIR now and they need to hear from you. Let them know your opinions! And, if you like, can you copy us so that we know what they are receiving.

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