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Can Green Line make the train to plane connection?

A state infrastructure bond may bridge the gap between a Green Line stop at Aviation Boulevard in El Segundo and LAX.

[»PHOTO GALLERY: Green Line link to LAX?](#)

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To reach his ground operations job at Los Angeles International Airport, Terry Quiroz leaves home before sunrise.

The Corona man starts each morning with a drive to Norwalk, where he picks up a Green Line train that brings him just close enough to his destination to see the hangars and hear the jets.

The trip is not over, though.

"There's the inconvenience of making a long workday even longer," Quiroz said one morning as he waited for the shuttle bus from the Green Line to the airport.

The 1½-mile gap between LAX and the light-rail line's Aviation Boulevard stop in El Segundo is a daily source of frustration to commuters such as Quiroz as well as travelers who often can be seen scrambling with their luggage as they make the train-to-bus transfer.

It is also a legacy of political dysfunction, decades-old funding shortages, technical concerns, uncertainty over the airport's growth and healthy doses of institutional foot-dragging and infighting.

Now, with the confluence of a state infrastructure bond and the resolution of the long-running legal dispute over growth at LAX, some officials finally see a chance to link the Green Line to the airport.

"This is the first time I really have hope," said Councilman Bill Rosendahl, who represents the LAX area.

While there is opportunity, there are also challenges, though -- notably the tangle of bureaucracies with a stake in the Green Line, and the fierce competition the light-rail line will face should the state bond win at the ballot box.

Underscoring the financial hurdles, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, which operates the Green Line, just passed a new budget with no money set aside for extending it.

"We have been looking at a number of transit corridors throughout the county, and the Green Line extension is certainly one of them, but not the only one," said Carol Inge, the MTA's chief planning officer.

In a recent MTA document that ranked long-range transit projects based on construction costs and projected ridership, plans to bring the Green Line further north and deeper into the South Bay were

relatively low on the list.

MTA officials declined to speculate about how much a Green Line link to LAX might cost, but the agency is still hoping that a Green Line extension to the airport could be funded as part of the city's wider LAX renovation, Inge said.

Those efforts remain on hold as airport and community leaders revisit the overhaul as part of this year's settlement agreement that ended the lawsuits concerning the LAX Master Plan.

Los Angeles World Airports, the city agency that runs LAX, has been holding community outreach meetings, while airport officials have met with their counterparts at the MTA and regional cities as recently as May 18, said Patrick Tomcheck, the airport's senior transportation engineer.

"The agencies are now talking on a regular basis," he said. "It's still a work in progress."

To provide the Green Line-LAX link, airport officials have proposed building a "people mover" around the airport that travelers could walk to from the Aviation Boulevard station. Other officials prefer a northbound spur of the light-rail line with a more direct connection to the people mover.

Assemblyman Ted Lieu, D-El Segundo, is among those who favor the latter.

"It doesn't make logical sense to stop the Green Line that short a distance from the airport -- it's just far enough away to make it not relevant," he said.

Lieu and Rosendahl are hopeful that some money for the project may be found in the \$37 billion infrastructure bond Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger and the legislature recently placed on the fall ballot.

Unlike an earlier proposal, the current plan includes money for public transportation. If the bond passes, the MTA would likely make recommendations for dividing the local share, with a state commission having ultimate approval.

Rosendahl said he will advocate for the Green Line in that discussion on a local level, and Lieu and Sen. Debra Bowen, D-Redondo Beach, said they will do the same in Sacramento.

"I'll be working to make sure that the project gets qualified and funded," Bowen said. "In every major city, when there's been rail that ends near an airport, it's eventually been extended."

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who also chairs the MTA board, has said publicly that bond money would help extend the Red Line subway to West Los Angeles. He has not made a similar commitment for the Green Line, but he expressed general support, saying it is an important part of the LAX settlement.

County Supervisor Don Knabe, also an MTA board member, wants to wait for community input to surface in the airport settlement discussions. However, a spokesman for the supervisor said that eventually extending the Green Line north and south is important to the South Bay's future.

Such statements mark a significant shift in what officials consider to be the rail line's purpose.

Completed at a cost of \$718 million, the 20-mile Green Line was envisioned mainly as a way to bring workers from their homes in southeast Los Angeles County to aerospace jobs in the South Bay. But the aerospace industry had dwindled by the time the railway opened in 1995.

Now, more than a decade later, officials see the Green Line as a way to ease the oppressive traffic jams stretching from the South Bay to LAX and West Los Angeles.

To fulfill this new role, though, the railway would need new legs up and down the coast.

"It used to be on the old graphs of futuristic mass transit, but they shoved it into the drawer about 10, 15 years ago," Rosendahl said. "I pulled it out of the drawer and all the future maps are going to have it on it -- then we'll talk about how to fund it."

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