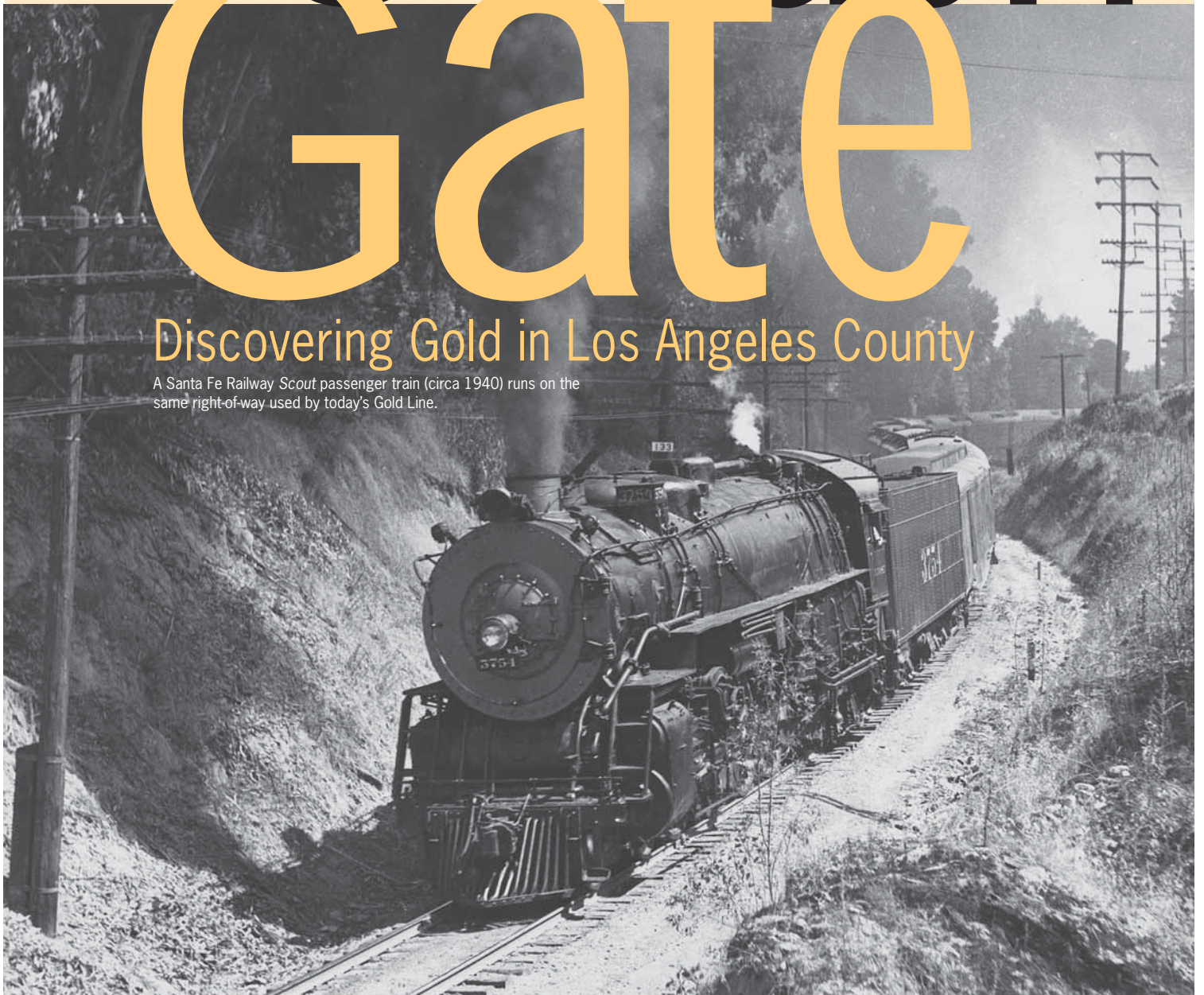


By Beth Wilson

Opening the Golden Gate

Discovering Gold in Los Angeles County

A Santa Fe Railway Scout passenger train (circa 1940) runs on the same right-of-way used by today's Gold Line.



Like other communities along the Gold Line's proposed Foothill Extension, Monrovia is planning for a community connected by the Gold Line. A mixed-use development will incorporate the city's historic Santa Fe depot.

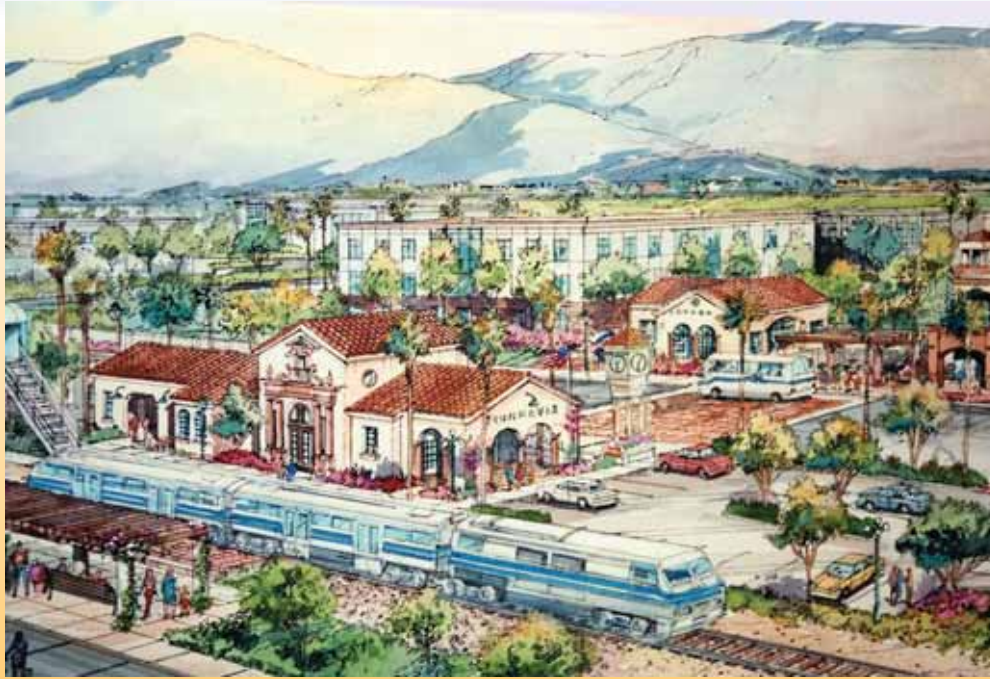


Image courtesy of the City of Monrovia.

As the sleek new train gathered speed on its northbound run from downtown LA to Pasadena, I realized that the Los Angeles I'd known when I lived here over a decade ago was no more. And the rest of the nation is watching how this region pieces together mobility, opportunity, housing and community in an effort to reshape its future. The experiment began with the Blue Line, followed by the Red and Green, and in a decade of transformation passenger rail began changing Los Angeles' cartography of connectivity – from the Long Beach harbor to downtown's Civic Center to Hollywood's Walk of Fame to Redondo Beach. The city's MetroLink commuter rail service, too, adds to the growing rail culture. Expansion of the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority rail system is impacting mobility options, economic opportunities, traffic congestion, future growth and quality of life in southern California.

The latest addition to the region's rail lineup is the Pasadena Gold Line, stretching from downtown's Union Station to the foot of the San Gabriel Mountains, and serving multiple communities in between. The line's evolution – both in terms of its own construction and the community development it's spurring – stands apart from its earlier Metro Rail siblings. Future rail projects in Southern California will now be held to the Gold standard.

A Different LA Story

Los Angeles is not New York City or Boston or Chicago or even San Francisco. How could passenger rail make its way back into an ever-expanding megatropolis fed by eight-lane arteries?

Photo courtesy of the Los Angeles Railroad Heritage Foundation (www.larhf.org).



THE ORIGINAL INTERCITY

The first intercity route of the Pasadena & Los Angeles Electric Railway linked the two cities in 1895. Reorganization – and a couple of name changes – couldn't combat financial difficulties, however. Collis Huntington, president of the Southern Pacific Railroad, and his nephew Henry Huntington took control of the company, expanding the system with connections to Long Beach, Monrovia, Glendora, Sierra Madre, Newport Beach, San Pedro and Santa Ana under the Pacific Electric banner. The Great Merger of 1911 consolidated several local traction and interurban companies into a new Pacific Electric, which introduced a unifying paint scheme for its grand fleet. The era of the Red Cars had begun.

And what an era it was. There were few places in LA that the Red Cars didn't run to and long-time Angelenos, almost universally, have fond memories of one of America's premier urban rail systems. The last of the Red Cars made its final run on the Long Beach line in 1961. Running over much of the same right-of-way, the Metro Blue Line signaled rail's return to the region in 1990.

With more than 10 million current residents and over six million newcomers expected to arrive in the region by 2030 – and with freeways at capacity – Los Angeles County – and much of California, for that matter – is rethinking how it manages growth. To encourage higher density communities, a new mobility strategy is emerging, and a shift in transportation infrastructure. In just 20 years, a viable passenger rail network has emerged.

The Los Angeles region has deliberated the resurgence of rail since the day the last Pacific Electric Red Car departed downtown's Subway Terminal Annex on April 8, 1961. A 1964 reconfiguration of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority produced the new Southern California Rapid Transit District (RTD) – a body with the power to levy voter-approved taxes and a mission to build a rail network. It would be another decade before voters would support mass transit, allowing the diversion of some gasoline tax revenues in 1974 to fund rail construction. By the end of the decade, the federal government saw promise in the region's rail studies, and federal investment looked possible. Area residents recognized the value, too, approving a half-cent sales tax to support passenger rail efforts.

While RTD was far along in its plans for a subway emanating from downtown's Union Station, a new planning body – the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (CTC) – refocused efforts on a less complicated and less expensive light-rail line from Los Angeles to Long Beach, reclaiming an old Pacific Electric right-of-way. This corridor signaled the rebirth of rail in the area, with the Blue Line opening in 1990. The first segment of the Red Line – finally putting in motion the subway plans and marking the merger of RTD and CTC to become today's MTA – opened three years later, with extensions to Hollywood and North Hollywood in place by the end of the decade. The Green Line, a second light-rail line, opened between Norwalk and Redondo Beach in 1995.

Enter the Gold Line. Launched in 2003, it follows the route of the old Santa Fe Railway Pasadena Subdivision – territory once covered by the legendary *Super Chief* and *El Capitan* (as well as the *Scout* we feature in the photo on page 18). It runs north from downtown, goes through the Old Town district of Pasadena and moves passengers onto the median of the Foothill Freeway on its way



Photo courtesy of Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority.

There's no mistaking the Gold Line's Chinatown Station. Its design was guided closely by area residents.

Gold Line's Mission Station serves as the backdrop for this July 2003 broadcast. Rides were free over the summer weekend as the line was launched, and more than 150,000 passengers came on board to celebrate and explore. This morning's commute on the Gold Line's official first day may offer a better gauge of public reaction, and callers to the show are enthusiastic. Riding the rails to downtown Los

Angeles enables passengers to avoid the congestion of the area's busiest freeway corridor. When the Gold Line's success is measured, however, more than ridership will be in the tally.

Mantle has invited several individuals involved in the Gold Line's development to join him in observing this morning's activity from the rail station's plaza. Built to complement the historic commercial neighborhood in which it sits, it includes brick pav-

to its current outbound termination at Sierra Madre Villa in east Pasadena. The 13.7-mile light-rail line connects Pasadena, South Pasadena and several Los Angeles neighborhoods with downtown Los Angeles, where Union Station is the gateway to mobility – subway, bus, commuter rail and Amtrak.

The equipment plying the Gold Line's tracks are Siemen's P200 stand-alone cars built locally in Southern California and designed for use on LA's Green and Gold Lines. They offer a seating capacity of 76.

The Gold Line's completion brought the tally to 411 miles of rail and 89 stations in Los Angeles County. Wait a minute. Los Angeles? A rail town? It once was, in an era where passenger rail and real estate development were inextricably linked. A similar connection is reemerging in communities along the Gold Line. A return to the streetcar suburbs, if you will.

"In a city that's been designed and zoned to accommodate travel by car, it isn't enough to simply build public transit – you have to make it convenient by building up the city around it," say Gloria Ohland, senior editor with Reconnecting America,

a national organization working to connect transportation networks with community development.

"Building up" means creating easy access to the stuff we call community – home, jobs, groceries, medical care, restaurants, pharmacies, retail, day-care, dry cleaning, city hall and more combined together in destinations marked by rail stations. With the right mix of housing density, land use and public policy to support it, says Ohland and a growing number of transit operators, planners and policy makers, passenger rail works ... even here. This is the Gold Line story.

Panning for Success: The Gold Line

We'll begin this story almost two years ago. It's Monday morning, and AirTalk host Larry Mantle is broadcasting live from South Pasadena. In place of the KPCC studio, the Metro

Gold Line ridership is expected to grow as the line expands into new communities at both ends.



Photo by Juan Ocampo, courtesy of LACMTA (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Authority).

ing stones, retro-style street lamps, an old-fashioned clock tower, decorative metal benches and brass railings leading up to a station platform shaded by canopies. A 10-foot-tall bronze statue of a man in mid-stride, artist Michael Stutz's *Astride-Aside*, adds public art to the public transit experience.

Especially noteworthy today is the

construction site down the block from Mantle and his on-air guests. Months before trains started running here, developers broke ground just north of the station on Mission Meridian Village, a 67-home project – a mix of artist lofts, Craftsman-style townhouses and single-family homes, along with 5,000 square feet of retail space – all designed for rail commut-

ers. On the northern edge of historic Old Pasadena, just three stops away, the Memorial Park Station sits beneath the Holly Street Village Apartments. The Gold Line was incorporated into the design of this residential and retail complex ... nearly a decade before trains even started rolling.

Clearly, the Gold Line is not just about getting places but also about places themselves. This latest light-rail line moves outside the bounds of traditional mobility, with communities leveraging rail connections to re-fashion and even create destinations.

Rail-oriented development became a popular concept over the last decade, and has taken its place in our modern day lexicon. It connotes an attractive idea but still a novel one not easily defined or understood. We tend to think of it as a product with specific characteristics. But it's really more of a process, one that looks different in different communities, requiring policies and actions that match the community's assets and goals. In some locations, more density may be needed around existing services. In others, more transit may be needed to serve existing densities. In still other regions, greater pedestrian connectivity or regional connectivity by the rail system itself may be needed to make transit a convenient, viable option.

But transit alone is not



Rail-oriented, mixed-use development, including senior and family affordable housing, is replacing industrial warehouses — and building community — next to the Lincoln Heights/Cypress Park Station.



enough to spur transit-oriented development, says Ohland.

“You need the market.”

And the market for dense, walkable and accessible communities is growing. A new study by *Reconnecting America's Center for Transit-Oriented Development* suggests that the demand for higher-density housing near passenger rail stations is likely to more than double by 2025, pushed higher by aging baby boomers, shrinking household size, continuing immigration and expanding transit systems. The potential demand in the Los Angeles metro region is expected to be the second highest in the country, behind only New York.

People are seeking convenience, says Ohland from her home near the Gold Line's Southwest Museum sta-

tion, and rail-oriented development enables lifestyles that make transit a convenient choice. A forthcoming study from the Mineta Transportation Institute in San Jose echoes that claim. Surveys show that people living along the corridor are three times more likely to take the Gold Line than those living further out who are required to connect first by car or bus. Dr. Hollie Lund with the Department of Urban and Regional Planning at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona, principal investigator in the study, says that a severe housing shortage combined with municipal efforts to support mixed-use development in city plans made the Gold Line an attractive investment.

“The main driving factor for developers was the opportunity to build

new housing,” she says.

Currently, only a small portion of all new housing is being built near passenger rail. If development strategies shift to capture this market, rail-oriented development could accommodate a significant portion of regional growth and boost ridership, according to the study's authors. By leveraging their investment in passenger rail, communities could potentially see a greater return — not just mobility but a new way of living. Walkable communities close to shops, services and transit, and characterized by new capital investment, rising property values, increased commercial activity, stable municipal budgets, stronger public services and community improvements like streetscaping and parks.

Such transit-oriented space must be shaped and guided by public policy and regulations. Zoning and planning codes in many regions were put in place to fit the housing and traffic patterns of an earlier era, requiring separation of residential, commercial and industrial structures, as well as a certain amount of available parking. Besides raising construction costs and lowering investment potential for developers, both requirements run counter to transit-oriented-development ideals. A mix of land uses promotes the creation of place defined by access and choice.

Which is exactly what happened along the Gold Line. With common goals, the member communities along the corridor crafted creative public-private partnerships to leverage the arrival of passenger rail.

The Line that Almost Wasn't

Designs for a rail transit system serving the Los Angeles region began in earnest when highway gas taxes were committed to its construction in the mid-1970s. When passage of Proposition A in 1980 committed a half-cent sales tax increase to public transit projects in Los Angeles County, the idea of a rail line to Pasadena was placed on the table. When Proposition C added another half-cent to mass transit projects and Proposition 108 authorized \$1 billion in state bonds to improve railroad infrastructure in 1990, the idea moved forward.

The Gold Line – originally called the Blue Line (as an extension of the original) – became MTA's fourth conventional rail project in 1994, following the purchase of the former Santa Fe Railroad right-of-way. The customary development sequence – designing the line, requesting bids and ultimately building the connec-

tions – was halted, however, by an agency budget crisis a few years later, with construction little more than 10 percent complete. Communities along the planned corridor – long anticipating new mobility options and determined to see the Gold Line through to fruition – saw in the crisis an opportunity.

Congressman Adam Schiff was at that time a state senator representing California's 21st District, including Pasadena – a community that, along with the rest of the region, was grappling the challenges of growth. Schiff saw a light-rail line as a strategy to not only ease commutes, preserve green space and improve air quality; it would be a primer for economic development and revitalization, maximizing a community's investment in mobility.

"There are many benefits to rail transit – getting people to work, alleviating congestion, reducing pollution," says Schiff of the Gold Line. "There are also economic benefits. You've got shops, restaurants and parks blossoming around these stations. They're like economic incubators."

Crafting two senate bills, Schiff legislated state credit guarantees to local transportation projects, along with the creation of the Los Angeles to Pasadena Blue Line Construction Authority – a single-purpose Joint Powers Authority (JPA) that focused efforts and resources from the cities of Los Angeles, South Pasadena and Pasadena on completing the rail line. What was originally envisioned as an extension of the Blue Line – and named thus – was later christened the Gold Line because it actually ran on a separate track, requiring passengers to transfer at Union Station. The legislated Authority name, however, stuck.

"They should have named it the

Phoenix!" says Pasadena City Manager Cynthia Kurtz, of a rail line plagued by agency mergers, diverging priorities, scarce resources, growing price tags and a two-decade process of fits and starts. "Three times we worked to resurrect the project."

The local communities' strong interest in the rail line was key to the project's success, says Schiff. But it was a competing interest within the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority. By taking ownership of the project, he explains, the cities along the corridor could make the Gold Line a number one priority.

"The cities in my district had built the rail line into their urban plans," says Schiff, underscoring the determination of the municipalities involved. "There were already holes in the ground where the stations were supposed to be."

Resuming construction required new investment that could be pooled with the remaining MTA funds allocated to the project. The Construction Authority secured additional funds – primarily state and local – and sold development rights along the corridor they now owned.

"The lion's share of the challenge was to cut costs to match available revenues," explains Schiff. "The JPA, using a design-build model, was able to cut \$100 million from the total price tag."

This streamlined approach to rail construction – eliminating the need for staff to manage multiple design, engineering and construction contracts; speeding construction with a single contractor – (Washington Group International); – setting timelines and allocating budget – introduced flexibility, low overhead and time-saving continuity.

Bottom line? The Construction Authority brought the Gold Line to



Public art, as in other LA rail projects, is an important aspect of the Gold Line.

the San Gabriel Valley on time and under budget.

“I think that’s a first for LA transportation,” adds Schiff. “And an important lesson for the region.”

The Joint Powers Authority was a vehicle for community control and ownership. It also removed from the Gold Line the stigma of politics that had enveloped other rail projects in the area.

“The JPA – this was local elected officials. They had an enormous say in how the project developed. That was important because it was their community,” explains Rick Thorpe, former chief executive officer of the Construction Authority and now executive officer for project management at MTA. “As a result of their guidance, their understanding of how it should all fit, we wound up with

something that fits the fabric of these communities extremely well.”

Crafting a rail line attuned to the communities it serves, the Construction Authority incorporated public input into each station’s design, as well as the route itself. An extensive community outreach program walked residents through the project, introduced proposed design elements and gathered feedback.

“We started from scratch,” says Thorpe. “We threw out what we were given and went back to the community.”

That meant, for instance, redesigning a Chinatown station that tied into the community’s architecture, and tunneling under Pasadena’s Colorado Boulevard to accommodate the famed Rose Parade.

“At my first meeting, I was booed

and almost booted out of the room,” says Thorpe, recalling the dissatisfaction of residents with the line’s initial plans for Chinatown. “At the last meeting I received a standing ovation. We came a long way.”

Trains at last started running in July 2003. But there was a lot more riding on the Gold Line than passengers.

More than Mobility

The Metro Blue Line connecting Long Beach and downtown Los Angeles, now in operation for a decade and a half, has become the most heavily used light-rail route in the nation,

with over 70,000 week-day boardings in FY2004. It was built on an existing right-of-way running primarily through sparsely populated industrial pockets. Serving South Los Angeles County – where one in three people lacks access to a private vehicle – the line’s success remains moving large numbers of people to and from jobs in the developed anchors at both ends.

The Green Line has been moving people between Norwalk and Redondo Beach for a decade now. Built to run down the middle of and provide an alternative to the Century Freeway, the potential for station area development is severely limited.

Los Angeles’ only subway, the Red Line, has been the platform for a number of joint development projects, including retail, entertainment, resi-

Photos courtesy of the City of South Pasadena.



South Pasadena has anchored its community with a pedestrian plaza that flows from the Mission Station platform. The nearby Mission Meridian Village will similarly blend into the existing neighborhood while revitalizing an old commercial area.

dential and even educational.

And even with the Red Line's oft-cited construction problems and cost overruns, its role in re-shaping parts of Hollywood is unmistakable.

Ohland speculates that rail-oriented development has been a much bigger part of the Gold Line story for several reasons. First, the concept had a decade to mature, and cities, planners, transit providers and the general public has become slightly more sophisticated about the process. Also, the Gold Line brought together three cities to collaborate on a common, regional vision. The 22-mile Blue Line, in contrast, involved 15 different cities – cities that did not necessarily have the same kinds of resources or share the same goals. Lastly, the market for transit-oriented development was strong along the Gold Line corridor. The cities and citizenry were ready and eager for it.

When you hear people speak of the Gold Line, they don't talk as much about a transportation option to downtown Los Angeles as about light-rail coming to their neighborhood. It's useful, then, to explore the Gold Line's impact by following the route on its outbound run, headed for communities that are themselves des-

tinations along the line – not simply nodes in a rail network but places in their own right.

A Whole Experience in Los Angeles

Leaving downtown's Union Station, the Gold Line travels north on elevated track to Chinatown, then on through the neighborhoods of Lincoln Heights, Cypress Park, Highland Park and Mt. Washington – the original suburbs of the city. These are neighborhoods that have experienced decline fed by a flight to the newer, outer suburbs. The remaining population has one of the nation's lowest percentage of automobile ownership.

Six of the Gold Lines' 13 stations are located within the city of Los Angeles, and five of those are located in Councilmember Ed P. Reyes' district (for more on Mr. Reyes, please see p. 10). Reyes was an instrumental force behind the creation of the Rail Oriented Districts along the Gold Line route.

"The Gold Line created a certain synergy – bringing in a new look and role for how this space is used," says Reyes of the transformation of an old freight line corridor that had devolved into an unsightly and unsafe dump-

ing ground. "It changed the whole image of the space."

The Joint Powers Authority process, he says, reflected different environments and the needs of different communities. His district's challenge, he explains, was to build a rail line that was safe, that complimented the unique corridor "and all of its nuances," and that would serve as a stimulus for economic development.

The community worked with the Construction Authority to designate more train stops – at the Southwest Museum, the Audubon Center, the Highland Park Recreation Center and at parks and childcare locations – to slow train speeds and to build below-grade separation where needed.

"We were concerned with linkages," says Reyes of a focus that widened beyond simple mobility. "With how we could put together a whole experience."

In the fall of 2002, with the Gold Line's opening approaching, the City of Los Angeles adopted several planning ordinances aimed at addressing the area's housing crisis. A new Residential/Accessory Services Zone would encourage mixed-use development to reenergize dilapidated commercial streets. A new formula for



calculating density would encourage the development of multi-bedroom living spaces. And increased density bonuses, a streamlined building permit process and reduced parking requirements would invite more affordable housing near public transit.

The first significant mixed-use development along the City's Gold Line corridor broke ground in June 2004. The land next to the Lincoln Heights/Cypress Park rail station had once supported manufacturing businesses and warehouses but had sat vacant in recent years. The City changed the seven-acre area's zoning designation to permit residential development, and AMCAL Multi-Housing, Inc. qualified for both the 35 percent density bonus (available for construction within 1,500 feet of a major transit hub) and tax credits to build low-income housing. When completed in 2006, the \$73 million Avenue 26 Condominiums will feature affordable and market-rate units, a senior center, a childcare center and retail.

"Bringing the Gold Line to our neighborhoods allowed us to build destination points for the people who live here," says Reyes, pointing to lighted walkways and signage for a multilingual, multicultural environment. "What brings this all home for me is that these are the same streets I used to walk on as a kid."

The City expanded its adaptive reuse ordinance in 2003, widening its reach to include older neighborhoods like Lincoln Heights. The ordinance streamlines the conversion of older, vacant commercial buildings into residential units, and has helped fuel a residential resurgence downtown. Soon to make the growing list is Fuller Lofts in the W.P. Fuller Building, a 1920s-era concrete industrial building four blocks from the Lincoln Heights/Cypress Park rail station.

Livable Places, a Los Angeles nonprofit development organization promoting local policy reform and affordable home ownership opportunities near transit, plans to offer 102 for-sale loft housing condominiums and live-work units – combined with on-site amenities – aimed at first-time homebuyers. While Fuller Lofts will include a new parking garage, the City's reduced requirement makes the mixed-income targeted development more financially feasible.

"The Gold Line is a big factor in this project's success," says Livable Places Policy Director Beth Steckler. "Parking takes up so much space and distorts the building form. To be able to do this, and have it work for residents, they have to have real transit choices."

Steckler says the new rail line is spurring more revitalization efforts, a credit to the communities' purposeful placement of change-inducing stations in old industrial neighborhoods. As complementary city endeavors proceed – such as the transformation of a 32-acre abandoned rail yard sitting between the LA River and Chinatown into the first state park in downtown Los Angeles – the area is getting back to tried community basics.

"There is now a momentum in terms of reclaiming," explains Steckler. "The Gold Line has presented a new vision for this place."

A Different Kind of Congestion in South Pasadena

Residents of the City of South Pasadena are acutely aware of transportation issues. Debate over the extension of the 710 freeway – which would dissect the 3.5-square-mile municipality – has been ongoing since the 1960s. Fighting for its sur-

vival, South Pasadena got behind the rail line as an alternative to another freeway. The next, and more complicated step, was making the most of rail's arrival.

In addition to introducing a mobility option, the Gold Line held prospects for a new housing opportunity. The City envisioned a project that would replace a vacant lot, address growing housing need, preserve and blend with existing neighborhoods and revitalize an old commercial area. And not require a lot of public money.

Enter Mission Meridian Village.

The \$22 million mixed-use project, situated just north of the Gold Line's Mission Station, has been as complicated as they come, says Michael Dieden of Creative Housing Associates, developer of the Village – combining housing with retail, providing public parking for the station, relocating historically relevant structures, crafting a public-private partnership to make the numbers add up. (\$5 million in state and local funds supported the parking structure.)

"The key to making it work was the City of South Pasadena," says Dieden. "They had anticipated the coming of rail."

The Gold Line's arrival, says Assistant City Manager Marc Castagnola, came with the risk of disrupting South Pasadena's small town character. A new Specific Plan was crafted in 1996 with special attention placed on the prospects of passenger rail.

"There was a strong commitment to taking advantage of the Gold Line by putting in place parameters to guide how development should occur," says Castagnola.

That meant addressing issues of housing density, parking, business turnover and expansion, historic preservation, streetscaping, open

space and pedestrian traffic. And teaming up with a developer and architect that shared the community's values. Several years of public meetings and input have gone into the design of Mission Meridian.

The Gold Line station is the heart of the project. Its plaza, says, Castagnola, anchors the community, distributing pedestrian traffic coming off the train and providing a gathering place for special events, the weekly farmers market and daily interaction. The increased activity has been a boon for business.

"Transit-oriented development generates a lot of activity," says Reconnecting America's Ohland, pointing to the number of new businesses around South Pasadena's rail station. "Now there are people on the street all the time. The vitality is amazing.

This is a different kind of congestion, she adds.

"This congestion creates value."

The sheer force of housing demand alone, says Castagnola, would most likely have produced higher-density residential development in the city. But the minute Gold Line construction began, he adds, the commercial area began to transform.

"The Gold line brought energy – a strengthening of retail and of neighborhood identity," he says, highlighting South Pasadena's heightened visibility. "And you have to look at our experience in the context of greater Los Angeles. Things were changing all around us. Our economy was floating outward. We needed to recapture the dollars being spent outside our city."

Pasadena's optimism was strong as the Gold Line faced obstacles. Holly Street Village, sitting over the Memorial Park Station, was completed nearly a decade before trains started running.



Photo by Eric Shen, courtesy of the City of Pasadena.

Creative Housing Associates did no marketing, no advertising, and all 67 housing units were sold within two weeks. The market value of condominiums within a five-minute walk of the Gold Line station increased 10-15 percent over other similar condominiums further away during the three years before rail service even began.

"People can walk a few steps and connect with the entire Southern California Basin and, in a way, with the world," says Dieden.

"Just outside their door is a bakery and café, a newsstand, a flower stand, a grocery store and the library.

The growing housing demand near transit is changing the development world, says Dieden of Creative Housing Associates.

"In the 1990s, it was very difficult to attract interest from the equity folks. They said Angelinos will never take the train," he remembers. "That's all changed."

Gateways in Pasadena

Pasadena, too, is being transformed by rail.

In the early 1990s, the City of Pasadena reexamined its general plan, exploring changes in zoning and density to guide future growth. With an eye to a future light-rail connection, the city ordered its land use to keep intense development downtown around rail stations, and keep auto congestion out of residential streets.



Photo by Eric Shen, courtesy of the City of Pasadena.

Running down the middle of the Foothill Freeway, the Gold Line offers an alternative to auto congestion. The Sierra Madre Village Station is the line's current northern terminus.

"We didn't know it at the time, but this was Smart Growth," says Pasadena Manager Cynthia Kurtz. "We needed to have growth and jobs, but we also wanted to protect our beautiful neighborhoods."

Pasadena created Transit-Oriented Zones, allowing increased density, lowering parking requirements and emphasizing pedestrian amenities. The result was new investment and energy.

"That was attractive to developers," explains Kurtz. "In the 1990s, there were 100 to a 110 residential units being added a year. Since 2000, we've had 300 a year, and housing applications are continuing at this high level."

Another 347 units will be added upon completion of the 500,000-square-foot Del Mar Station, a mixed-use development project that incorporates a renovated historic Santa Fe Railroad Depot, retail, underground parking and a public plaza. More housing options and mixed-use development near Gold Line stations

are on the way in Old Pasadena, East Pasadena and the Playhouse District. The Holly Street Village apartment complex led the transit-oriented-development movement in the city, constructed in 1994 at the base of a proposed Gold Line station.

The Gold Line is seen as a milestone in development efforts for the City, says Eric Duyshart, with the City of Pasadena's Economic Development Division. The mobility option has enabled Pasadena to purposely guide a particular kind of development. The City recently adopted a new zoning code creating transit-oriented requirements for projects within a quarter mile of the downtown rail stations. These new rules discourage and often prohibit non-transit, car-oriented uses, including drive-thru businesses, auto-repair and service stations, car washes, warehouses and public storage. Parking caps are also being applied to new projects in an attempt to encourage downtown residents and employees to utilize the light-rail option.

Six unique rail stations enable easy connections to cultural destinations, educational institutions, medical facilities, the city's convention center, shopping, dining and housing. Pasadena's profile has risen, says Duyshart, bringing people and dollars to the area. New housing and increased foot traffic have enhanced retail and office development. Rising property values and economic activity only strengthen City coffers.

"We see the stations as much more than commuter stops. They're gateways into the City. Nodes of activity. Concentrations of daily living," says Duyshart. "Pasadena understood the opportunity to concentrate future growth near rail stations."

Light rail has enabled dynamic economic growth. Rail-oriented development has enabled the city to manage that growth. The return on investment continues.

"This is just the beginning," says Kurtz. "We're guiding the next 50 to 100 years. And we only expect to see the value increase."

The Gold Standard

The region's newest light-rail line is connecting employees with jobs, investment with opportunity, communities with place. The Gold Line is also carrying the region's prospects for a new era of passenger rail. While the network is nowhere close to the 1,000-mile system that linked Los Angeles until the late 1920s, the changing perception – that passenger rail is actually feasible and fitting in the Los Angeles metropolis – is making tracks.

And along with it, a changing landscape. The Gold Line is transforming the way communities evolve, the way they prepare for and guide

population and economic growth. Focused policies are creating new types of investment opportunities.

"It's taken a long time to get developers to understand the value of rail, and it's taken a long time to get cities to understand the benefits of higher density," says Thorpe.

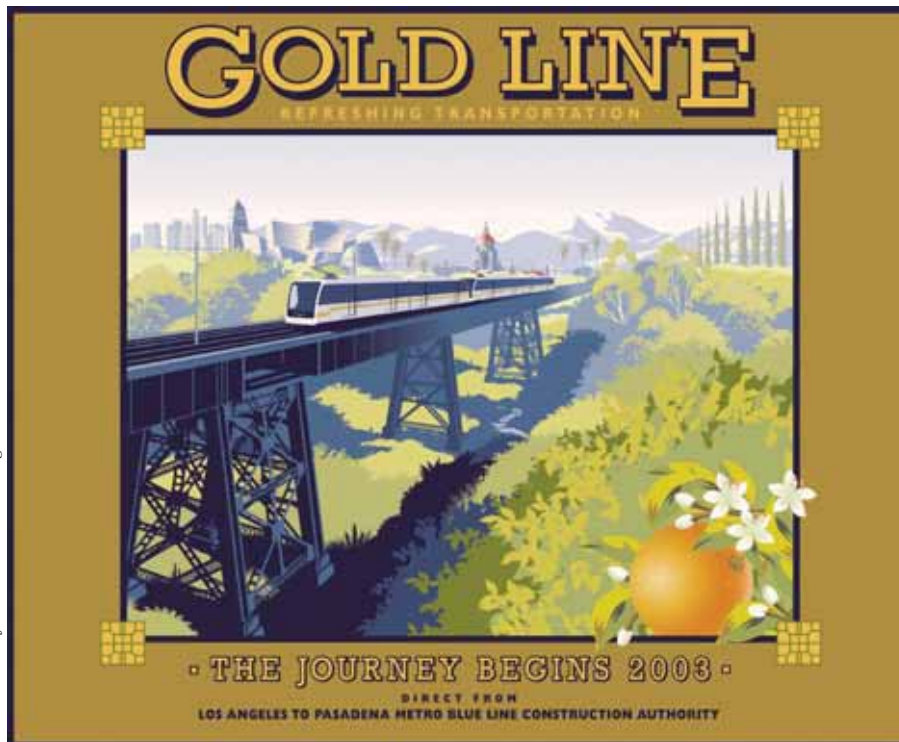
That MTA put Thorpe at the helm of its project management division speaks loudly of the Gold Line's potential as a passenger rail model, says Pasadena's Kurtz. From his MTA office, Thorpe agrees.

"I think you'll see a lot more of it," he says. "That's why I was brought here. To take some of those lessons and apply them to future projects."

That's already happening. The proposed light-rail line to East Los Angeles, an extension of the Gold Line, will use a design-build scenario patterned after the Gold Line, says Thorpe. And the new Exposition Corridor Joint Powers Authority,

with west side cities guiding design and construction of light rail to Culver City (and ultimately Santa Monica), was modeled on the Blue Line Construction Authority.

The latter is being reconfigured as the Foothill cities – from Arcadia to Montclair – develop their communities' plans for a north-end Gold Line extension. Connections for students, faculty and businesses to over a dozen educational institutions along the corridor will be an important force in an emerging University District, and individual municipalities aim to capitalize on the energy of new mobility. While the planning and funding details have yet to be finalized, 11 communities



Artwork courtesy of Pasadena Advertising.