

# Los Angeles Daily News

## Angelenos ride trains in Paris -- why not here?

**By A. Dennis Lytton**  
**Guest Columnist**

**Thursday, May 12, 2005** - Being a supporter of trains in Los Angeles is frustrating. Opposition comes from all sides. Libertarians oppose trains and support suburban sprawl and more freeways out of principle.

On the other end of the spectrum are those who argue, strange as it may seem, that trains in L.A. are a racist plot to take money away from minority bus riders -- despite the fact that the trains clearly reflect the communities that they pass through.

Our friends insist that trains could never work in Los Angeles. They assume that being in a miserable, environmentally degrading, suburban=sprawl-induced traffic jam is fixed in our future. They see traffic as a legacy, perhaps, from the "geniuses" who in the middle of the last century dismantled the most extensive rail-transit system in the world, the Pacific Electric trolley system. We forget that Los Angeles was built and expanded by a rail system.

L.A. has a history of forgetting.

Over the past several years, Metro Rail has built 73 miles of subways and light rail to North Hollywood, Long Beach, Pasadena and Redondo Beach. Nearly a quarter-million people a day board Metro Rail. Metrolink boards about 40,000 passengers a day across Southern California, and it's the largest commuter railroad west of Chicago. Amtrak's Pacific Surfliner service now boards about 150,000 passengers a month, making it the busiest intercity train service outside of the Northeast Corridor.

But these improvements are too few for this sprawling region. For many, trains barely exist. Many of our fellow Angelenos would sooner take a train in New York or Paris than ever take one to Long Beach, to the Music Center in Downtown L.A. or to Old Town Pasadena. The sprawl that we inherited and 60 years of anti-transit culture feed into this.

On April 28, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority board voted to fund construction of the first half of the Exposition light-rail line to Santa Monica. Perhaps just a few years later, the 9.6-mile line to Culver City could be extended to the beach. Set to open by 2009 or 2010, it is an important start to expanding our rail system to the Westside, an area currently devoid of any rail service. By 2009, the

East Los Angeles extension of the Gold Line will add six more miles to Metro Rail.

The Exposition and East L.A. lines are not enough. Mayoral candidate Antonio Villaraigosa has a much more ambitious plan. He proposes a massive investment in trains -- extending the Metro Red Line subway west to the sea and north to the airport at Burbank, constructing a crucial connection linking the Gold, Blue and Exposition lines through downtown, connecting Los Angeles International Airport to the Green Line, and connecting the South Bay to downtown quickly via a Metro Rail or Metrolink line. He envisions future growth revolving around rail stations, encouraging people to live and work near public transit.

Villaraigosa's vision would not be cheap. Expanding the rail system would not just cost money, but also political capital. But only a real plan and the willingness to spend political capital will get us over the hurdles to pay for these crucial projects.

For so many reasons, automobile-oriented suburban sprawl cannot continue. Increasing congestion, environmental degradation and rising gas prices are its results. It is pretty obvious that the sprawl growth model can no longer provide us with affordable housing.

During the MTA board meeting on April 28, speaker after speaker, including this writer, asked the board to vote for the Exposition Line. The board voted unanimously. The silent majority that wants rail transit was heard that day.

At least for a while, being a supporter of rail transit in Los Angeles County will not be so frustrating.

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