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MTA approves Exposition train

By Lisa Mascaro, Staff Writer
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Los Angeles County's next rail line - the Exposition Light Rail train between downtown and Culver City - was approved Thursday by the MTA board, setting the stage for a spring groundbreaking.

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority approved the environmental study for the \$640 million, 9.5-mile train that will run along Exposition Boulevard, through the USC and Crenshaw District. Officials hope to someday extend it to Santa Monica.

"This is a major milestone for this critical project," said Darrell Clarke, co-chair of Friends 4 Expo Transit, who has been working on the project for more than 15 years. "We're thrilled."

However, the board left open the thorny question of a pitch by University of Southern California officials to build the system under Exposition, the route used by Trojan fans who attend football games at the Memorial Coliseum.

MTA says the university would have to pay the \$100 million cost of building the tunnel, but campus officials have indicated they would be willing to pay only half that amount.

The board's action would allow the tunnel to be built if funding is secured.

But if the tunnel is built, the city is worried its proposed Exposition Park station would be forced underground, which would cost more than at grade.

"This action allows the discussions to continue," said USC Vice President Curt Williams.

The MTA plans to use the expedited design-build construction method, and it hopes to hire a contractor early next year and open the Exposition line in 2010.

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