

 Christmas sneaking up on you?  


<http://www.latimes.com/news/local/la-me-waxman17dec17,1,81632.story>

## **In a Reversal, Waxman Backs Westside Subway**

After being assured that tunneling under Wilshire could be safe, the congressman will try to lift his two-decade-old ban on the project.

By Martha Groves  
Times Staff Writer

December 17, 2005

Rep. Henry A. Waxman, a powerful opponent of building a Westside subway along Wilshire Boulevard, changed course Friday and introduced legislation that would lift a two-decade-old prohibition against tunneling.

The Los Angeles Democrat's action was cheered by transit boosters, who called it a necessary first step toward resurrecting the dream of a Metro Red Line subway that would run from downtown Los Angeles to the beach in Santa Monica.

Hopes for such a line were dashed 20 years ago after a methane gas explosion at a clothing store in the Fairfax district prompted Waxman to write, and Congress to pass, legislation barring the use of federal money to drill the needed tunnels.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa has made the subway a priority and helped push for a study that found that a tunnel could be safely built through the area. In recent months, a growing chorus of support for extending the subway through the congested Westside has sparked optimism about an idea that had long seemed moribund.

But even with Waxman's action, a Westside subway would be years from reality at best.

No funding has been earmarked for such a project. The cost of subway construction is estimated at \$300 million to \$350 million a mile. It's roughly 13 miles from the subway's current western terminus at Western Avenue to the beach along Wilshire.

Nonetheless, Los Angeles County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky called Waxman's decision "very good news."

"At least we can have a realistic conversation now about the extension and not just a hypothetical one," Yaroslavsky said.

Waxman said in a statement that his bid to lift the ban was spurred by a report from a five-member expert panel that recently studied the safety of tunneling in methane risk zones. The review panel concluded in October that tunneling could be done safely if proper procedures were followed and appropriate technologies were used, but Waxman insisted on evaluating the report before taking any action.

"I am very pleased with the panel's unanimous finding," Waxman's statement said, "and I will make lifting the prohibition a priority."

Nick Patsouras, a former transit official who advised Villaraigosa during his campaign, noted that Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger plans soon to propose a statewide bond that would provide billions of dollars for transit and other projects.

"I believe that the infrastructure bond ... will have money for the subway thanks to the mayor's strong ties to Sacramento," he said. "If the bond goes [forward], the mayor will break ground."

Villaraigosa is a former speaker of the state Assembly.

Waxman's 1986 tunneling ban had a profound effect on the Red Line. It was intended to head west as far as Fairfax Avenue and then north under Fairfax, doglegging back under the Cahuenga Pass and into North Hollywood.

Instead, it was rerouted to run under Vermont Avenue and then west under Hollywood Boulevard on its way to the San Fernando Valley. A spur was built that extended the line as far as Western Avenue.

During construction in June 1995, a large sinkhole opened along Hollywood Boulevard. Construction defects caused Congress and the Clinton administration to consider pulling the financial plug. Soon after, Yaroslavsky put on the ballot a measure to bar the use of local sales tax dollars for further subway construction. Voters approved it, and that prohibition remains in effect.

Yaroslavsky said Friday that local money could be used to cover subway-related costs, as long as it was not used directly for tunneling. He said Waxman had taken a necessary, if not sufficient, step toward getting the ball rolling again at a time when much opposition to a subway has eased as Westsiders grapple with gridlock.

Running the subway west under Wilshire Boulevard continues to make the most sense, some experts said.

"The Wilshire corridor is the single densest corridor in both employment and population in the entire region," said Genevieve Giuliano, director of the Metrans Transportation Center, a joint research center of USC and Cal State Long Beach. "That was always the logical place to have a subway."

---

If you want other stories on this topic, search the Archives at [latimes.com/archives](http://latimes.com/archives).

**TMSReprints**

Article licensing and reprint options

Copyright 2005 Los Angeles Times | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Service](#)  
[Home Delivery](#) | [Advertise](#) | [Archives](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Help](#)

PARTNERS:  