

# RAIL LEADERS

A History of the Modern Public Rail System in  
Los Angeles County

1973-2004

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When the last Pacific Electric train closed in 1961, the city of Los Angeles was left without public rail transportation for the first time in eighty years. The decline of the rail cars had been a slow process as the trains became victims of their own success. By allowing communities to sprawl farther out from the city center, the trains paved the way for the automobile to become the primary means for Angelenos to commute without having to rely on fixed train routes.

The extinction of rail transit in 1961 was not a cause for celebration for many Angelenos. The problems that sprawl had unleashed, in the form of traffic and poor air quality, spurred efforts throughout the remainder of the decade and into the early 1970s to reinstate rail transit. However, rail advocates failed to secure public financing and support. County voters had at least one opportunity to vote for a sales tax increase in 1968 to finance an 89-mile rail system, but the measure lost with only 44% support.<sup>1</sup>

In 1973, Tom Bradley set out to change both the political and urban landscape in his run for mayor. Bradley knew that transportation was a pressing issue for the many city voters who were tired of driving in traffic and paying high prices for fuel. Amidst the backdrop of a foreign energy crisis that spiked fuel prices and some of the worst air pollution conditions that Los Angeles had ever seen, Bradley promised voters a world-class subway system for an emerging world-class city.

This paper documents the history of the public rail transportation system in the City of Los Angeles since Bradley's run for mayor in 1973. The rail system in Los Angeles was a multi-billion dollar public works project that required the vision and commitment of individual leaders to secure public support and financing from all levels of government. The system came into existence despite the opposition of diverse interest groups, leadership missteps, construction difficulties and the unique geography and urban landscape of a large county with diffuse and divergent power centers.

Among the rail system's opposing interests have been politicians who advocated smaller government or were protecting their districts from unwanted rail encroachment, local citizens and business owners who did not want their neighborhoods altered by the noise, construction and additional people brought by a rail system, bus riders and their advocates who protested the large funding commitment to rail over bus, academics and other transportation critics who believed that rail was not appropriate or cost-effective for Los Angeles and voters who were unwilling to commit tax dollars to a rail system that they felt would not benefit them.

The geography and urban landscape of Los Angeles overarched these diverse opposing interests. As a sprawling low-density county, modern Los Angeles was built to accommodate the automobile. The county development extended well beyond the old public rail system, so a new system had to be superimposed upon an existing landscape created by the car. The enormous size of the county also created diffuse power centers, jurisdictions and interests that struggled to reach agreement on the rail project and its routes.

To overcome the opposition, local politicians had to marshal political support from county voters and financial assistance from state and federal officials, which in turn depended on a strong economy to generate available funds. The individual leadership

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<sup>1</sup> Assessment of Community Planning for Mass Transit: Volume 6-Los Angeles Case Study, *Critical History of Transit Planning*, Office of Technology Assessment, Congress of the United States (February 1976), pp. 15-16 at <http://www.wws.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/byteserv.pr/~ota/disk3/1976/7607/760705.PDF>.

and interests of these rail advocate politicians, with their personal commitments to reintroducing rail to Los Angeles and their ability to compromise, were crucial to creating the rail system. But their missteps and misjudgments also hampered and shaped the rail system that now exists in Los Angeles County.

### 1973-1974: An Eighteen-Month Promise

Before he ran for mayor in 1973, Tom Bradley had been active in transportation issues as a city councilman. His fellow Councilman (and later Los Angeles County Supervisor) Ed Edelman fought with him to change the state gas tax law, which limited state gas tax funds for use only to build roads and highways. For public transit advocates during this time, the state gas tax law was one of the “big issues,” and Edelman joined with then-Councilman Bradley to “file a lawsuit, along with some transportation advocates, to break the hold that existed on the gas tax so we could use the money for public transit, building rail systems.”<sup>2</sup> Bradley and Edelman’s lawsuit eventually sparked legislative action in 1971 to amend the state gas tax law to allow its use for public transportation projects<sup>3</sup> – a change that proved crucial to developing the future rail system.

Bradley made transportation a major platform issue of his campaign in 1973, criticizing Mayor Sam Yorty for his handling of the issue. He argued that “it was time to make Los Angeles an accessible city by developing a mass transit system that is a realistic alternative to the automobile.”<sup>4</sup> The night before he gave the speech in which he announced his plan to develop a subway system in Los Angeles, his aides presented him with a plan to begin breaking ground on the subway within eighteen months. Bradley looked at the eighteen-month reference and quickly told his staff to “take it out.” He knew it would be impossible to begin work on a project of this magnitude so quickly and that it was a “dangerous statement to include.” Yet under the glare of the media lights while giving the speech, the eighteen-month time frame “had been so firmly embedded in my mind that it popped out almost spontaneously.” Bradley found himself stuck with the deadline. “From that point on,” he lamented, “I was never able to get away from it.”<sup>5</sup>

Bradley’s motivation to build a subway system in Los Angeles came from a belief that a world-class city required a subway system and that it would improve the economy and the quality of life. “Los Angeles is the last of the great cities of the world to secure an underground rapid transit system,” he remarked, arguing that the subway “will impact the economy, permit people to move from jobs to homes, reduce the headaches of traffic congestion and it will reduce air pollution.”<sup>6</sup> As Edelman described, Bradley was “a

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<sup>2</sup> Interview with Ed Edelman, former Los Angeles County Supervisor, 1973-1993 (December 9, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> Assessment of Community Planning for Mass Transit, p. 17.

<sup>4</sup> Boyarsky, Bill, *Bradley Proposes Rapid Rail System, Bus Fleet Expansion*, Los Angeles Times, February 8, 1973, at Section II, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Bradley, *The Impossible Dream: Oral History Transcript*, (Los Angeles: Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles, c. 1984), pp. 198-199 (interviewed by Bernard Galm, 1978 and 1979. Source: Oral History collection, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, University of California, Los Angeles).

<sup>6</sup> Nora Zamichow, *Once-Scorned Red Line Poised to Open New Era Subway*, Los Angeles Times, January 24, 1993, at A-1.

visionary” who “looked ahead to what the area needed and wasn’t just interested in looking good. He wanted to accomplish something.”<sup>7</sup> Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky commented that Bradley viewed the subway as a “jobs program.”<sup>8</sup> Bradley was a New Deal-style Democrat, and the subway would be a means of generating business for local construction firms and thus bolstering the local economy. Labor union leaders, for example, ardently supported the subway project.

Always a savvy politician, Bradley knew that in 1973 there was strong public support in Los Angeles for a transit plan to ease the traffic congestion. Bradley ran for mayor in an era of rising fuel prices and terrible air quality and congestion in the Los Angeles Basin. Edelman believed that air pollution concerns may have helped fuel the desire for public transit and commented that “the time was one of ripeness for this issue” of public transportation. “The people realized that we needed a balanced system – the freeways and highways alone would not do the job.”<sup>9</sup>

Voters elected Bradley in the spring of 1973, one of the nation’s first African-American mayors of a major city. As a result, he became a figure of national significance – a stature that Bradley would capitalize on to build the subway. He worked immediately to line up funding for the subway project. For a public works project of this magnitude, he would need to marshal all sources of funding: local, state and federal. Rail advocates had consistently supported raising the county sales tax rate via a ballot initiative to provide the local funding. The federal government offered cities matching funds to cover 80 percent of the cost of a rail system, provided that the city could find the additional 20 percent from state and local sources. Bradley, along with many other local politicians, was eager to cash in on the federal offer. He set his sights on securing state gas tax funds for the twenty percent of the costs. His goal was to use Los Angeles County’s share of the state gas tax revenue, which he and Edelman had helped make available for public transit, to contribute to the financing of a subway system.

After taking office, Bradley publicly backed off the eighteen-month pledge and promised instead that groundbreaking on the subway would happen within four years. He traveled repeatedly to Sacramento to lobby the state legislature to commit state gas tax funds to the project.<sup>10</sup> He also visited Washington, DC in an effort to convince federal officials that Los Angeles was a good investment of transit dollars.<sup>11</sup> By the end of September 1973, the *Los Angeles Times* commented that transportation appeared to have dominated Bradley’s term since taking office July 1<sup>st</sup>.<sup>12</sup>

In the midst of his efforts to secure state and federal funding, Bradley also worked on placing a local initiative before the voters to raise the county sales tax by one cent to fund public transit. Half of the revenue would go to buses and the other half to a 145-

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<sup>7</sup> Edelman interview.

<sup>8</sup> Jim Newton and Beth Shuster, *Tom Bradley: 1917-1998, Mayor Who Reshaped L.A. Dies*, Los Angeles Times, September 30, 1998, at A-1.

<sup>9</sup> Edelman interview.

<sup>10</sup> Doug Shuit, *Bradley Campaigns in Sacramento for LA Transit System*, Los Angeles Times, June 15, 1973, at Section 1, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Bill Boyarsky, *Bradley Meets With DC Solons for Transit*, Los Angeles Times, June 22, 1973, at Section 2, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Doug Shuit, *Bradley Debuts on TV Show, Talks on Rapid Transit*, Los Angeles Times, September 25, 1973, at Section 2, p. 1.

mile high speed rail network.<sup>13</sup> Bradley asked the staff of the Southern California Rapid Transit District (RTD) to assist him in placing the initiative before the voters, and “feverish work took place between July of 1973 and November of 1974, when the matter was on the ballot.”<sup>14</sup> Bradley felt that placing the initiative on the ballot within eighteen months of taking office would partially fulfill his campaign promise to begin construction within that time period.<sup>15</sup>

In support of the ballot initiative (Proposition A), the mayor forged a coalition of downtown business leaders, civic organizations and labor groups, such as the League of Women Voters, Atlantic Ritchfield, Co. and the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG).<sup>16</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* supported the proposal, arguing in an editorial that the measure was necessary to raise local funds so the city could qualify for federal matching funds from the Ford Administration. The *Times*, like many local politicians, was eager for the city to receive the potential \$1.2 billion available for Los Angeles under the federal policy.<sup>17</sup>

Bradley spent the time before the vote campaigning for Proposition A. As a city mayor, Bradley reached out beyond his constituents to gain the countywide support necessary for the initiative to pass. “I then campaigned very actively all over the city of Los Angeles,” he remembered five years later. “In fact, I went to communities around Los Angeles that were within the county in an attempt to get support.” His efforts also took him to Sacramento, where he sought political support and “enabling legislation.”<sup>18</sup> Bradley’s efforts indicate the amount of political capital and energy he was willing to spend to create the subway.

Bradley’s efforts proved unsuccessful. In November 1974, Los Angeles County voters rejected Proposition A, with 47% approval.<sup>19</sup> Bradley publicly blamed the loss on anti-tax sentiment and a lack of confidence in the RTD.<sup>20</sup> He observed that although 57 percent of the people in the city of Los Angeles voted “to tax themselves an additional cent on their sales tax in order to provide local financing for that system,” the proposition was sunk by the “smaller cities around Los Angeles [County]” where support was “not very good.” Frustrated by the lack of support from citizens who did not feel the subway would benefit them, he wryly remarked that the proposed rail system “did not go into every neighborhood, and where it did not run in front of somebody’s door, they simply were not that enthusiastic about supporting it.”<sup>21</sup> The large geography of Los Angeles County, with its far-flung residents and sprawling multi-city districts, coupled with a

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<sup>13</sup> Ray Hebert, *Bradley Opens Drive for Rapid Transit Plan*, Los Angeles Times, August 6, 1974, at Section 2, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> Bradley, p. 202.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*, p. 199.

<sup>16</sup> Hebert, *Bradley Opens Drive for Rapid Transit Plan*.

<sup>17</sup> *Transit and the Importance of Prop. A*, Los Angeles Times, October 13, 1974, at Section VI, p. 2.

<sup>18</sup> Bradley, p. 202.

<sup>19</sup> Southern California Rapid Transit District, *Summary Report on Rapid Transit Starter Line Corridor as of July 15, 1975*, at p. 1. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, UCLA.

<sup>20</sup> Tom Bradley, *Where Do We Go Now on Rapid Transit?* Los Angeles Times, December 20, 1974, at Section II, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Bradley, *The Impossible Dream*, p. 205.

popular anti-tax sentiment, had thwarted the majority desire of those within the city of Los Angeles for a rail system.

Compounding the difficulty for Bradley was, in his view, the “lack of enthusiastic support by other leaders throughout the county of Los Angeles; one man simply couldn’t do it alone. I went wherever I could to campaign for it, but I couldn’t reach enough people.”<sup>22</sup> Although the mayor reached out to “secure support from other mayors and elected officials,” the support he received was “some, but not enough.”<sup>23</sup> Bradley’s comment highlights the difficulty he had in forging a political coalition of leaders who had a similar commitment to the resurrection of a rail network for the county.

### 1974-1975: The Starter Line Consensus

The county voters’ lukewarm response to the tax proposal did not deter Bradley. He convinced himself that the proposal lost not because of anti-rail sentiment, but rather due to the “bad timing” that “people got their tax bills the weekend before the election” and were therefore unwilling to vote to raise taxes.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps encouraged by the support within the city for the rail proposal, he emerged from the defeat with a new plan. Bradley later recalled, “immediately – I would say within next two or three days,” working on alternative plans. “Since we couldn’t get support for the entire system – and it was proposed for about 142 miles...we then said, let’s take a more modest step. Let’s try to develop plans for a starter line, something less than the full system.”<sup>25</sup> Bradley’s strong commitment to the subway had kept him from abandoning his goal.

Six weeks after the vote, the mayor went public with his plan. In an editorial he wrote for the *Los Angeles Times*, he vowed to continue plans for a subway system on a smaller scale by relying solely on state gas tax funds. He promised to develop light rail using existing rights-of-way within the city.<sup>26</sup> Bradley’s resilience, adaptability and ability to compromise therefore resulted in a new and more feasible plan that appeared to have a greater chance for success.

In May 1975, his starter line plan received a jolt of energy. At a luncheon for transportation officials in Los Angeles, President Ford’s Secretary of Transportation, William Coleman, informed local leaders that the federal government had \$7.9 billion worth of Federal Mass Transit Funds. If Los Angeles hoped to receive its portion of these funds, the county would need to set aside a local commitment of funds as early as possible in the fiscal year so that a federal grant could be “seriously reviewed” for that fiscal year. The local money would be necessary to trigger the 80/20 matching dollars. Meanwhile, Coleman’s staff had privately indicated to local officials that a Los Angeles rail project would be “within the ability of UMTA [the federal Urban Mass Transportation Administration] to fund.”<sup>27</sup> Coleman also indicated that “Los Angeles

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<sup>22</sup> Id., p. 204.

<sup>23</sup> Id., p. 206.

<sup>24</sup> Id., p. 204.

<sup>25</sup> Id., pp. 202-3.

<sup>26</sup> Bradley, *Where Do We Go Now on Rapid Transit?*

<sup>27</sup> Southern California Rapid Transit District, p. 18.

should choose a starter line corridor within 60-90 days” or else the federal government would not consider the city when allocating the funds.<sup>28</sup>

Regardless of whether the Ford administration was interested in currying favor with local politicians and voters, Coleman’s prompting set rail advocates’ wheels in motion. Bradley now had two tasks: secure state gas tax funds and develop a consensus on the route. In order to convince federal officials to contribute to a rail system that had just been rejected by county voters, Bradley had to demonstrate that Los Angeles had the political consensus and popular will to see a project of this scope to completion. The starter line route would need to keep local politicians and their constituents happy. In this effort, Bradley forged alliances with like-minded politicians who shared his vision for rail transit.

The local funding piece of the puzzle came quickly. One month after Coleman’s visit, the Los Angeles City Council set aside \$31.1 million in state gas tax funds by a 12-1 vote for a starter line.<sup>29</sup> Within a few days, the County Supervisors, on the motion of rail advocate Supervisor Baxter Ward, voted 4 to 1 to commit \$53.1 million of county funds for the project.<sup>30</sup> The political consensus on the route, however, took negotiation among diverse political interests. Initially, the starter line concept received broad support. The cities of Los Angeles, Long Beach, Glendale, Burbank and Compton, as well as Los Angeles County and the State Legislature, passed resolutions in support of a starter line effort.<sup>31</sup> In response to Coleman’s request for a specific starter line corridor, the rail-friendly Board of Supervisors authorized a 59.6 mile corridor, from Canoga Park on the west end of the San Fernando Valley, through downtown and out to Long Beach.<sup>32</sup> The route would follow existing railroad rights-of-way through the Valley and from downtown to Long Beach.<sup>33</sup>

Mayor Bradley initially joined with Supervisor Ward to support the corridor. Ward was an ardent supporter of increased public rail transit, in particular aboveground light rail transit. As Ward’s fellow Supervisor Edelman remembered, “He [Ward] was in love with old trains – sort of taken by riding the rail as a kid. So he believed you didn’t need to build a subway. You just use existing rights-of-way. You use a light rail system. It would be cheaper and faster.” At one point, Ward’s interest in trains led him to have the county purchase a historic train to raise public interest in rail. As Edelman recalled:

“When I was on the Board of Supervisors, Baxter tried to get funding -- and I supported him -- to buy an old train, I forget where it was from. But it was sitting somewhere, it was an old train, beautiful train, good shape, and he wanted to run the goddam thing on the existing track. Because he had helped me on my

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<sup>28</sup> Southern California Rapid Transit District Staff Report, p. 1-1.

<sup>29</sup> *Council Earmarks Rapid Transit ‘Starter’ Transit Corridor*, Los Angeles Times, June 17, 1975, at section 1, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Letter from James S. Mize, Executive Officer, Executive Office of the Board of Supervisors, County of Los Angeles, to Tom Bradley, Los Angeles Mayor (June 20, 1975). Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>31</sup> Southern California Rapid Transit District, p. 15.

<sup>32</sup> Ray Hebert, *Supervisors OK 59 Mile ‘Starter’ Transit Corridor*, Los Angeles Times, June 18, 1975, at section I, p. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Southern California Rapid Transit District, p. 11-16.

campaign, supported me, I felt that I, all things being equal, I wanted to help him a little bit on one of his pet projects. I remember being the third vote to help him get his train moving. Some of my colleagues didn't appreciate that. But his intentions were good because he was dramatizing the need to do something with the existing rail system that we had. So he bought this cockamamie train, and turned out it had all sorts of problem. Eventually it was sold. But he was a great advocate for light rail. And he did a lot to create an interest in public transit."<sup>34</sup>

Edelman's story illuminates the disparate motivations of rail advocates such as Ward who struggled to decide on a starter route. While Ward's motivations may have been more idiosyncratic than other rail advocates, his leadership eventually proved crucial to helping Bradley and other rail proponents secure funding and political support.

After a few months, however, Bradley changed his mind and abandoned Ward's plan. He urged a 24-mile Wilshire route instead because it would serve more people. The route would run from North Hollywood down to the densely populated Miracle Mile development area of Wilshire Boulevard and then east to downtown.<sup>35</sup> Bradley effectively wrote off bringing the subway to the greater San Fernando Valley, an area that was less dense than the rest of the city and outside Bradley's base of political support.

Bradley's support for a Wilshire route set up a round of negotiations between the city, county supervisors and other local officials with an interest in the rail route. These diffuse power interests needed to negotiate a compromise between the two competing starter lines, and each side had different political considerations and different bases of support. As an RTD report characterized it, the city "stressed the need for more intensive study with respect to local circulation needs," while the county "requested that additional corridors be given more attention."<sup>36</sup> Transportation officials estimated that Ward's aboveground, 53-mile plan would cost between \$1.47 and \$1.58 billion, while Bradley's belowground 23.8-mile plan would cost \$1.43 to \$1.7 billion.<sup>37</sup> RTD described the southern portion of the Supervisor's route from downtown to Long Beach (the South Central Los Angeles Corridor) as exhibiting "relatively superior need for improved public transportation, as well as having the patronage potential to justify its selection."<sup>38</sup> The report's description of South Central referred to the poverty of the area, and most likely referenced the need to bring in public transit following the Watts Riots in 1965.<sup>39</sup>

To settle the impasse, rail advocate and California Secretary of Business and Transportation Agency Donald Burns called two meetings to develop consensus on the starter line route while Secretary Coleman's window for federal funding was still open. On November 21, 1975, he invited the major local political players to the California Highway Commission Room in Los Angeles to negotiate a starter line route. In his letter

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<sup>34</sup> Edelman interview.

<sup>35</sup> Ray Hebert, *Bradley Urges Wilshire Route for Transit Line*, Los Angeles Times, August 14, 1975, at Section I, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> Southern California Rapid Transit District, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> *SCAG Staff Report*, pp. 1-1 - 1-2. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>38</sup> Southern California Rapid Transit District, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup> The McCone Commission, created in the aftermath of the 1965 Watts Riots to identify the causes of the violence, identified lack of transit options as a pressing need for the community.



inviting Mayor Bradley to the meeting, Burns stressed that his “objective [was] to develop the highest level of consensus” on the scope of the starter line, the available state and local financial support and the responsibilities of each official “to insure the successful completion of the project.” He wanted to “demonstrate to Secretary Coleman that he [could], with confidence, give some indication of a Federal commitment.”<sup>40</sup> Bradley’s bid to build a subway therefore received major assistance from Sacramento in the form of Burns’ efforts to gather political leaders to reach consensus.

The meeting followed a preliminary gathering in Sacramento on October 10th, where the same officials met and agreed to reconvene once the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) developed system costs and patronage estimates.<sup>41</sup> This second meeting offers a glimpse into the decision-making process of choosing the rail routes. Instead of relying on the Caltrans transportation experts to choose the best route for a rail line, the county’s elected officials, with their diffuse and divergent interests in a geographically sprawling county, determined the rail routes primarily by political factors. Ward, Bradley, Supervisor Hayes and Mayor Thomas Clark of Long Beach were in attendance, and Burns chaired the meeting with an eye toward a meeting with Coleman four weeks later. He began by stating that the purpose of the meeting was to “develop a unified position on this starter line...to demonstrate to the Federal Government, and Secretary Coleman particularly, that we have strong evidence of progress toward a decision by the people in authority in the Southern California area so that we can get a commitment from them.”<sup>42</sup>

After the District Director of Caltrans detailed the costs and routes of the two competing plans, Ward offered a compromise. Ward’s plan would start with a Long Beach to Union Station line, which would “incorporate Long Beach’s money, solve their problem, solve the Mayor’s problem in South Central Los Angeles and also serve a large portion of the Central Business District to the tunnel.”<sup>43</sup> Ward’s statement indicates his effort to address the political considerations of each politician’s district and the need to broaden the financial pool with Long Beach’s portion of the gas tax for the starter line, estimated to be \$2.9 million over five years.<sup>44</sup> He then proposed that additional phases of construction would follow this first phase, and those later phases would include Bradley’s subway plan to North Hollywood. Ward demonstrated his willingness to give up the Valley portion of the Supervisors’ corridor in exchange for the South Central corridor and a promise to build the subway later. He finished by arguing that the plan “solves our problem for money today, it’s a compromise of the needs, aspirations.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Letter from Donald Burns, California Secretary of Business and Transportation Agency, to Tom Bradley, Los Angeles Mayor (September 5, 1975). Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>41</sup> Letter from John Mansell, Long Beach City Manager, to the Long Beach Mayor and City Council (November 25, 1975), at p. 3. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>42</sup> Transcript of Meeting Regarding Decision Paper for Transit Development in Los Angeles, November 21, 1975, p. 20. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>43</sup> Id., p. 27.

<sup>44</sup> Mansell Letter, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Transcript, p 27.

Mayor Clark supported the proposal – not surprising given the benefits his city would gain by having quick rail access to the Los Angeles downtown business district. He pointed out that of the 25 miles of the route, “Long Beach has six, Los Angeles has over twelve and the County has almost four. So everyone is basically getting something out of that starter line.” As with Ward, political considerations dominated Clark’s reasoning: “It’s the only line I see that everyone gets something out of politically.” Knowing that the plan needed to address Bradley’s interests in pleasing his base of support in South Central and getting the City Council to approve of the plan, Clark said, “I don’t know, Tom [Bradley], if you get enough out of it politically or not, but you have over twelve miles, 48% of that’s in the City of Los Angeles.”

Bradley was hesitant about the proposed line and was concerned with choosing the best starter line possible in order to stimulate broad public support for the rail project. “I’ve been trying to quickly look at the patronage figures for each of these options,” he stated and asserted his belief that “in our first effort we’re going to have to try to do something that represents a successful demonstration. If we ever hope to expand it we want to do a good job on that first phase.” Addressing the specific proposal, Bradley was concerned with how much benefit the city would receive: “it just leaves me out such a large segment that it’s going to be hard to convince our Council on it.”<sup>46</sup> Eventually, Bradley acquiesced to the compromise, however. He may have been reluctant to drag his feet further given the support the proposal had among other officials and the time pressure to receive federal funds. At the end of the meeting, the officials in attendance unanimously agreed that the first segment of the starter line would stretch from downtown to Long Beach.<sup>47</sup> The Ward and Bradley dispute apparently had been settled, and Burns presented the consensus to Secretary Coleman on December 16<sup>th</sup>.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the state and local effort, however, Secretary Coleman decided not to fund the starter line in 1976. His decision may have reflected a long-held belief by federal Transportation officials that Los Angeles was simply too sprawling and too dispersed to justify federal dollars on a train that could only serve a fraction of the population.<sup>49</sup> The process, however, had resulted in a compromise among the diffuse power interests in the county, and within a few years local politicians would resurrect the Long Beach route.

### 1976: The Sunset Coast Line

Local leaders like Ward and Bradley, with their strong commitment to rail, did not give up their fight. Supervisor Ward immediately announced his plan to place on the June 1976 ballot a 2.5-cent sales tax increase to finance the development of a 260-mile (later pared down to 232-mile) multi-billion dollar regional rail network. Ward believed

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<sup>46</sup> Id., pp. 28-29.

<sup>47</sup> Mansell Letter, p. 3.

<sup>48</sup> *A Program for Transportation Improvements in the Los Angeles Area*, Presented to William T. Coleman, Jr., December 16, 1975. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, UCLA.

<sup>49</sup> A *Los Angeles Times* article in 1979 referred to the attitude that most federal officials had in rejecting Los Angeles for transit funds as a belief that the city was simply too big to justify a rail project costing potentially billions of dollars. Ray Hebert, *US Concedes LA Transit Needs – But It’s Too Late*, Los Angeles Times, November 5, 1979, at Section II, p. 1.

that state gas tax funds and federal matching dollars would be insufficient to begin a regional system within the next two decades. The Supervisor wanted not just a starter line but a comprehensive and immediate solution to the automobile gridlock. His plan envisioned using freeway, flood control channel and railroad rights-of-way exclusively to develop a \$7.5 billion light rail network. It would interlock with a future subway starter line and the potential Orange County regional rapid transit plan.<sup>50</sup> The rail lines covered virtually all of the city of Los Angeles and its neighboring cities.

Ward, harkening to his boyhood days riding the rail, called the project the "Sunset Coast Line." In the proposal, he wrote, "Because the heart still returns to the rails, people still talk about the [Pacific Electric] Big Red Cars.... The Sunset Coast Line brings all that talk and nostalgia and hope together." Referring to the air quality problems in the Los Angeles Basin, he wrote, "There is not a flicker of feeling for the bus. Their fumes add to our problems with the air." For Ward, the comprehensive rail plan would be crucial to "protecting the natural environment, enhancing the man-made environment, improving the level of movement...[and] uncertainty of energy supply."<sup>51</sup>

Just a few weeks before the election, however, the *Los Angeles Times* ran a series of articles challenging virtually every positive assumption about the impact of Ward's plan. In a seven-article series entitled "Rail Rapid Transit: The Doubts Persist," the influential paper went to work questioning the need for rail transit at all. The article quoted Professor James Dyckman in the USC planning department, who asserted that Los Angeles "already has a good flexible transportation system – its freeway network." The professor labeled the Sunset Coast Line as "costly" and not urgent. The article went on to argue that "for the first time since Los Angeles began weighing the possibilities of rapid transit, there appear to be growing signs that an extensive rail network is not needed here."<sup>52</sup>

Quoting from UCLA economics professor George Hilton, the paper discredited the idea that the Pacific Electric cars were worth saving. Hilton stated that the demise of the rail cars was "no cause for regret" and that "efforts to upgrade it would have amounted to a pure waste for ...the operation could have yielded no substantial external benefits." The article claimed that even in cities with light rail, such as the San Francisco Bay Area, traffic declined only 2%. It finished with a quote from USC urban regional planning professor Harry Richardson, who stated, "To pay billions for half-empty trains and half-empty freeways hardly seems a wise investment."<sup>53</sup>

The next article in the series detailed the cost overruns that plagued mass transit projects in other cities (including San Francisco's BART system).<sup>54</sup> The following article argued that rail projects make sprawl worse.<sup>55</sup> The paper then attacked the notion that rail transit makes air quality any better, claiming that it might even make the air

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<sup>50</sup> A Program For Transportation Improvements, pp. 5-6.

<sup>51</sup> Ray Hebert, *Opposition Growing: Rail Rapid Transit: the Doubts Persist*, Los Angeles Times, May 23, 1976, at Section I, p. 1.

<sup>52</sup> Id.

<sup>53</sup> Id.

<sup>54</sup> George Reasons, *Cost Overruns Have Plagued Mass Transit*, Los Angeles Times, May 24, 1976, at Section I, p. 1.

<sup>55</sup> Robert A. Jones, *Sunset Coast Line: How It Could Shape LA's Future*, Los Angeles Times, May 25, 1976, at Section I, p. 1.

worse by encouraging people to make short and inefficient drives on cold engines to the local transit station.<sup>56</sup>

An exasperated Ward called the series “one hell of a hatchet job.”<sup>57</sup> The *Times* articles spurred the anti-tax and smaller government sentiment among the voting population and dampened voters’ faith in rail as a means of solving Los Angeles’s transportation difficulties. The series relied on the anti-rail beliefs of academic transportation experts who favored bus systems or automobiles over the expense of rail. These expert opinions added weight and authority to the anti-rail articles.

The articles had an impact on voters. Although a poll taken two weeks before the 1976 vote showed that a bare 50.2% majority favored the rail plan,<sup>58</sup> Ward’s Sunset Coast Line went down to defeat on June 8 by a three to two margin (59.3% to 40.6% opposed).<sup>59</sup> A despondent Ward proclaimed that rail transit in Los Angeles was “dead.”<sup>60</sup> County voters had now rejected ballot measures for rail projects three times in eight years. Ward’s proposal fared the worst of the three, although his sales tax increase was the highest and the scope of his designs was the largest. The defeat indicated that local voters were unwilling to pay for a comprehensive solution to the congestion in Los Angeles. It also reinforced the importance of the compromise step-by-step approach that Mayor Bradley and other leaders advocated in the starter line concept.

#### 1977-1980: Federal Funding for the Starter Line

Following Ward’s defeat, Bradley and other local officials continued their pursuit of federal dollars for the compromise starter line. Bradley returned to pushing his plan for the Wilshire subway route, which promised greater benefits for the city given the population density of the corridor. In December 1976, the Department of Transportation came through with preliminary money for the planning effort of the starter line.<sup>61</sup> With the change in Presidential administrations a month later, however, came a change in federal attitude. In May 1977, newly elected President Carter came to visit Los Angeles. While taping a television interview show, the President responded to a question about rail transit by saying that rail would probably never be built in Los Angeles due to the low density of the county.

Supporters of the rail line scrambled to put a positive spin on Carter’s remarks. In the media, transportation officials commented that President Carter never specifically ruled out the Wilshire corridor starter line proposal. The corridor had the fourth highest population density in the United States and was as dense as much of Manhattan, with over 15 thousand people per square mile.<sup>62</sup> Carter’s statement, however, exemplified the

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<sup>56</sup> W.B. Rood, *Transit Plan Offers Little Improvement for LA Air*, Los Angeles Times, May 26, 1976, at Section I, p. 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Ward Assails Times’ Articles on Rapid Transit*, Los Angeles Times, May 27, 1976, at Section I, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> *Majority in Poll Favor Transit Plan*, Los Angeles Times, May 27, 1976, at Section II, p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> Ray Hebert, *Rail Transit For LA Dead, Ward Says*, Los Angeles Times, June 10, 1976, at Section I, p. 22.

<sup>60</sup> *Id.*

<sup>61</sup> Bradley, *The Impossible Dream*, p. 203.

<sup>62</sup> Ray Hebert, *LA Rail Transit Not Ruled Out, Officials Claim*, Los Angeles Times, May 19, 1977, at Section I, p. 1.

difficulty that local rail advocates had in lining up committed support from all levels of government, particularly from federal officials convinced that Los Angeles was too sprawling for rail. Even with a fellow Democrat in the White House, Bradley could not rely on Carter for support.

As the next two years passed, Bradley's subway plan for Wilshire steadily gained local support. In July 1979, the Los Angeles City Council voted 11 to 0 in favor of a North Hollywood to Wilshire subway route. Bradley still counted on the federal government to contribute to 80 percent of the costs of the project, which were estimated to be from \$1.2 to \$2 billion.<sup>63</sup> In the intervening years he had traveled frequently to Sacramento to lobby for state gas tax funds to make up the remaining 20 percent.<sup>64</sup>

In September 1979, the RTD formally recommended Bradley's Wilshire route out of eleven other options. As the agency in charge of choosing and building the subway route, the RTD's decision was crucial for Bradley. The agency was part of the diffuse power centers in the county that Bradley needed to support his subway route.<sup>65</sup> City leaders now agreed regarding the starter line route: it would be the Wilshire corridor to North Hollywood. Despite the setbacks at the ballot, the rejections from federal officials and the opposition at home, Bradley retained a deep and personal commitment to seeing the subway happen. "We still think that there's a very serious need for a fixed-rail rapid transit system in Los Angeles," he remarked. "And I'm determined to do everything I can until it is a fact."<sup>66</sup>

With the starter line route chosen, Los Angeles was once again in the position of trying to woo federal dollars. In November 1979, the Department of Transportation finally agreed that rail transit was a good idea in Los Angeles. This attitude marked a dramatic change of heart for the agency, which for years had believed Los Angeles to be too low-density for rail transit. But the other shoe soon dropped: money for rapid transit programs had dried up, according to transportation officials, and there would be no federal money available to Los Angeles for a few years at least. The city had already raised its 20 percent share of the \$2 billion necessary for the subway – \$400 million of that sum came from state and county gas tax revenue. The remaining \$1.6 billion from the federal government would now have to wait until a stronger economy could generate the federal funds.<sup>67</sup>

Just seven months later, however, Bradley finally heard the news for which he had been waiting for seven years. In June of 1980, the Carter Administration agreed to grant \$12 million to begin the Wilshire subway. The money would go to the planning phase, in which engineers would determine the soundness of the route and estimate the construction costs. Officials set a 1983 or 1984 date to begin breaking ground. Pointing out that it was the first time in twenty years that there was a consensus on both the route and where the 20 percent local share would come from, Bradley described himself as

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<sup>63</sup> Ray Hebert, *City Officials Give Strong Backing to Proposal for Downtown – Valley Subway*, Los Angeles Times, July 10, 1979, at Section II, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> *Bradley For Gas Tax Use in Transit*, Los Angeles Times, June 8, 1979, at Section I, p. 27.

<sup>65</sup> *RTD Panel Urges Subway Along Wilshire Route*, Los Angeles Times, September 21, 1979, at Section II, p. 4.

<sup>66</sup> Bradley, p. 203.

<sup>67</sup> Ray Hebert, *US Concedes LA Transit Needs – But It's Too Late*, Los Angeles Times, November 5, 1979, at Section II, p. 1.

“elated.” He remarked, “A lot of people thought, ‘you’ve got to be loony to think this is going to happen.’”<sup>68</sup> The Carter Administration emphasized that the announcement followed the June primary to avoid the appearance of politics. Yet the general election season could not have been far from the President’s mind, when just seven months earlier his administration claimed that it would be years before the federal government would have the money necessary to fund the subway.

### 1979-1980: A Ballot Initiative for Light Rail

Bradley did not want to rely solely on the state gas tax for the local share of the subway funds. Despite the losses at the ballot box in 1968, 1974 and 1976, he was willing to try again for a county sales tax increase to fund the subway. His plan, however, faced an immediate hurdle. Less than four years after county voters had roundly defeated his dream of returning the trolley cars to Los Angeles, Supervisor Ward was eager to place another initiative on the ballot in 1980 to finance his 232-mile Sunset Coast Line. With the support of Supervisor Hahn, Ward had two of the three votes necessary to prevail on the five-member Board. Bradley did not want two competing sales tax increases on the ballot for rail. Although the two plans were ostensibly compatible, support for one plan would most likely have drained support for the other. At stake was who would shape the future of rail transit in Los Angeles.

As the Board of Supervisors came to vote on Ward’s initiative in 1979, Supervisor Edelman opposed the plan. Although Edelman had supported Ward in many past efforts, including the purchase of an historic train to run the rails, he led a three to two movement to defeat Ward’s second attempt at creating the Sunset Coast Line.<sup>69</sup> Edelman viewed Bradley’s subway plan for Wilshire as an approach that “was more sound.” For Edelman, it was more important that Los Angeles start “the subway where you had the density.”<sup>70</sup> Bradley therefore would not have to face Ward’s initiative on the ballot in 1980, helped in large part by the shared vision of county officials and the ability of elected leaders to compromise on a plan.

Meanwhile, the mayor continued his effort to gain support for the sales tax increase plan. The Los Angeles City Council voted to support the proposal, but the Supervisors resisted. Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, in particular, showed more concern over rising bus fares than rail plans.<sup>71</sup> Hahn had been a fixture of local politics since the 1940s, having entered the City Council at the age of 26 and the County Board at age 32. Among his many accomplishments, he helped bring the Brooklyn Dodgers to Los Angeles. His district contained the primarily poor and largely African American communities in South Central Los Angeles, including the area scarred by the Watts Riots in 1965. With his low-income constituency came a strong interest in keeping the bus fares low, since for many of his constituents bus was the only mode of transportation. Hahn was therefore able to support Bradley’s half-cent sales tax increase only if it meant

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<sup>68</sup> Sharon Rosenhouse, *Funds Granted For LA Subway*, Los Angeles Times, June 5, 1980, at Section I, p. 1.

<sup>69</sup> Sharon Rosenhouse, *Supervisors Back Subway Plan*, Los Angeles Times, August 15, 1979, at Section II, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Edelman interview.

<sup>71</sup> Victor Merina, *Supervisors Refuse to Back ½ Cent Sales Tax to Help Fund Public Transit*, Los Angeles Times, May 14, 1980, at Section II, p. 8.

lowering the bus fares. Working as chairman of the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission (LACTC), a separate transit agency created by state law in 1976 to “improve the transportation decision-making process in Los Angeles County,”<sup>72</sup> Hahn went to work shaping the ballot initiative to suit his interests.

On August 20, 1980, Hahn called a special LACTC meeting to propose lowering the bus fare to a flat 50 cents throughout Los Angeles County for a period of five years. He would finance the bus fare reduction through the half-cent sales tax. Since state law authorized the LACTC to place the initiative on the ballot, Hahn needed six of the Commission’s eleven votes to win. Supervisor Ward – still championing a rail plan – introduced an amendment to dedicate 50 percent of the tax proceeds from the initiative to build a rail system. Hahn was unwilling to accept the motion and it died for lack of a second. Wendell Cox, a member of the LACTC, privately suggested to Ward (who was seated next to him) to try for a 35 percent rapid transit set aside instead. “Ward responded that 35 percent was simply not enough,” Cox recalled. “I suggested that it was more than nothing. [Ward] consented to support my motion only if I specified “rail” instead of ‘rapid transit.’” With the motion introduced and seconded, Hahn indicated that he would accept the motion if it did not interfere with the bus fare reduction plan. After some negotiation, the LACTC agreed to change the period of bus fare reduction to three years and to start the 35 percent rail set-aside in the third year (1983).<sup>73</sup> The six to five vote in favor of the sales tax plan<sup>74</sup> was therefore the result of compromise by politicians with different political and personal motivations.

As the election of 1980 approached, Hahn and other officials were eager to see the sales tax initiative succeed. The proposal, another Proposition A, received a critical endorsement from the *Los Angeles Times*. The *Times* supported the proposition for its bus fare reduction and to create a rapid transit system in an “era of tenuous energy supplies.”<sup>75</sup> On November 4<sup>th</sup>, Los Angeles County voters finally approved a sales tax increase to finance public transit in the region with 54 percent approval.<sup>76</sup>

The ability of political leaders to compromise by placing a more modest and balanced approach to the measure had ensured its success. Past ballot attempts had focused solely on rail plans that the majority of voters felt would not benefit them.<sup>77</sup> Leaders like Ward and Hahn, however, had balanced Proposition A in 1980 between rail (35 percent) and bus (40 percent), with the remaining 25 percent to go to the county’s cities for “local transit needs.”<sup>78</sup> This wide-reaching proposal was more likely to appeal to voters beyond the base 40 percent that consistently favored rail. Its modest approach

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<sup>72</sup> Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, *Fact Sheet*, October 1985, at p. 1. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>73</sup> Wendell Cox, *Present at the Creation: The Los Angeles Rail System*, Wendell Cox Consultancy, at <http://www.publicpurpose.com/ut-larail80.htm>.

<sup>74</sup> Jean Merl, *Transit Tax Plan To Go On 1980 Ballot*, *Los Angeles Times*, August 21, 1980, at Section I, p. 3.

<sup>75</sup> Editorial, *Transit: Yes On A*, *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1980, at Section VII, p. 4.

<sup>76</sup> Cecilia Rasmussen, *A Subway Saga*, *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1993, at B-1.

<sup>77</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* poll in 1976 showed that only four in ten residents think they would use a comprehensive rail system. *Majority in Poll Favor Transit Plan*, *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1976, at Section II, p. 1.

<sup>78</sup> Fact Sheet, p. 1.

to rail funding may have swayed voters who were reluctant to begin a massive rail project without trying a small approach at first.

### 1982-1985: Planning Two Light Rail Lines

With roughly \$100 million a year expected to be generated by Proposition A for rail,<sup>79</sup> county officials went to work plotting the first light rail route that Proposition A would finance. With the 35 percent set-aside for rail scheduled to take effect in 1983, debate went on in 1982 to choose a light rail route. Supervisor Hahn, who had been instrumental in getting Proposition A passed, was determined to use his clout to get the rail line built through his district in the lower-income areas of South Central Los Angeles. The same route that city officials had briefly settled on in 1975 from Long Beach to downtown Los Angeles would travel straight through Hahn's district. He pointed out that the 22-mile segment would serve economically depressed communities and would revitalize them – still a concern after the 1965 Watts Riots.<sup>80</sup> Since the money for rail from Proposition A would be lost if the LACTC could not come up with a plan, Hahn's plan had the benefit of urgency. The LACTC needed to agree on a route soon, and Hahn's influence over the Commission meant that critics of the Long Beach route would not have much time to mount an opposition.<sup>81</sup>

Hahn's Long Beach route had critics. Members of the LACTC argued that the Long Beach plan was too hasty given the time pressure and that it was made out of political convenience rather than sound judgment. They pointed out that most of the potential riders in the South Central corridor were bus riders, so by switching to rail they would not be reducing the automobile burden in the region. Furthermore, the Long Beach route would cost \$194 million, whereas a Santa Monica route would serve more people and cost only \$130 million. The Santa Monica route would travel along Santa Monica Boulevard and serve UCLA, USC Medical Center, Beverly Hills and Hollywood. Hahn responded to this proposal by arguing that his route would serve the poor. "In Beverly Hills," he remarked, "everyone has a car and a chauffeur, and they only need [transit] for their maids and gardeners."<sup>82</sup> His statement reveals the extent to which Hahn's personal views and political interests were motivating his attitude toward light rail.

Although Hahn was unable to reach immediate political consensus on his route, the County officially approved the Long Beach to downtown route in 1985. Despite objections from city leaders in Compton that the light rail route would negatively impact the safety and traffic flow of the city, Hahn successfully shepherded the light rail plan through his district.<sup>83</sup> His success demonstrates how widely disparate local interests and the powerful politicians who represented them shaped the light rail system in Los Angeles. While a Santa Monica Boulevard route might have been cheaper and served

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<sup>79</sup> Ray Hebert, *Los Angeles: Two Systems Going, One On Hold*, MT, January/February 1986, at p. 14.

<sup>80</sup> *Id.*, p. 17.

<sup>81</sup> Leo C. Wolinsky, *Decision May Be Near on County Rail System*, Los Angeles Times, March 22, 1982, at Section II, p. 1.

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*

<sup>83</sup> Victor Merina, *County Approves LA-Long Beach Light Rail System*, Los Angeles Times, March 28, 1985, at Section II, p. 1.



more people, Hahn's influential role in getting Proposition A passed and determining the route selection proved more powerful.

Meanwhile, the LACTC used its funds to support a light rail line down the new Century City Freeway. The Century Freeway was originally proposed as a multi-lane, automobile-only freeway. Transit advocates balked, and after a ten-year court fight that ended in 1981, they successfully changed the freeway into a scaled down version that had additional lanes for buses and carpools, with tracks in the center for a transit line.<sup>84</sup> Governor Jerry Brown's administration had assisted in this effort. With his Caltrans chief Adriana Gianturco, Brown had emphasized a concern for transit over building more freeways throughout his administration.

The 1981 court decree that ended the litigation mandated a transit line down the middle of the freeway, but it allowed for local officials to determine its best use. In 1984, the LACTC decided that light rail would be the best option for the \$2 billion freeway.<sup>85</sup> The future Green Line would run down the middle of the freeway and east from the Los Angeles Airport for 17.3 miles to within a few miles of the Los Angeles and Orange County line in Norwalk. Although Caltrans was in charge of building the line, the LACTC funded the \$133 million cost with Proposition A funds. At the time, the LACTC predicted that the ridership on the Green Line would exceed 100,000 riders daily and that it would be ready in 1993.<sup>86</sup> The Green Line was therefore created from the available financing from Proposition A, the litigation spawned by transit advocates, the support of Governor Brown's administration and the LACTC's leadership in deciding on light rail.

### 1982-1985: Federal Commitment to the Subway Stalls

With a federal commitment to planning the subway, Bradley let the RTD, the agency in charge of building the subway, handle the politically sensitive task of determining its route. While downtown and Hollywood business leaders lobbied for the subway to pass through their city blocks, Bradley took a hands-off approach to avoid the political heat that would come from opposing groups.<sup>87</sup> To allay fears from the San Fernando Valley that the subway would never come to them, Bradley announced that there should be a two-way start from the opposite ends of the route, with the North Hollywood side seeing the first construction.<sup>88</sup>

While the decision-making process continued on the route and the planning, the subway received another boost of federal dollars. This time the Reagan Administration offered \$117 million for advance design work and the beginning of construction.<sup>89</sup> By 1984, the estimated price of the subway had increased to \$3.4 billion.<sup>90</sup> With the

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<sup>84</sup> Hebert, *Los Angeles: Two Systems Going, One On Hold*, p. 18.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Simon, *Is New Green Line a Road to Nowhere?* Los Angeles Times, August 12, 1995, at A-1.

<sup>86</sup> Hebert, *Los Angeles: Two Systems Going, One On Hold*, p. 18.

<sup>87</sup> Bill Boyarsky, *A Subway For The City*, Los Angeles Times, August 15, 1982 at Section IV, p. 2.

<sup>88</sup> Janet Clayton, *Bradley Calls For A '2-Way' Start On Metro Rail Project*, Los Angeles Times, August 20, 1983, at Section II, p. 5.

<sup>89</sup> Cecilia Rasmussen, *A Subway Saga*.

<sup>90</sup> Editorial, *Signal To Washington*, Los Angeles Times, September 13, 1984, at Section II, p. 4.

injection of federal dollars and the promise of state money to cover the rest, transportation officials set a date for a June 1985 groundbreaking.<sup>91</sup>

By 1985, however, the small government-minded Reagan administration changed its views on the subway. Perhaps motivated by its position as a second-term administration that did not need to curry favor with Southern California voters, as well as a desire to reduce the enormous federal structural deficits, the administration began calling for cutbacks on the subway project. UMTA head Ralph Stanley commented in March 1985, "Los Angeles has got to recognize that there is not unlimited federal funding for both highway and mass transit projects."<sup>92</sup> During this period, City Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky emerged as a vocal subway opponent. "Metro Rail is clearly in critical condition," Yaroslavsky commented in reaction to Stanley's remark. The federal tone worsened for the subway in April, when Reagan Budget Director David Stockman called the subway project "foolish for us, as federal taxpayers, who are bankrupt, to get into."<sup>93</sup> The administration pressed Congress to reign in subway funds.

The federal rebuke jeopardized the subway project. Bradley had managed to receive a pledge from Sacramento for \$400 million for the subway, contingent on the federal government commitment of two-thirds of the cost. Meanwhile, the LACTC contributed \$412 million from Proposition A funds, and the city of Los Angeles added \$7 million more. Through creative financing, Bradley also raised an additional \$170 million from benefit assessments on property owners in special districts around the subway stations, whose land would increase in value with the arrival of the subway. These non-federal sources would provide \$989 million for the subway, but this was not enough to guarantee a June groundbreaking. Governor George Deukmejian, a conservative who shared the Reagan administration's limited view of government spending, maintained publicly that he would keep his promise on the state funds. "We made the commitment that we would provide \$400 million,"<sup>94</sup> the Governor announced, but he added that he found it hard to disagree with Stockman. Bradley and the subway clearly had a reluctant ally in Sacramento.<sup>95</sup>

Bradley made an emergency lobbying trip to Washington, DC in May to secure support from Congress to include subway funds in the federal budget. The tension spilled over into the halls of Congress, where the mayor got into a verbal sparring match with local Congressional Representative Bobbi Fiedler (a Republican from Northridge). Fiedler loudly charged that the subway was "catering to the downtown business interests," while Bradley called Fiedler a "liar."

Bradley's trip eventually proved successful. The mayor, along with the RTD lobbying staff in Washington (which had spent \$875,000 on lobbying efforts) and

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<sup>91</sup> Hebert, p. 22.

<sup>92</sup> Peggy Pagano and Victor Merina, *US Won't Budge On Metro Rail Cuts*, Los Angeles Times, February 16, 1985, at Section II, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Karen Tumulty, *Stockman Calls LA Metro Rail 'Foolish' Waste*, Los Angeles Times, April 16, 1985, at Section II, p. 1.

<sup>94</sup> Victor Merina, *State To Keep Its Pledge On Metro Rail, Gov. Says*, Los Angeles Times, April 19, 1985, at Section II, p. 1.

<sup>95</sup> Hebert, pp. 21-22

business and labor lobbyists,<sup>96</sup> were able to get three crucial Republican representatives to soften their stance on subway funding.<sup>97</sup> Although all three representatives had voted against the funding in 1983, Bradley's lobbying efforts had convinced them otherwise.<sup>98</sup> The mayor's emergency trip to Washington and hands-on approach to resuscitate the project indicates the impact that his personal commitment to the subway project had on the process, as well as the impact of the financial interests that supported the subway. A less forceful advocate for the subway, or one less inclined to use his or her clout to push it forward, would not have achieved Bradley's results.

Before a congressional compromise to the federal budget impasse could be resolved, however, nature intervened. On March 24<sup>th</sup>, 1985, underground methane gas seeped into the backroom of a Ross Dress-For-Less store on Fairfax Avenue in Hollywood. After sundown, a spark from the store ignited the gas, creating an explosion that injured 21 people and caused a scene of disaster on the busy street, with material from the store burning on the pavement. The district's congressional representative, Henry Waxman, expressed concern that a similar disaster could befall the subway if methane crept into the tunnels and ignited as the subway passed through.

Waxman called a hearing for engineers to testify about the safety of tunneling through methane gas. At the hearing, engineers overwhelmingly spoke of the safety and ease of drilling through methane gas deposits. Waxman, however, seized on one engineer's comment that, although there would be relatively little danger once a subway tunnel was in place, "I do not know if any of the present-day conventional tunneling equipment and safety procedures would be able to cope with (an) unexpected chance breakthrough" into a large pocket of natural gas, such as those that exist along the Wilshire corridor.<sup>99</sup>

Perhaps what was more convincing for Waxman was the testimony of Diana Plotkin, vice president of the Beverly Wilshire Homeowners Association. Plotkin related at the meeting that residents are "deeply concerned" about the possibility of another explosion. "Whose idea was it to build a Metro Rail through an oil field?" she asked.

Plotkin (and most likely Waxman's) real motives in seizing on the chance of another explosion to stop the subway's progression down Wilshire became more apparent in a meeting two months later. At a Los Angeles Planning Commission hearing for the subway route in August, several hundred people attended, including about 70 residents of the Beverly-Fairfax area where the proposed subway station would be located. They arrived at the packed hearing room in City Hall with small flags that read "No to Metro Rail" and a cardboard sign with the words "No Way! L.A. Subway." Plotkin's concern over methane gas was no longer her driving force in protesting the arrival of the subway in her neighborhood. "If Metro Rail [the subway] is built, the problems that we would suffer would be tremendous," she said, citing traffic and parking problems. Other residents of the Beverly-Fairfax area expressed concern that a possible loss of adequate

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<sup>96</sup> Rich Connell and Victor Merina, *Reagan Signs Bill Containing First Metro Rail Funds*, Los Angeles Times, December 20, 1985, at B-2.

<sup>97</sup> The Representatives were Dan Lundgren (R-Long Beach), Bill Lowery (R-San Diego) and William Thomas (R-Bakersfield).

<sup>98</sup> *3 House Foes of Metro Rail Soften Stands*, Los Angeles Times, May 3, 1985, at B-1.

<sup>99</sup> Mathis Chazanov, *Methane Gas Pockets May Kill Metro Rail - Waxman*, Los Angeles Times, June 15, 1985, at B-2.

rental housing could displace the elderly if the subway went through their neighborhood. Speakers from other areas of the city, including Los Angeles City Councilman John Ferraro, a subway foe, echoed the sentiment. Ferraro said there "is no protection for existing rental housing" under the plan.<sup>100</sup> What had appeared to be opposition based on the dangers of methane gas explosion was turning out to be a classic case of NIMBY – not in my backyard – opposition.

Despite the engineering statements to the contrary, Waxman insisted that tunneling through the Fairfax area was too dangerous. Eventually, with the help of Congressman Julian Dixon, Waxman was able to push through a congressional compromise that would fund the subway but ban federal dollars to pay for it to travel west of Wilshire and Western Avenue.<sup>101</sup> Congressman Dixon represented the district immediately to the south of Waxman's, so a subway diversion would take the subway through his district and benefit his constituents.

Waxman's opposition meant that the subway would not be able to travel down one of the most densely populated areas of the United States: the Wilshire corridor. As Supervisor Edelman observed, "Unfortunately it [the subway] should have gone along Wilshire Boulevard all the way to the ocean." Edelman blamed Waxman and the constituents in his district: "people there didn't want folks to come out of the subway into their neighborhood – pathetic." Waxman's specific concern about tunneling in the Fairfax area did not make sense given the presence of methane gas deposits throughout the Westside of Los Angeles. "Methane is not limited to one area," Edelman summarized. "We have it all over. That was used as a pretext to stop the thing."<sup>102</sup> Waxman's stubborn opposition to the expansion of the subway, based on the interests of his constituents, prevented the subway from going precisely where it was most necessary. He represents the power that one county politician was able to wield in blocking the subway.

### 1985-1986: Groundbreakings

On October 31, 1985, construction began on the Blue Line from downtown Los Angeles to Long Beach, estimated at the time to cost \$595 million. Considering that the last Pacific Electric trolley car closed on the same tracks in 1961, it was a fitting place for Los Angeles to begin a new era of rail service. In attendance that day were Mayors Bradley and Ernie Kell of Long Beach, as well as Supervisors Ed Edelman, Deane Dana and Kenneth Hahn. In his remarks, Mayor Bradley promised that the 21-mile route would serve 35,000 people a day, increasing to 54,000 by the year 2000. To show the voters that their sales tax increase was beginning to pay dividends, he commented that the entire financing would come from Proposition A. "We knew that choosing the first line would be tough," the mayor said, "but with the leadership of the Commission [LACTC] and the support of the communities, we have agreed to start this line." Referring to the car culture of Los Angeles, the mayor finished by adding, "We all know that Los

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<sup>100</sup> Victor Merina, *Residents Swipe At Subway Corridor Development Plan*, Los Angeles Times, August 2, 1985, at B-2.

<sup>101</sup> Rich Connell, *House Compromise Clears Way for Metro Rail Funds*, Los Angeles Times, September 12, 1985, at Part B-1.

<sup>102</sup> Edelman interview.

Angelenos love their cars, but we hope they will fall in love with the convenience and comfort of this light rail project.”<sup>103</sup>

The Blue Line had its immediate detractors. Writing in the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, Professor Jonathan Richmond of MIT downplayed the benefits of the train. “Light rail has few tangible benefits to offer depressed South-Central Angeles,” he wrote. “The work trips of mid-corridor residents...are dispersed, with only 9 percent working in downtown Los Angeles.” Quoting from the SCAG report on the Blue Line, Richmond argued that the train will “mostly accommodate travelers who would otherwise have taken buses,” so the train would likely not result in less traffic or air pollution. Richmond proposed using the money for expanded bus service for the region.<sup>104</sup> Peter Gordon, Associate Professor of Urban Planning at USC, was more blunt: “there is just no reason for optimism. It’s going to be a ghost train.”<sup>105</sup> These objections illustrate the opposition to light rail from transportation experts and bus advocates.

Meanwhile, Bradley had reason to celebrate for his subway project. Following Waxman’s House compromise, which banned subway construction west on Wilshire, Congress sent a federal spending bill to President Reagan. On December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1985, Reagan signed the bill, which authorized \$429 million for the subway’s first 4.4-mile downtown phase.<sup>106</sup> Bradley called it a “wonderful holiday gift.” Acknowledging the opposition that had consumed his effort to build the subway, he said, “If we had a dollar for every time somebody said Metro Rail was dead, we could have built this system.”<sup>107</sup>

Two months later, however, the President changed his mind and called the subway an example of “a ton of fat in this trillion dollar government.” He said the funding should be killed to help achieve budget cuts required by the federal deficit reduction law. “It’s pretty quick to have that kind of a change of heart,” Bradley responded. But Congress stepped in to ensure the funding would continue.<sup>108</sup> Reagan’s posturing reveals the difficulty in securing consistent support for rail at the federal level and the importance of subway allies in Congress.

In September 1986, construction finally began on the Metro Rail subway. Amid political, business and labor leaders, Mayor Bradley beamed as he addressed the crowd of roughly 1200 guests. The start of construction was a “tribute to tenacity,” he said, “in the face of what many said couldn’t be done and shouldn’t be done.”<sup>109</sup> Instead of breaking ground in eighteen months, as he promised voters in 1973, it took the mayor thirteen years to reach this stage. The length of time reveals the depth of opposition to the subway and the difficulty of lining up support and funding from all levels of government. Only the commitment and persistence of leaders like Bradley, in the face of so much opposition, could result in a project of this magnitude.

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<sup>103</sup> LACTC, *Long Beach-Los Angeles Rail Transit Groundbreaking*, October 31, 1985. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>104</sup> Jonathan Richmond, *Light Rail: The Dream vs. Reality*, *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, January 24, 1986.

<sup>105</sup> Rich Connell, *Question of Ridership Light Rails: Visionary or a Step Back?* *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1985, at A-1.

<sup>106</sup> Rasmussen, *A Subway Saga*.

<sup>107</sup> Rich Connell and Victor Merina, *Reagan Signs Bill Containing First Metro Rail Funds*.

<sup>108</sup> Rasmussen, *A Subway Saga*.

<sup>109</sup> Rich Connell, *Metro Rail Start Feted in \$90,000 Ceremony*, *Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 1986, at B-2.

## 1987-1988: Rail and the San Fernando Valley

The San Fernando Valley presented a problem for rail transit advocates. The original starter line corridor in 1975 included a rail line from the Warner Center in Canoga Park on the east end of the Valley to North Hollywood on the west side and through to downtown. The area was not dense enough to justify a subway, but residents in the suburban Valley generally resisted aboveground light rail through their communities. They did not want loud rail cars passing through previously dormant rights-of-way – some of which were literally in people's backyards.

In September 1987, the LACTC agreed to study 12 rail projects along five routes in the Valley, including one along the Ventura Freeway and one parallel to Burbank and Chandler boulevards. Residents expressed concern about the increased noise and changed characters of their neighborhoods that would result. Rabbi Chaim Schnur of Agudath Israel of California, whose mission was to protect “the civil and religious rights of the observant Jewish community,” wrote to Bradley to protest a light rail route through the orthodox Jewish community on Chandler Boulevard. “It is our sincere belief that the construction of this system on Chandler Boulevard will do great harm to the residential community and its outstanding institutions,” Schnur wrote. “The synagogues, day schools, and other services... would be severely threatened,” he added. “Safety risks, noise, traffic disruption would further impede and prevent continued settlement in the area.”<sup>110</sup> Other residents, such as Bruce Varnum of Reseda, wrote, “This line would come very close to my house and would create noise, vibration, excessive traffic and undermine the value of my property.”<sup>111</sup>

However, valley residents tended to favor light rail routes that did not pass near their houses. The Reseda Community Association, for example, wrote to Bradley to express support for a “North/South San Fernando light rail route,” but three other routes along Ventura Boulevard did “not have the community acceptance” that the north/south route had.<sup>112</sup> In response to residents' concerns, light rail advocates developed plans for quiet rail cars that traveled below grade when near homes. The Valley Industry and Commerce Association proposed a rail route roughly following Ventura Boulevard. The Association promised that rail cars on the route would “not be seen out of residential windows” and “noise and distraction will not occur.” Station platforms would go “below ground yet open and airy with landscaping along the cut which will enhance and beautify what is at present less than attractive railroad right-of-way.”<sup>113</sup> Despite these efforts at compromise, San Fernando Valley residents would not agree to any of the five proposed

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<sup>110</sup> Letter from Chaim Schnur, Rabbi, Agudath Israel of California, to Tom Bradley (October 18, 1988). Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>111</sup> Letter from Bruce V. Barnum to Tom Bradley/Ray Remy (November 14, 1987). Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>112</sup> Letter from Milena Miller, President, Reseda Community Association, to Tom Bradley (July 14, 1988). Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>113</sup> Valley Industry and Commerce Association, *The New Southern Pacific Burbank Branch Transit Light Rail Line*, July 1988, at pp. 3-8. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

routes.<sup>114</sup> For his part, Mayor Bradley was not willing to advocate an expensive subway system through a less-densely populated region of the city that was outside his base of political support. But without an underground route, light rail lines through residential neighborhoods faced too much opposition. As a result, the Valley never received the kind of strong attention from rail advocates among the city and county leadership that the more urban parts of the city received.

### 1987-1990: Corruption and Accidents Begin

By 1987, construction continued on three rail projects: the Blue Line to Long Beach, the Green Line along the Century Freeway, and the subway (the Red Line) through downtown Los Angeles. Overseeing the subway was the RTD, while the LACTC was in charge of building the Blue Line and administering Proposition A funds. The RTD had had a history of allegations of fraud and mismanagement, and in 1987 these allegations surfaced again. Charges included reports of soaring administrative costs, lax control over travel and entertainment expenses by board members and executives and the possible payment of hundreds of thousands of dollars in phony insurance claims.<sup>115</sup>

The news reports sparked discussions among Bradley, county supervisors and legislators in Sacramento (who authorized the agencies and had legislative oversight) as to whether they should merge the RTD and LACTC to increase efficiency and reduce mismanagement. Bradley opposed a merger, fearing it would jeopardize federal funding by showing disorganization.<sup>116</sup> By the end of the year, Governor Deukmejian vetoed the legislature's attempt to merge the two agencies, arguing that it would be cosmetic and would not solve the fundamental problems.<sup>117</sup> The two agencies, however, were caught up in bureaucratic turf wars, culminating in the LACTC trying to take unilateral control of the subway away from the RTD in 1988.<sup>118</sup>

Meanwhile, mismanagement allegations continued. In 1989, an audit revealed that the RTD had not accurately accounted for millions of dollars in Metro Rail funds. Cost estimate increases and construction delays made the news consistently.<sup>119</sup> In 1990, RTD Director Jan Hall resigned her seat to work for a private consulting firm that had just signed a \$99,500 contract with the huge transit district.<sup>120</sup> To compound matters for the subway, construction difficulties were beginning to occur. In July 1990, a 750-foot stretch of Metro Rail tunnel collapsed in an accidental fire near the Hollywood Freeway,

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<sup>114</sup> Hugo Martin, *Riordan Seeks to Kill Valley Subway*, Los Angeles Times, December 20, 1995, at B-1.

<sup>115</sup> Kevin Roderick, *RTD Chief Concedes Need, Vows Fix-It Plan*, Los Angeles Times, January 9, 1987, at B-2.

<sup>116</sup> Bill Boyarsky, *Bradley Says He's Opposed to Transit Merger Plan*, Los Angeles Times, February 12, 1987, at B-2.

<sup>117</sup> *The State: Deukmejian's Veto Saves RTD*, Los Angeles Times, September 30, 1987, at B-1.

<sup>118</sup> Rich Connell, *County Panel Acts to Take Reins of Metro Rail Project*, Los Angeles Times, September 15, 1988, at B-2.

<sup>119</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, *Opinions Clash on Metro Rail Cost Overruns*, Los Angeles Times, July 26, 1989, at B-1.

<sup>120</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, *Lobbyist for RTD Angers Patsaouras*, Los Angeles Times, January 31, 1990, at B-1.

causing \$2.2 million in damage.<sup>121</sup> Although construction continued on the three rail projects, the media coverage of the accidents and mismanagement laid the foundation for weakening public support for rail.

The mismanagement and allegations of corruption proved difficult to control and underscores the importance of the personalities involved in leading the project. While strong leadership had been crucial to starting the rail system, the flip side of the power of individual leadership was beginning to appear. Just as transit leaders' strong dedication to rail had helped it, these same leaders' flaws were beginning to hinder the project. The inability of Bradley, legislators, supervisors and the members of the transit agencies to control the corruption and infighting was becoming a serious problem.

### 1990: A Second Ballot Initiative for Light Rail

The day after the tunnel fire in 1990, the first rail line opened in Los Angeles since 1961 – on the same tracks as the last train. The Blue Line was finally completed at a cost of \$877 million, \$270 million more than projected at groundbreaking five years earlier. At least 25,000 people jammed the trains for free opening day rides from Long Beach to downtown. Despite the bad publicity from the tunnel fire, the arrival of light rail sparked a wave of public nostalgia for the Pacific Electric Red Cars and of excitement of having rail transit back in Los Angeles.<sup>122</sup> Nick Patsouras, president of the RTD, said in English and Spanish in his opening remarks, "I feel like dancing." He noted, "A lot of the skeptics said this would never happen. The skeptics were wrong. The trains are back. This is the beginning of a transit renaissance." Mayor Bradley and Supervisors Kenneth Hahn and Ed Edelman attended, along with other public officials. They delivered speeches and made congratulatory remarks. "It was a hard fight, but we won," said Hahn, who in many ways was the public official most responsible for the light rail line, given his role in passing Proposition A and in selecting the route. "The Blue Line is here," he said. "Now use it."<sup>123</sup>

Despite the good news surrounding the opening of the Blue Line, however, money was running out. Ten years after county voters approved Proposition A, there was insufficient funding available to complete the 150-mile light rail system. With the costs of the Blue Line, Green Line and Red Line running beyond the initial estimates, Mayor Bradley began advocating an additional half-cent sales tax increase for the county, from 6.5% to 7%. Bradley was concerned that important city regions such as Pasadena, the San Fernando Valley and the South Bay might not see the rail system come to them. "There is not enough money," Bradley told the public. "This is the only way we can build" the entire system. The system was in fact \$300 million short of its necessary budget for the next ten years, and the additional half-cent would provide \$400 million a year for rail construction.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Eric Malnic, *Fire Under Freeway Subway Tunnel Caves In, Jams Downtown Traffic*, Los Angeles Times, July 13, 1990, at Part-P.

<sup>122</sup> Dean Murphy and Ronald B. Taylor, *Riders Get First Look at Blue Line Light Rail Transit*, Los Angeles Times, July 15, 1990, at A-1.

<sup>123</sup> Id.

<sup>124</sup> Rich Connell, *Sales Tax Hike OKd for November Vote Transit*, Los Angeles Times, August 9, 1990, at B-1.



The LACTC barely approved the measure for the ballot, 6 to 5. The deciding vote came from conservative Supervisor Pete Schabarum. Employing an odd electoral strategy, Schabarum hoped that the transit tax would fail and drag down other proposed tax hikes on the ballot. "[I'm] trying to present a menu of tax increases so substantial that they are rejected in their entirety," he said.<sup>125</sup>

Schabarum's strategy failed. In November 1990, voters once again approved a sales tax increase to fund rail transit in Los Angeles. This time, however, the measure (Proposition C) barely passed with a 50.8% approval. Among the projects that the measure promised to fund was an expansion of the Green Line to the Los Angeles Airport, a new light rail line to Pasadena, and a plan to purchase existing railroad rights-of-way to create commuter rail lines to far-flung regions of the county. The rights-of-way purchases proved critical to earning the *Los Angeles Times* endorsement of Proposition C.<sup>126</sup> The *Times* endorsement also resulted from the recognition that federal funds for the Los Angeles rail system were drying up with the national economic recession.<sup>127</sup> As for Schabarum and other opponents who were surprised at the support the measure received: he remarked, "I wouldn't have voted for it knowing what I know now."<sup>128</sup>

County voters had now approved sales tax increases for rail twice in a decade. Both times, the proposals involved modest sales tax increases for diversified plans that included general congestion-reducing plans in addition to rail. The groundbreaking of the three lines, plus the completion of the Blue Line, may also have inspired confidence that a rail network was worth investing in. The corruption allegations and construction accidents may have dampened support for what was a narrow victory. In the end, the leadership and ability to compromise of Bradley and other transit officials helped shepherd another local funding victory for a rail system that so many critics believed would never happen.

### 1991: Westside Story

In 1991, with money from Proposition C, the LACTC purchased a network of rail rights-of-ways throughout Los Angeles County. Most of the rights-of-way were for the promised commuter rail service that eventually became Metro-Link (providing rail service to Union Station from Orange County, the San Gabriel Valley and San Bernadino County). At least one right-of-way held promise for a city light rail line: Exposition Boulevard. The old railroad route traveled from Exposition Park near downtown Los Angeles toward Santa Monica, ending at the Santa Monica Civic Center. For the second time in five years, the Westside had an opportunity to reap the benefits of a rail system now that Waxman had denied Westside residents the subway.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Id.

<sup>126</sup> Editorial, *Rail Way: Transit Without Tears*, Los Angeles Times, October 16, 1990, at Part-B.

<sup>127</sup> Id.

<sup>128</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, *Transit Plans Get Tax Boost From Voters Transportation*, Los Angeles Times, November 8, 1990, at Part-B.

<sup>129</sup> Nancy Hill-Holtzman, *A Green Light for Rail Line Mass Transit*, Los Angeles Times, September 5, 1991, at Part-J.

Debate began on extending light rail down Exposition Boulevard. The LACTC included the rail plan in its 30-year budget. Supporters included many Westside residents, including the Mayors of Santa Monica and Culver City. Culver City had urged Bradley in a resolution to purchase the right-of-way in 1989, citing the enhanced “economic vitality” and improvement in air quality that rail would bring. The city called the purchase a “once in a lifetime opportunity.”<sup>130</sup>

The plan faced immediate opposition from local residents who did not want the noise and changed neighborhood character that the rail would bring. Residents of Rancho Park and Cheviot Hills in particular were concerned with security and declining property values following a rail line.<sup>131</sup> They found a champion in Los Angeles Councilman Zev Yaroslavsky, an outspoken opponent of the subway. Yaroslavsky called a rail line on Exposition Boulevard a “waste of money,” pointing out that it is “the lowest density corridor in Los Angeles.”<sup>132</sup> He claimed to support rail passing through Century City and Beverly Hills on the Santa Monica Boulevard right-of-way instead. The opposition to the Santa Monica light rail plans represents the difficulty rail planners had in extending rail through residential neighborhoods. Los Angeles’s sprawling character, with residential neighborhoods dispersed in the midst of commercial centers, poses a particularly acute problem in avoiding residential rail. Partly as a result of the opposition, LACTC was not able to plan formally for a light rail line down the corridor.

### 1992-1993: Corruption Charges and Merger

In March 1992, the *Los Angeles Times* published a report of serious mismanagement and corruption at the LACTC. The report documented evidence of “casual spending and lax accounting” at the LACTC, including \$2.9 million spent on meals, travel and company fleet cars over an 18-month period. These expenditures included a “\$9,000 Palm Springs retreat for accountants and bookkeepers, catered, staff-only lunch meetings that cost up to \$499 per day, and many thousands of dollars worth of free coffee and doughnuts for staff members.” The paper also reported, “Government-issued credit cards were used by top LACTC executives to pay for golf lessons in Arizona and bicycles in Los Angeles” and “many of these personal expenses were not reimbursed until they were questioned by The Times.”<sup>133</sup>

In response to the reports, Mayor Bradley sent a letter to the Chairman of the LACTC, Michael Antonovich. The letter asked Antonovich to convene an independent review of agency spending by a “financial and management audit team.” Bradley wrote, “Continued allegations about outrageous spending indicate that the agency may be out of control” and that “there seems to be no fiscal watchdog at the agency.” He also bemoaned the evasive answers from the LACTC that “requires me to track allegations

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<sup>130</sup> Letter from Jozelle Smith, Mayor of Culver City, to Tom Bradley (July 7, 1989) and Culver City Resolution No. 89-R 075 (June 26, 1989). Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>131</sup> Id.

<sup>132</sup> Louise Yarnall, *SM May Get On Light Rail Line*, Santa Monica Outlook, September 9, 1991, at A-3.

<sup>133</sup> Mark A. Stein, *U.S. Will Probe Expenditures for Metro Rail Finances*, Los Angeles Times, September 18, 1992, at Part-B.

and run down answers."<sup>134</sup> Bradley's letter reveals the extent to which he had lost control of the fiscal oversight at a major transportation agency. The mayor, however, was unable to take a strong public stand to reform the agency. Instead of publicly demanding accountability through a state investigation, Bradley found himself in the position of having to ask the LACTC to reform itself. Perhaps the mayor was concerned (as he was in 1988 during the RTD scandals) that admitting publicly that the LACTC needed reform would jeopardize state and federal funding. But by not addressing the problem quickly and firmly, Bradley helped create the public perception that government spending on rail was out of control. Once again, the inability of rail leaders to control the spending and behavior of the transit agencies hurt the project.

By 1993, the state legislature had had enough of the difficulties with the LACTC and RTD and voted to merge them. Perhaps the final indication of waste and infighting was the LACTC's attempt to build itself a new headquarters more than a mile from where the new RTD headquarters was under construction. The new agency became the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA).<sup>135</sup> Bradley pushed to have Franklin White, an African-American attorney and head of New York's Transportation Commission, installed as the MTA's first chief. White was close with the mayor, and when the MTA approved his appointment, Bradley called it a victory. He said, "Frank White is most impressive. It became clear to me that he had the kind of breadth and knowledge to lead us into a new era of transportation."<sup>136</sup> Bradley's personal and political influence over the MTA allowed him to continue shaping the direction of rail planning in Los Angeles.

### 1993-1994: Light Rail Plans and the Subway Opening

Proposition C advocates had promised that the revenue from the measure would benefit communities like Pasadena, the San Fernando Valley and the South Bay. The LACTC, in one of its final acts as an independent agency, authorized Proposition C dollars to build light rail to Pasadena from Union Station. The commission earmarked \$841 million for a 13.6-mile, light rail line between downtown Los Angeles and Pasadena, with the line slated to open in late 1996. LACTC estimated that the ride would take about 25 minutes, stopping at six stations, including Chinatown and Old Town Pasadena. "This next light rail line is a much-needed corridor for people who use the overcrowded Pasadena Freeway now for travel between Pasadena and downtown L.A.," Stephanie Brady of the LACTC remarked. The Commission conceived of the line as an extension of the Blue Line.<sup>137</sup> The line was therefore the result of available local funds and a desire to reward the politically important Pasadena region with rail.

For Bradley, nearing the end of his 20-year run as mayor, an even happier occasion occurred just a few days later. The opening of the first 4.4-mile segment of the

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<sup>134</sup> Letter to Michael Antonovich, Chairman of the LACTC, from Mayor Tom Bradley, March 6, 1992. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, UCLA.

<sup>135</sup> Editorial, *Let's Be Clear, the Merger Is Here*, Los Angeles Times, March 8, 1993, at Part-B.

<sup>136</sup> Nora Zamichow, *New York Official to Head Huge L.A. Transit Agency*, Los Angeles Times, February 5, 1993, at Part-A.

<sup>137</sup> Nora Zamichow, *County Clears Way for Light-Rail Line Transportation*, Los Angeles Times, January 28, 1993, at Part-B.

first Los Angeles subway took place in front of officials from all levels of the United States government. California's two senators, Governor Pete Wilson, the five county supervisors and city council members were in attendance as a proud Mayor Bradley presided.<sup>138</sup> "I'm very excited, very happy about this day; it's been 20 years coming," he announced. "The Red Line is going to deliver us to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."<sup>139</sup> As the mayor called out, "All aboard our new Metro Red Line subway" and blew a whistle, technicians cued up the song "I Love LA" by Randy Newman. After twenty years of battling politicians, skeptics and funding woes, Bradley finally achieved a campaign promise he had made to voters in 1973.

### 1994-1995: Corruption and Debt at the MTA

The subway glow wore off quickly as charges of mismanagement and growing debt hobbled the MTA. In 1994, Representative Waxman requested a federal investigation into shoddy construction and poor planning on the Metro Rail subway. "They are serious problems," the subway foe wrote in his letter to the Department of Transportation, citing "the presence of methane gas and hydrogen sulfide in some stations" and "tunnel walls that were built much thinner than contract specifications."<sup>140</sup>

Perhaps more damaging for the MTA was the agency's growing debt. In 1995, with federal transit spending slashed in response to an economic downturn, the MTA was forced to scrap a 30-year plan devised in 1992 that called for \$183 billion in transit projects and instead spend \$65 billion over the next two decades. The proposed rail system would shrink from 296 miles to 95 miles, including a loss of eight rail lines from Burbank and Azusa to Santa Monica and Torrance. Franklin White contended that the 1992 plan "incorporated some far-reaching ideas that just aren't attainable," and he blamed the recession and the "overly ambitious nature" of the plan. Critics such as State Senator Tom Hayden (Democrat from Santa Monica) went further. He said, "The time is overdue to question whether the [MTA] should exist at all." He cited the agency's "insatiable need to project fanciful rail lines in every direction."<sup>141</sup>

Remaining in the MTA plan, however, was the Downtown Los Angeles-to-Pasadena rail line and the extension of the Downtown subway to the Westside, the Eastside and the San Fernando Valley as far as the San Diego Freeway. MTA sacrificed rail lines along the Pomona Freeway, the Crenshaw district, Downtown Los Angeles to Burbank and Glendale, Exposition Boulevard from USC to Santa Monica, Pasadena to Irwindale or Azusa, Los Angeles International Airport to Palmdale, and extensions of the Green Line to Torrance and Downey. "The agency has been spending beyond its means for several years," said newly elected County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky. "So naturally, there needs to be a mid-course correction. [The new plan] is an attempt to bring

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<sup>138</sup> LACTC News Release, "City To Celebrate L.A.'s 1<sup>st</sup> Modern Subway." January 25, 1993. Source: Tom Bradley Papers, Dept. of Special Collections, University Library, UCLA.

<sup>139</sup> Nora Zamichow, *52,800 Ride the Rails of History as Subway Rolls*, Los Angeles Times, January 31, 1993, at Part-A.

<sup>140</sup> David Willman, *Waxman Calls for U.S. Probe of Subway Transportation*, Los Angeles Times, September 20, 1994, at Part-B.

<sup>141</sup> Eric Lichtblau and Richard Simon, *MTA Scuttles Rail Projects in Drastic Retrenchment*, Los Angeles Times, February 2, 1995, at Part-A.

the agency's spending in line with its revenues. Failure to do so will bankrupt the agency and leave a bunch of unfinished lines all over the county."<sup>142</sup>

Federal funding vanished quickly. In response to the federal budget deficits and the national recession, President Clinton proposed a 30% cut in federal transit subsidies. The new Republican-dominated Congress expected to make further cuts. Federal officials had temporarily frozen \$1.6 billion in funds in the fall of 1994 due to MTA's construction problems on the subway. Meanwhile, bus advocates criticized MTA for raising bus fares on low-income riders. Peter Gordon, a USC planning professor, criticized the MTA for making public transportation too expensive for many who are most dependent on it, even as it billions of dollars go to rail projects. "You're going in reverse," Gordon said. "You've spent more money and you're serving less people."<sup>143</sup>

MTA's dramatic scale-down was the result of funding woes, precipitated by an overly-ambitious rail agenda and an economic downturn that dried up state and local funds as well as federal subsidies. The corruption and mismanagement served to heighten the public perception that the agency was responsible for its predicament by wasting taxpayer dollars and exhibiting lax oversight on construction.

The bad publicity for the MTA soon worsened. In December 1995, the television news show *60 Minutes* broadcast a report highlighting the corruption, bureaucratic ineptitude and mismanagement of the subway. Entitled "Riots, Earthquakes and Now the Subway," the special featured an interview with subway-foe and mayoral hopeful Tom Hayden. Hayden said in an interview with reporter Leslie Stahl, "My view is that they ought to stop it in its tracks and declare a victory. They can't finish their fantasy. There are too many problems ahead." The report fueled concerns by local officials that it would dampen Congressional support for a politically unpopular program and helped drive Franklin White from his role as MTA chief.<sup>144</sup>

In response, Bradley's successor, Mayor Richard Riordan, who had previously supported a \$2.2 billion expansion of the subway through his political base in the San Fernando Valley, decided to stop the subway at North Hollywood. Riordan had originally advocated a subway route along the same corridor that transit officials had included in the original 1975 starter line route, from downtown to Canoga Park at the Warner Center. But the mayor now believed that a light rail line would better serve the Valley.<sup>145</sup> Riordan's change of heart illuminates the increasing political unpopularity of the subway system, given the economic downturn and bad publicity for the MTA. It also reveals Riordan's tepid support for the subway. Whereas Bradley staked his political reputation with a personal commitment to the expansion of the subway, Riordan was willing to retreat on the subway once it became unpopular.

### 1995: The Green Line Opens

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<sup>142</sup> Id.

<sup>143</sup> Id.

<sup>144</sup> Bill Boyarsky, *MTA's Countdown to TV Earthquake*, Los Angeles Times, December 15, 1995, at Part-B.

<sup>145</sup> Hugo Martin, *Riordan Seeks to Kill Valley Subway*, Los Angeles Times, December 20, 1995, at Part-B.

In 1995, the Green Line finally opened along the Century Freeway. The line was a disappointment, however, because it did not reach the Los Angeles Airport and because the defense industry in El Segundo, which the rail line was designed to serve, had collapsed since construction began. Transportation officials were defensive about the route of the Green Line. "In 50 years, let's talk about whether the Green Line was a good idea," said Jacki Bacharach, a member of the defunct LACTC, which planned the line. "Let's not talk about it now."

The line never reached the airport due to lack of funding and disputes with Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) officials. Although planners never designed the line to go directly into LAX for fear of slowing the train for commuter riders, planners had instead called for a spur line that would go to airport parking lot C. From there, passengers could transfer to a small automated train (a people mover) that would connect to the terminals. The Green Line would then continue to Westchester and Marina Del Rey. However, FAA officials expressed concern that the train's lights could distract pilots, its electric-power system could disrupt electronic navigation aids and its overhead wires, near the ends of two runways, could endanger low-flying aircraft in an emergency. Although planners came up with a realignment addressing the FAA's concerns, budget cutbacks forced the LACTC to drop the parking lot C extension. Some transit planners privately blamed airport officials for the Green Line not reaching LAX, suggesting that airport officials resisted public transit to protect airport parking revenues. Airport officials denied the charges.<sup>146</sup>

The Green Line's unfortunate route was the result of poor planning and bad luck. Transportation officials hoped that eventually a spur line to the airport would be built and that the line would be extended to Redondo Beach and the commercial district near Rosecrans Avenue. The funding woes and the FAA disagreement had scuttled these plans. But the route was also an example of misjudgments. The Century Freeway litigation had created an easy transit route for rail officials down the center of the freeway. But the political convenience of building in that region meant that more densely populated regions of the city with proven rail needs, such as the Westside corridors, would have to wait for rail. The Green Line was therefore a casualty of the political process of route-selection, where politicians selected a route rather than employing transit experts who selected routes based on need and logistics rather than political expediency. Although ridership on the Green Line may increase in the future with additions to the airport and shopping centers, in the short term it represents a missed opportunity to expand rail to where more county residents could use it.

### 1997-1999: Subway Ballot Initiative

By 1997, public support for the subway had decreased. Despite the opening of the Wilshire extension of the subway in 1996 (to Wilshire and Western Avenue),<sup>147</sup> a *Los Angeles Times* poll in February showed a narrow majority against the poll. It became a narrow majority in favor of the subway, however, once pollsters gave respondents pro

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<sup>146</sup> Richard Simon, *Is New Green Line a Road to Nowhere?* Los Angeles Times, August 12, 1995, at Part-A.

<sup>147</sup> Richard Rimon and Jon D. Markman, *Future of Wilshire May Ride on Subway Extension Transit*, Los Angeles Times, July 12, 1996, at Part-B.

and con arguments. Demographically, the poll revealed that an individual's geographic location, ethnicity and gender affected his or her views. Latinos supported the subway the most of any group, while African-Americans and whites were mostly opposed. Half of the respondents believed that it would be unrealistic to expect the subway system to reach most of the residents who needed public transportation. South Los Angeles residents were the most likely to say they favored the subway. Westside residents were narrowly split, and residents of the San Fernando Valley were opposed to the subway in either case. By solid margins, the survey found that men liked subway trains and women did not. Young adults were most inclined to favor the subway, and senior citizens were generally opposed.<sup>148</sup> The poll indicated that support for the subway had declined since voters approved the sales tax measures in 1980 and 1990, but supporters and detractors did not generally have firm opinions.

Taking advantage of the weak support and the bad publicity dogging the MTA and the subway throughout the decade, Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky decided in 1998 to introduce a ballot measure that would ban the use of the sales tax to fund any subway extensions.<sup>149</sup> The Supervisor was an outspoken critic of the subway project from his days as Councilman representing the Fairfax area, where residents opposed the subway intrusion. He frequently criticized MTA's deficit spending. The MTA was partly responsible for this perception, as the agency constantly underestimated costs on the subway and then had to revise them upward. Following the 1990 election approving Proposition C, the MTA revised the costs of the subway upward twice in one week. In both instances, local officials blamed federal officials for dragging their feet, while federal officials blamed the locals for mismanagement.<sup>150</sup> Further eroding the subway's image was the negative publicity from construction accidents, such as the tunnel fire disaster and the charges of corruption and mismanagement. High profile news reports such as the *60 Minutes* special worsened the reputation.

As a result of the negative perception of the subway, Yaroslavsky's ballot initiative passed overwhelmingly: 68.1% of the voters approved the ban on further subway funding. Even in the Eastside, where the subway was next slated to expand, residents voted decisively in favor of the measure. Most observers considered the measure to be a referendum on the MTA. The MTA, for its part, declined to mount an opposition. MTA officials knew that their agency and the subway project were deeply unpopular. They privately expressed hope that after a few years, when the negative news stories about mismanagement and construction accidents faded from people's memories and as the convenience of the subway became apparent to more voters, public perception would shift and the ballot measure could be overturned.<sup>151</sup>

Although MTA would continue work on the subway until all routes under construction were completed, the measure represented a low point for subway advocates. The news reports of mismanagement, corruption and over-spending had affected public

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<sup>148</sup> Jeffrey L. Rabin and Jon D. Markman, *L.A. Residents Divided on Subway Completion*, Los Angeles Times, February 7, 1997, at Part-B.

<sup>149</sup> Jeffrey L. Rabin and Richard Simon, *Backing for Anti-Subway Measure Equally Strong in All Areas of City*, Los Angeles Times, November 5, 1998, at Part-B.

<sup>150</sup> Ronald B. Taylor, *Overruns Climb to \$538 Million for Metro Rail Transportation*, Los Angeles Times, November 17, 1990, at Part-B.

<sup>151</sup> Jeffrey L. Rabin and Richard Simon, *Backing for Anti-Subway Measure Equally Strong*.

confidence in the project. Although the MTA and its predecessor agencies exhibited poor planning and poor management decisions, the cost overruns and construction accidents became magnified by the media glare and by the vocal opposition to the project. As former Supervisor Edelman observed regarding the construction difficulties, "That happens in many big construction projects. I think it was an overreaction. The *Herald-Examiner*, which is no longer [in print], saw the expense of the problems of shoddy workmanship and kept repeating it over and over again."<sup>152</sup> As Edelman's argument indicates, the media desire to report on the bad news of a project often colored public perception and detracted from stories on the long term benefits of a rail project. The inability of leaders to control the spending and corruption, coupled with the intensity of the media coverage, had resulted in an electoral backlash.

The ballot setback preceded another blow for the subway. In 1999, a federal court Special Master ruled for the plaintiffs in a long-running lawsuit brought by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, the Bus Riders Union and Labor Community Strategy Center. These groups alleged that MTA's consistent funding preference for rail over buses, which serve predominantly low-income riders of color, constituted discrimination against minorities. The Special Master ordered the MTA to purchase 532 buses and put pressure on the agency to end the funding imbalance, either by cutting rail spending or improving bus funds.<sup>153</sup> The lawsuit vindicated rail opponents who argued that rail provided a massive subsidy for the middle class professional workers who used it and for the downtown business interests who reaped the benefits of having a professional labor force delivered to their firms on rail cars. Retailers also benefited from the increased foot traffic with rail. While buses require less of a per passenger subsidy than rail, rail costs over the long term are often less than bus costs. Since rail cars last longer than buses, the replacement and maintenance costs are lower over the long-term. But for many riders who depend on the bus system, increased fares and route reductions became more frustrating when they heard news of lavish spending on rail projects.

### 2000-2003: Openings and Completions

The subway was finally completed to the San Fernando Valley in June 2000. Although ridership on the Red Line subway had increased to 59,000 a day after it opened in Hollywood (falling short of predictions that it would be 80,000), it was expected to increase greatly once Valley commuters had access to it in North Hollywood. At the opening, Mayor Riordan, when asked if the \$4.7 billion for the 18.6-mile subway was worth it, responded, "No, no it's not worth it. We could have spent the money more efficiently."<sup>154</sup> Riordan, although nominally a subway supporter, indicated through his comments a lack of commitment to the idea of subway transit in Los Angeles. His remarks stand in sharp contrast to Mayor Bradley, who believed in a vision of the subway as bringing long-term benefits to the community.

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<sup>152</sup> Edelman interview.

<sup>153</sup> Jeffrey L. Rabin, *MTA Told to Buy 532 Buses to Ease Crowding Transit*, Los Angeles Times, March 9, 1999, at Part-B.

<sup>154</sup> Jeffrey L. Rabin, *Subway's Arrival in Valley Ends a Long, Costly Journey*, Los Angeles Times, June 18, 2000, at Part-A.



By August 2000, parking lots at the North Hollywood subway station were 90 percent full by 8am.<sup>155</sup> One year later, ridership peaked at 150,000 boardings a day.<sup>156</sup> In 2002, a *Los Angeles Times* poll showed that 78% of rail riders described their experience as “good” to “very good,” compared to 56 percent of bus riders who felt that way.<sup>157</sup> With the positive news from the subway, MTA publicly proclaimed a desire to overturn the Waxman ban and extend the subway down Wilshire Boulevard through the Fairfax district and into the densely populated Miracle Mile section.<sup>158</sup> The Los Angeles City Council endorsed such a move in September 2004, arguing that “congestion has reached a breaking point” in the area.<sup>159</sup> The success of the subway and the passage of time without reports of corruption and accidents had emboldened transit planners to contemplate future rail lines.

In 2003, MTA completed the light rail line from Union Station to Pasadena, now dubbed the “Gold Line.” Although originally conceived as an extension of the Blue Line, the Gold Line ended up being separated from the Blue Line, requiring a ride on the Red Line to connect the two routes. It cost \$900 million to build (close to the original estimates) and featured 13 stations. Although the line presented problems for neighbors with noise and was still slower than automobile traffic, real estate projects around the stations began to boom with high demand for housing.<sup>160</sup>

Meanwhile, the MTA planned a light rail extension to the Eastside in place of the subway. It would be a six-mile route from Union Station through Little Tokyo, Boyle Heights and ending in unincorporated East Los Angeles.<sup>161</sup> Newly elected MTA chief, Roger Snoble, who had won a national award as transit official of the year in Dallas,<sup>162</sup> discussed using the Exposition Boulevard right-of-way as light rail or an express busway to the Westside. The *Los Angeles Times* endorsed light rail down the line in December 2004, arguing that the line would reduce traffic and was wide enough to be safe for pedestrians.<sup>163</sup> Snoble helped deliver the first under-budget fiscal year for the MTA, which contributed to a new image of the MTA as a responsible and efficient agency.<sup>164</sup> Snoble’s ability to control costs at the agency, helped by the work of his predecessor, Julian Burke, stood in contrast to the inability of prior MTA officials to run the agency efficiently and highlights the importance of responsible leadership. Funding still

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<sup>155</sup> Annette Kondo and Edgar Sandoval, *Lack of spaces has Red Line Riders in North Hollywood Requesting Additional Lots*, *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 2000, at Part-B.

<sup>156</sup> Andrew Blankstein and Richard Fausset, *Los Angeles Gas Prices, Tourism Boost Red Line Ridership*, *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 2001, at Part-B.

<sup>157</sup> Caitlin Liu, *Los Angeles MTA Survey Finds Most Riders Happy*, *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 2002, at Part-B.

<sup>158</sup> Kurt Streeter, *MTA Revives Subway Proposal*, *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 2002, at B-1.

<sup>159</sup> Caitlin Liu and Jessica Garrison, *Council Backs Expansion of the Red Line*, *Los Angeles Times*, September 29, 2004, at B-3.

<sup>160</sup> Kurt Streeter, *Gold Line Railway on Track for Summer Start*, *Los Angeles Times*, March 31, 2003, at Part-B.

<sup>161</sup> Kurt Streeter and Caitlin Liu, *Los Angeles Eastside Rail Line Gets Green Light From MTA*, *Los Angeles Times*, March 1, 2002, at Part-B.

<sup>162</sup> Kurt Streeter, *MTA’s New Leader Says He’s Ready For Challenge*, *Los Angeles Times*, September 30, 2001, at B-4.

<sup>163</sup> Editorial, *Westward Ho*, *Los Angeles Times*, December 4, 2004, at B-20.

<sup>164</sup> Kurt Streeter, *MTA Scales Back Projects*, *Los Angeles Times*, December 5, 2003, at Part-B.

presented a problem for the MTA, however. The California state budget crunch, coupled with the conservative control over Congress in Washington, meant that MTA was faring poorly in the lobbying effort to bring in federal funds.

The Metro Rail system was beginning to see substantial ridership and customer satisfaction. Ridership for the system now reached 260,000 boardings a day. The Blue Line was by far the most successful of the light rail lines, with 75,000 riders a day on what one academic had predicted to be a “ghost train.” The Green Line maintained 32,000 riders with plans to extend the line to the airport. The new Gold Line carried a mediocre total of 14,000 riders a day.<sup>165</sup> Red Line ridership consistently hovered at close to 100,000 a day.<sup>166</sup> The number of riders indicated that the rail line was positively impacting people’s lives and creating the foundation for public support for future rail projects. As the memory of corruption and mismanagement faded, MTA found itself in a position to marshal support for expansion.

### 2004: Transit Villages

With the rail system now up and running throughout the county, the *Los Angeles Times* began running articles on mixed use, pedestrian-friendly “transit villages.”<sup>167</sup> In these transit villages, residents live in high-density dwellings above rail stations and can walk to work and to rail stations. The intersection of Western Avenue and Wilshire, where a subway station was located, was experiencing a revitalization of growth and development. Residents expressed satisfaction with being able to get around the city without being dependent on an automobile.<sup>168</sup>

The MTA actively pursued a transit village policy. The first official transit village was planned for the North Hollywood Red Line Station. The MTA swapped land with a high school to build mixed-use buildings on the right-of-way next to the station controlled by MTA.<sup>169</sup> The primary difficulty with transit villages was luring developers to build in dense urban areas, where construction costs were higher. In addition, buildings over rail stations require greater sound-proofing and reinforcement. Sometimes city governments must change zoning laws to allow for the mixed use development.<sup>170</sup> However, the popularity for the transit village lifestyle was clearly demonstrated by the long waiting lists for housing and the satisfaction of the residents who lived there.

The MTA’s emphasis on encouraging transit villages shows the importance of sound vision from the agency in making rail lines more important to the fabric of Los Angeles. By using rail as a scaffold around which the city can build high-density developments, MTA’s leadership was setting the stage for increased rail ridership and popularity.

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<sup>165</sup> Roger Christensen, Letter to the Editor, *Connecting the Dots on Our Light-Rail System*, Los Angeles Times, March 13, 2004, at Part-B.

<sup>166</sup> Kurt Streeter, *MTA Says Subway Riders Over-Counted*, Los Angeles Times, June 18, 2003, at B-3.

<sup>167</sup> Diane Wedner, *'Transit Village' Development Trend Gains Ground in Valley Real Estate*, Los Angeles Times, July 14, 2001, at Business Section.

<sup>168</sup> Caitlin Liu, *Many Are Stationing Themselves Near Depots*, Los Angeles Times, October 25, 2004, at B-1.

<sup>169</sup> Patrick McGreevy, *'Transit Village' on Tap in Valley*, Los Angeles Times, September 3, 2003, at B-1.

<sup>170</sup> Caitlin Liu, *Many Are Stationing Themselves Near Depots*.

## Conclusion

Due to the persistence of county leaders and the willingness of the voters to support limited tax increases, Los Angeles now possesses the beginnings of a comprehensive rail network. The study of the modern rail development in Los Angeles offers an important glimpse into how any large local project gets realized. Local leaders must negotiate diverse power centers within the region and within the state and federal government in order to secure financing and consensus on the project. Project advocates must negotiate among all levels of government, from city council district to President of the United States, in order to see these large projects happen.

The rail study also reinforces the importance of the personalities of local leaders. Without the commitment and vision of elected leaders, projects like the rail system in Los Angeles would never have happened. Their vision and their missteps shaped the design of a rail system that now impacts hundreds of thousands of Angelenos on a daily basis. Policy-makers benefit from studying the development of the rail system in Los Angeles. By understanding the forces that oppose and support rail expansion, local leaders will be able to manage these forces in order to harness the public funding and support necessary to see the project to fruition.

As the population of Los Angeles and California continues to expand with new immigrants, the Southern California region must make choices as to how best to accommodate the influx of residents. While current policies have allowed low density sprawl to continue farther out from the city centers into the Mojave Desert and the Santa Clarita Valley, at some point in the future the congestion on the region's freeways and the overuse of land and water resources, as well as air pollution, will significantly diminish the quality of life in the area.

Although the current low-density system allows people greater space and a house of their own, the costs of this way of life in the aggregate and to the individual are substantial. The inefficiency of this system becomes apparent by factoring in the amount of time people spend commuting and not with their families or in leisure, the money spent on gas and car purchases and the degradation of the natural environment. Many residents express frustration with this aspect of life in California. Perhaps as a result, there has been increasing demand for urban living, with its emphasis on walking and mixed-use neighborhoods. Transit villages provide a solution for this demand. These developments allow people to live less wastefully, as they consume fewer resources for their lifestyle. At the same time, the villages provide individual benefits of creating community and offering greater exercise and human contact in a walking environment. They also take pressure off of real estate in the surrounding area, as more people can live within the city instead of bidding up housing costs in outlying areas.

Future policy-makers and residents will have to grapple with these fundamental issues. The rail project offers lessons on how to manage the vast forces, geography and finances involved. Increased rail may be one solution to the population and resource problems facing Southern California. But as the history of rail in the region indicates, there is no substitute for strong leadership and ingenuity in order to help California plan for its future.