

WARNING RISKS OF NEW EXPOSITION METRO LINE

According to construction contractors they are taking into account all safety measures.

By Jorge Morales Almada

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The new Exposition Metro Line would circulate down town areas passing by the University of Southern California (USC), all the way up to Culver City. This new Exposition Line could be more dangerous than the Blue Line which already sums more than 70 deaths since 1990; warned the Organization Expo Communities United.

However, the Expo Metro Line Construction Authority in charge of the project through the MTA (Metropolitan Transportation of the city of Los Angeles) assures that “ safety “ is the major priority of the project.

According to Mark Jolles who is a member of the Organization of Residents of the area where the new light rail train will be passing by, this project that is about to start is dangerous because there are 34 pedestrian crossings at the street level and there are 5 schools close to the tracks.

Four months ago the Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, and the County supervisors and advisors had a symbolic inauguration ceremony of the construction, but the works are about to start within a month. There are estimates that by the year 2010 the line will begin to operate and later that train will continue up to Santa Monica.

“ This is an important piece of the extensive train network that we need to provide public transportation that is efficient and convenient” then said, Villaraigosa.

However, many residents of the area and even members of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) don't see the project with good eyes.

A letter signed by Glenn Striegler, of the Office of Environment Health and Safety of the LAUSD, and sent to the California Public Services Commission (CPUC) warns about the worry that exists to the construction of this line, because there are already 5 schools placed from 50 to 70 feet of distance of this line.

Mark Jolles as representative of the neighbors, estimated that between 20,000 and 30,000 students are in risk; giving the fact that there is a total of 12 schools immediately adjacent to the projected route.

The letter of the LAUSD points out that the worries are based on pedestrian safety of the students, the noise and the vibrations that will get into the classrooms, the risk of a derailment and the polluted emissions that will affect the

health of the students; and they believe that the project will carry out precisely a major traffic congestion.

In the Blue Line of the Metro there were 68 counted deaths until November (76 according to another source) but since then, there are some more registered accidents like the one that happened in Watts last Thursday, when a child that was in his skateboard was hit by the passenger train that was going to Long Beach.

The residents wonder about cases like this in the zone where the new light train will pass; which would go from the station at 7th Street to USC, throughout all the Exposition Boulevard all the way until it becomes Rodeo Road in Culver City, a track of 8.5 miles total.

The MTA referred their comments about this project to the Expo Metro Line Construction Authority.

Janita Eddins, representing that entity and in charge of carrying out the project, pointed out that the new train line will be constructed under similar guidelines as the Gold Line, where there are not fatalities.

She said that there should not be any worry, because they are taking into account all the necessary safety measures.

“All the crossings will have safety doors; she pointed out.”

However, the Expo Communities United insisted that the project seems to be more risky than the same Blue Line, which is considered the most dangerous in the country.

In addition to and according to Mark Jolles, after 6 years of planning the project the MTA could not create a model according to the criteria of the Federal Transit Administration, which has already expressed its worry about the use of tracks to relieve the demand of transportation in the area.

Jolles pointed out that it must be alternatives to the project, like to build the tracks underground with stations in Vermont, Crenshaw and Venice; which can be supplemented with rapid transit services that would improve the transportation.

The United Residents against the project had pointed out that also, the streets of the zone, are being used to their maximum capacity, thus they predict more and bigger traffic jams and vehicular congestion to travel from north to south because the construction is planning to close 17 car crossings permanently.