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News Articles

1. Meetings This Week To Focus On Santa Ana Transit

Orange County Register

Residents can offer their ideas on a proposed streetcar or other transit line through downtown Santa Ana during a series of meetings this week.

The city is considering transit options that include rapid-transit buses, a modern streetcar or light-rail trains. The city intends to link the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center with such local destinations as Santa Ana College, the Santa Ana Civic Center and downtown Santa Ana.

The public scoping meetings will be from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. tonight at Spurgeon Intermediate School library, 2701 W. 5th St.; from 7:30 a.m. to 9:30 a.m. at the Grand Central Arts main lobby, 125 N. Broadway; from 4:30 p.m. to 7 p.m. at the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center main lobby, 1000 E. Santa Ana Blvd.; or from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at the Santa Ana Public Library, 26 Civic Center Plaza.

2. Peelings

Orange County Register

The Orange County Transportation Authority announced that the railroad crossing on Katella Avenue, between Batavia and Glassell streets, will be closed for motorists from 10 p.m. Friday, June 11, to 5 a.m. Monday, June 14. OCTA spokeswoman Sarah Swenson said the closure is for the installation of rail-safety devices at the crossing. Motorists can use Batavia or Glassell to Collins Avenue or Taft Avenue as detours. Access to businesses and for pedestrians will be provided.

Contact Mr. Orange at 714-704-3704 or at askmrorange@ocregister.com. Feel free to ask about Villa Park as well.

Contact the writer: If you have a question about Orange, ask Mr. Orange at 714-704-3004 or askmrorange@ocregister.com. He wanders around Villa Park, too, so feel free to query him about V.P. as well.

3. I-5 Work Continues In Buena Park Area

By Michael Mello

Orange County Register

BUENA PARK — The I-5 will continue to be closed in both directions from Artesia Boulevard to the Riverside Freeway from 11:30 p.m. to 4 a.m. through Saturday morning.

For more information on the I-5 Gateway Project, visit octa.net/i5gateway or call the Transportation Helpline at 800-724-0353.

4. Open House: Westminster

By Deepa Bharath

Orange County Register

The Orange County Transportation Authority and Caltrans will host an open house Tuesday from 6 to 8 p.m. on planned improvements to the 22, 405 and 605 interchange. This event will take place in council chambers, 8200 Westminster Blvd. Information: Christina Byrne at 714-560-5717.

5. Small Intersection Is The Big Concern For Expo Light-Rail System

If regulators OK a grade crossing and station at Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard, it will clear the way for completion of the first modern rail link between downtown L.A. and the Westside.

By Dan Weikel
Los Angeles Times

The last battle line in the effort to build the Expo light-rail system has been drawn at Farmdale Avenue and Exposition Boulevard — a small intersection about 20 yards from Susan Miller Dorsey High School in central Los Angeles.

If state regulators sign off on a grade crossing and station there, it will clear the way for completion of the first modern rail link between downtown Los Angeles and the bustling Westside.

But the plan to lay track at street level by Dorsey has run into intense opposition from neighborhood associations, students, teachers, Dorsey alumni and community activists who have fought for almost four years to change the project's design.

Unless the rails are elevated or put below ground like other sections of the project, they say the line will create an unacceptable risk for pedestrians and motorists, especially when students head to class in the morning and leave campus in the afternoon. The school has about 1,600 pupils.

At a recent public hearing at Dorsey, some activists and residents from the predominantly black neighborhood also bristled when whites from the Westside turned out to voice their support for the line and its safety features.

"I've noticed lots of whites coming into the community to tell us how to live," testified Clint Simmons, one of 300 to 400 people who crowded into the school's cafeteria and an annex reserved for the hearing.

Critics of the project are concerned because at certain times of the day, hundreds of Dorsey students cross Exposition at Farmdale as parents drive past on their way to pick up or drop off their children. Plans call for light-rail trains to pass through the intersection every few minutes.

"All it would take is one car making a wrong turn at the wrong time and it would go right into a group of 100 students," said Damien Goodmon, a community activist who chairs The Fix Expo Campaign, a coalition of community organizations, Dorsey alumni and civil rights groups.

If done today, the estimated cost to put the line underground at Farmdale would be at least \$100 million, and an elevated section would cost at least \$30 million. The amount does not include \$1 million for every month of delay completing the project.

Trying to ease neighborhood concerns, the Expo Construction Authority revised its

original plan for the Farmdale grade crossing and submitted it for approval to the California Public Utilities Commission, which regulates certain rail issues.

The commission, which held the hearing Tuesday night, rejected for safety reasons the authority's first design for the grade crossing in February 2009 but allowed project officials to amend their plan. The initial proposal called for a pedestrian area and vehicle gates to control the intersection where trains would pass.

The revision includes traffic signals, warning signs, the latest vehicle and pedestrian gates, a pedestrian holding area and two station platforms, which will require trains traveling in both directions to stop before reaching the intersection. The station, which can be used by students and residents, was not in the original plans.

In addition, Expo officials say trains will not enter the intersection unless it is clear and the line will have an automated system to prevent trains from going faster than 15 mph across Farmdale.

The intersection is the last of 38 Expo grade crossings that still needs commission approval. Authority officials hope to receive a ruling by July.

"This is the missing piece so we can finish the alignment," said Eric Olson, who oversees the line's design and construction. "We think we have done what we need to do to come up with alternatives that add safety measures."

Estimated to cost almost \$900 million, the Expo line will run 8.6 miles from downtown Los Angeles to Culver City via Figueroa Street and Exposition Boulevard — a 30-minute trip one way. Construction is scheduled to be completed next year.

Just before USC, the tracks descend into a 1,000-foot-long trench to avoid the heavy traffic at Figueroa and Flower Street. The line resurfaces at Exposition and Trousdale Parkway and proceeds at ground level to La Brea Avenue, where the tracks and a station are elevated.

The line and stations also are elevated over La Cienega Boulevard and at Venice and Robertson boulevards in Culver City, the line's terminus.

Expo officials said the four areas meet the criteria set by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority for grade separations, such as trenches, tunnels or elevated sections of track. Farmdale did not, they added, partly because of moderate traffic conditions.

Despite the crossing's revised plan, critics are not convinced the intersection will be safe. They cite light-rail accidents in Los Angeles County and the earlier testimony of Russell G. Quimby, the former head of rail accident investigations at the National Transportation Safety Board.

Addressing the initial Expo plan, Quimby told the commission that a street-level crossing at Farmdale would present "an unreasonably high safety risk" to Dorsey students, even at speeds as low as 10 mph.

A catastrophic accident could occur, he said, if a train derailed and went into a crowded pedestrian holding area or a train pushed a vehicle into the same place. A serious explosion, he said, could occur if a train collided with a truck or bus.

Quimby further testified that MTA's grade separation criteria appeared to be more concerned with operational convenience than safety.

Critics also say that students, adults and motorists can get around crossing gates and there are no assurances that train speeds through the intersection won't increase later. They note that serious accidents have occurred on the county's Gold Line and Blue Line light-rail systems at speeds of 15 mph or less.

"The entire community is put at risk by this train. It's jeopardizing everyone," testified Jevante Davis, a Dorsey student and captain of the varsity wrestling team. This issue "isn't going to be over until it [the train] is under."

Expo's supporters told the commission Tuesday night that light-rail lines have operated safely near schools for years and Expo's revised plan is a substantial improvement over earlier proposals, including one that called for the closure of the intersection and a pedestrian bridge.

"This will benefit students and the community," said Darrell Clarke of Friends 4 Expo Transit, who testified at Tuesday's hearing. "This will be safer than the Gold Line, which has had zero accident deaths."

The line's proponents also downplay Quimby's opinions, contending that his primary expertise is in freight and passenger train accidents, though he says he served as an expert witness for MTA in a lawsuit involving a light-rail crash. Samantha Bricker, an Expo spokeswoman, said his remarks are not applicable because light-rail trains go slower, stop quicker and derail less often.

"It's time to move forward. We've been dealing with this issue a long time," Bricker said. "We feel we've gone beyond what has been done on other light-rail lines."

6. Transit Improvement Key To State Greenhouse Law

Sacramento Bee

If California's sweeping greenhouse emissions reduction law, SB 375, is to succeed, the state will have to do a better job of providing public transportation, a new report from the Urban Land Institute (ULI) has determined.

The 2009 law, known as the Sustainable Communities Strategy, by Sacramento Sen. Darrell Steinberg, the Senate Pro Tem, and based in part on Sacramento's "Blueprint" land use process, requires metropolitan areas to design growth so that new communities are less dependent on automobiles. The ULI report concludes the law could help urban areas become more economically and environmentally sustainable, if implemented correctly.

The report authors say more public transportation, including buses, trains, light rail and shuttles, will be a key factor in allowing communities to be built more densely. "The coverage and efficiency of these services must keep pace with the anticipated increase in urban and suburban density," the report says. "Improving the service levels and ongoing investment in transit capital improvements and operations creates transit certainty, a critical factor for supporting the growth of compact communities."

Transit agencies statewide, however, including in Sacramento, have been cutting service and raising fares for several years during the economic downturn. Sacramento Regional Transit will eliminate 20 percent of its bus routes and will reduce light rail service on June 20 as part of budget cutbacks. Officials also have been forced to temporarily shelve plans to expand light rail to Cosumnes River College.

The report says the state must work past the current "volatile" state of transit finances, and find more stable annual revenue sources, including possibly charging drivers fees for using some roads or lanes during congested periods or charging drivers fees per mile they travel.

The report also says transit agencies should use technology to provide better services for customers, including message boards telling transit users when the next bus or train will arrive.

7. Ramp Closing Could Hasten I-215 Project

By Dug Begley
Riverside Press-Enterprise

Changes to how drivers will exit Interstate 215 at Fifth Street in San Bernardino could hasten construction of the massive freeway widening but come with months of construction closings, officials said.

As construction continues on the widening from Rialto Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue, officials have revised plans for how to build an exit ramp from the southbound I-215.

Crews will permanently close the off-ramp to they can speed up work on the new ramp, which should open about eight months later, according to Robert Chavez, a spokesman for the widening project.

Officials will hold a 6 p.m. public meeting today at Norman Feldheim Public Library to discuss the closing with residents and local businesses.

By closing the existing ramp and allowing crews to work unimpeded on the new one, Chavez said construction of the Rialto to Massachusetts phase will finish seven months faster.

The work will also end the ramp's descent from the fast lane of the southbound I-215, said Mike Barnum, who is overseeing construction for San Bernardino Associated Governments. The new ramp will be built west of the freeway and connect with Fifth Street.

But closing the ramp -- a popular one for drivers headed downtown and to areas north and west of downtown -- will cause headaches for drivers and businesses. Realistically, there is no solution that will make everyone happy, said Nick DePasquale, managing partner of Fairview Ford in San Bernardino.

"Anytime they come to us about the construction, they are in kind of a no-win situation," DePasquale said. "I guess we try to live through it, but it is inconvenient." Orange-vested crews have been a constant along the interstate since 2007. Construction of the Rialto-to-Massachusetts avenues span started in September. Construction is also ongoing on the fourth and final phase, a redesign of the I-215/Highway 210 interchange and freeway widening to University Parkway. Both sections are expected to be completed by March 2013, officials said. "Everybody is in the same boat," DePasquale said. "We just want to get through it." Reach Dug Begley at 951-368-9475 or dbegley@PE.com

Meeting Info

San Bernardino transportation officials will be available to answer questions and show revised plans for expediting the exit ramps from Interstate 215 to Fifth Street.
When: 6 to 8 p.m. tonight

Where: Norman Feldheim Public Library, 555 W. 6th St., San Bernardino
Source: San Bernardino Associated Governments

8. Yellow Cab Offering Free Rides To Polls

By Paul Eakins
Long Beach Press Telegram

Long Beach Yellow Cab is offering free rides to the polls for Tuesday's election.

Voters who need a ride to their polling place should call 562-444-4444 to order a cab.

Callers must state their polling location and provide the dispatcher with the code "Account LB Vote" when booking a cab.

9. How Effective Is Fullerton's Winkin' Yellow'?

By Michael Mello
Orange County Register

Q. Fullerton has installed flashing yellow left-turn arrows at several intersections. As I understand it, they are to eliminate "confusion" when a car is in the left-turn lane but does not get a green arrow. This looks like a rather expensive system, and I fail to see the advantage. Have there been any studies to see if it speeds up traffic, prevents accidents or provides any other benefit?

– Allan Meyer, Fullerton

A. This is a subject dear to the heart of Mark Miller, Fullerton's traffic engineer. As part of a three-month experiment several years ago, Fullerton was the first city in California to get the yellow arrow, winking like some sort of flirtatious metallic traffic cop.

That experiment worked, Miller said, and Fullerton now has more than 10 intersections with lights geared to show a blinking yellow arrow.

There indeed have been studies about intersections with the yellow lights, which is why Fullerton got them in the first place.

The winking yellow serves the same left-turn purpose as a solid green light (or green "ball" in traffic parlance): It permits a left turn when oncoming traffic allows it.

"The feds determined there were more collisions with the permissive green ball than there were with the flashing yellow," Miller said.

Some people love them. Some people hate them, and many have called Miller to let him know. But nearly everyone pays attention to the odd, pulsing light.

Miller believes the lights make people think twice, especially drivers who may not be familiar with them.

"I'd rather have a driver err on the side of caution and wait than turn in front of somebody," he said.

Q. I was wondering when they were going to repave Beach Boulevard – especially from Lincoln Avenue in Anaheim south to Katella Avenue on the Cypress/Stanton border. It is pretty bad.

– Carole Watkins, Anaheim

A. Relief is on the way – though the permanent solution is still a ways off. Unlike many of North Orange County's major surface streets, Beach Boulevard is a state highway, so it's the responsibility of Caltrans.

Caltrans spokesman Alex Valdez chatted with his colleagues about this stretch of the road that the agency refers to as state Route 39.

"(A) project is planned (for that stretch) to go to construction in summer of 2012," Valdez said. "In the meantime, field maintenance crews will correct the most distressed areas of Beach Boulevard with patches of asphalt to make the driving surface smoother for motorists."

Contact the writer: Perplexed about something on North Orange County's roadways, waterways or railways? Send an e-mail to melloBTW@gmail.com.