



Transportation

Sacramento Light Rail Now Extends to River District

Ryan Lillis
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Fireworks are set off to celebrate as the first train of the \$44 million Green Line rolls into the new light-rail station on Richards Boulevard north of downtown on Friday. The station borders the Township 9 development site, a 65-acre undeveloped field that is slated to ultimately host thousands of housing units, and a range of retailers.



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A train rolls into its new Green Line station north of downtown on Friday. The 1.1 mile extension from downtown took nearly three years to construct, and cost \$44 million. Officials ultimately plan to extend service 12 miles through Natomas and to Sacramento International Airport.



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Rep. Doris Matsui sports a green jacket in honor of the Green Line's debut as she leads officials to the podium at the opening of the new station on Richards Boulevard north of downtown on Friday.



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Scott Syphax, Nehemiah Corp. CEO, sparks laughs from Councilman Steve Cohn, left, Rep. Doris Matsui, and RT CEO Mike Wiley, right.

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As fireworks rang out and more than 100 spectators cheered Friday morning, the inaugural light-rail train on Sacramento's \$44 million Green Line rolled into a new station at Seventh Street and Richards Boulevard north of downtown.

For now, the area directly surrounding the station isn't much to look at.

The Township 9 development site, bordering the station, is a 65-acre field of dirt awaiting construction. A pristine new Greyhound bus station is two blocks away, but warehouses line much of Richards Boulevard, including a



building across the street from the light-rail station where a business is offering to purchase broken television monitors.

Officials are counting on that environment improving – and for the presence of light rail to act as a catalyst.

"I am confident that the Green Line will lead us to a renaissance in the River District," said Rep. Doris Matsui, D-Sacramento, referring to the neighborhood surrounding the new station.

While some have criticized officials for building a line to a sparsely populated area, supporters of the plan said investing in infrastructure would open the door to development.

"This is going to help attract private investment to this area," said Councilman Steve Cohn, who represents the River District area. "This will no longer be an isolated neighborhood."

The new station was built on the southern border of the Township 9 development, where nearly 2,500 housing units and thousands of square feet of retail are planned. The project was awarded millions of dollars in state funds given to developments closely linked to public transportation.

The light-rail station's shelters were constructed using brick columns and other materials from a historic cannery and other buildings that once stood on the Township 9 site and are inscribed with quotes from Sacramentans and about Sacramento.

The Green Line now extends 1.1 miles from downtown and took nearly three years to construct, several months longer than planned. The project cost \$44 million, most of which came from Measure A tax funds earmarked for transportation projects. That paid for the new Richards Boulevard station, a new station at Eighth and H streets, and track and signal construction along the route.

"Although this project is just a tad late, we have accomplished this during extreme economic hardship," said Regional Transit General Manager Mike Wiley.

Perhaps as important as its new destination is what the extension of the Green Line means for the light-rail system's future.

The next step for the line is a bridge over the American River. After that, officials plan to extend service 12 miles through Natomas and to Sacramento International Airport. That work could be years away.

"The date is not the issue," Wiley said. "The dollars are the issue."

A bridge across the river would alone cost \$80 million, Wiley said. While some city officials – including Cohn – have discussed a possible transportation tax measure for the November ballot, Wiley said he was instead targeting 2014 for a ballot measure.

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