



SOUTHEASTconnections

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NEW LIGHT-RAIL PLATFORM DEBUTS AT UNION STATION IN DENVER

Denver Mayor Michael Hancock took advantage of the commemoration of the opening of RTD's new light-rail platform at Union Station this morning to reiterate his pledge to complete the massive FasTracks transit expansion.



"My hope is that we go to voters in 2012," Hancock said of the possibility of asking voters in the eight-county Denver metro area to double the existing 0.4 percent FasTracks sales tax. The mayor discussed the tax in a post-ceremony interview with The Denver Post.

Of a possible vote next year, the mayor acknowledged, "We have to build a best case for it."

Hancock said among the factors public officials will weigh as they consider a tax vote are the state of the economy and what competing measures may be on the 2012 ballot.

Voters approved the original FasTracks tax in 2004, but since then lower-than-anticipated tax revenues and higher-than-expected construction costs have combined to leave the project more than \$2 billion short of what is needed for completion.

"We will aggressively pursue all types of funding before going back to voters," Regional Transportation District General Manager Phil Washington said at the August 15th ceremony.



Hancock and other officials arrived at the new light-rail station around 7:40 a.m. on a train from the Pepsi Center. Speaking of other planned elements of the \$489 million Union Station redevelopment, the mayor said, "Very soon I want to take that 28 minute ride to DIA. That will continue to transform the entire region and connect Denver with the rest of the world."

The construction tab for the new light-rail station is about \$37 million, but the Denver Union Station Project Authority also is spending \$113 million on a commuter-rail facility just outside the west doors of historic Union Station.

RTD expects to start construction in earnest soon on the \$1.1 billion East Corridor commuter train to Denver International Airport. It is due to open in 2016.

In opening the new light-rail platform at Union Station, RTD restarted service on its Central Platte Valley rail line that had been closed for the past three weeks for various construction projects, including the move of the light-rail station about two blocks west from its old location.

Continued on the next page...



WEBSITE INVIGORATES CONVERSATIONS ABOUT TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

People looking to join conversations around the topic of transit-oriented development (TOD) in the Denver region have a virtual gathering place available to them where they can find best practices, watch real people affected by TOD, hear from local elected officials and business leaders, and share their reactions to what they're reading and watching. This marketplace of ideas can be found at <http://tod.drcog.org>, a website hosted by the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG).

The primary goal of the TOD website is to be a resource for citizens, community leaders, city planners and elected officials as its one-stop site and idea exchange platform for all things related to TOD. Among the highlights of the site are a series of videos showing stories of real people who are or could be served by TODs, and a blog with posts from a range of guest writers. Transit Alliance Citizens' Academy students have also been posing questions on a discussion board feature of the site, known as Today's Topic.

The site was funded through a grant from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) to engage the public in creating community conversations around the topic of TOD. The FTA supports initiatives that enhance economic development and private investment activities. The FTA notes the benefits of TOD in helping cities reduce vehicle miles traveled, energy consumed and carbon dioxide emissions.

- Provided by the DRCOG

LIGHT-RAIL PLATFORM AT UNION STATION CONTINUED

RTD also extended its 16th Street Mall free bus shuttle today to serve the new station.

"It's an easy transition," said Kelsey Ripley as she arrived on an E line train at the new station around 7:50 a.m. Ripley and a fellow commuter, Kelly Schaible, work only a block away at Gates Corp.

A short time later, arriving passenger Barb Nisley said of the new station: "It's beautiful."

"It's a block further than I typically walk," said Nisley, who works at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's office at 16th and Wynkoop streets. But Nisley wasn't complaining.

Some transit advocates have complained for years about Union Station redevelopment designs that placed the light-rail platform further from the historic station.

The Union Station project authority is building a \$177 million underground bus depot that will link the light-rail platform with the commuter-rail terminal adjacent to the old station.

"It's not bad at all," arriving light-rail passenger and attorney Andy Rottman said this morning, as he hopped the Mall bus shuttle to get to work. Rottman's law office is at 17th and Market streets.

-Provided by the Denver Post



Passengers disembark from a train at the new light rail platform at Union Station on Monday, Aug. 15, 2011. (Steve Nehf, The Denver Post)



An image of the new light rail station. (credit: CBS)

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EXPRESSTOLL TO BEGIN PHASING IN NEW STICKER TAGS

EXpressToll has begun phasing out its current plastic-encased tags and phasing in new, peel-and-stick windshield tags. The new style is similar to an oil change sticker and mounted on the inside lower left corner of the windshield.



EXpressToll is the automatic toll collection system used in metro Denver on the E-470 and Northwest Parkway toll roads, and on the I-25 Express Lanes north of downtown Denver. EXpressToll is accepted on all three toll facilities. There are approximately 800,000 tags in use, issued to 380,000 accounts.

The introduction of the new sticker tags will occur in several phases.

Sticker tags will be provided to new customers, fleet accounts, non-commercial customers who recently acquired bumper-mounted transponders, and to public safety agencies in the first phase. In addition, any present customer who contacts the EXpressToll Service Center and requests a swap for a new tag will receive one.

Later this year, an advertising and public relations campaign will encourage current EXpressToll customers to exchange their old tags for new ones at any of approximately 70 Front Range retail locations from Colorado Springs to Fort Collins, in Cheyenne, or at the EXpressToll Service Center.

The move to the new transponder was made because it is easier for customers to install, provides enhanced signal reading capability, and is less costly for EXpressToll to acquire and mail to its customers, thus helping limit operational costs. EXpressToll is operated by the E-470 Public Highway Authority.

EXpressToll customers on E-470 pay 20 percent less for tolls than License Plate Toll customers. For retail locations or to sign up for EXpressToll, go to www.expresstoll.com or call the EXpressToll Service Center at 303-537-3470; out-of-area customers can call toll-free 888-946-3470.

E-470 is a toll road that runs along the eastern perimeter of the Denver metropolitan area. The 75-mph highway extends 47 miles from State Highway C-470 at I-25 in Douglas County, ending at I-25 just south of 160th Ave., in Thornton.

- Provided by E-470

SCORE ONE FOR THE FANS WITH BRONCOSRIDE



Catch all the gridiron action this season with BroncosRide direct bus service to INVESCO Field at Mile High. Service is available from many RTD Park-n-Rides and other locations to all home games.

BroncosRide buses provide convenient drop-off and pick-up locations right outside INVESCO Field. And if you don't live near a BroncosRide stop, RTD light rail will drop you off near the stadium.

- Provided by the RTD



FEDS ANNOUNCE \$15.3 MILLION IN TRANSPORTATION GRANTS FOR COLORADO

Federal transportation officials today announced grants totaling \$15.3 million for a variety of projects in Colorado, including about \$3.7 million to assist in the widening of Interstate 225 between Parker Road and East Mississippi Avenue in Aurora.

The Colorado Department of Transportation is collaborating with RTD on the I-225 project and in addition to the highway widening, the Regional Transportation District is using its own funds to extend light-rail in the corridor from the Nine Mile station at Parker Road north to East Iliff Avenue, where another rail station will be constructed.

Other grants announced by the U.S. Department of Transportation today include about \$3.8 million for replacing the Pecos Street bridge over Interstate 70 and \$4.6 million for resurfacing nine miles of U.S. 160 near the Mesa Verde National Park in southwestern Colorado.

The federal agency is contributing \$652,200 for the purchase and installation of 20 bike-sharing stations in downtown Denver and \$25,200 for the installation of 30 bicycle racks along the 40-mile Lariat Loop Scenic & Historic Byway route in the foothills west of Denver.

- Provided by the Denver Post

RTD STAFF CALLS FOR INCREASED FARES AND SERVICE CUTS



To forestall looming deficits in RTD's annual operating budget, agency directors Tuesday night approved a five-year budget plan that calls for a 10 percent reduction in transit service.

The one-time cut — set to start Jan. 1 — is aimed at saving the Regional Transportation District \$12 million a year in each of the next five years.

Buffeted by lower-than-expected sales-tax collections and higher expenses, including the cost of diesel fuel, RTD finance officials said the agency's operating budget would likely run in the red for a good part of the 2012-17 period without the relief.

The new budget plan approved Tuesday, which includes 10 percent across-the-board fare increases scheduled for 2014 and 2017, should result in RTD staying in the black over the next five years, said Doug MacLeod, the agency's manager of financial reporting.

The aim of the five-year plan is to provide RTD with more "sustainable" financial projections that should allow the agency "to avoid big fluctuations in service that we've seen over the years," MacLeod said.

Spokesman Scott Reed added that RTD approved service increases in recent years that were "not sustainable."

Reed said RTD's staff and the agency's board of directors still need to identify which routes should be targeted for the 10 percent service reduction scheduled for January. Initial ideas for the cuts will be presented at a board study session Tuesday night, he said.

The budget plan also calls for RTD to get \$2.4 million in annual savings over the five years from a hiring freeze and by not filling vacancies.

The planned cuts in transit service mean RTD will need 120 fewer positions in the agency's bus-operations department, but officials said such reductions can be achieved from the normal attrition rate of 10 to 15 bus operators who leave the agency each month, and by the transfer of about 35 bus operators to the West Corridor light-rail line that will run to Lakewood and Golden from Denver.

Testing of trains on the \$710 million West line, now under construction, is scheduled to start next year, Reed said, and the rail line is to start passenger service in May 2013.

- Provided by the Denver Post

