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#### Southern Pacific Deal Builds Steam for 3 Rail Projects

Transportation: The county pact spurs optimism for forging of train links to outlying areas within two years. Talks continue on further expansion.

ALD B. TAYLORTIMES STAFF WRITER  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Even as lawyers for the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission were looking over the fine print Monday on the proposed \$450-million purchase of railroad rights of way, the commission's staff was planning how to get three new commuter lines into operation.

The first order of the day was filling out \$86 million in purchase requests for 17 sleek, new 70 m.p.h. locomotives and 40 passenger cars to link downtown Los Angeles to outlying counties within two years. The commission is expected to approve the purchases later this month, if all goes as planned.

Transit officials then prepared to work on some of the finer points of developing the railroad network that will link Union Station downtown with the Newhall-Saugus area, Simi Valley and San Bernardino.

The flurry of optimism by transit planners Monday was touched off by the announcement Friday that the commission had closed a deal with the Southern Pacific Transportation Co. to take over 112 miles of rights of way and operate on another 135 miles of railroad track.

Experts consider the deal a major breakthrough in their effort to build a 350-mile rail network that will ultimately bridge five counties and help alleviate Southern California freeway congestion by the year 2010.

However, the Southern Pacific package is only a portion of the complex, behind-the-scenes maneuvering to make rail transit a success in gridlocked Los Angeles.

Separate negotiations are ongoing with the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railway Co. for more rights of way and operating rights. Officials consider these talks a critical part of developing regional rail plans that include a Pasadena light-rail line and commuter links into Orange, San Bernardino and San Diego counties.

Commission officials refused to comment on the state of the Santa Fe talks other than to say the two sides are still far apart.

And, they cautioned, the Southern Pacific package will not be complete until the rights of way are inspected to make sure there are no hidden problems, such as toxic wastes, alongside the corridors.

But the deal looked good enough Monday for the staff to get started on its effort to add, first and foremost, three commuter lines to the fledgling rail network that now has only a single operating system--the 22-mile Blue Line from Los Angeles to Long Beach.

The commission paid \$50 million for operating rights on the three routes that can very quickly be turned into commuter rail lines.

The four-car commuter trains--powered by \$2-million diesel locomotives--each will carry up to 600 passengers at speeds up to 70 m.p.h., experts said. The new passenger coaches will cost about \$1.2 million each and resemble Amtrak cars, they said.

Transit officials say that initially they will run a total of 12 trains on the three lines each morning and evening, carrying an estimated 7,200 passengers into and out of downtown, starting in 1992.

The first of the three routes--called the Coast Main Line--will run from Union Station north and west 36 miles across the San Fernando Valley and Simi Valley to Moorpark.

The second, the Saugus Line, will carry passengers 40 miles from downtown through Burbank to Santa Clarita, officials said.

The third and longest of the commuter lines will reach 60 miles from downtown out to San Bernardino, running down the center of the San Bernardino Freeway through El Monte, then branching off through Baldwin Park and Claremont, officials reported.

As part of the land package, the commission bought 65 acres north of Union Station for construction of a regional set of rail yards, shops and maintenance facilities. It will cost \$150 million to build these facilities, install signals along the three lines and upgrade the tracks and crossings, authorities said.

Coming years later will be train service on the rights of way that are being purchased outright in the Southern Pacific deal, officials said. Each of these projects will be more costly because the commission will start from scratch--laying track and building stations and other facilities for the new train systems.

The most ambitious of these projects will be the development of Southern Pacific's so-called Burbank Branch, a 20-mile freight line that extends west from North Hollywood to Warner Center in the western San Fernando Valley. Part of this route is expected to become an extension of the \$3-billion Metro Rail subway that runs from downtown to North Hollywood.

The proposed extension of Metro Rail would run from North Hollywood to the San Diego Freeway and would be completed sometime after the turn of the century. Farther west, the line would feature light-rail trolleys from Warner Center north to Chatsworth. Another line would head east from North Hollywood to Burbank, sources said.

Two other railroad branch lines are being acquired in the deal as well. One would eventually allow a link between the University of Southern California campus and **Santa Monica**; the other would connect Los Angeles County with Orange County along the Southern Pacific's existing West Santa Ana Branch freight line.

No firm timetable has been set on developing these routes, but commission officials said they hope that sections, including the extension of the Metro Rail subway west across the San Fernando Valley, would be in operation by the year 2010.

Jubilant transportation planners regarded last week's announcement as a breakthrough in slashing the gridlock that plagues the region.

"It's stunning--a major first step," said Richard Stanger, the transportation commission's director of rail development, echoing the sentiment of his colleagues.

Funding for the three commuter rail lines and the first of the branch line projects is assured, said Stanger. The money will come from a half-cent local transit sales tax passed in 1980 and the new state transit measures passed by the voters in June, he said.

Stanger said county officials are also hoping for the passage of Proposition C on the November ballot. The measure, which asks voters to approve a half-cent sales tax increase, would provide another \$400 million annually for Los Angeles County transit projects.

Regardless of the election's outcome, Stanger said no major roadblocks stand in the way of finalizing the Southern Pacific package deal.

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