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Our View: Regional Connector will link up our region

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CONNECTING our region by rail line to other parts of Los Angeles County - Downtown L.A., Hollywood, the San Fernando Valley - is the ultimate goal of rail planners. After all, if you can't get there from here by train, you might as well drive.

While we have been advocates of the San Gabriel Valley getting its share of rail lines built, we also see the bigger picture. Now that the Metro Board of Directors agreed in October to fund the Gold Line Foothill Extension's first leg from east Pasadena to Azusa (at Citrus College/Azusa Pacific University), it's time to plan for future connecting light-rail lines.

One of those planned is the two-mile long Regional Connector line, which is aptly named: It will connect to the existing Gold Line at the Little Tokyo Station, moving passengers directly to the Long Beach Blue Line and the under-construction Exposition Line, which by 2011 will run from 7th Street in Downtown L.A. to Culver City.

Why is such a connector line so important for San Gabriel Valley light-rail riders? Because there's a flaw in our region's still young and growing light-rail system. The lines don't always connect. In fact, they rarely overlap. Riders who

have ridden rail lines in New York, Boston, Washington, D.C. and even the Bay Area expect rail lines to connect and to reach their destinations without getting out, changing trains, changing lines and platforms.

This is not the case with most of our light-rail and subway lines. The result is an inconvenient trip, one that often takes longer than if the trip was made by car, which is why many have not switched from car to rail.

With a completed Regional Connector, which will cost a cool \$1 billion, a rider can get on a Gold Line Eastside train in Monterey Park or East Los Angeles and get to Staples Center for a Lakers/Clippers/Kings game, or to L.A. Live across the street, site of concerts, museums, movie theaters and restaurants. The MTA is still deciding where the stations will go, but we would recommend stops at the Disney Hall (supported by Los Angeles County taxpayers) and the financial district. This would open up the rail choice to weekday commuters who work in these more far-flung Downtown locations and to weekend riders and tourists who want an easy, convenient way to reach L.A.-area destinations and events without driving and paying for parking.

We support the funding of the Regional Connector in the Metro's Long Range Transportation Plan, which right now would get \$160 million. Metro has asked that each of the five subregions of the county served by the Regional Connector pay a one-fifth share of that start-up costs. This is a reasonable and

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appropriate funding approach. We also support the Metro going after Federal New Starts funding for the balance.

The Regional Connector is a project that would add riders to both Gold Line Eastside and Gold Line Foothill. It fills in some connectivity missing from a nascent rail line system that is behind other big metropolitan areas - but rapidly catching up.

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