

Metro Rail going through first tests, up and running by 2009

Contributed by Heidi Schoonover

Passenger trains in Austin, after 22 years of debate, an election and something like \$100 million (and counting) spent, will begin running this evening. Well, one of them will. However, the only people on board will be transit workers. Update on Metro Rail...will be up & running very soon!!!!

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By Ben Wear | Monday, December 17, 2007

Passenger trains in Austin, after 22 years of debate, an election and something like \$100 million (and counting) spent, will begin running this evening. Well, one of them will. However, the only people on board will be transit workers.

This is just testing, but a transportation milestone for Central Texas nonetheless.

The transit agency this evening (and overnight) will begin testing the first of two diesel commuter trains it has on hand and assembled. Runs should begin about 8 p.m. and be done by 5 a.m. between the Capital Metro maintenance facility at Burnet Road and U.S. 183 and the intersection of Howard Lane and the Loop 1 tollway. Testing, at least this first flurry, should run for the next three nights.

The car will be tested for now at no more than 20 mph, about a third of the speed they will run in some sections of the Leander-to-downtown-Austin line when it opens next fall. The train will be blowing its horn at road crossings. However, the agency is installing special gates with four arms at most road crossings, which are virtually impossible for a car to pass. Eventually, this will allow the train operators to pass such intersections without blowing the train horn.

The agency is buying six cars for more than \$35 million (on time payments). Each car is 138 feet long, with 117 high-backed cloth seats, built by Stadler Bussnang, a Swiss company. The cars are being manufactured in Switzerland, where they undergo on-track testing and then are broken down in three pieces for shipment to the United States.

The first two cars arrived several weeks ago and were assembled at the Burnet Road facility. Two more cars arrived in the past few days, again, in pieces for assembly. Agency officials have said in the past that they intend to give each vehicle about 1,000 miles of testing on the actual rails. The full commuter line will run 32 miles, with nine stations.

The other two cars should arrive by the end of January, the agency says.

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