

Blue Line in Long Beach to close for a total of eight months next year to undergo \$300 million renovation

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The 1st Street Blue Line Station in Long Beach for the Metro Blue Line. Long Beach February 21, 2018. Photo by Brittany Murray, Press Telegram/SCNG

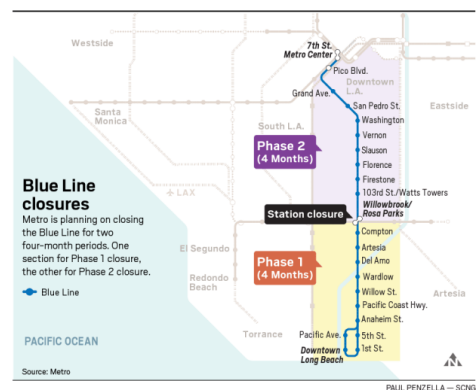
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PUBLISHED: February 21, 2018 at 6:25 pm | UPDATED: February 24, 2018 at 5:34 pm

Metro is preparing to close the 22-mile Blue Line for a total of eight months next year to complete the modernization of the transit agency's oldest train line.

Opened in 1990 and showing its age, the Blue Line will be receiving \$300 million in improvements during the closure period.

The agency plans to add four new switches that allow trains to move quicker, new signals, new tracks in downtown Long Beach and improvements at street level intersections, especially at the Washington Boulevard and Flower Street junction near downtown Los Angeles where cars have crashed into trains, causing significant delays.



Metro planners are working with the city of Long Beach and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation for better signal synchronization at sections where the trains stop for traffic at red lights, Ted Lindholm, executive officer of capital projects for Metro, said Tuesday.

“What we are trying to do with the Blue Line is take a 28-year-old workhorse and improve it, turn it into a good state of repair,” he said.

After construction is completed in October just before the opening of the new Crenshaw Line, the agency hopes to shave 10 minutes off the end-to-end trip from downtown Long Beach to the Seventh Street/Metro Center Station in the Los Angeles financial district, from 58 minutes to 48, Jose Ubaldo, spokesman for the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority said in an email.

The Blue Line Averages about 73,000 boardings each weekday, making it one of the most ridden lines in the county. But ridership on the line is dropping, according to recent surveys.

To bring back riders, the agency already started making changes to hasten trips. For example, Metro separated the Blue Line trains from the Expo Line trains at the busy Seventh Street/Metro Center Station platform, making it easier for trains to turn around and less confusing for passengers, officials said at a recent operations committee meeting.

A major portion of the project will include tearing down and rebuilding the Willowbrook/Rosa Parks Station in Willowbrook, the fourth busiest station in the Metro light-rail system and where Blue Line passengers transfer to the Green Line, an east-west line running down the middle of the 105 Freeway.



The Willowbrook/Rosa Parks Station on the Metro Blue Line, slated for renovation, is seen on Feb. 21, 2018. (Photo by Brittany Murray, Press Telegram/SCNG)

Metro will also add a new public plaza, a service center, a bike hub, brighter lighting and new bus bays.

While the station will remain closed for eight months during construction, the Blue Line closures will be broken into two, four-month segments.

The southern half of the Blue Line — from downtown Long Beach to the Rosa Parks Station — will be closed for four months starting Jan. 10, Lindholm said. The northern half between the 103rd Street/Watts Towers Station and the Seventh Street/Metro Center Station will close for four months in the second half of the year, after the first half has reopened, he said.

The entire line should reopen in October, he said. The project, part of an ongoing, \$1.2 million rehab, has been dubbed “The New Blue” by Metro CEO Phil Washington.

During the two, four-month closures, Metro will run special shuttles and buses, both locals and express lines, aimed at moving passengers from closed to working stations. But delays are expected, Metro reported.

Still, the closure plan is expected to shorten what would’ve been a three-year construction time, Metro officials said.

Robert Garcia, mayor of Long Beach and a Metro board member, attended the operations committee meeting last week when the closure plan was unveiled for the first time.

“I have a lot of concerns about additional loss of ridership on the line post improvements,” Garcia told his fellow committee members. “We will lose some riders.”

As rumors spread about coming closures, Garcia said many Long Beach Blue Line riders began voicing their concerns. “I’m getting a lot of questions and concerns from people saying, ‘I will have to start taking my car (during the closures next year).’ And I don’t want them to get used to that.”