



ide'em

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and beyond is ready to roll

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CELEBRATE RTD R LINE

Come out and celebrate the grand opening of the R Line, RTD's newest rail service to Denver, Aurora, and Lone Tree.

**GRAND OPENING CELEBRATION
FRIDAY • FEBRUARY 24**



RIBBON CUTTING

Join us at the Iloff Station on Blackhawk Street and Iloff Avenue.

10 AM - 11 AM



FAMILY FRIENDLY FUN

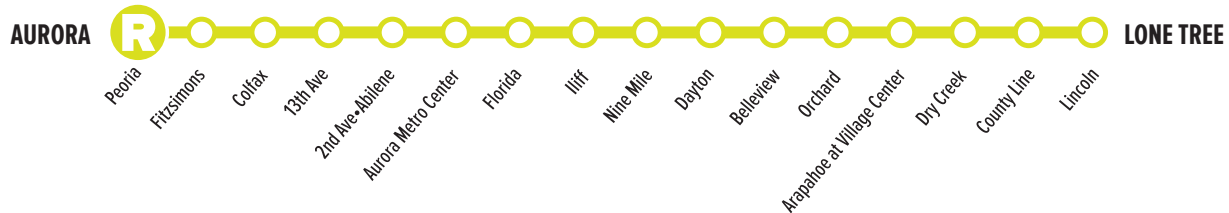
Games, hot chocolate, mascot characters, RTD information, and more at the Iloff and Aurora Metro Center stations.

11 AM - 4 PM



FREE RIDES ON THE R LINE

11 AM - 9 PM



GRAND OPENING SPONSOR:



rtd-denver.com



'R' is ready to ride, but the rest of the system is off track

Finally, Aurora goes from 0 to 55 mph this week as the Regional Transportation District turns on the long-awaited R Line through Aurora and way, way beyond.

I was among those who enthusiastically and naively voted for the beleaguered FasTracks tax plan back in 2004. That was back when the metro area was a place where we were wishing to be such a cool place to live that everyone would want to move here.

It is. They did.

So this critical, new light-rail link that takes you to places you might actually want to go is well timed. From any number of stops on the line that runs from way out on Lincoln Avenue in Douglas County, north to Peoria Street near Interstate 70, you can catch a train that takes you Denver International Airport, downtown Denver, Aurora's City Center, Park Meadows Mall and IKEA, Anschutz medical Mecca, The Town Center of Aurora mall, The Medical Center of Aurora complex



DAVE PERRY
Editor

and, soon, an assortment of budding developments that will have cool cafes, apartments, shops and pubs.

It's a great achievement, but not great enough. Not yet.

Oh, sure. The trains are cool and the stops are pretty well planned. But as nice as RTD's light-rail trains are, realistically, you pretty much have to drive your car on overburdened metro streets and highways to get to a place to catch the train. From there you get off the train and catch a cab or Uber or Lyft to your final destination. That's because walking, biking or catching a bus there is increasingly impractical.

Drive to ride? That's just dumb.

I'm a lucky guy. I not only love traveling all over the country and the world, but I've been fortunate enough to do a lot of it. Rural and urban, I've gotten around a lot of places. The mass transit systems in places like Vienna, Paris, London, Prague, Frankfurt, Copenhagen, Oslo, Barcelona and Gothenburg are astounding, and not just because they work so well. It's because they are created to accommodate people who need or want to get around without cars. In Vienna, you can walk to a place to catch the metro system from almost anywhere. If you can't or won't, you can ride a bike there. Or catch a trolley. Or a bus. Or, if you must, snag a taxi or an Uber.

In Aurora? Oh, please. There are huge areas of the city along concrete or fence canyons where traffic rushes by like fierce rapids in a torrential river of cars. They're often places that don't even have sidewalks, let alone safe ones, or ones that are cleared of snow and ice in the winter. I regularly walk to shops and places near the newsroom at South Peoria Street and East Iliff Avenue. Almost every time, I am nearly accosted by a driver while crossing that petrifying intersection, which is practically adjacent to two, huge public schools.

As a pedestrian in Aurora, and much of the metro area, you are invisible until you are nearly or actually run over. And on a bike? Ack. Just try and ride your bike anywhere on or near Parker Road, Peoria, Havana, Colfax, Chambers or Buckley. By my office, I see a handful of brave souls riding illegally on the sidewalk along Peoria, to school or Nine-Mile Station, because any other option means certain death.

Or, you can walk 20 minutes to catch a bus to the train and wait 20 minutes at the bus stop for a 20-minute bus ride for a 30-minute train ride to walk 15 minutes to a bus stop to wait there for 20-minutes for a 15-minute ride to your final destination. And then do the same thing in reverse to get home? Yeah, right. Mass transit in Denver was created for those without jobs and plenty of time. Or it's for those with cars and great jobs strategically placed where you can get to them. But to go from your Aurora home to the store, a movie or to school here and most other ring cities? Good luck with that.

We don't need luck. We need commitment. We need bike lanes, sidewalks, public education on not terrorizing anyone not inside a car on metro roads and streets, more buses, which run on-time, more bus stops, cheaper fares and realistic plans that allow people to get out of their cars and go somewhere other than the end of their driveway.

It's not an option, it's the future. The traffic in metro Aurora is now so bad, and getting rapidly worse, that we have no choice but to make mass transit actually appealing to the masses, or just stay home.

It won't be cheap. And it won't be easy. But for now, go ahead and drive to a station along the new R Line. Walk as much as you can. Shake your fist at drivers who bully you while you cross streets or parking lots on foot. Go on a nice day when you don't have to sit in the wind at a bus stop for a transfer. Pay too much for a short ride. And then read this again and call your councilman, your RTD board member and your state lawmaker and tell them to get on board with bringing us the rest of the mass-transit system.

Follow @EditorDavePerry on Twitter and Facebook or reach him at 303-750-7555 or dperry@AuroraSentinel.com



The R Line stops Feb. 17 at the 2nd Avenue and Abilene Station in Aurora. After just a few months delay — the line was originally slated to open in late 2016 — the Regional Transportation District's Aurora-bound train is passenger ready and will welcome riders Feb. 24. McKenzie Lange/Aurora Sentinel

TIME TO RIDE

Rail life in Aurora is on a roll

BY QUINCY SNOWDON

Staff writer

The digital letters scrawled across the front of the light rail trains that have been coursing through Aurora in recent months will finally swap out that “test train” text for “Lincoln” or “Peoria” next week when the new R Line, a 22-mile stretch of light rail connecting Aurora to Denver International Airport and the rest of the metro area, opens to the public.

After almost four years of construction and several months of delays, the R Line — also referred to as the I-225 Rail or the Aurora Line — will bring 10.5 miles of new light rail to the city, spanning from the northern terminus at the Peoria Station to the current end of the line at Nine Mile. The R Line will continue west and south before finishing each route at the Lincoln Station in Lone Tree.

The full line opens to the public Feb. 24. Riders will be able to hop on the train, which will serve eight new stations in Aurora and eight existing stops toward Denver and Lone Tree, free of charge next Friday between 11 a.m. and 9 p.m. Feb. 24 also marks the first day the existing H Line will be extended two stops from the current end of the line at Nine Mile Station to the Florida Station.

Part of the Regional Transportation District's FasTracks plan, which was approved by voters in 2004, the new R Line sews up what had been a lingering gap in RTD's regional network, according to Dave Genova, general manager and CEO of RTD.

“It's going to be an incredible connector of the eastern part of the Denver metropolitan region, connecting northeast Denver and through Aurora city center all the



This rail line traverses the core of the city and ... it will truly connect the entire metropolitan region to Aurora.

MAYOR STEVE HOGAN

way down to southeast Denver,” Genova said during a media tour of the new line Friday. “It's going to create ... brand new commutability options in a lot of different directions and, of course, connect this part of the Denver metro region like it's never been connected before.”

The R Line, which cost about \$687 million to construct, is expected to service approximately 12,000 riders per day one year after it opens, according to Genova. Kiewit Infrastructure Company laid down the new sections of track along the line.

Originally scheduled to be completed several months ago, the line was delayed due to hang-ups obtaining additional certifications with the city and the Public Utility Commission, according to RTD Spokesman Nate Currey.

“I think the most important part was making sure that we had coordinated everything with the city of Aurora and that our gate arms were working properly in coordination with the lights,” Currey said. “And this is the only area outside of Downtown Denver that you're actually going to see the train running at-grade with cars, so that's pretty significant. We wanted to make sure that that was all 100 percent ready to go before we opened.”

Prolonged decisions to reroute the R Line around the Anschutz Medical Campus and closer to the

Aurora municipal complex on Alameda Avenue also caused early snags in the line's development.

Riders will be able to travel the entire line for \$2.60 one-way. To get to the airport, riders will be charged \$9, which is the flat rate for access to DIA from anywhere in the RTD network.

The R Line will take about 55 minutes to travel from Lincoln station to Peoria Station. It will take about 20 extra minutes to get to DIA. Trains will come every 10 minutes during peak hours and every 15 minutes during non-peak times.

On top of trains, the R Line will bring four new park-n-rides with a total of 1,249 spaces to the city. Three of those parking lots will operate like the rest of the parking lots in the RTD service area, which provide free parking for 24 hours and a \$2 daily fee after that. The city-owned Iliff parking garage, which boasts about 600 parking spots, will cost drivers \$3 per day to park their cars and will not include a 24-hour free period. That is the only such garage in the RTD service area, according to Currey.

Aurora Mayor Hogan Steve Hogan did not immediately return a request for comment on the R Line Friday afternoon. But in a statement released last month, Hogan said the rail line “will transform Aurora.”

“This is not just a train line running through a part of our community,” Hogan said. “This rail line traverses the core of the city, and when it opens on Friday, Feb. 24, it will truly connect the entire metropolitan region to Aurora.”

Larry Hoy, chairman of the RTD board of directors said the new line will accelerate the evolution of the city's geographic heart.

“Trains are a bit nostalgic, aren't they?” Hoy said. “And I think it'll change (Aurora's) character to kind of a warmer, neighborhood feeling”

How Aurora's light rail link became the train that could

BY JEREMY JOHNSON
Staff writer

The Regional Transportation District's long-awaited R Line to Aurora is *finally* rolling 'round the bend. But way back in the beginning, it was hard to even imagine an end of the line.

Things began smoothly enough in 2004 when metro-area voters approved the \$4.7 billion FasTracks plan, which included a much-anticipated connecting rail line between a major light-rail artery through the south corridor and the then-yet-to-be-built A Line from Downtown Denver to the University of Colorado Aschutzh Medical Campus and, ultimately, Denver International Airport.

But it wasn't long before enthusiasm waned under the weight of a sputtering economy, inaccurate cost and revenue projections, and the always-nagging question: What to do with about 650 prairie dogs living along what was then referred to as the Interstate 225 rail line?

Nonetheless, obstacles couldn't stop the little train that could, and as long-time RTD board member Tom Tobiassen noted in the early stages of the line, in 2012: "Time is money, and if we hold up the project ... we're going to be burning through dollars and the risk of not being able to get

it completed on time."

And, so, "on time" it was — well, sort of. While the R Line is technically a few months behind the earliest estimates for completion, it could be worse: at least Aurora's not Boulder, which due to a lack of funding could be seeing a train line around the same time flying cars are finally invented.

The R Line will now join the W Line to Golden, the much-touted-if-not-beleaguered A Line to the airport, and the short-but-sweet B Line to Westminster as the new rails on the block, with others like the G Line to Wheat Ridge and the N Line to Northglenn/Thornton soon to follow suit.

Here's a brief timeline of events leading up to this glut of public transportation spanning the metro area, and the R Line specifically, courtesy of RTD (rtd-fastracks.com):

- The first plans for mass transit in Denver were published in the early 1970s, driven by a dream to connect — through existing commercial rail lines — Denver and Golden, or what is commonly known as the West Corridor.

- No major project can be without a major study. RTD's major investment study for the West Corridor was wrapped up in 1997, and concluded that LRT, or light rail transit, provided the best bang for the buck, and that the old Associat-

ed Railroad and Denver Interurban Transit Line adjacent to 13th Avenue provided the most "transportation benefit," with the fewest negative impacts.

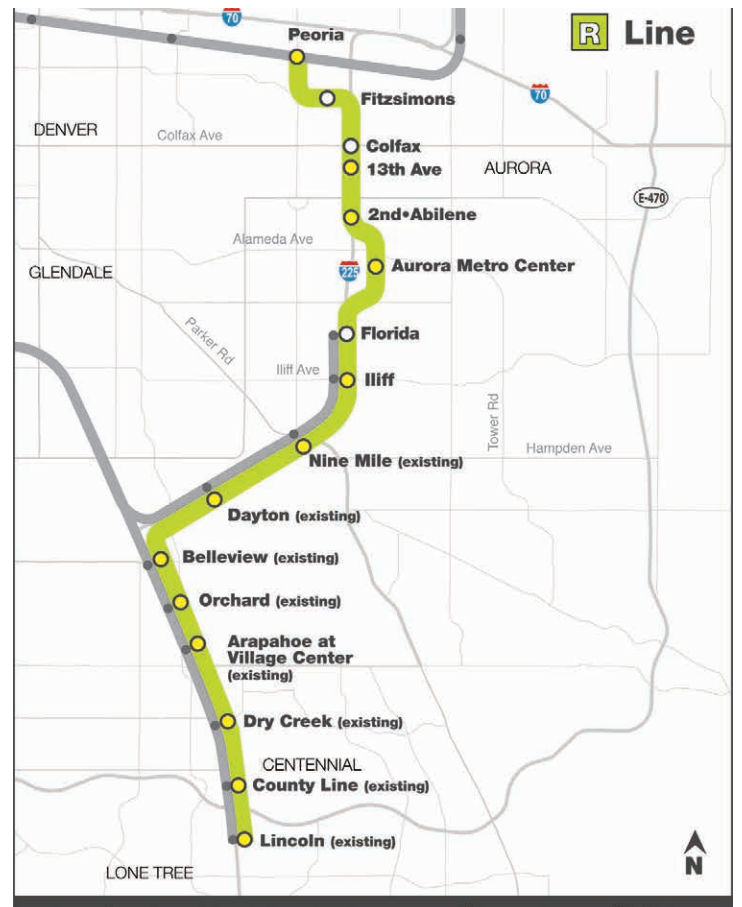
- Meanwhile, more relevant to the R Line, Denver-area voters in 1999 approved the T-REX project, which included reconstruction of I-225 between I-25 and Parker Road in Aurora, including the Southeast Corridor light rail and its H Line extension — the first glimmer of rail transit, even if it existed on the very outskirts of town.

That light rail line opened in November 2006.

- In 2001, RTD kicked off a study to consider positive and negative impacts of the Denver-to-Golden line. The environmental impact statement helped illuminate for RTD the technical, environmental and community challenges associated with light rail as it pertained to the West Corridor.

- Studies aside, 2004 was the year when it really started coming together, as taxpayers approved the FasTracks initiative, which would provide cents on \$10 of retail tax toward six total rapid transit corridors (including the I-225 line), three extensions of existing corridors, the revamp of Union Station, thousands

» See HISTORY, 5



The RTD R Line — Need to Know

Station	Cross Streets	Parking	Amenities	Connections
Peoria	33rd & Newark	550	10 bike lockers, racks	University of Colorado A Line, 37, 45, 121, 153
Fitzsimons	Fitzsimons/Peoria	-	5 bike racks	Fitzsimons Shuttle (by CU)
Colfax	I-225 & Colfax	-	12 bike racks	15, 15L
13th Ave	13th Ave & Sable	262	3 bike lockers, 5 racks	-
2nd - Abilene	2nd Ave & Abilene	242	4 bike racks	6
Aurora Metro Center	Sable Blvd & Centrepont	145	4 bike racks	3, 3L, 6, 11, 15L, 21, 130, 133, 153, 157
Florida	Florida St & Abilene	-	4 bike racks	H Line, 11
Iliff	Iliff Ave/Blackhawk	600	8 bike racks	H Line, 21, 131,
Nine Mile	I-225 & Parker	1225	16 bike racks, 28 bike lockers	H Line, 35, 83, 121, 130, 131, 133, 135, 139, 483, AT
Dayton	I-225 & Yosemite	250	16 bike racks, 8 bike lockers	H Line
Belleview	I-25 & Belleview	29	12 bike racks, 12 bike lockers	E, F Lines, 46, 73
Orchard	I-25 & E Orchard	48	6 bike racks	E, F Lines
Arapahoe at Village Center	Caley & Yosemite	817	22 bike racks, 10 bike racks	E, F Lines, 66, AT
Dry Creek	I-25 & Dry Creek	235	6 bike racks	E, F Lines
County Line	I-25 & County Line at Park Meadows Mall	388	8 bike racks, 16 bike lockers	E, F Lines, 402L
Lincoln	I-25 & Lincoln	1734	8 bike racks 16 lockers	E, F Lines, 403, 483

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- The R Line adds eight new stations and 1,800 new parking spaces to the RTD system.
- The Peoria Station is the only place where light rail and commuter rail vehicles run side-by-side and where light rail and commuter rail platforms are side-by-side for passenger transfers.
- The light rail tracks at Peoria Station can store 18 trains.
- The University of Colorado is planning to provide a free shuttle that will pick up riders at Fitzsimons Station and bring passengers to the Anschutz campus.
- Out of a total of 29 crossings on the R Line between Nine Mile Station and Peoria Station, 13 are gated crossings.
- There are seven light rail bridges on this project.
- The first bridge on the R Line is the Median Bridge. The 1,200-foot structure is made up of clear spans up to 135 feet in length, two post-tensioned straddle bent caps and ten 96-inch diameter caissons 45 feet long. The train tracks will be directly fixed to this bridge, instead of the concrete ties and ballast rock that you see now on RTD's current light rail lines. Direct fixation is used instead of concrete ties and ballast on bridges that are more than 400 feet long to reduce the weight on the bridge. This is the second longest bridge on the project.

• There are 11 Traction Power Substation (these substations supply the power to the overhead catenary system of the light rail) locations that are approximately one mile apart along the I-225 Rail Line.

• There will be 37 relay houses along the I-225 Rail Line. Relay houses contain the equipment that controls the signals and crossing gates necessary to allow for movement of trains in a safe and efficient manner.

• The Colfax Avenue Bridge goes over Colfax Avenue and is an elevated station. When the public sees this bridge, they may not realize it's actually several different structures. Technically there are two separate bridge structures, which appear to be one long continuous bridge. As such, this is the longest bridge on the project.

• The Colfax Station has a distinctive arch design which signifies the city of Aurora's signature station and the "Gateway to the Rockies."

— RTD



It's a train of thought, Aurora. Go catch it

BY BRANDON JOHANSSON
Staff writer

Aurora residents can be forgiven if they were a little jealous as they watched light-rail trains roll through the suburbs west of Denver a few years back.

And while many may still be perturbed that the metro's biggest suburb, the state's third-largest city and home to the booming Anschutz Medical Campus got snubbed for that first run of trains, the days of feeling left out are over.

This week, Aurora's very own R Line — which snakes along Interstate 225, connecting the existing Nine Mile station with the A-Line to the airport — opens.

Finally, Aurora residents have plenty of options if they want to hop a train into Downtown Denver, or even ride the rails from Aurora to DIA without having to trek all the way to Union Station.

So, let's say you live in one of those southeast Aurora enclaves like Mission Viejo, Saddlerock, or even one of the more far-flung neighborhoods near Southlands. And from that neighborhood you'd like to get

downtown for dinner and a show, or to DIA to catch a flight out of town. Here are the details you'll need to make that trek along the city's shiny, new public transit system.

First you need to decide which station you're going to start from. If you live in the city's southeastern reaches, the best bet is probably the stop at East Iliff Avenue and I-225, or the Nine Mile Station at Parker Road and I-225.

If you select Nine Mile, you will have more than 1,200 parking spots to choose from. Or you could hop on your bike and lock it at one of the station's 16 bike racks.

Parking your car at Nine Mile is free for the first 24 hours if you live in the RTD service area. If you call Mission Viejo or the vast majority of Aurora zip codes home, you likely do live in that service area. But to be safe, check out rtd-denver.com/HowToPark for details.

If you opt for the new Iliff Park-and-Ride station, which is run by the city of Aurora, you have about 600 parking spots to choose from, and it will cost you \$3 per day.

Once you have your car parked or your bike locked up, you're gonna need to buy a ticket. If all you're



looking to do is cruise along the R-Line, maybe to Anschutz or all the way down to Park Meadows, it's gonna cost you \$2.60 per person for a one-way fare.

If you'd like to ride the train to the airport it's \$9, but that covers

your ride on the R Line as well as the A Line, which you will transfer to at the Peoria stop at the end of the R Line.

If you'd like to ride from Aurora into downtown you'll have to pay for a regional fare, \$4.50 each way. Then you need to hop on one of the existing lines headed into Downtown Denver. You can make that switch at Nine Mile, the Dayton Street stop or several others along Interstate 25.

If you want to ride the whole length of the R Line — that means from the Peoria stop near Peoria and Interstate 70 all the way down to the Lincoln Street stop near Lincoln and I-25 in Douglas County — it'll take you about 55 minutes. The train will reach speeds of about 55 mph along the 10 new miles of track through Aurora.

Depending on the time of day, you shouldn't have to wait long to catch a train at any of the eight new R Line stations. From 4 a.m. to 5 a.m., there's a train every half hour. During the peak times from 5 a.m. to 8 p.m., a train will pull up every 15 minutes. For the late-night crowd from 8 p.m. to 1 a.m., a train arrives every 30 minutes.

» HISTORY, from 5

more parking spaces and an extended bus feeder system.

• Final designs began a year later and lasted through 2008, around the same time the economy started to spiral down and material costs sky-

rocketed up. Subsequent changes in plans also meant more studies to fulfill environmental impact mandates.

• But as the economy rebounded

and Kiewit Infrastructure Company successfully pitched a proposal in 2012, full funding was secured. The rest is, as they say, history.



R Line trek to VA hospital in Aurora could pose challenge for some veterans

BY SUSAN GONZALEZ
Staff writer

While the new R Line is bringing expanded transportation options to Aurora, some are still concerned it won't be enough to get veterans where they need to be.

Patient advocate and Korean War veteran Bernie Rogoff has been asking for more than four years how veterans will get from the East Colfax Avenue light rail stop to the Veterans Affairs Eastern Colorado Health Care System Hospital on Wheeling Street, which is set to open in 2018 after years of budgeting problems.

"You can't drop a guy with a walker or a wheelchair on that location at Potomac and have him walk 800 feet into the hospital," Rogoff said in November 2016.

Rogoff started advocating for the pedestrian bridge in 2012 when hospital administrators first met with members of the Aurora Veterans Commission to discuss the issue.

The new elevated R line light rail stop is near the corner of East Colfax Avenue and Potomac Street. The main entrance to the upcoming VA hospital is on the



You can't drop a guy with a walker or a wheelchair on that location at Potomac and have him walk 800 feet into the hospital.

BERNIE ROGOFF

Veteran and advocate for a pedestrian bridge allowing for better veteran access to upcoming VA Hospital

east edge of the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus off of Wheeling Street and faces west, the opposite direction of the light rail station.

Rogoff said he worked with the Greeley-based bridge construction company Big R Bridge to develop a formal proposal for recommendation to the city and the VA hospital. He said their estimate for the bridge in 2013 was as much as \$7.5 million.

In November of last year, Pete Nieman, a sales manager with Big R Bridge, said he has had no contact with city, RTD or VA officials since that discussion three years ago.

The VA didn't include plans for

any sort of bridge for veterans to get from the light rail to the hospital because when the design plans for the hospital were drafted years ago, RTD officials said the I-225 light rail line wasn't funded and wouldn't be built for decades.

However, this is an alternative veterans can use if they don't want to make the 800-foot trek to the front door.

The new CU Anschutz Medical Campus Rail Shuttle will debut the same day as the light rail, connecting with the R Line at the Fitzsimons Station on north Fitzsimons Parkway. The free shuttle will take veterans to the VA Hospital from the Fitzsimons Station, which is one stop away from the Colfax station.

The Fitzsimons light rail station is parallel to Tollgate Creek on Fitzsimons Parkway, and will be on the north side of Fitzsimons and just north of the hospital and the Anschutz Medical Campus. It will take less than five minutes to get to the hospital from that stop via shuttle. The first stop for that shuttle will drop veterans off around 500 feet from the VA hospital entrance at the intersection of Wheeling and East 17th Place.

Learn to R Line it

Watch these Aurora Sentinel videos to learn everything you need to know about how to get on board. Go to ow.ly/OLKq309gc9Z

Parking



Etiquette



How to ride



Public art



.Ties

R is for Ready

- The R Line is part of RTD's 2004 voter-approved FasTracks plan to expand transit across the Denver metro region.

- The newly constructed 10.5-mile light rail line through Aurora will provide regional connections to the East and South-east rail lines.

- The line will feature eight stations: Peoria, Fitzsimons, Colfax, 13th Avenue, 2nd Ave, Abilene, Aurora Metro Center, Florida and Iliff.

- From the existing Nine Mile Station to Peoria Station, the line will give passengers access to the Aurora Metro Center, the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus, the Fitzsimons Life Science District and Denver International Airport via a transfer to the University of Colorado A Line.

FAST FACTS:

- Length: 10.5 miles
- Vehicle: Light rail
- Stations: 8
- Parking: 1,800 new spaces
- Service Frequency: 10 min (peak) / 15 min (off-peak)

'boooooooard!

- \$2.60 Local one-way fare

- 8 new light rail stations – 16 total; 4 new Park-n-Rides

- 15 minute service most of the day – 30 minutes in non-peak hours

Fares

- All trips on the R Line are a local fare \$2.60

- If your trip involves a transfer to another rail line, fares could be regional (\$4.50) or airport (\$9.00) depending upon your destination

Frequency

- 4 am – 5 am, service every 30 minutes; 5 am – 8 pm, service every 15 minutes; 8 pm – 1 am, service every 30 minutes

New construction

- 10.5 miles of new light rail, connecting Nine Mile Station to Peoria Station
- H Line service is extended to Florida Station

Light rail vehicles

- Max speed: 55 MPH
- Max capacity: 155 passengers (64 seated, 91 standing)

- Boarding: Ramp available at the first set of doors and stairs at all other entrances to the vehicle

- Bikes: Two bikes allowed per bike zone, located at both ends of a train car

— RTD

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