

HOT RAILS TO HADES

✘ It has been quite the rage on the progressive internets to discuss trains, trains and super trains. Atrios is the King of all Train Media. Yglesias has climbed on board, and now even a dyed-in-the-wool California suburban guy like Kevin Drum is jawing about them, although he seems to have differing views on short-haul commuter (for) than long-haul passenger (against for financial reasons).

Well, this is most certainly not an area I have any expertise in, so I call on you, the smartest commentariat available, to edify me. And, this is important, because I just got a brand new choo choo.

A dress rehearsal for the new Metro light-rail system went smoothly Friday as trains packed with VIPs and special guests rolled out of Tempe for Phoenix and Mesa.

A couple hundred people trooped into the chilly plaza of the Tempe Transportation Center before dawn to be among the first to ride the \$1.4 billion system. Metro has been making test runs with the trains and the Friday event for invited guests was a warm-up for Saturday, when the public is welcomed on board.

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Tempe Mayor Hugh Hallman said the rail system not only would help reduce congestion and bad air but also contribute to "cultural sustainability," helping cities preserve resources.

"We have to thank the taxpayers who sponsored this investment," he said.

Metro runs from the Christown Spectrum Mall area in Phoenix through downtown Tempe into west Mesa.

They have been planning, researching,

constructing and developing the Valley Metro Light Rail for twelve years, and talking about it since the mid 80s. And now it is ready to roll. In fact, I saw the VIP run earlier today as I went to Sky Harbor airport to pick up a friend. Definitely very shiny. I am, however, not quite sure what to make of it.

Here is a good overview of the whole Valley Metro Rail System.

Phoenix and the greater "Valley of the Sun" is the very definition of urban and suburban sprawl. And it is very automobile centric; if you don't have a car, you can't get around. I have no idea what it would be like to ride a bus here, but my guess is not very pleasant or convenient. So, I have some questions.

- 1) Being so car ingrained, will people really ride this thing in numbers great enough to make it worthwhile?
- 2) Will it work in light of the fact that things are so spread out? Phoenix has a "downtown" core, but it is nowhere near anything like in eastern cities; not that great of percentage of workers are going to have jobs within walking distance of the rail line.
- 3) Will the mere presence of the line itself draw development to it, i.e. along its route, so as to make it more useful? How long will this take?
- 4) Once the initial route is built and opened, as it is just being done here now, how long before additions are made? How generally have other places determined the nature and routes of such additions?
- 5) It is a 115 degrees here a significant amount of the year, are people going to ride this thing when it is that hot out? Seriously, I am thinking about waiting at a platform in that heat, then climbing in a cigar tube with a bunch of other mopes who have been doing the same thing, maybe a lot longer than me. Scary!

6) What else do I need to consider, or do we need to discuss here? How can my city improve on what it has started?