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Railtown: The Fight For The Los Angeles Metro Rail And The Future Of The City



Synopsis

The familiar image of Los Angeles as a metropolis built for the automobile is crumbling. Traffic, air pollution, and sprawl motivated citizens to support urban rail as an alternative to driving, and the city has started to reinvent itself by developing compact neighborhoods adjacent to transit. As a result of pressure from local leaders, particularly with the election of Tom Bradley as mayor in 1973, the Los Angeles Metro Rail gradually took shape in the consummate car city. Railtown presents the history of this system by drawing on archival documents, contemporary news accounts, and interviews with many of the key players to provide critical behind-the-scenes accounts of the people and forces that shaped the system. Ethan Elkind brings this important story to life by showing how ambitious local leaders zealously advocated for rail transit and ultimately persuaded an ambivalent electorate and federal leaders to support their vision. Although Metro Rail is growing in ridership and political importance, with expansions in the pipeline, Elkind argues that local leaders will need to reform the rail planning and implementation process to avoid repeating past mistakes and to ensure that Metro Rail supports a burgeoning demand for transit-oriented neighborhoods in Los Angeles. This engaging history of Metro Rail provides lessons for how the American car-dominated cities of today can reinvent themselves as thriving railtowns of tomorrow.

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Customer Reviews

Elkind's "Railtown" is a fascinating read of the Los Angeles Metro light-rail system. The book sends the reader on a historical journey of rival politics, financial hurdles, and NIMBY opposition that have

shaped the light-rail network maps posted across L.A.'s Metro stations today. After reading this book, you'll know why... - the Blue Line was chosen as the first light-rail corridor (instead of a subway) in Los Angeles - the Green Line veers south to El Segundo on its western terminus instead of north to LAX - the Purple Line is finally pushing ahead on a subway after years of legislative constraint - the Expo Line almost became a bus-way instead of a light-rail corridor - the Orange Line became a bus-way instead of light-rail - the Red Line became so accident-prone during construction and influenced the way other lines would be prioritized - the Gold Line became a controversial issue between San Gabriel Valley constituents and the rest of Los Angeles when prioritizing limited project funds. Los Angeles is notorious for its sprawl and it would seem logical to build an effective heavy/light-rail network grid. However, planning for a regional urban rail network amid a diverse political background that only Southern California can bring is no simple task. The complexity of 88 cities under the County of Los Angeles with many politicians representing a plethora of diverse districts only compounds the problems of regional strategic planning. Elkind tells us how one politician (Henry Waxman) introduced legislation to ban a subway along one of L.A.'s busiest and densest corridors (Wilshire) and why local opposition and limited funding placed LA county supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky on a plane trip to Brazil.

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