

## CTA wraps up Brown Line renovations

January 9, 2010 (CHICAGO) (WLS) -- The massive project to rehab and renovate the CTA Brown Line is officially complete.

The project cost more than \$500 million and took nearly four years to finish.

The project had many delays, reroutes and inconveniences for tens of thousands of Brown, Red and Purple Line riders.

Officials celebrated the CTA success Saturday and also looked ahead to future projects.

The Belmont and Fullerton stations were the final two to complete construction. Transit officials say the renovations were designed to relieve congestion and add to customer comfort and safety while providing for the future growth.

But with the CTA still suffering from budget woes, it is unclear how many more of the projects riders will see without some change to how transit is funded in Illinois.

"These stations are something of which everyone can be proud of for years to come," said Chicago Transit Board Chairman Terry Peterson.

Saturday morning's ribbon cutting celebrated the completion of renovations to the Brown Line's Fullerton station that extended existing platform and put in new elevators and escalators.

Also, there are now bike racks, brighter lighting, and new signs, including Braille.

"It's so much nicer. There's a sign outside, and this is all new on top. I think it looks great," said CTA rider Marilyn Mikluka.

The 18-station, \$530-million capacity expansion project is finished, but it does not solve the CTA's funding problems that could put planned extension projects on the Red, Orange, and Yellow lines in jeopardy.

"We're about \$6.8 billion in unfunded liabilities and capital funds," CTA Pres. Richard Rodriguez said.

Lawmakers are hoping federal stimulus dollars can help.

"Every billion dollars you spend in transit creates 36,000 jobs. You really get the bang for your buck with transit dollars," said U.S. Congressman Mike Quigley, who represents the 5th District.

Last year, the Chicago Transit Board approved a \$1.27-billion bailout budget for 2010 that doesn't increase fares but calls for service cuts and layoffs.

Before that, the governor said the state would pick up the tab for the CTA to borrow money to keep operating.

"Going through this every two years is a real sad state of affairs. We have to fix it," said State Rep. Ken Dunkin.

But how, with what some call disparities in funding with Metra, Pace, and CTA?

"The reality is, Chicago is the economic engine for the state, and mass transit allows people to be part of that economic engine," State Rep. John Fritchey said.

And with the economy still suffering, Mayor Daley says investing in transit may be one of the better ways for a city to survive.

"We have to re-emphasize how important infrastructure is to the future of our economy," Chicago's Mayor Daley said.

CTA officials say the system is currently operational and safe, but they say even more money is needed to bring it into good repair over the next few years.

The Brown Line renovation project was largely funded by the federal transit administration. That kind of funding is crucial to allowing agencies, like the CTA, to make infrastructure improvements.

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