

18 November 2012

The good news is that the Rail Yards are finally going to be developed. The City of Albuquerque has signed up with a developer called Samitaur Constructs to do this.

And don't get us wrong; they're coming up with some pretty exciting stuff; solar panels, green roofs, water catchment, a growers' market, affordable housing, bicycle access, the Wheels Museum, etc.

The bad news concerns transit. The plans call for an intermodal connection or terminal on 2nd Street SW, for busses and cars. The Rail Runner is not about to add a station stop for the Rail Yards, because this stop would be too close to the Alvarado Center (First and Central). This makes sense until (and unless) the Yards become a truly major destination. However:

There is no provision at this time for any access to the railroad tracks —despite the fact that the nearest main line is about six feet from the East fence of the property, and there are at least two spur lines (side tracks) running from the center of Downtown right into major buildings on the property. This is nuts. It's a Rail Yard!

Every major city in the North American West has learned that transit means Rail as well as several sizes of Bus. Seems that we have not. If it's not in the political or financial cards to set up a Light Rail or Modern Streetcar line as part of this redevelopment, we need to "bank" this possibility for the future.

The most cautious, "conservative" way to do this is to preserve these spur tracks and remodel the buildings they go to so that the Yards could be easily served by Rail transit if and when our local politics discovers the 21st Century.

And should this (literally) millennial event come to pass, we'd start by creating a Rail shuttle between the Alvarado Center and the Yards. This shuttle would be a short standard gauge modern streetcar (or double streetcar), either new or reconditioned, diesel or electric. This shuttle, like all modern Rail, would be a great little ride— fuel/energy efficient, smooth, safe, convenient, and would serve to

acquaint the public with the benefits and joys of Rail transit.

Our favorite location for this shuttle would be the track that runs from Downtown into the old brick Blacksmith Building, which to us cries out to become a small Union Station (with all appropriate shops and services). Our vehicle model is the Doodlebug, a short commuter train that ran between Belen and Albuquerque in the 1930's and 40's.

Every place that Rail transit is introduced, even after heavy opposition, it becomes a transportation rock star almost instantly. Someday we've got to join the parade (notice we didn't say, "get on board").

To learn more, consult this Web site and also:

<http://www.lightrailnow.org/mythbusters>.

To become a part of this planning process, contact: pmorris@cabq.gov.

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