

(Published as Op Ed, Albuquerque Journal, Dec 26, 2012)

It looks like the long-stymied redevelopment of the Albuquerque Rail Yards is finally happening.

The city has contracted with a developer called Samitaur Constructs to design a modern multi-purpose destination utilizing the major existing yard buildings. Several open houses have been held to introduce these proposed designs to the public.

The good news is that they're coming up with some great ideas: solar panels, green roofs, water catchment, a growers' market, affordable housing, performance spaces, the Wheels Museum. The draft plan is hitting a lot of right notes.

The bad news is that their transit proposals are at this stage insufficient (to put it as kindly as possible).

Attention is rightly being paid to traffic management, buses, bicycles, plain old walking, even steam trains. But as this is written there is no provision for modern rail transit of any kind. This despite the fact that the nearest main track runs about six feet from the east fence of the yard, and there are at least two spur lines (side tracks) running from the center of Downtown right into major buildings in the yard.

There are many reasons rail transit — light rail, modern streetcar, rapid streetcar — is roaring back almost everywhere (except Albuquerque). The one you most frequently hear concerns the happy marriage of rail-anchored transit and inner-city renewal. This alone is reason enough for metro rail, but there are many others that any regular person can appreciate:

- ◆ Urban trains get three to four times the fuel/energy “mileage” that buses do.
- ◆ Buses last about 12 years, urban rail vehicles more like 50 to 100.
- ◆ Rail transit rarely gets stuck in traffic.

- ◆ Tracks support a lot more passengers on a lot less land than streets do, and, like their vehicles, last a lot longer with less maintenance than streets do.
- ◆ Rail transit affords more effective deployment of security personnel (transit cops).
- ◆ Tire pollution and disposal are serious problems — with buses.
- ◆ Modern trains offer a smooth quiet ride; so quiet in fact that you've got to put in bells, whistles and barricades so people know they're coming.
- ◆ People of all ages, colors and economic levels really like to ride trains.

If it's not in the political or financial cards to include modern rail transit in the Rail Yard plan, we need to "bank" this possibility for the future.

The most cautious, "conservative" way to do this is to preserve these spur tracks and to remodel the buildings they go to so that the yards can be served by modern rail if and when our local political thinking catches up to the 21st Century.

And should this (literally) millennial event come to pass, we can start cheap and quick by creating a rail shuttle between the yards and the Alvarado Transportation Center. Our dream shuttle would be a modern standard-gauge streetcar (or double streetcar), new or reconditioned, diesel or electric. It would take after the Doodlebug, a short commuter train that ran between Belen and Albuquerque in the 1930s and 40s. Our dream mini-Union Station would be the old brick Blacksmith Building, the terminus of one of those spur lines.

We predict this shuttle, if built, will become a transportation rock star from its first day in revenue service.

Don't take our word for it. And you don't have to look to New York, Paris or Toronto to confirm these assertions. Look no further than Calgary, Dallas, Denver, Houston,

Phoenix, St. Louis and Salt Lake City.

Not too many hippie heavens among them, but they all know something we haven't figured out yet.

People frequently cite the railroad origins of Albuquerque (at least Angloid Albuquerque). True enough, but irrelevant. Most of us already appreciate what passenger trains used to do for Albuquerque.

What's more to the point is what they do for us now and what they could do in the future if there were a lot more of them.

It's a rail yard, get it?

Share this:

- [Share on X \(Opens in new window\) X](#)
- [Share on Facebook \(Opens in new window\) Facebook](#)
- [Email a link to a friend \(Opens in new window\) Email](#)
- [Share on LinkedIn \(Opens in new window\) LinkedIn](#)
- [Share on Reddit \(Opens in new window\) Reddit](#)
- [Share on Tumblr \(Opens in new window\) Tumblr](#)
- [Share on Pinterest \(Opens in new window\) Pinterest](#)
- [Share on Telegram \(Opens in new window\) Telegram](#)
- [Share on WhatsApp \(Opens in new window\) WhatsApp](#)