

Like any good observant lapsed Jew, I'm always on the lookout for tasty pork. But as [Jonathan discussed](#) on this blog, the highway pork in the stimulus bill is looking most unsavory — especially relative to the sweeter meats of public transit funding.

No doubt, money for public transit agencies would go a long way toward creating jobs: orders for new buses and rail cars alone would create solid manufacturing jobs domestically. But for those hoping to see big capital projects like new urban rail lines, don't get your hopes up. Rail projects like L.A.'s "Subway to the Sea" and the proposed Expo light rail to Santa Monica (artist rendering below), as well as Bay Area projects like the BART extension to San Jose, are years away from being "shovel-ready." The days when cities like Boston could put [200 Irishmen with pickaxes](#) below ground to build a subway in less than two years are long gone. Nowadays the environmental review process alone typically eats up at least two to three years of time (and sometimes, nightmarishly, much more). The Santa Monica light rail line environmental review document is just now [hot off the PDF presses](#), and the Subway to the Sea [isn't even at that stage](#) yet. So the stimulus bill, even with sweeter pork, is unlikely to change the transit landscape in California very much.



But hope remains. The real action on transit spending will happen later this year when the [federal transportation spending bill](#) is up for a vote ([the last time was 2005](#)). Supposedly Obama chose LaHood for secretary of transportation in part for his ability to steer bills through Congress without them getting loaded up with ridiculous pet projects. So maybe this time transportation funding will go to meritorious projects, and there will be no more talk of "bridges to nowhere" (except at "Free Ted Stevens" rallies). If that's the case, California could be first in line to receive funding for major transit projects. But it probably won't happen with this stimulus bill.

So there will be pork, but we'll have to wait to see how sweet it is.