

# Nashville's Music City Star on Track to Open This Year

Special to *Passenger Transport*

By Teresa McKissick  
Marketing Coordinator  
Regional Transportation Authority  
Nashville, Tenn.

**T**he Music City Star, Tennessee's first commuter rail line, is solidly on track to begin operation in the second half of the year, with \$6 million in federal funding for Fiscal Year 2006 approved by Congress in November of last year.

The Music City Star East Corridor connects suburban Wilson County to metropolitan Nashville. A regional commuter transit network is planned for the entire nine-county area, but this corridor was selected first for two reasons: because of the existence of a public railroad with available capacity, and because 2000 U.S. Census data show that 45 percent of Wilson County residents commute into Nashville/Davidson County each workday.

In addition, the sheer statistics of the metro Nashville area make com-

muter rail necessary. Metro Nashville has some of the most congested thoroughfares in the country, increasing the travel time for commuters. Currently the region is home to 1.2 million people, and the population is expected to grow 42 percent by 2025. The area is also home to 19 colleges and universities. In 2000, *The Employment Review* listed Nashville as one of the 15 best cities to live and work, making it an even more attractive place for businesses and families to relocate. In fact, the Nissan Corporation announced in November 2005 that it will move its corporate headquarters to the region from the Los Angeles area.

In addition to receiving substantial support in the region, the MCS East Corridor project is being embraced by federal and local leaders



Music City Star commuter rail will arrive this year in the Nashville region.

because it is being built for just under \$40 million. This figure includes track improvements, station construction, crossing upgrades, bridge replacements, and administrative costs. "It's quite amazing that what we are doing for \$40 million is what some systems spend for a single station," says Kevin Walker, project engineer and resident engineer with Neel-Schaffer Inc.

The Regional Transportation Authority, lead agency for the rail project, managed to keep capital costs low by acquiring retired rail cars from Chicago's Metra commuter rail system through transferring remaining federal interest. Additionally, when the project was put out to bid in the spring of 2004, steel prices were extremely volatile.

"The RTA found it difficult for companies to give us long-term bids because of the volatile market. Therefore, we took the steel cost out of the bid and purchased the steel directly from L.B. Foster Company. This enabled us to lock in a steel price and saved the project several hun-

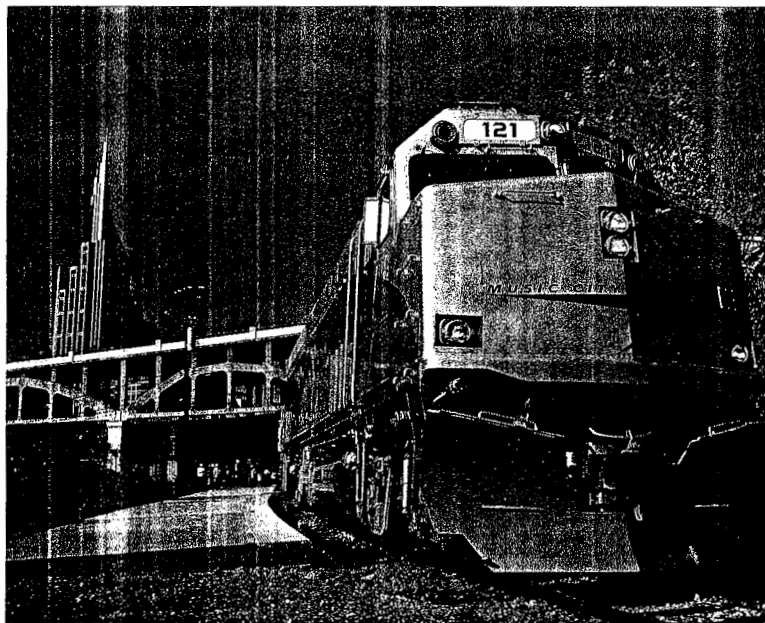
dred thousand dollars," said Allyson Shumate, project manager.

The Music City Star East Corridor project also is breaking new ground in other ways. Besides the low capital costs, the project has had tremendous support from its partners.

"Getting three cities, two counties, state, and federal entities together was a coup. This project is the best example of regionalism that there is, where everyone comes together in the best interest of the region and the residents," said Bill Orange, RTA board chairman and Cheatham County mayor.

Bill Farquhar, commuter rail director and RTA interim executive director, added, "The Tennessee Department of Transportation has provided in-kind marketing assistance and has committed to \$400,000 annually through its operating assistance program. Nashville's Metropolitan Transit Authority will provide ticket sales, public information, and connecting and shadow bus services to get commuters from their destination station to their workplace. Our suburban cities will also provide security at the stations, as well as maintenance and utilities support." The Nashville and Eastern Railroad is contributing the local march for improvements to the right-of-way.

Construction continues on the project, including building each of



Music City Star at Riverfront Station, with the Nashville skyline in the background.