

San Diego's *SuperLoop Rapid*



High-speed bus service keeps students moving while reducing vehicle load

Tied to a tight schedule, HNTB delivered the design for Phase 2 of the *SuperLoop Rapid* transit service to the San Diego Association of Governments in just four months. *SuperLoop Rapid* provides frequent, high-speed bus service within the North University City area of San Diego. The first two phases of the project are currently operating and, when completed, the route will be nine miles long with up to 26 stations.

The University of California, San Diego anchors North University City, which is considered San Diego's second downtown. The area also is home to UC San Diego's Thornton Hospital and Scripps Memorial Hospital with surrounding medical facilities and a major shopping center. As a large employment center that includes high-density residential areas, it's not surprising that traffic congestion is commonplace.

A study showed that most trips taken in the area were relatively short. Thus, the nine-mile loop that incorporates transit elements was proposed to reduce the vehicle load in the system. Led by SANDAG, the project is a partnership of the San Diego Metropolitan Transit System, the City of San Diego and UC San Diego. It is funded by TransNet, the regional half-cent sales tax for transportation administered by SANDAG.

"With multiple stakeholders, including UC San Diego, our Phase 2 construction schedule had to coincide with summer break, a significant schedule driver," said Rob Colosimo, HNTB project manager.

The project moved quickly, according to former SANDAG Project Manager John Dorow.

"*SuperLoop* Phase 2, building the Gilman Transit Center, had a very aggressive schedule as desired by the campus community and planners at UC San Diego," Dorow said. "HNTB and its team were able to deliver quality plans and specifications within the milestone deadlines and took the project from a 65-percent design level to final in just under three months."



The system was designed with riders in mind. Each *SuperLoop Rapid* station includes a shelter, seating, low-power lighting and variable message signage that alerts users to the arrival of the next bus. Many stations include leaning rails or seat walls. *SuperLoop Rapid* uses both standard 40-foot buses and 60-foot articulated buses. Each bus seats up to 52 people and offers additional standing

room. At the transit center, ample queuing areas and bus turnouts allow for easier traffic flow around buses and shuttles.

"Two of the routes now feature larger vehicles with more seats, improved lighting, more headroom and bigger windows," Colosimo said. "They also incorporate traffic signal priority so they efficiently move through traffic and maintain schedule reliability."

SuperLoop Rapid ridership

is consistently exceeding expectations. The student population has embraced the service. Just recently, UC San Diego students voted to pay a fee for a regional transit pass, or U-Pass, as part of their quarterly registration fees. That boosted ridership even more.

When the final phase of construction moves forward, it will contribute to the efficiency, reliability and increased ridership of *SuperLoop Rapid*. Construction completion and full operation is expected by 2017. ■

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Bright Future

Once complete, *SuperLoop Rapid* will continually adapt to new technology and service. Providing frequent, high-speed bus service within the North University City area of San Diego will remain its focus. Making it easier to use and accessible to more riders are the goals of SANDAG and MTS.

In addition, the Mid-Coast Trolley Project that is scheduled to begin construction this year will extend trolley service from downtown San Diego to University City. When completed, it will serve the commercial and residential growth expected in the University City region. *SuperLoop Rapid* will encircle the northern section of this extension, allowing commuters another efficient option to reach University City locations. ■

