



Elati Light Rail Facility

DENVER/ENGLEWOOD, CO

2007 REGION 8 WINNER

Key Project Lesson: Strategically located brownfield properties can be ideally suited for reuse as public works or similar facilities, and cross-agency, cross-jurisdictional cooperation can enhance benefits for all stakeholders.

Overview

Through multi-agency cooperation and innovative environmental solutions, the Elati Light Rail Maintenance Facility has set a progressive trend for future public works industrial-design projects. Two cities, Denver and Englewood, came together to transform five properties—including the former General Iron Works foundry, an automobile salvage yard, and railroad surplus property—into an attractive, state-of-the-art light rail facility that has brought significant environmental and economic benefits to the Denver region.

Featured Partners

- Regional Transportation District
- Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment
- City and County of Denver
- City of Englewood
- Brown and Caldwell
- Carter & Burgess
- Maintenance Design Group (MDG)
- M.A. Mortenson
- RNL Design

Primary Reason for Redevelopment

The site chosen for the Elati Light Rail Maintenance Facility project, known as T-REX, offered an ideal location between the two primary light rail lines it serves, and an opportunity to redevelop with minimal disruption to the community. The 22.5-acre Elati site, which sits on the border of Englewood and Denver, was on the new Southwest Corridor light rail line, provided ample space for the maintenance operations, and would not displace any residences. The redevelopment would affect only three small existing businesses and five landowners. In addition, the City of Englewood had wanted to redevelop the old General Iron Works site for several years. The selection of this location represented an opportunity to remove the rusting, decrepit, former foundry and provide the spark for future redevelopment of adjacent properties.

Approach

The Denver regional transportation district needed a new facility to store, service, and clean the 34 additional light rail vehicles it acquired to accommodate expansion of its system. It also needed a staging place for train operators to begin and end their shifts. As a result, the redevelopment approach for the T-REX project was driven by the need to ensure that the new facility was operational in time to receive the new cars and launch the new line. To that end, the \$40 million project was characterized by exceptional cooperation among two cities, two design teams, multiple funding sources, and two construction delivery systems. The level of cross-jurisdictional, intergovernmental, and public-private cooperation also reflects the importance of the project to the larger community. For the first time, the Federal Highway Administration and the Federal Transit Administration sat at the same table and represented equal interests. In addition to federal transportation money, state and local funding was secured. The two cities negotiated an agreement governing how revenues from future development would be shared. This commitment to cooperation was reflected in the seamless transition between two contractors: one design team was deployed for the maintenance building and civic design, and a second design team of T-REX staff designed the rail, signals, and light rail components of the project.

Innovative Techniques

The history and historic images of rail facilities are symbols of the industrial era—complete with black smoke, soot, and pollution. The Elati facility has brightened this image in its appearance and functionality, and in its architectural adaptation to the surrounding neighborhood. Project planners envisioned the facility as an integral part of the area's fabric rather than an isolated public works structure. Accordingly, they shifted the layout to the north end of the property, which saved 10 acres for future re-development within the boundaries of the landlocked City of Englewood. Innovative approaches used during construction of the Elati facility included an environmental cap that was integrated into the facility design, which reduced remediation costs by over \$1 million.

Challenges

A project of this magnitude that straddles two cities requires surmounting numerous regulatory, political, and financial hurdles. One of the greatest challenges was establishing and maintaining a productive and cooperative working relationship with the facility's future neighbors. The proposed location of the Elati maintenance complex was in the midst of a mature neighborhood. The General Iron Works facilities there were rundown and rusty, and undermined property values in the neighborhood. The area was a haven for vagrants, vandals, and drug dealers. Nevertheless, residents were concerned about what a new use for the property might bring to their neighborhood. To alleviate concerns, the transit district initiated a robust community relations plan that included flyers, a website, and several public meetings that invited members of the community to share their concerns and offer suggestions. Based on community concerns, the Regional Transportation District implemented an air monitoring plan to assure neighbors that they were not being exposed to airborne contaminants from earthwork and demolition activities.

Benefits

Expansion of light rail in the metropolitan Denver area means less dependency on oil and reduced impact to local roads, highways, and air quality. The Elati maintenance complex itself was designed to reduce its impact upon the surrounding environment through a variety of strategies, such as minimizing spillage of indirect lighting into the adjacent residential neighborhood and carefully integrating the facility's storm water drainage system to reduce neighborhood flooding. Residents also are pleased that the design of the service building reflects the historical architectural tradition of the General Iron Works industrial complex, where many residents' families had worked. Due to the magnitude of the T-REX project and the Elati facility, the project has received significant attention from other transit and public agencies throughout the country.

The Elati Light Rail Maintenance Facility project has brought 311 permanent jobs to the area, a large number for a community with significant numbers of senior citizens and low-income minorities. Additional jobs will be created in the future, as the facility is already undergoing expansion to accommodate additional light rail lines. Overall, redevelopment and environmental restoration of five properties that have had minimal positive impacts and aesthetically negative impacts to the community for years, today is launching a community renaissance.



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Names of Participants:	Regional Transportation District, Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment, City and County of Denver, City of Englewood, Brown and Caldwell, Carter & Burgess, MDG, M.A. Mortenson, RNL Design
Number of Acres:	10.7 acres remediated
Former Uses:	heavy equipment producer
Current Uses:	transportation
Former number/Types of jobs:	at peak, more than 1,000, laborers, carpenters, mechanics, engineers, etc.; from 1986-2002, approximately 15 laborers
New number/Types of jobs:	311, management/administrative, operators, light rail mechanics, other personnel
Type of Site:	industrial
Regulatory Program:	Colorado Voluntary Cleanup Program
List of Major Contaminants:	arsenic, lead, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons
Magnitude of Contamination:	up to 10 feet of metal- and hydrocarbon-impacted foundry sand and debris over approximately one-half of the current facility
Greatest Challenge:	establishing a relationship with future neighbors
Length of Time to Remediate Site:	6 months
Primary Reason for Redevelopment:	location, minimal disruption to community
Years Abandoned or Challenged:	16 years
Cleaned up under Consent Decree:	no
List of Financial Assistance:	sales tax-funded mechanisms, bonds, full-funding grant agreement, other contributions, EPA brownfield assessment grant
New Tax Revenues:	The Regional Transportation District is a tax-exempt transportation district
Community Outreach Activities:	community relations plan
Innovative Remediation Techniques:	cap integrated into facility
Innovative Economic Development:	public works project funded by no new or increased taxes
Land Conservation:	approximately 10 acres set aside to the south for future use
Sustainable Development:	use of ambient lighting, recycled wash water system, efficient cooling and heating design elements, diffuse and indirect outdoor lighting
Federal Partners:	EPA, Federal Transit Administration