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## Next stop: Prosperity

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SERIES: Economic outlook for 2007 (1st of 2 parts)

SUMMARY: County leaders say the MAX line extension will carry a business boom along its rails

Planners say the MAX line on its way to Clackamas County in 2007 will lay down track for more than just a light-rail train. It also will carry an economic engine for jobs and business stretching into the next decade.

The real estate and business boom --anticipated as a result of stores and services created for commuters --could start as early as next year, planners said.

TriMet estimates the \$557 million project will roll in 7,600 jobs during construction, which begins in full next year and is expected to continue until the line opens in September 2009.

The 6.5-mile South Corridor Light Rail project will bring the MAX line from the Gateway Transit Center along Interstate 205 to Clackamas Town Center. In Clackamas County, workers will add about 3 miles of track and two light-rail stations, one near the intersection of Southeast Fuller Road and Johnson Creek Boulevard and the other at Clackamas Town Center.

By 2025, about 46,500 people are expected to board light rail every day between Clackamas Town Center and downtown Portland. About a third of those riders will travel within the section of the light-rail track that runs along I-205.

"That's huge," said Renate Mengelberg, Clackamas County business and economic development coordinator.

Businesses such as coffee shops, bookstores and hotels probably will sprout up along the line, as will apartments and condos for people who like the convenience of the light rail, she said.

That's what has happened in other areas where the light rail has been built, TriMet officials say.

In all, Portland-area light-rail lines have resulted in \$6 billion of development within walking distance --less than half a mile --of MAX stations, said Mary Fetsch, a TriMet spokeswoman.

For example, in 2004 after the Yellow Line, which runs from the Rose Quarter to the Expo Center, was finished, a New Seasons Market opened across the street from the Portland Boulevard station, a nearby Fred Meyer spent millions of dollars improving its retail building, and dozens of smaller shops appeared, Fetsch said.

Although the ongoing redesign of Clackamas Town Center is partially brought about in anticipation of light rail, most rail-related development probably won't leave the station until the light-rail line is close to being finished, said Gary Cook, a development manager for Clackamas County.

"Developers want to see it first," Cook said.

It could prove difficult to encourage development at the station planned near Fuller Road because the area is partially hidden from Southeast 82nd Avenue, the main commercial strip in the area. As a result, the station area isn't an obvious place to shop, said Shari Gilevich, a senior planner with the county.

Clackamas County probably will rezone the land around the Fuller Road station to allow four- or five-story structures with shops on the bottom and apartments and offices on top, she said.

The county is also considering a 620-car lot or parking structure in that area, she said.

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Although MAX is expected to decrease traffic overall, it might increase traffic around the light-rail stations. That has some workers concerned.

Brenda McRae, a showroom consultant at 3 Day Blinds near Fuller Road, said she hopes more traffic means more customers. But congestion would also force her to spend more time driving to clients' homes for consultations.

It could mean she'll face more competition because it'll become easier for clients to travel to competing stores on light rail.

Still, less traffic overall means goods can be delivered faster and businesses can operate more efficiently, said Clackamas County Commissioner Martha Schrader.

As a result of the project, cars will drive 125,000 fewer miles a week along the I-205 corridor, according to a study evaluating the environmental affects of the project.

"It makes us (Clackamas County) a more appealing place to do business," Schrader said.

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ILLUSTRATION: Graphic -- Chart by The Oregonian / MICHELLE DRAEGER -- JOB OPENINGS

ILLUSTRATION: Graphic -- Chart by The Oregonian / MICHELLE DRAEGER -- EMPLOYMENT BY INDUSTRY

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