

Elevated stations

The term public infrastructure often sends a shiver up any architect's spine. Think brute concrete, raw steel, nuts and bolts and form always being sacrificed to function. For it is engineers – not architects – who normally take the lead constructing roads, rails and bridges. But not always.

"I'm kind of gushing, but it's been an incredible experience," says Alan Hart, the lead architect for Vancouver's new Millennium Line, the second major phase of the city's commuter SkyTrain. Hart, of Vancouver-based VIA Architecture, persuaded provincial officials to let architects take charge of this \$1.7 billion project and it shows: each of the 12 new stations is light, airy and highly sensitive to local topography and community – a stark contrast to the original enclosed industrial-looking Expo Line stations completed in 1986 for the world's transport exhibition here. Hart says the public wanted more transparent, warm and well-lit metro stops – "beacons in the community," he calls them.

This page and bottom right: Vancouver's new Brentwood Skytrain station, by Busby + Associates, hovers on concrete piles over a highway, and features wooden ribs bent to form a canoe-like roof over the platforms. Right, top two photos: Braid Station, by Walter Francl Architects and Architectura, won a Lieutenant Governor's architectural merit award. Right, third and fourth from top: A tilted wing at Production Way-University Station, by Hotson Bakker Architects, allows views up Burnaby Mountain.

Seven of the city's top firms – VIA Architecture, Busby + Associates, Hotson Bakker Architects, Paul Merrick Architects, Walter Francl Architects, Architectura and Hancock, Bruckner, Eng + Wright Architects – were commissioned to build the stations, which commonly feature concrete guideways, glass enclosures and steel and wood canopies. Yet each is

unique, with the roof being the expressive architectural element and art, including stained glass, dynamic sculptures, landscaping and murals, integrated into every design.

"The canoe was really the inspiration for the structure," says Martin Nielsen of Busby + Associates who designed the Brentwood flagship station. "It's a series of ribs with a shell laid on top." Brentwood is by far the most visually stunning. It hovers on concrete piles over a highway, drawing attention to the innovative, groundbreaking



design of the Millennium Line. In an unusual move for public infrastructure, wood has been used as a structural component. The 34 ribs are made of gluelam, an engineered wood, bent to form a canoe-like roof over the arrival-departure platforms. Glass plates are overlapped like shingles to form the walls of the station, allowing views of the cityscape and the mountains. The result is Canadiana-meets-Futurama – the craftsmanship, without falling into cliché, echoes our history (think *coureur de bois*) while the overall form looks entirely futuristic, like a spaceship.

The roof of the other flagship station, Lougheed Town Centre, looks like a series of five sleek steel Chinese pagodas, while the Production Way-University Station is a swooping wing tilting to give views up Burnaby Mountain. The Braid Station has already won a Lieutenant Governor's architectural merit award.

"The city will shape itself around the stations because the line runs along an old industrial corridor," lead architect Hart says, explaining how the 20-km Millennium Line, servicing four municipalities, will promote Greater Vancouver's eco-friendly growth strategy. "Villages will build up around the stations."

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ERIC ENNO TAMM

