

Little Italy - University Circle Rapid Station

From one of the nastiest, most prominent eyesores in town to a bright, whimsical transit station, the Little Italy – University Circle Red Line Rapid Transit Station has transformed its physical location on bustling Mayfield Road and has helped revamp the perception of public transportation in Cleveland.

The new station replaces an aging, outmoded, poorly located, and menacing East 120th Street Red Line station. By relocating the station a block south to Mayfield Road, the facility provides better service for more riders, with direct access to the Historic Little Italy Neighborhood and the bustling University Circle District.

By relocating the station, an opportunity was created to change the face of the unattractive railroad underpass at Mayfield Road that separates two of the City's most robust neighborhood. A collection of railroad bridges had turned the road into a dank, 200-foot tunnel lined with crumbling concrete, graffiti, and cracks that allowed gravel from the railroad tracks above to sift down to muddy sidewalks below. Situated in an opportune location to connect these bustling communities, the tunnel instead created an intimidating edge with aesthetic and physical liabilities.

The new station, located at the eastern end of the tunnel, is a beacon that cuts into the darkness. It reuses a bunker-like concrete structure built on the spot in the 1930s as an interurban rail station, a project that was only partially completed and later abandoned during the Depression. As part of the project, the bridges were spaced apart for the west and eastbound tracks so they could be served by a central platform, rather than two platforms, one on either side. This fundamental step provided an opportunity for daylight to flood down to the sidewalks below, shortening the darkness of the tunnel.

Emblazoned with a bright red logo, the concrete and steel station features a circular canopy over its corner entry, which is topped with tiers of undulating stainless steel mesh panels. The wavelike mesh panels above the canopy have an ebullient and whimsical effect, and express the idea that transit can bring delight to city living.

The station's dramatic, creative lighting not only add to its identity, but also provide a sense of safety and security in the station and its surrounding urban environment. Colorful, changing LED lights artfully illuminate the mesh ribbons and animate the station at night, while sculptural, lacey chandeliers greet riders entering or exiting the station. Additional public art, including paving that picks up on the organic imagery of the station entry structure, adds to the project, as does a poem incised in steps that curve around a small piazza at the entry.

Since the station's opening less than a year ago, ridership has doubled and is expected to continue increasing. Future improvements, including lighting, drainage and sidewalk railings under the tracks west of the new station are currently under way to further strengthen the connection between University Circle and Little Italy.