



Southern California's famous congestion wastes resources and bleeds the local economy.

along with the city we have, but build the city we need.

The right answer is density, even if "density" is the least popular word in post-war suburban America. We often throw the word out as a verbal firebomb against new development. However, the right density is really our solution. Not everywhere of course, only within walking distance of a transit station. To offset building concentrations, we can become less dense in between transit lines to the point where we can create new open space. Yes, a better, denser, and more sustainable city can also mean less dense areas and more parks! If we succeeded in creating a balance between higher density along public transit lines and new open space in other areas of the city, we'd once again create a model for the world to admire and imitate.

Imagine our city with bustling pedestrian zones, coffee shops, and corner stores, markets, plazas, and lots of housing options surrounding our public transit hubs. Then imagine those hubs separated by low-density areas filled with picturesque narrow residential streets, bicycle networks, community gardens, and parks. All could be connected with public transit, and all of this in our near-perfect climate, and you could still drive, if you chose to.

But we cannot achieve this by only making minor adjustments to our land-use laws based on the popular consensus of people who want to continue to drive yet want all the other people to get off the road. We need to change much more rapidly and radically and we must get people mobilized toward change. We must create grass roots "YIMBY" (Yes, in my yard!) movements that demand different solutions; that is really the challenge of our time.

Perhaps the reason that could convince car-love stricken Angelenos toward a catalytic change is that we want to keep money in local pockets and contribute to a thriving local economy, with jobs and opportunities right here at home. In the 1940s, we used approximately 3 cents of every disposable dollar on one of the best public transit networks in the U.S. (yes, here in LA). Today, we are spending 19 cents of every dollar not being able to move around much.

Angelenos without a car will have upward of 10 percent to 15 percent more money to spend and probably will do so locally. If we could eliminate only 10 percent of the vehicles in LA County, we would infuse \$4.7 billion a year into our local economy. Imagine what our city would be with an extra \$4.7 billion circulating locally, per year, every year.

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## CALLING FOR A REVOLUTION IN CAR COUNTRY

Angelenos, we must build a different city—or drive ourselves broke...

According to the American Automobile Association, it costs, on average, approximately \$8,500 per year to own and operate a car. An infographic from the National Building Museum finds that of that \$8,500, less than \$1,500 stays local. For every car on the road in LA, more than \$7,000 per year goes elsewhere—much to international oil companies and car manufacturers.

Let's do the math. In 2009, LA County had 6.7 million registered vehicles. 6.7 million times \$7,000 not spent locally equals approximately \$47 billion! This is the amount we are taking out of our local economy per year, every year, because we drive.

At the sunset of Mayor Villaraigosa's administration we rightfully celebrate our city's amazing recent accomplishments and return to public transit. However, we are only halfway done. The next steps won't be easy, nor are they obvious. Yes, we need to continue to build new transit infrastructure, but we must also build a different city around the shiny new transit network that can maximize its benefits.

Decades of development and sprawl are rightfully blamed for the degradation

of our quality of life, and for our near unbearable congestion. This has turned many Angelenos against development and into NIMBY activists ready to object anytime to anything. But contrary to NIMBY creed, we cannot do nothing. The path we are on is really an economic fiasco in waiting.

In greater Los Angeles, we are using more than 60 percent of our land for our automobiles (roads, parking lots, landscaped buffers, traffic islands, etc.). According to Christopher Alexander's book *Pattern Language*, the ideal percentage of land given over to automobiles in a city with balanced transit options (that also include cars) is 19 to 20 percent of the land area.

Examples for this can be found in those areas of Boston, Brooklyn, or Philadelphia that were built before the automobile. In these areas, four out of every five acres generate tax revenue to improve the shared infrastructure on that one remaining acre. In LA, on the other hand, only two out of every five acres create revenue. Those two acres that actually generate revenue need to support the remaining three. No wonder we can't even keep up with our potholes.

This structural imbalance was not felt

while we were sprawling, because new growth generates new money, once. It is a well-known secret that many communities survived mostly through collecting development fees for new growth to maintain the previous one, and that worked for a while. But then we got stuck in traffic, and stopped sprawling, and observed our communities going into financial distress.

These issues are connected. Popular lore is that we have gotten too big, too dense. NIMBY groups blame growth for most of our woes. But by protesting growth they are also cutting off the funds that have kept us going thus far; and NIMBY activist's resolve is putting the fear of God into our politicians if they just think about new development.

Building public transit into a city with an automotive DNA is not nearly enough. Public transit needs ridership to sustain itself. In our car-based city, people are living too far apart from each other to make it possible for enough of us to walk to transit. Once we are in a car, not enough of us get out to switch over to trains. Metro calls this the first mile, last mile problem. There are lots of smart people working on this problem, but the only way to fully resolve it is not to limp

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