

## 4 Los Angeles Metro

### **OVERVIEW: TRANSIT SYSTEM CHARACTERISTICS**

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The Los Angeles or L.A. Metro is a regional rail system that was initially conceived as part of L.A.'s city-centered plan concept in the 1960s 1970s and then system planning began in the early 1980s. It was intended to provide alternatives to automobile travel in the Los Angeles area. The first segment of the Metro system, the Blue Line, opened in July of 1990, and today, there are 44 stations and 92.4 miles in operation along three lines. The Blue Line and Green Line are both light rail systems; the Red Line is a heavy-rail system.

The Blue Line runs 22 miles from 7th street in downtown L.A., through Vernon, Huntington Park, South Gate, Watts, Compton, and Carson, and ends in the City of Long Beach. The Green Line runs 20 miles from Norwalk to El Segundo, crossing the Blue Line south of downtown. A short 5-mile segment of the Red Line is also currently in operation, running from Union Station, through downtown, toward Hollywood.

Metro is currently constructing several extensions of the Red Line, which will reach Hollywood and eventually run north to the San Fernando Valley. An extension of the Blue Line from downtown to Pasadena is also planned but has been indefinitely delayed. Characteristics of Metro lines and specific stations that have characteristics similar to some of the Seattle stations are shown in Table 4-1.

**Table 4-1.**

**L.A. METRO: SELECTED STATION CHARACTERISTICS**

	1996 Average Weekday Exits			
Blue Line	43,198			
Red Line	33,100			
Green Line	17,377			
	1996 Average Weekday Exits	Type of Structure	Parking Lot?	Surrounding Urban Form
Downtown				
Long Beach	1,189	Grade	No.	Urban Core
Slauson	1,081	Grade	No.	Urban Residential/Industrial
Hollywood/Highland	to open, 1999	Tunnel	No	Urban Core

Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority; Dyett & Bhatia.

**STATION AREA PLANNING FRAMEWORK**

In some L.A. Metro station areas transit-oriented development has occurred in spite of a limited planning framework for such activities. Although Metro has the ability to do joint development projects, neither Metro nor any local jurisdiction has taken a strong lead in station area planning in the Los Angeles region.<sup>4</sup> Successful station-area development has largely stemmed from the initiatives of private developers, and local jurisdictions and Metro have helped create supportive land use policies and conducive joint development agreements.

The following stations will be examined in detail for their experiences with transit-oriented development: Downtown Long Beach, Slauson, and Hollywood/Highland. These three stations represent three distinctly different types of planning initiatives along the Metro line.

- *Downtown Long Beach:* Private Developer Initiative. In the absence of a concerted city-led initiative for transit-oriented development, a private developer worked with the Long Beach Redevelopment Agency to build a large, mixed-use multi-family residential and commercial project adjacent to the Blue Line in downtown Long Beach.

<sup>4</sup> The City of Los Angeles established a land use and transportation policy framework to plan for station areas, but the framework has not been successful in working through land use and development issues at specific stations. As a result, the City is currently creating Station/Neighborhood Plans that will address local land use, development, urban design, and community needs. Interview with Lyn Harper, City of Los Angeles, 5/22/98.

- *Slauson: Incentive Zoning.* The County of Los Angeles is using incentive-based overlay zoning to entice development at the four stations that fall within the unincorporated County, Slauson, Florence, Firestone, and Imperial Stations.
- *Hollywood/Highland: Joint Development.* Metro is working with the private development firm of TrizecHahn to jointly develop the property at the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland Avenue. The entertainment complex will serve as a regional attraction that has a direct, on-site transit connection.

## **DOWNTOWN LONG BEACH**

The Metro Blue Line ends in a transit mall for buses in downtown Long Beach, and the station there provides an example of a downtown central business district station. Although neither the City nor the Redevelopment Agency has made intentional efforts to encourage transit-oriented development downtown, the Pacific Court project effectively supports transit use.

Pacific Court was part of a Redevelopment Agency program to re-introduce housing and mixed uses into downtown Long Beach. Constructed in 1992, Pacific Court has 142 apartments above two stories of retail, and it is located one block from the Long Beach Transit Mall. The project was developed by the Janss Company, which was attracted to the development for two reasons:

- *Market Appeal.* The urban site appeals to young middle-class professionals without children who want multi-family housing.
- *Redevelopment Financing.* The City's Redevelopment Agency was willing to write down the cost of land acquisition and provide tax-exempting financing for the project.

The project has turned out to be very supportive of the use of the Blue Line. A 1994 survey of the residents of Pacific Court revealed that ten percent of households commuted by public transit, nearly a third more than the countywide average for employed residents.<sup>5</sup>

The experience of Pacific Court shows that incentives related to land assembly and financing were strong enough to create transit-oriented development; development or design standards tailored to transit stations were not critical in generating transit ridership.

## **HOLLYWOOD/HIGHLAND**

MTA is currently working with TrizecHahn Centers on a joint development project at the corner of Hollywood Boulevard and Highland Avenue, in anticipation of the Red Line extension. When construction of the Hollywood segment of the Red Line is completed, downtown Hollywood will be directly connected with downtown Los Angeles. Current plans for the

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<sup>5</sup> Michael Bernick and Robert Cervero, *Transit Villages in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. (McGraw-Hill: San Francisco, 1997), 240.



hotel and retail users and will not be permitted for use by MTA patrons. The entertainment complex will be connected to Mann's Chinese Theater and will have a direct entrance into an underground Metro Red Line station.

## **SLAUSON**

Metro's Slauson Station is a grade-level structure, and the surrounding area has a mix of older residential and industrial uses. The area immediately adjacent to the station, along Slauson Avenue, is industrial or vacant, and areas south and west of the station have moderate to low density housing and commercial development. The Slauson station area is a mixed black and Hispanic neighborhood and has among the lowest incomes in the L.A. region.<sup>7</sup> The Slauson station provides insight into planning for former industrial and economically disadvantaged communities, such as Seattle's East Lake or Rainier Valley areas.

The County has created a set of supplementary zoning regulations for designated transit station areas along the Blue Line. The Transit Oriented District ordinance creates incentives for development around stations, such as reduced parking requirements and reduced fees. Currently, the County is not actively seeking developers for the station areas, but is intending for the ordinance itself to entice existing property owners into initiating new development at their stations.<sup>8</sup> So far, no developers have expressed interest in development around the station areas.

## **STATION AREA DEVELOPMENT TRENDS**

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No comprehensive, quantitative study has yet been made of land use changes or development around Metrorail stations. However, some stations have become the site of successful transit-oriented projects, particularly where local jurisdictions have leveraged funds for development. Completed and planned projects are listed in Table 4-2 in as much detail as available. This list does not give a complete picture of land use changes or development over time, but it gives some indication of station-area development.

Most other stations are surrounded by park-and-ride lots, and some jurisdictions have only begun to plan for transit-oriented development. Los Angeles County only recently approved transit-oriented regulations for areas in the vicinity of Metrorail stations, allowing for higher densities and more appropriate development standards.

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<sup>7</sup> Southern California Rapid Transit District. Joint Development and Value Capture Potential in the Harbor Freeway Corridor. Prepared by Blayney-Dyett (May 1981) 3-14:3-20.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Fiona Schneider, Los Angeles County Planning Department, 5/7/98.

## **FACTORS INFLUENCING STATION AREA DEVELOPMENT**

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Several factors are influencing station area development in the Los Angeles region. The first three factors are the same as those in most other urban areas with light rail systems: regional economic trends, local market conditions, and local land use policies.

- **Regional Economic Trends.** Transit-oriented development projects in Los Angeles did not meet initial expectations in the early 1990s, mostly due to the severe economic depression that hit Southern California. When the California economy started regaining strength in 1996-97, projects that were planned before and during the recession have once again become financially feasible.
- **Local Market Conditions.** The market conditions of each specific station area also influence the potential for development. For example, blighted areas may have difficulty attracting any sort of investment. Areas with an abundance of existing retail centers may not be able to support additional retail.
- **Local Land Use Policies.** Local land use policies have also played a role in station area development, particularly in the City of Los Angeles and in Los Angeles County, both of which have policies intentionally oriented to transit station.
- **Public Funding.** Another factor influencing station area development in the Los Angeles region is the leveraging of public funding, particularly through a redevelopment agency, for station-area joint development projects. Although some other transit systems throughout the county have used this technique, it is a particularly important factor in the Los Angeles area. Almost every transit-oriented project along the Metro-rail system, as shown in Table 4-2, has included public funding.
- **Joint Development.** So far, few jurisdictions in the Los Angeles area have approached station-area development by creation of a master plan. More often, cities or the MTA have worked with private developers who have created their own development plans for the station site. The City of Los Angeles prepared master plans for Union Station and Westlake MacArthur Park, but the latter plan was never acted upon by the City Council. Currently, neighborhood plans are underway for Red Line stations in Vermont and for Hollywood/Western station, and their emphasis on economic development, community design, and public facilities promises to introduce community-based station-area plans to the Los Angeles region.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with Lyn Harper, City of Los Angeles, 5/22/98. Interview with Mark Woerschling, City of Los Angeles, 5/22/98.

**Table 4-2.**  
**DEVELOPMENT AT METRORAIL STATIONS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY, 1993-1998**

	Project	Description	Status	Notes
Transit Mall, Long Beach	Pacific Court	142 apartments, 30,000 sq.ft. retail, 16-screen theater	Completed, 1992	
Willow Street, Long Beach	Neighborhood Shop- ping Center	130,000 sq.ft retail, surface & garage parking	In construc- tion	
Holly Street, Pasadena	Holly Street Village	374 apartments, 11,000 sq.ft. retail	Completed, 1994	Anticipates Blue Line ex- tension
Hollywood/ Highland, Los Angeles	Hollywood/Highland Center	470-room hotel, 624,000 sq.ft. retail 3,000-car parking ga- rage, 3,300-seat live theater, multi-plex cinema	Detailed site planning	Anticipates Red Line ex- tension
Little Tokyo- Arts District, Los Angeles	Little Tokyo-Arts Dis- trict Transit Village	7,000,000 sq.ft mixed- use art studios, retail, housing, entertainment	Detailed site planning	Anticipates Red Line ex- tension
Pershing Square, Los Angeles	Grand Central Square	121 apartments;	Completed, 1994	
		Park improvements; underground municipal parking garage	Completed, 1996	
		Refurbished market- place, 20,000 sq.ft office	Planned	Awaits funding
Union Station, Los Angeles	Union Station Gateway	628,000 sq.ft. MTA of- fice, bus plaza, intermodal transfer cen- ter	Completed, 1996	
		540,000 sq.ft. office	In construc- tion	
		Mid-rise housing, entertainment complex, office & retail	Planned	
Westlake/ MacArthur Park, Los Angeles	MacArthur Park Transit Village	220 dwelling units, 50,000 sq.ft office,	Planned	Stalled by local opposition, recession, cost

Source: Dyett & Bhatia; Robert Cervero, *Transit Villages in the 21st Century* (1997), 240-51.

## REGIONAL ECONOMIC TRENDS

Recessionary trends in the early 1990s stalled plans for transit-oriented development, but current estimates for population and employment increases will make the market more conducive for TOD projects. Population and employment projections for Los Angeles County are listed in Table 4-3. The expected population increase for Los Angeles County will add nearly 3,000,000 people to the region; this projected increase is nearly the equivalent of adding another City of Los Angeles to the existing county population. Now that the recession has ended, the enormity of the expected growth makes transit-oriented development a necessity for accommodating new people and jobs.

**Table 4-3.**  
POPULATION AND EMPLOYMENT IN L.A. COUNTY,  
1990-PROJECTED 2015

	1990	2015
Population	8,859,722	11,819,655
Employment	4,612,821	5,939,331

Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, *A Plan for Los Angeles County: Transportation for the 21st Century* (March 1995), 22-25.

## LOCAL LAND USE POLICIES

Two jurisdictions in Los Angeles County have created special land use policies for areas around transit stations: the City of Los Angeles and the County of Los Angeles. In both cases, the land use policies use incentives to encourage appropriate development and the provision of community amenities. The policies of the City of Los Angeles rely more heavily on incentive measures, whereas the County ordinance mixes incentives with development standards.

Incentive-based planning often produces disappointing results, because standards are effectively voluntary and because the incentives are often not strong enough to entice developers to areas with unattractive market conditions. The City and County provisions have not yet been tested extensively for their effectiveness, but given historical evidence, the provisions are not likely to play a significant role in enticing developers. Market conditions and the availability of public funding are much stronger incentives.

### *City of Los Angeles Land Use and Transportation Policy*

The City of Los Angeles Land Use and Transportation Policy was adopted in 1993 and creates a series of incentives to apply to projects within one quarter mile of transit stations. The precise tradeoffs vary according to the characteristics of the station area: Major Urban Centers, Urban Complex, Major Bus Center, Neighborhood Center, Regional/Suburban Center, and Industrial Complex.

- *Community Amenities.* A density bonus of two square feet for every one square foot of open space, plazas, childcare, eldercare, or community meeting rooms.
- *Historic Preservation.* Special provisions through joint public-private efforts.
- *Pedestrian Enhancements.* Special street lighting, special street trees, special paving/amenities, bicycle storage facilities through joint public-private efforts as well.
- *Funding/Reduced Costs.* If the station is in an environmentally disadvantaged area, developers may be eligible for redevelopment, blockgrant, or housing funds; or tax abatements, increment financing, and tax credits from the City in the context of a joint development partnership. Developers may also be exempt from City fees, and delays for service connections may be avoided.
- *Density Incentives.* Reduced parking, land assembly, provision of housing, and combined hearing processes may permit the developer to build at higher densities than normal.<sup>10</sup>

To their merit, these incentives recognize that the City needs to make special efforts for attracting developers to station areas. Adjusting land use or zoning requirements alone will not necessarily make the station areas more attractive for development.

However, these incentives would not be expected to produce the best results around stations, because of their indeterminate standards. Pedestrian enhancements are negotiated in joint development agreements, suggesting that no definitive standards will be applied for street lighting, urban design, orientation of building entrances, or the location or amount of parking relative to buildings and streets. The negotiation-based incentive system effectively creates a system of loose, voluntary regulations, the outcomes of which are uncertain.

The public funding incentives may make station area development more affordable and thus more attractive, but in comparison, other incentives will not entice developers, particularly in poor market conditions. For example, if a station area has no market for housing, offering higher residential densities in exchange for reduced parking will do nothing to attract investment.

Another problem with the incentives is that they are attached to particular station prototypes. So far, the City has found that the prototypes have not fit station areas well, because each station has an established set of complex planning issues that are not well addressed through development prototypes. Incentives may be more effective if they are tailored to a specific station, and the City of Los Angeles will be developing a series of station master plans that will take this very approach.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> City of Los Angeles/Planning Department. Land Use/Transportation Policy for the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. (November 1993), 12-14.

<sup>11</sup> Interview with Lyn Harper, City of Los Angeles, 5/22/98.

### ***County of Los Angeles Transit Oriented District Ordinance***

The County of Los Angeles has a more comprehensive approach to transit-oriented development. Some incentives are integrated into the ordinance, but the ordinance also includes specific development standards for residential and commercial uses, including regulations for lighting, design, parking, pedestrian areas, public spaces, and streets and sidewalks. Incentives are more limited, focusing on a 25% reduction in fees and a 40% reduction in parking requirements.

Nevertheless, while the zoning policy itself has a better structure, it has little planning context in which to be used effectively. The County has no program to guide station-area development or to create new development opportunities. Instead, the County plans to market the new zoning ordinance to existing land owners, attempting to spur neighborhood-based property improvements.

### **PUBLIC FUNDING**

Most completed or planned projects in the Los Angeles area have depended upon public funding, as shown in Table 4-4, and public funding has been critical to the success of those projects that have been completed. The need for public funding results from two main factors. First, the economic recession of 1992-96 made many projects financially impossible without substantial public subsidies. Second, because Metrorail was built along old railroad rights of way, through industrial and depressed residential areas, investment at station areas has required substantial cost and risk. Developers often cannot afford to invest in such areas without public support.

**Table 4-4.**  
**PUBLIC FUNDING FOR DEVELOPMENT**  
**AT METRORAIL STATIONS IN L.A. COUNTY, 1993-1998**

Station	Project	Description of Funding	Source of Funding
Transit Mall, Long Beach	Pacific Court	Writing down cost of land; issuance of tax-exempt financing.	Long Beach Redevelopment Agency
Willow Street, Long Beach	Neighborhood Shopping Center	Cost of land assembly; CEQA review.	Long Beach Redevelopment Agency
Holly Street, Pasadena	Holly Street Village	\$6.9 million in low-interest loans; \$7.2 million in tax-exempt bonds through facilities district.	Pasadena Redevelopment Agency
Hollywood/ Highland, Los Angeles	Hollywood/Highland Center	Pending negotiation.	City of Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency
Little Tokyo- Arts District, Los Angeles	Little Tokyo-Arts District Transit Village	To be determined.	City of Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency
Pershing Square, Los Angeles	Grand Central Square	\$6.8 million in taxable bonds \$13.3 million in tax-exempt bonds	City of Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency
Union Station, Los Angeles	Union Station Gateway	None.	
Westlake/ MacArthur Park, Los Angeles	MacArthur Park Transit Village	None.	

Source: Dyett & Bhatia; Robert Cervero, *Transit Villages in the 21st Century* (1997), 240-51.

## IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

Implementation tools for transit-oriented development in the Los Angeles region has focused on the provision of public funds from Redevelopment Agencies to developers under the auspices of a joint development agreement.

- In Long Beach, the Pacific Court development became transit-oriented by coincidence. No overall plan was developed specifically for the Transit Mall area. In downtown Long Beach, the joint development agreement involved only the developer and the City's Redevelopment Agency; the project was not intentionally transit-oriented.

- The City of Los Angeles has been implementing station area development through its general Land Use/Transportation Policy of 1993 and through direct work with developers. According to the policy, many development requirements for stations may be adjusted in accordance with the surrounding environment, helping to ensure compatibility with surrounding areas. At the Hollywood/Highland station, for example, TrizecHahn was able to substitute outdoor circulation space within the development for a pedestrian plaza at the Metro station entrance. Although this approach permits maximum flexibility, the City sacrifices taking a more comprehensive and long-range approach to station-area planning. Station/Neighborhood Plans will create more specific guidelines tailored to each station.

**Table 4-5.**  
**IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS FOR TOD AT SELECTED L.A. METRO STATIONS**

	Downtown Long Beach	Slauson	Hollywood/Highland
Station Area Market Development Strategies	No	No	No
Non-rail Infrastructure Investments	Street improvements as part of area-wide Re-development program	No	Reciprocal Easement and Operating Agreement will determine role of City and Redevelopment Agency in construction & maintenance
Shared Parking/ Parking Management	No	Reduced parking requirements	Parking garage to serve theater, shops, and hotel
Expedited Permits and Reviews	No	Reduced fees	No
Rezoning	No Special TOD regulations; some rezoning at specific stations to suit joint development projects	TOD regulations	No
Land Assembly	Redevelopment Agency writes down cost of land acquisition	No	Redevelopment Agency assembles properties
Direct Public Investments in Projects	Redevelopment Agency secures tax-exempt financing to help finance development	No	Reciprocal Easement and Operating Agreement will determine role of City and Redevelopment Agency in construction & maintenance
Local Transit Service Design	Free shuttle from LRT to Long Beach attractions	No	MTA may adjust bus routes and service

The County of Los Angeles has so far not approached developers for joint development or specific station area projects. The strategy for joint development at the four Blue Line stations in the unincorporated County had focused on rezoning for appropriate development. No additional incentives have been given.

## **SUMMARY ASSESSMENT; IMPLICATIONS FOR SEATTLE**

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The experience of station-area development along the L.A. Metro system has certain implications for transit-oriented planning and development in the Seattle area.

- *Incentive Zoning.* The City of Los Angeles implemented a series of incentive zoning measures that are intended to encourage development along the light rail system. However, incentive zoning may not always produce the best results, and such measures may not be consistently applied. Direct public funding, flexibility in use controls and development standards, and provisions for high-density development may encourage more and better development. Incentive zoning is not necessarily more flexible than normal zoning provisions, because the options offered are usually limited and require that the developer trades one benefit for another.
- *Public Funding.* Most TOD projects in the Los Angeles area have benefited from public funding to some extent. Public funding has helped defray the cost of development, particularly for amenities like parking or pedestrian improvements.
- *Station Area Master Plans.* Jurisdictions in the Los Angeles area have made little use of master plans for station areas. Station-area zoning has been used to focus appropriate development at the stations, and individual joint development projects or individual developers have established the character or the predominant structures that define the station area. Although these elements may attract the appropriate types of development at some stations, this system promises that transit-oriented development in Los Angeles will remain unique to specific stations and will vary with market conditions. In an attempt to take a more proactive approach to station-area planning, the City of Los Angeles has recently started developing eight Station/Neighborhood Area Plans; this approach recognizes the value of creating specific plans for each individual station.

## **REFERENCES; ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

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Cervero, Robert and Michael Bernick. *Transit Villages in the 21st Century*. San Francisco: McGraw-Hill, 1997.

City of Los Angeles/Planning Department. *Land Use/Transportation Policy for the City of Los Angeles and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority*. November 1993.

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Southern California Rapid Transit District. *Joint Development and Value Capture Potential in the Harbor Freeway Corridor*, prepared by Blayney-Dyett. May 1981.

## **TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS**

### ***City of Long Beach***

Ruth Mizobe, (562) 570-6876, 5/14/98.

### ***City of Los Angeles***

Lyn Harper, (213) 473-3774, 5/22/98.

Mark Woersching, (213) 580-5244, 5/22/98.

### ***City of Los Angeles, Community Redevelopment Agency***

Kip Rudd (for Anne Marie Gallant), (213) 977-1635, 5/22/98.

### ***County of Los Angeles***

Fiona Schneider, (213) 974-6476, 5/7/98.

### ***Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority***

Kevin Michel, (213) 922-2854, 4/28/98.