

On Saturday, July 14, the League of Women Voters Transportation Committee hosted a public forum on Transit Oriented Development, LA ON BOARD? TRANSIT AND HOUSING INTERSECTIONS. Moderated by Alissa Walker, from Curbed LA, panelists included Christopher Hawthorne, Chief Design Officer, City of Los Angeles; Dick Platkin, Board of Directors, Beverly Wilshire Homeowners Association (and City Watch columnist); Mott Smith, Co-Founder, Civic Enterprise Development; Tunua Thrash-Ntuk, Executive Director, LA Local Initiatives Support Corporation; and Denny Zane, Executive Director, Move LA.

Denny Zane began the discussion with an overview of the transit situation in Los Angeles County. Currently, transit ridership, which is largely low income people and people of color, has declined and continues to decline. There are several possible causes for this decline, including fare increases and reduced hours of service, but Zane believes the decrease in ridership owes more to an increase in high income households (mostly the result of a growing tech sector) and an accompanying decrease in low income households (the base of the transit system) as housing costs rise. Transit-oriented development has been one of the most discussed possible solutions to this problem.

Zane, however, proposed looking at the approach taken by Santa Monica to build more affordable housing, while also preserving existing affordable units. Rather than raze areas around transit hubs to make way for denser housing, Santa Monica shifted new affordable housing to commercial areas like the development along Santa Monica's Third Street Promenade, which includes shopping, office space, apartments, restaurants, theaters, a hotel and a library. It is also near a future stop on Metro's Purple Line. In Santa Monica, according to Zane, about 1/3 of housing is affordable and the city has faced little opposition from the community.

In the following discussion, the panel identified a number of issues that contribute to the complex problem of changing Los Angeles into a transit-friendly community; one that is attractive and financially available to families and individuals across all income levels.

Issues identified:

- Affordable housing and improved transit must be approached simultaneously on several levels.
- Current transit in LA is not appealing
 - Transit doesn't run regularly and doesn't reach into enough communities
 - Subways and light rail don't have frequent enough stops
 - Transit hours are too limited
 - Efforts must be made to attract higher income riders to transit
 - Stations could be a focus with retail, parks, other inviting elements
- Transportation should be introduced into more neighborhoods where it could attract economic development and allow more people to live near where they work
- The California lifestyle (car-oriented, single family homes) needs to be redefined
- Providing parking increases development and rental costs and encourages people to use their cars rather than public transit
- Many housing and development proposals do not include measures to preserve currently available affordable housing - one of the problems with SB 827
- There is a need for onsite inspection and enforcement for developments that purport to include affordable housing (and who have consequently received concessions)
- No easy-to-use database of available affordable and section 8 housing
- Effective ways should be established to identify and incorporate community needs without allowing fears to derail overall plans

- There is no private sector solution to these issues. Large public expenditures are needed to create transit-friendly infrastructure: shade trees, restored sidewalks, protected bike lanes, pedestrian-activated crosswalks, retail, walkable neighborhoods

Some proposed solutions

- The City has committed \$200 billion to address some of these issues in the lead-up to the Olympics
- Provide free or very low cost transit for residents, possibly funded by sales tax - not all services have to make a profit
- Create dedicated bus lanes and protected bike lanes
- Update and enforce CEQA standards, and include an optional climate change element
- Update the City's General Plan as well as the community plans
- Cultivate mission-based developers to purchase existing housing and make it affordable
- Plan neighborhoods so services and entertainment are walking distance, allowing people to minimize use of cars
- Encourage telecommuting and flex time (Flex time was used to good effect during the 1984 Olympics)
- Institute a vacancy tax to prevent the removal of rental units from the market for Airbnb
- Use urban design to make transit attractive and to build a constituency
- Take advantage of current codes that allow denser building in commercial areas
- Incorporate cost of maintenance when considering a development proposal