

Latino New Urbanism

“Transportation and Urban Design: Solutions for Greater Mobility”

February 20, 2004

Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Panel One:

G.B. Arrington; Parson’s Brinckerhoff (Moderator)

G.B. Arrington of Parsons Brinckerhoff provided a comprehensive overview of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD), and what strategies seem to work. Some of his presentation focused on his statewide TOD study, “Factors of Success in California.” He emphasized that there would increasingly be more demand for infill development around transit as the market shifts towards the elderly population, empty nesters, and smaller families with children. Affordability is key, and there needs to be efforts made to discourage gentrification and the pricing out of lower income communities. He said “Don’t forget the rest of the community surrounding the project. You need to reinvest in the community for a TOD project to really be successful.” G.B. closed with the idea that projects themselves will not automatically integrate into the communities they serve, so that an emphasis on community buy-in is very important, not just simply expanding the number of projects.

Gloria Ohland; Reconnecting America & Editor, The New Transit Town

Gloria made a quick plug for her recently published book, “The New Transit Town,” and gave a brief overview of the community need for TOD. She emphasized the statistic of 43% of new growth could be accommodated by Transit-Oriented Development. She compared California cities to Denver, where there is a transit measure on the ballot right now to encourage infill development and inclusionary zoning. Such measures are needed in California to expand transit options for people who want to use them, according to Ohland.

Ernesto Vasquez; Architect, McLarand Vasquez Emsiek & Partners, Inc.

As a longtime architect on major infill development projects, Mr. Vasquez highlighted some of his more successful infill projects throughout California. MVE typically focuses on lower income locations, and on populations which rely heavily on transit options. Some of the projects Ernesto presented were in the Bay Area and San Diego. These included the Fruitvale Bart Station plan, “La Clinica” housing project in East Oakland, the Vallejo Ferry Station in Mare Island, and Rio Vista in San Diego, as well as “The City of Villages,” a San Diego planning project done with designer/planner Peter Calthorpe. Some of the MVE projects focused on Latino-style architecture and design. Ernesto stressed the community involvement in all of these projects and mentioned that

citizens need to keep pressuring their local government officials to ensure that affordable housing is definitely mandated in each community project, with no exceptions.

Nick Patsouras; Polis Builders, Ltd.

Mr. Patsouras began his presentation by stressing that New Urbanism comes in many different shapes, sizes, and cultures. It is not limited to the Latino Population, but can also be expanded to include the multifaceted face of Los Angeles. In his projects, Nick tries to incorporate community input wherever possible, especially for TOD projects. Mr. Patsouras currently has several proposals for TOD-styled developments in Los Angeles in very preliminary stages and one on Wilshire Boulevard in Koreatown that is further along.

Panel Two:

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris; Chair & Professor of Urban Planning, UCLA
(Moderator)

As moderator for the second panel, Ms. Loukaitou-Sideris introduced the other panelists and then stated the critical need for more Transit-Oriented Development. Anastasia stressed that in general, there are more accidents from transit in Latino neighborhoods than in most others. TOD should focus on safety in its design, and include neighborhood input. TOD could also be implemented around bus stations or other forms of transit, not just light rail. She added that its implementation should be more holistic in approach. One major obstacle is that TOD is often more expensive to build than other projects.

Diego Cardoso; Director, Metro Gold Line East Side Extension,
Metropolitan Transportation Authority

Mr. Cardoso kicked off his presentation with an analogy of a piñata. When a child breaks the piñata, goodies are spread everywhere, not in just one location. With the huge population increases predicted for California in the next few decades, transportation agencies are going to have to take a multi-pronged approach to addressing our transit shortcomings, not just a single line of action. One cannot just focus on rail, or buses, or bicycle transport separately.

He then followed with a detailed PowerPoint showing population projections for Los Angeles in the coming decades, and about the history and progress of the East Side light rail extension. The project actually re-invents the 1920s electric trolley system and is complemented by the MTA's Community Linkages Program. This linkages program focuses on development around transit nodes, and is primarily funded by local governments or by private funding through investments.

Laura Avila; Project Manager Gold Line Tomorrow

Laura Avila focused her presentation on how light rail will affect the communities it serves once the Gold Line is extended eastward to Montclair (Phase II, also now called

the “Foothills Gold Line” by some). The extension will provide an opportunity for major TOD in the downtown Azusa area, particularly as it complements that city’s General Plan update, which calls for more housing density in the downtown core. Gold Line Tomorrow (GLT) is a Caltrans-funded planning project that seeks to educate residents about the opportunities and benefits of the Metro Gold Line Phase Two light rail transit through the San Gabriel Valley. The project involves hundreds of residents, community leaders, policy makers and business leaders and will assist them in shaping future station area plans for the Azusa civic center transit stop.

Laura spoke about the challenges and opportunities her project carries with it, especially in a city with a Latino population of 64%. Her goals were to make sure that Gold Line Tomorrow works with the existing transit corridor, and making sure that the station area is viable, and in context, with surrounding land uses. Tying into the theme of Latino New Urbanism, some Azusa residents were sold on increasing housing density downtown, but others - “the Old Guard” - were not as welcoming. The goal has been to de-mystify the concerns about TOD, enhance community character, link the station to the surrounding neighborhoods, increase pedestrian and bike access and encourage compatible, as opposed to competitive, uses. The Developer Roundtable meetings, resident and business bus tours, and five consecutive community meetings were described as key avenues used to help achieve these goals.

Beth Steckler; Policy Director, Livable Places

The final speaker for the day was Beth Steckler, Policy Director for nonprofit developer and advocacy group Livable Places, who was very animated in her presentation. Beth represented the affordable housing sector and began her talk stressing the importance of increasing transit-dependency in Los Angeles. “We all know that car dependent communities are not good for our communities or our wallets,” she stressed. It is important to address the entry-level homeowner market and avoid gentrification by advocating for inclusionary zoning, and public subsidies. There needs to be a proper mix of housing types between rental and owner units, and linking parks with new housing is also important. Beth showed slides of plans for current Livable Places developments incorporating parks, schools, and housing in a unique mixed use package.

According to Ms. Steckler, the crux of the problem lies in the entitlement process itself and the community linkages. If infill projects are too lengthy, difficult and costly to plan, permit and build, most developers will lose interest. In addition, TOD housing production cannot keep up with the overall demand. As Beth summarized poignantly: “We can’t do infill development fast enough to make it economically viable.”