

CITY COUNCIL - TRANSPORTATION DAY

January 29, 2008

10:40 a.m.

“Transportation and Traffic in L.A.”

Verbal Remarks by Gail Goldberg

Today I would like to talk about why cities exist and why many people choose to live in large cities. I will also talk about some of the costs of living in big cities especially those that are growing. I will talk about the special challenges that make Los Angeles different from other large cities. And finally I will talk about how we begin to create a careful balance between the costs and benefits of living in Los Angeles.

Cities exist to bring people together with jobs, services, cultural and social networks. Cities attract us with a greater choice of everything from consumer goods to entertainment, and of course, jobs. Small towns don't have a philharmonic orchestra, sushi bars, or major movie studios. People go where there are the greatest opportunities; small towns can't compete in these qualities. People come to Los Angeles because they see an expanded horizon for themselves and their families, but with these opportunities, come costs.

Some of these costs are higher priced housing, a faster pace, more competition, but the cost we're talking about today is traffic. In every large city, all of these people gathered together want to take advantage of the many attractions offered by that city. If most of the access to jobs and services means traveling by automobile, there's going to be growing traffic. When the traffic demand exceeds the system's capacity, you get congestion. Still, most people continue to stay in the city because they think it's worth it. They are not opting to move to the thousands of small towns that offer fewer jobs, services and no traffic congestion. It's a fact of life that all large vibrant and growing cities have congestion.

However, even though people in Los Angeles put up with the congestion, it doesn't mean that they are not demanding relief. How can we provide some relief and what is the cost of those solutions? There is a growing recognition in all large cities that simply creating more capacity for cars or even finding ways to move cars faster will not solve the problem alone. Many cities have invested scarce resources to projects that offer only temporary relief before the never ending demand overtakes the new capacity.

Other large cities have successfully provided an alternative to many automobile trips with accessible public transit. But public transit, while critical to our future in Los Angeles, will always be challenged by our unique development pattern. Most other large cities reflect the more common pattern of development – dense clusters of urban development separated by much less dense suburban or even rural scale development. Connecting these dense clusters with public transit can provide a high level of connectivity between

people and the places they want to access. Los Angeles is unique in how consistently the density is spread over a huge geographic area. The densest areas of Los Angeles, our urban cores, are much less dense than the urban cores of other large cities. Our least dense areas are much denser than the suburban/rural areas of other large cities. This combination gives Los Angeles the worst of all worlds—dense sprawl. It makes transit a more challenging solution in Los Angeles, one that we need, one that we plan for, but one that cannot be the only solution.

So what are some additional solutions that planners can offer utilizing good land use policy? Urban planners have always believed that the ideal city maximizes access among its interdependent residents and establishments. In the 1960's Lewis Mumford, a famous urban planner said that the problem of urban transportation could be solved by "bringing a larger number of institutions and facilities within walking distance of the home." This observation is still relevant 40 years later in Los Angeles.

A typical household takes 10 trips per day. Only two are work trips. The other eight are for school, doctor's appointments, trips to the drug store, trips to the movies. We have some control over the 20% for commuting, but we have enormous control over the other 80%. It is these non-work trips we can affect most with good land use planning.

Most of these non-work trips are less than five miles. They occur within people's own neighborhoods. So if neighborhoods actually have drug stores, schools, movies, doctor's offices, restaurants and parks within walking distance and if the walk to get to them was a fabulous experience, or even just a really pleasant experience, some of our 4 million residents wouldn't be driving all over the city for their daily needs. That's what Lewis Mumford meant 40 years ago and is what I mean when I talk about a City of Neighborhoods. For short distances, we could walk, we could ride a bicycle (if it were safe and enjoyable), and we could take neighborhood DASH-like vans or jitneys.

If we could eliminate just one of the eight non-work trips for each of our residents across the city, we would reduce traffic by 10%. This would conceivably cost few, or no, public dollars.

We also must make transit more viable in Los Angeles. The most predominant complaint about transit in Los Angeles today is that it is not convenient to where people want to go. From the perspective of the transit operator, the potential riders are not convenient to where the routes are. This, again, is the result of the "dense sprawl" of Los Angeles. Both the uses and the people need to be located in "clusters" in order to make transit work. In the next decade, we have to concentrate on "transit oriented districts" (TODs) and "district oriented transit" (DOTs).

This is what "do real planning" means-- figuring out where to strategically concentrate different amounts and types of uses people want. There can't be a place for the philharmonic in every neighborhood, so where does it go? There can be movies in more places, but not every block. So where do we put them? There can be restaurants in even more places.

Smart planning is about matching up the uses and the people in a more perfect balance so that we create the most benefits for the most people, while spending the least amount of money and incurring the fewest environmental, economic, and social impacts. That means planning land uses to maximize opportunities for walking, biking, and alternative transportation while minimizing automobile trips. It also means making decisions that support these goals, like investing in our streetscapes, shade trees, beautiful bus shelters, and wide sidewalks. It means rejecting decisions aimed solely at moving more cars faster when they result in driving pedestrians away.

Finding this balance is a continuous struggle and it is always evolving. What was a good solution in the 1920's or 1950's in Los Angeles is no longer a good solution today. Conditions have changed and we must change our approaches and our solutions.

It is not reasonable to take people's cars away. What we need to do is make our neighborhoods more complete, more geared to the people who live nearby, places that have the services and uses people want, places where people of different economic levels and types of households can live, work and play. That way, as many of us as possible, have convenient access to our daily needs without having to use an automobile. One goal is to bring more efficient forms of transit to more neighborhoods, so that in the coming decades, when our city has tens of thousands of 80-and 90-year-olds, probably no longer driving, they can have a reasonable and affordable place to live and still go to a restaurant or a movie or visit their kids.

Consider how things will change when the several thousand apartments and condominiums come on line around the Hollywood and Vine Metro Station. No matter where those residents work, when they come home from work and on the weekends, they can walk a block or two and have access to Borders, the Pantages Theater, the Arc-Light movies, dozens of restaurants of all price ranges, drug stores, hotels, grocery stores, and many other amenities. Isn't it just possible that they will make only seven non-work trips by car instead of eight? And isn't it just possible that some of them will take the Red Line to their jobs?

Good land use planning is the means to provide the opportunities for a more sustainable city, a city where people have access to all that they need and want, but in an economically and environmentally rational way. That is why we must look for opportunities to link land use and transportation. That is how we can begin to reduce our traffic and congestion problems in Los Angeles even when there are another 2-1/2 million more of us living in the region over the next 25 years.

Linking Land Use and Transportation - The Role of City Planning in Solving Los Angeles' Congestion Problems

The Department of City Planning is fully engaged in numerous efforts aimed at reducing automobile trips, or vehicle miles traveled (VMT). The role of the Department is to link land use and transportation in order to make Los Angeles a healthy, sustainable and economically prosperous City in which jobs, services, and amenities are easily accessible to all residents and visitors, and which respects its unique communities and neighborhoods.

The following is a list and brief description of efforts underway in the Department that will advance these goals:

- 1. New Community Plans** – The Department is in the process of preparing 12 new Community Plans which will identify neighborhood needs, mixes of uses, and densities, create appropriate land use and zoning, identify the necessary infrastructure to support these neighborhood visions, and the financing mechanisms to implement them.
- 2. Transit Oriented Districts** – The Department has secured grants, and combined them with Prop C transportation money and General Fund budget to develop 10 TOD plans at rail stations—4 on the Expo Line, 3 on the Gold Line Eastside Extension and 2 on the Gold Line. Each Plan will involve neighborhood charettes and workshops and each plan will have a team of consultants to assist city staff. One plan is nearly completed for the station stop at La Cienega and Jefferson Boulevard, and the rest are in various stages of development. These plans will be very neighborhood specific and developed in conjunction with all stakeholders in each neighborhood. Plans will be very detailed and articulate a shared vision that leverages the rail investment so that it is an asset for the neighborhoods they are in for the people who live there now as well as for future generations.
- 3. Mobility Plan** – The Department of City Planning and the Department of Transportation are working together to prepare a new Transportation Element of the City's General Plan, to be renamed the Mobility Element. The Mobility Element will establish the City's vision regarding the movement of people and goods. It will establish values and principles that will serve as a foundation for citywide goals, policies and objectives regarding accessibility, livability, the relationship of mobility to communities, the multipurpose role of streets, economics, health, sustainability, innovation, and resources. The Mobility Element will be adopted by the City Council and the Mayor, and will thereafter guide land use, funding, capital expenditure, and other decisions made by all departments and elected officials.

- 4. Transportation Planning** – In the upcoming budget, the Department of Transportation and the Department of City Planning are proposing the creation of a joint transportation planning function for the City of Los Angeles. The City needs to (1) formally and structurally integrate transportation and land use planning; and (2) develop the in-house capacity to model and manipulate transportation/land use data in order to control its own destiny within the region and make more informed policy and capital expenditure decisions. The City needs the capacity to lead, rather than react to, regional transportation efforts, to develop transportation demand management strategies that reduce single-occupancy vehicular trips, to transform major streets into livable boulevards, to develop neighborhood tailored policies that use parking as an economic development tool, to leverage funding sources that link capital investments in parks, housing, transportation and infrastructure to bring implementation dollars to the City's neighborhoods served by transit, to develop streetscape plans and implementation mechanisms, and to develop a "tool kit" of innovative techniques to improve neighborhood traffic. The departments believe that an investment in this joint function will not only be fully cost recoverable within two years, but will save money currently spent by both departments on outsourcing land use and transportation modeling work.
- 5. Bicycle Plan** – DCP and DOT are working with a team of consultants to update the City's Bicycle Plan, which is a component of the Transportation Element of the General Plan. The Plan will identify gaps in the City's bicycle network and propose mechanisms for creating feasible connections. Community workshops will be held in the spring.
- 6. Parking Management Plans for Downtown and Hollywood** – DCP and CRA have worked with stakeholders in these communities to revise the way parking is incorporated into new development. We envision more flexible requirements reflecting parking districts, off-site and shared parking mechanisms, and in-lieu of parking fees that could be utilized for the enhancement of alternative modes and walking.
- 7. Grants** – The Department has sought and received several grants to develop technical studies and analyses to improve accessibility. This year we will be analyzing mobility alternatives, such as flex car, shared cars, jitneys, etc. to determine when and how they can be incorporated into development projects and/or through the public sector and we will be developing a comprehensive inventory of all existing and planned development at 46 of the City's rail stations.
- 8. Housing Element** – Pursuant to State law, the Department is preparing a revised Housing Element to address housing needs from 2006-2014. The Housing Element establishes the City's goals, objectives, policies and programs to create housing for all residents throughout the City, particularly affordable housing. One of the major programs of the Housing Element is to accommodate growth in strategically locations near transit.