

MOBILITY IN LOS ANGELES
THE L.A.C.T.C. STRATEGIC PLAN

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THE CHANGING AMERICAN CITY

Over the past four decades very basic changes have occurred in American urban areas. Population densities have plummeted, and urban areas have spread over many times their former area. A single example illustrates what has occurred in virtually all large urban areas. In 1950, the Philadelphia urban area had a population of 2.9 million and a land area of 300 square miles, or 9,400 people per square mile. By 1980, the population had risen by 40 per cent, to 4.1 million, but the land area had increased by 225 per cent, to over 1,000 square miles. In only 30 years the population density dropped by nearly 60 per cent, to 4,000. The popular conception is that the older urban areas have followed the Southern California suburban development model. However, this dispersion has been so substantial that the Los Angeles urbanized area is now second only to the New York urbanized area in population per square mile. If present trends continue, Los Angeles will lead New York before the 1990 census. And yet, while a large percentage of the urban population can now be found far from the city center in the suburbs, very substantial areas of high population density remain in the cities, including Los Angeles.

At the same time that residential densities have dropped, perhaps even more substantial changes have occurred in the distribution of employment locations. Business has followed the migration of residents to the suburbs, with new employment centers ranging from very low density to the very large employment centers such as El Segundo, the Santa Clara Valley and Route 128 in Boston. Again, however, by no means has all employment been dispersed to such locations. Downtowns are experiencing a resurgence of growth, and remain the largest and the most concentrated employment areas.

The dispersion of residences and employment has been driven by many factors, including inexpensive energy, highway construction programs, the proliferation of automobiles, income tax provisions which encourage home ownership and the government sponsored housing programs, which were established after World War II.

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Yet, the automobile, is not a comprehensive solution to the urban transportation problem. The daily traffic congestion, such as on the San Diego Freeway illustrates the shortcomings of single occupant automobile commuting during peak travel periods. The continued economic health and vitality of the city requires that progress be made in increasing vehicle occupancy rates during the peak hour. Public transportation plays an important role in peak hour travel, especially to downtown areas. In Los Angeles, for instance, more than 45 per cent of the downtown work force commutes by public transportation. Public transportation service is also important to the large number of people who do not have automobiles.

The city of the 1980's is very complex. In some ways the city resembles what it was around the time of World War II, when public transit achieved record patronage. In other respects the city is radically different. Not all of today's city can be effectively served by the conventional public transportation which was so productive in the 1940's and before. On the other hand, not all of the city can be effectively served by the innovative services which are so successful in lower density areas. In short, there is no single transportation service which can alone adequately serve the complex city of today. Both the conventional and the innovative have their place, and to be effective, public transportation must provide services which are appropriate to the markets of today.

THE LOS ANGELES SITUATION AND PROPOSITION A

Public transportation has been very successful in Los Angeles over the last 10 years. Total daily ridership has increased from under 700,000 daily to nearly 1,600,000 (including the SCRTD and the municipal operators). This figure is more than four times that of transit patronage in Atlanta and five times that of Miami, both of which have built rail rapid transit systems with substantial Federal funding. In the Wilshire corridor alone, more than 190,000 people are carried daily on the buses, more than 30 per cent above the total transit patronage in Houston. In the Wilshire Corridor, it is not at all unusual for waiting passengers to be passed by buses which do not even have even standing room available. This very dense residential and employment market will be served by the Wilshire Subway, for which

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construction funds will, in all likelihood, be appropriated by Congress this year. Additionally, the Los Angeles to Long Beach light rail line is being developed to serve that very important travel corridor. It is hoped that at least part of both lines will be open to the public around 1990. Both of these projects have enjoyed substantial support from the business community and continued business support will be important.

Beyond these important advances there has been substantial progress in the large employment centers outside of the downtown area. In large measure due to the efforts of organizations such as the El Segundo Employers Association and involved employers, comprehensive ridesharing programs have addressed peak hour mobility, through subscription bus, van pool and car pool programs.

In 1980, the voters of Los Angeles County, by a 54 per cent to 46 per cent majority, approved Proposition A, the 1/2 cent sales tax issue sponsored by the Commission. The provisions of Proposition A are as follows:

25% of the funds are committed to the cities (and to the County, for unincorporated areas) on a population share basis. This provision has no expiration.

During the first three years of the program, the 50 cent reduced fare program is funded, with the remainder of the funds being committed to building the rapid rail transit system.

Starting with the fourth year of the program, 35 per cent of the funds must be committed to the rapid rail construction program. The remaining 40 per cent may be allocated by the Commission on a discretionary basis for public transportation purposes.

For the first time in the history of Los Angeles, there are dedicated public funds, raised locally, for the construction of a rapid transit system. Furthermore, there is a mandate from the voters of the county to build such a rail rapid transit system. The Los Angeles County

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Transportation Commission and the Southern California Rapid Transit District are committed to fulfilling that mandate.

There are, however, threats ahead. Partially because of the reduction in the growth of federal and state operating subsidies, the annual cost of the reduced fare program is far higher than had been anticipated. This year, of the \$225 million being collected from the 1/2 cent sales tax, nearly \$130 million is being spent to maintain the 50 cent fare. Before the end of the three year fare reduction program (June 30, 1985), the full 75 per cent may be required. Beginning in 1985-6, however, the maximum bus subsidy will be reduced to 40 per cent, and our staff has projected that a deficit of from \$85 million to \$245 million could occur. Some minor part can be offset by a fare increase, but transit industry experience indicates that a very large fare increase would drive away substantial ridership and would result in, at best, only a moderate increase in revenues (and certainly far less than the deficit). Service reductions can reduce the deficit, but the magnitude could be disruptive. Addressing the 1985-6 fiscal crisis will require more than the conventional approaches of fare increases and service reductions.

The Los Angeles County Transportation Commission has adopted a strategic planning process to address the transition to the end of the reduced fare program.

THE LACTC STRATEGIC PLAN

As adopted by the Commission, the Strategic Plan mandates submittal of three alternative operating scenarios by the transit operators. These plans will include anticipated fare levels, service reductions, innovative service strategies, reorganizations and adjustments, and any operating efficiencies which are anticipated before fiscal year 1985-6.

The Commission has adopted the following goals for the Strategic Plan:

1. To minimize public transit trip time for all patrons

2. To minimize the necessity for increased fare revenues in 1985-6
3. To minimize the cost of the fare reduction program, thereby maximizing the contribution to the rail rapid transit system in the first three years
4. To minimize service disruption in 1985-6

The Strategic Plan process arises from a recognition on that there is a serious financing problem ahead. Transit operators are being encouraged to consider a wide range of operating alternatives, including both the innovative and unconventional. The transit operator plans are due by September 1, 1983, after which they will be considered by the Commission, which will adopt a county wide plan.

Some of the approaches which I believe have considerable merit are:

1. Substitution of demand responsive and paratransit service for fixed route transit service in low demand areas and during low demand periods, such as on weekends and evenings. This approach has been successful in Phoenix and Des Moines. In Phoenix, the substitution of a user - subsidy taxicab program for the Sunday fixed route bus service is saving over 80 per cent in costs.
2. Contracting of some services to private sector bus and paratransit operators. This approach is being increasingly utilized around the country, and there are good examples here in Los Angeles County:

The County contracts with a private operator to provide commuter service to downtown from the Santa Clarita Valley. This service is being provided at a 45 per cent savings when compared to public operator costs, and that does not include the vehicle and fixed facilities capital costs, which are included in the private, but not in the

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public figure. Moreover, the annual competition among the private operators has effectively limited cost increases to well less than public transit cost increases; in fact, the latest contract reflects a two per cent reduction.

The U.S. Secretary of Transportation has published a report describing the more than 100 private, unsubsidized subscription buses which operate in Los Angeles County. Operating costs are about 50 per cent less than those of comparable public transit service, and inclusion of capital costs would result in even greater savings. Many of these buses are serving your employees in El Segundo.

3. Restructuring of suburban and low density transit service on a radial, timed transfer design. This service design requires substantially fewer buses, while improving travel time and mobility. Timed transfer systems efficiently serve the lower density areas of Edmonton and Portland, Oregon.

None of the above approaches constitutes a comprehensive answer to the funding shortage of 1985-6, but each could make an important contribution. Furthermore, there are other innovations which might be utilized. Whatever is the ultimate mix, the implementation of cost effective and innovative strategies will be important to maintaining comprehensive mobility in Los Angeles.

Los Angeles faces a dynamic transportation future. Major new rail systems will be soon be under construction. There will be continued significant partnership between the private sector and the public sector, as the private sector increasingly offers assistance in support, planning and operating services.

It is hoped that the public agencies will take the lead in embracing alternatives which maximize mobility for the public funding expended. The role of public transportation agencies is to provide mobility and the issues of service type, modes and operator depend upon costs and

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market need. Public subsidies support public transportation not out of an affection for transit itself, but rather to obtain public mobility. The long term capital programs and the Strategic Plan offer the opportunity for an improved public transportation future in Los Angeles.