

# Victorville Hopes to Capitalize on Las Vegas Bullet Train

BY JOSH STEPHENS

**IN A FEW YEARS**, if the funding lines up and environmental clearances are issued, California may welcome the nation's very first high-speed rail system, a high-tech wonder that promises to alleviate traffic, reduce pollution, and get Californians to the blackjack tables as quickly as humanly possible.

But it's not the California High Speed Rail project. Rather, it's the proposed DesertXpress. Five years in the making, the DesertXpress may sound like a frivolous party train, recent federal approvals have brought the line considerably closer to reality than it has ever been before. And as the projected price tag for the state's high-speed rail system steams towards \$100 billion, it is increasingly likely that the \$6.5 billion privately-developed line could turn out to be the nation's first true high-speed rail system.

Under the lead of the Federal Railway Administration, DesertXpress completed its environmental impact statement in April and last month the line received preliminary approvals from the U.S. Bureau of Land Man-

agement. It has received public support from Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) and Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood. It has received opposition from environmental groups concerned about the train's impact on desert tortoises.

The exclusive, double-tracked right of way would parallel Interstate 15. As proposed, the line would go from Victorville, in San Bernardino County, to the heart of Las Vegas. The 185-mile trip would take 80 minutes, at speeds of up to 150 miles per hour and spare travelers the agony of the five-hour traffic jams that often back up on Interstate 15.

"That's a hellacious drive," said John Husing, an economist who focuses on the Inland Empire (Husing worked on an economic analysis of DesertXpress for the City of Barstow). "On Friday evenings and Sunday when people are often going for the weekend, it can be bumper-to-bumper practically all the way out there."

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# Sacramento Puts K Street Pedestrian Mall Out to Pasture



**SOMETIMES IT SEEMS** that the only thing worse than a street choked with cars is a street devoid of cars.

Forty years ago, Sacramento's K Street Mall — three blocks of prime downtown real estate not far from the State Capitol — was closed off to vehicular traffic as part of a trend that swept downtowns across the country. The premise was simple enough: the absence of cars would increase foot traffic. But — as in other cities — that foot traffic never materialized in Sacramento and merchants and planners in the vicinity of the mall have been clamoring for the return of

cars for decades.

Last month, they finally got their wish. City officials hope that re-opening of K Street to cars will be the catalyst for a downtown revitalization that, though palpable, has been hindered by the ghost town in the heart of what should be a vibrant city center.

"It has come up off and on at least over the last 20 years," said Sid Garcia-Heberger, manager of the Crest Theater, on K Street. "It was always something that seemed impossibly expensive and difficult from

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COMPILED BY CP&DR STAFF

**THE CLEVELAND NATIONAL FOREST FOUNDATION** and the Center for Biological Diversity filed a lawsuit this month in the San Diego Superior Court against the San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG). The lawsuit challenges SANDAG's 2050 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy. According to the plaintiffs, SANDAG used a deficient process to develop a flawed plan that will invest heavily in freeways at the expense of public transit, increase pollution and exacerbate global climate change. "The time to move aggressively toward a more sustainable way of life is upon us," said Jack Shu, president of the Cleveland National Forest Foundation in a statement. "SANDAG's plan promotes an unsustainable vision for San Diego County: More traffic, less transit; more pollution, no solutions." SANDAG approved its \$200 billion transportation plan on Oct. 28. The agency is required to update its vision for regional transportation developments every four years. The recently approved plan invests primarily in expanding and extending regional freeways, which will promote sprawl and reinforce the region's dependence on expensive, car-oriented transportation. Most of the transit improvements identified in SANDAG's 2050 plan would be delayed by decades and fall far short of creating a robust transit network comprised of efficient rail systems supported by bus, bicycle and pedestrian options. Instead, the plan would encourage more driving, leading to more air pollution. The American Lung Association gives San Diego an "F" on air quality.

**THE LOS ANGELES COUNTY** Metropolitan Transportation Authority Board of Directors approved a \$37.3 million contract to CH2MHill to examine a range of alternatives, prepare technical assessments, and environmental and engineering studies about alternatives to close the gap between the 210 and 710 freeways Thursday. The studies are expected to be completed in the fall of 2014. "Metro looks forward to moving this much needed Measure R funded project through an alternatives analysis and environmental process to make decisions based on data regarding closing this longstanding gap in our transportation system and improving mobility throughout this region," said Doug Failing, Metro Executive Officer for Highway projects in a statement. The 4.5-mile segment between Valley Boulevard and Del Mar Boule-

vard in the City of Pasadena is the only uncompleted portion of the facility. The "gap" has contributed to local arterial congestion particularly during peak traffic periods. Proposals have been vehemently opposed for decades by local residents in the South Pasadena area who fear that construction of an extension of the 710 would take thousands of homes and otherwise disrupt surrounding communities.

**AFTER REVIEWING** extensive public comments and feedback from Central Valley residents, agricultural groups and businesses, the California High-Speed Rail Authority released a staff report recommending a preferred route for the Merced to Fresno Section. The recommendation of the preferred route advances the northernmost Central Valley segment toward construction. Construction of this segment will generate thousands of jobs in one of the state's highest unemployment regions. The Hybrid Alternative generally parallels the Union Pacific Railroad and State Route 99 between Merced and Fresno. To avoid impacts to downtown Madera, this route travels east to be adjacent to the Burlington Northern Santa Fe (BNSF) corridor. The station locations proposed along this route include downtown Merced between Martin Luther King Jr. Way and G Street and downtown Fresno at Mariposa Street.

**THE ANAHEIM REGIONAL TRANSPORTATION CENTER** (ARTIC) received a \$7.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Transportation, from the department's Bus Livability and State of Good Repair program. The funds will go towards the development of the \$184 million multimodal facility near Anaheim Stadium. That cost could go up to \$380 million if the California High Speed Rail Authority assures local officials and the Orange County Transportation Authority that ARTIC will be a high-speed rail station and contributes funds to outfit the station for high-speed rail. Those funds have yet to be promised.

**ACCORDING TO A REPORT** issued by Los Angeles City Controller Wendy Greuel, the Los Angeles Community Redevelopment Agency failed to account for \$1.7 million in funds that it transferred to the city for a variety of projects that it wanted to shield from potential dissolution of the agency, per Gov. Jerry Brown's budget proposal. The projects in question

are worth roughly \$13 million, but CRA/LA underestimated their value. Greuel's office attributed this discrepancy to sloppy bookkeeping and not to intentional fraud. CRA/LA responded that the accusations were unfair because the estimate of the value of the projects was based on incomplete tax information, which is provided by the county at the end of the fiscal year and takes time to analyze.

**A TRANSIT ADVOCACY GROUP** in Los Angeles called the Crenshaw Subway Coalition has filed suit against the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority for allegedly failing to follow the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act in planning a new light rail line through South Los Angeles' Crenshaw district. The suit claims that Metro, and the Federal Transit Administration, failed to properly disclose information and analyze environmental impacts. The 8.5 mile line would serve a largely minority population south of the 10 Freeway. The suit is led by Damian Goodmon, who slowed the planning and construction of the recently completed Expo Line on the grounds that it would endanger pedestrians. The Crenshaw Line is scheduled to open in 2018.

**THE TRANSBAY TOWER** in San Francisco, a proposed high-rise that would reach 1,070 feet, might block too much sun for stakeholders in the city's Financial District. With the title of tallest building west of the Mississippi, residents are concerned that the tower will prevent the sun from shining in the city, casting what some are afraid will be a dark and gloomy pall over the urban parks. The purpose of the Transbay Tower is to revitalize San Francisco's economy by creating 1.3 million square feet of office space, 16,500 square feet of retail space, and support the new transit hub nearby, the Transbay Terminal. All in all, the project could rake in millions of dollars for the city. Residents are nonplussed by these impressive numbers, instead focusing on the 90 percent shade covering on Portsmouth Square in the winter time – a 40 percent increase over current rates – and the possibility of Union Square being entirely in shade at some times. According to San Francisco's "Sunlight Ordinance," any new shadows over parks must be approved by the Planning commission and the

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Recreation and Park commission, on top of the development's requisite approval by the Board of Supervisors. Supporters of the building say that the complaints are based on an inaccurate prediction, and that in reality the shade from the building will be much less intrusive.

**AFTER SIX HEARINGS**, Marin supervisors are finally seeing a nearly-finished package of new regulations concerning development in Marin County. The proposed regulations impose new restrictions on sensitive areas, such as places without sewage systems or the bayside corridor, and ease older permitting and leasing rules by expanding the criteria for acceptable exemptions, like for homeowners with minor projects or for businesses moving into vacant space. Some controversy is expected over several new regulations concerning homeless shelters, tree-cutting on private land, and increased fees on lot splits for affordable housing. Noticing procedures may also receive a facelift – according to the proposal, planners may not have to notify the public in writing before going forward with some small projects. The overall purpose of the package is to streamline confusing or inefficient rules and to align local regulations with those at the state level.

**ACCORDING TO A RECENT SURVEY** by Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz and Associates, residents in the six counties governed by the Southern California Association of Governments significantly favor the spread of transit and higher-density neighborhoods than highways and sprawl. The survey included questions about housing, public transit, commute time, and best investments of public funds, among other things. One series of questions asked participants to allocate \$100 between five expenditures, and maintenance of current roads and highways was granted on average about a quarter of the funds, while building new ones was granted less than 20 percent. On a question about future investment, 66 percent of respondents thought expanding public transportation

was more important than expanding roads and highways. Questions about commute time received about the same ratio of affirming the importance of high-density neighborhoods over sprawl. The new Regional Transportation Plan reflects the turn in thinking in the Southland – though not influenced by the survey, the proposal contains a lot more funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects over the next 30 years.

**THE ACCOUNTABILITY** and Administrative Review Committee of the California Assembly is looking into the justifications for state subsidies given to the logging industry. According to the Legislative Analyst's Office, the state government pays out \$18.8 million each year to regulate logging on privately owned land, for varied costs such as area inspection to erosion protection. The logging industry pays back about \$550,000 for permit fees, which balances out to a state subsidy of around \$18 million per year. In other regulated industries, California earns back regulatory costs through fees paid by the industry – but logging has avoided this, even though it impacts public resources. Owners of California's private forestland, which takes up 8.7 million acres, say the subsidy is justified because the industry provides public benefits such as wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, cleaner air, and 22,000 jobs. Loggers also argue that the industry has had a 50 percent drop-off in the last decade, and the state costs should be lowered.

**MINING COMPANIES** have claimed 285 sites just outside of Yosemite National Park in recent years, and environmental groups are less than pleased. In order to separate ore from rock, miners must apply cyanide and other toxic chemicals, which environmentalists are afraid will affect the Tuolumne River and the plants and animals in surrounding areas. All 285 claims that have popped up in the past five years are within 10 miles of the park. Since the Department of the Interior banning mining for a million acres around the Grand Canyon in June, preservationists hope that a compa-

nable moratorium or ban will be imposed surrounding Yosemite. There are 32 known illegal gold mining operations in California, according to the Office of Mine Reclamation, but the state cannot interfere unless a mine disrupts more than one acre of land or takes away more than 1,000 cubic yards of material.

**THE CITY OF OAKLAND** has announced a pilot program for "parklets," small public spaces in areas currently reserved for street parking. Parklets – currently allowed by San Francisco, New York, Philadelphia, and several other cities – are no more than six feet in width and typically are about the length of two parking spots. The city issued a set of guidelines and encouraged anyone who wanted to build a parklet to apply by October 24. The pilot program will test out eight parklets from the general application process, which will be announced November 4 and open to public comment until January. Permits will be issued in January to candidates who carry insurance, agree to maintain the area, pay fees of over \$1,200, and can show support from the community for the parklet.

**THE SACRAMENTO CITY COUNCIL** has approved an agreement with developers to build a new sports arena in downtown Sacramento, and has permitted the hiring of consultants to help with the project. Though the \$555,000 price tag – including \$375,000 from Sacramento's general fund – gave the council some pause, ultimately the spending plan was approved 7-2, with the belief that the investment will bring in far more capital in the future. Several contracts were built into the cost, such as \$125,000 for Barrett Sports Group and \$180,000 for parking experts. City officials have been attempting to negotiate with Anschutz Entertainment Group to help finance the arena upfront. The council-approved agreement will last until March 1 of next year, by which point the city must have a plan for the arena or the Kings might leave Sacramento. ■

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## Sewage Plant's Impact on Development Immaterial Under CEQA

*Wastewater authority tried to turn CEQA on its head to block mixed-use development*

BY KATHERINE J. HART

IN THE CASE OF *South Orange County Wastewater Authority v. City of Dana Point* (2011) 196 Cal. App. 4th 1604 (“*South Orange*”), the Court of Appeal for the Fourth Appellate District was asked to order an environmental impact report (EIR) be prepared to assess the impact of the environment on a proposed project pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Court of Appeal declined to order such an EIR. The Court of Appeal also addressed whether the adopted project was inconsistent with the city’s general plan and zoning ordinance, and found that the project was consistent.

### BACKGROUND FACTS

In 2007, a landowner submitted an application to the City of Dana Point to create a new commercial and mixed use zoning under the city’s zoning code and to rezone its property from the new commercial to mixed use district. The property to be developed sits on the coastal shoreline, adjacent to the South Orange County Wastewater Authority’s sewage treatment plant. The city prepared an initial study and determined that any impacts the project might have on the environment could be mitigated. Accordingly, the city prepared a mitigated negative declaration and circulated it for review in February 2008. The city revised the MND and recirculated it in October 2008. Given the location of the project, the Coastal Commission also has land use jurisdiction and would need to approve the Project.

At both the Planning Commission and City Council, the wastewater authority challenged the project on the grounds that the plant emitted noise, and bad smells, and that it created water runoff on the project site, which would negatively impact future residents. On July 27, 2009, the City redesignated and rezoned the project site, and adopted an MND for the project. The authority filed a challenge to the city’s approvals seeking that an EIR be prepared to

address the odor issues, and alleging that the general plan amendments rendered the land use element internally inconsistent. The trial court denied the authority’s request for writ of mandate, which the authority appealed.

### ISSUES/HOLDINGS

Was an EIR required to study the impact of odors from the existing sewage treatment plant on the Project (e.g., redesignation and rezoning of land)? No.

Did the general plan amendment create an internal inconsistency? No.

### CEQA ISSUE

The Court of Appeal first reviewed the standard of review in an MND case – whether there is substantial evidence in the record supporting a fair argument of a significant environmental impact. It then reviewed the purpose of CEQA, and highlighted the fact that CEQA is intended to study a project’s impacts on the existing environment, not vice versa.

Presumably irritated with the authority’s intent – that of protecting itself from nuisance complaints by potential future neighbors based on putrid odors from the plant – the Court of Appeal noted that “[the Authority’s] objection to the adoption of the MND for the rezoning essentially turns CEQA upside down.” The Court of Appeal analogized the situation to the one in the *Baird v. County of Contra Costa* (1995) 32 Cal.App.4th 1464 (“*Baird*”) case, where neighbors of an addiction treatment facility urged that an EIR be prepared for the expansion of the facility on the grounds that the site was contaminated. As in this case, the appellate court in *Baird* held that an EIR was not necessary since the expansion of the facility would not have any impact on the environment.

The authority raised CEQA Guideline section 15126.2, subdivision (a) in support of its position. That subsection states that an EIR must analyze significant environmental effects a project might cause by bringing development and people to the affected area. The Court of Appeal declined to adopt the rationale and noted that “the guideline deals with the content of an EIR after it has been determined one is necessary. It does not address the question at

issue here: whether an EIR is necessary at all.”

The authority also argued that the city was piecemealing the project. More specifically, the authority urged that the city should be required to consider a development project – not just land use changes on the site because to do so conceals cumulative impacts. But, the Court of Appeal noted that neither the scope nor size of a project on the site adjacent to the sewage plant would affect the odors emanating from the sewage plant.

### GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

A general plan is internally inconsistent when one required element conflicts with another or when a part of one element conflicts with another part of the same element. In this case, the city added a new mixed-used land use designation to its general plan. The new mixed-used designation did not conflict with any other designations, nor did it conflict with any of the goals or policies contained in the land use element. The authority claimed that the new designation was not internally consistent because it did not include a way in which to ensure that the new designation was compatible with surrounding uses. The Court of Appeal dismissed this argument finding that no land use designation is required to do such a thing.

### CONCLUSION

This decision reaffirms the decisions in *Baird* and in the *City of Long Beach v. Los Angeles Unified School District* (2009) 176 Cal.App.4th 889, both which held that CEQA is intended to identify effects of the proposed project, not the effects of the existing environment on that project. ■

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#### ► The Case:

*South Orange County Wastewater Authority v. City of Dana Point* (2011) 196 Cal. App. 4th 1604; 127 Cal Rptr. 3d 636; 2011 Cal. App. LEXIS 859. June 30, 2011.

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# Court Rejects L.A. City Council's Variance for Synagogue

*City failed to make proper findings, violated its own zoning code*

BY KATHERINE J. HART

IN THE CASE OF *West Chandler Boulevard Neighborhood Association v. City of Los Angeles*, the Court of Appeal, Second Appellate District, considered the validity of the City of Los Angeles' grant of a conditional use permit, height variance and parking variance to a Chabad of North Hollywood, which was operating a synagogue in a residential neighborhood within the city.

Starting in 1981, the city granted Chabad a conditional use permit and parking variance to operate a synagogue in an R-1 zone for a congregation of 45 people. The variance allowed the synagogue to maintain seven spaces, as opposed to 20, as normally required under the city's zoning code. Approximately 25 years later, the congregation had grown to 200 people.

As a result, in March 2007, Chabad applied to the city for a demolition permit to demolish the existing one-story building and two variances – one to construct a 16,000 square foot, three-story building of 45 feet (instead of 36 feet in height), and the second to allow five parking spaces instead of the required 83 spaces.

The City prepared a mitigated negative declaration for the project finding that the environmental impacts of the project would be reduced to less than significant with mitigation.

The city held a public hearing on the application on February 4, 2008, where various residents voiced concerns about the impacts of the project on parking and views, among others. Then in November of 2008, the City's Zoning Administrator ZA conditionally approved Chabad's application, including a conditional use permit for Chabad to build a larger synagogue in the R-1 zone, but reducing its size by around 6,000 square feet to 10,300 square feet. The ZA denied the height variance request, but approved the variance request for five parking spaces, and limited the hours of operation from 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. The neighbors appealed the ZA's determination to the area planning commission. But, Chabad also appealed asking for an even larger building and longer hours of operation than in the original application.

The area planning commission held a hearing on the appeals in February of 2009. It sided with the neighbors in granting their appeal and denying Chabad's appeal. Specifically, the area planning commission made findings that the project was too large for the size of the lot, would be materially detrimental to the character of the neighborhood, was inconsistent with the City's general plan, and lacked sufficient parking.

Starting in 1981, the city granted Chabad a conditional use permit and parking variances for a congregation of 45. Approximately 25 years later, the congregation had grown to 200 people.

In June 2009, pursuant to the city charter, the city council asserted jurisdiction over the planning commission's decision and scheduled a hearing for three days later. At that hearing one of the council members proposed to modify the project as approved by the ZA, deny the neighbors' appeal of the ZA's decision, and grant Chabad's appeal of the ZA's decision. The council did not provide the neighbors an opportunity to address the council member's proposal. Ultimately, the council voted for the council member's proposal to modify the project and grant Chabad a conditional use permit to construct a 12,000 square foot synagogue, 28 feet high, and with five parking spaces. The neighbors timely appealed the council's decision to the superior court.

The trial court denied the neighbors' petition for writ of mandate on the grounds that the

findings made by the City council in support of the conditional use permit and the parking variance were supported by substantial evidence; it also determined that the neighbors had somehow waived their due process rights and CEQA claims.

The appellate court reversed, granting the writ and ordering the city to comply with its own charter and zoning code in reviewing the ZA's determinations. It first found that the council had the authority, under the city charter, to review the planning commission's decision on the conditional use permit and variance, but that in doing so, the council "stepped into the shoes of the planning commission."

The appellate court also held that the neighbors did not waive the issue of whether the City council violated the holding in *Topanga Assn. for a Scenic Community v. County of Los Angeles* (1974) 11 Cal.3d 506 case and the city's own zoning code by failing to explain and make findings as to why the Zoning Administrator's decision was incorrect. Finally, the appellate court held that in reviewing the conditional use permit, the city council was required to make its decision based on the record, as to whether the Zoning Administrator erred or abused her discretion, and it was required to base its decision on the variance only on the evidence and findings of the ZA and the city council was only entitled to modify the ZA's decision, as it did, by making specific findings as to how the ZA erred, which it did not do.

Thus, the appellate court determined city council abused its discretion by failing to make the proper findings as required by the *Topanga* case. The court declined to address the issue of whether the city council violated the neighbor's due process rights in refusing to allow them to speak at the city council hearing on the conditional use permit and variance. ■

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► **The Case:**

*Chandler Boulevard Neighborhood Association v. City of Los Angeles* (2011) 198 Cal. App. 4th 1506; 2011 Cal. App. LEXIS 1162. August 16, 2011, published September 6, 2011.

# 2011 NEW BOOKS ROUNDUP

BY JOSH STEPHENS

OVER THE PAST FEW YEARS, publishers have put out enough books on urban sustainability to make Al Gore blush. Unfortunately, making a city sustainable takes a lot longer than does writing a book about making cities sustainable. So while green fatigue may have crept in, 2011 brought an eclectic array of books about ur-

banism and, in particular, about California. *CP&DR* has received some captivating titles this year, and somehow, California (or at least Los Angeles) continues to fascinate authors and photographers alike.

This year's crop of *CP&DR*'s most intriguing books ranges from a micro-history of the *Hollywood Sign*, to a luscious glossary of

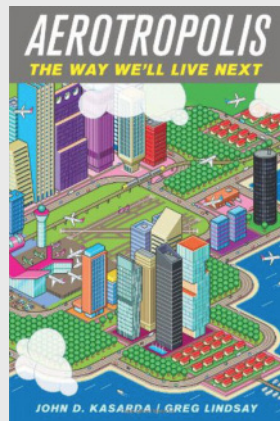
urban terms in the *Language of Towns and Cities*, to what may prove to be this generation's most enduring, wide-ranging account of urbanism, *Triumph of the City*. Though many California cities no longer have bookstores at which to pick up any of the following titles, *CP&DR* presents its inaugural roundup of urban books, just in time for the holidays.

## Books of the World

A CERTAIN BELOVED urban theorist once wrote about cities and the wealth of nations. With all due respect to Jane Jacobs, forget about nations. In the age of globalization, nations matter less and less. You'd think that cities would too, with the proliferation of electronic communication and the magic of the "cloud." But, argue John D. Kasarda and Greg Lindsay, one of the big reasons why cities will continue to thrive is actually up among the real clouds.

The somewhat unnerving implication of *Aerotropolis* is that the great cities of the global age aren't so much cities but rather are catchment areas for airports – specifically, airports that fling people and goods across oceans. We don't think of thriving cities today as "airport cities" the way we think of the great "port cities" of, say, the Industrial Age. But if the connection to a river or an ocean was good for New York, Baltimore, and St. Louis, then surely the connection to Asia, Europe, and even Africa can be good for the cities of today. Kasarda and Lindsay argue, in fact, that the connection is crucial. In fact, it's hard to argue otherwise.

All the efficiencies of globalization still rely on face-to-face contact, and many of them still rely on physical



## Aerotropolis: The Way We'll Live Next

by John D. Kasarda  
& Greg Lindsay  
*Farrar, Strauss, Giroux*

goods. iPods might not rot on a two-week ocean voyage, but they're a heck of a lot more valuable if Apple can flood the stores with them on the day of their release. The Asian city that can send that precious cargo and the American city that can receive it will both reap the benefits.

The best parts of *Aerotropolis* are those chapters that describe the incredible machinations of globalization, while going on a bit of a world tour. The authors connect the rose plantations of Kenya with the flower

markets of Amsterdam. They explain why Dubai is ideally situated to be the Constantinople of the future, with 3 billion of the world's most ambitious people in range of a single hop on a 777. They tell you exactly how your FedEx and UPS orders go from warehouse, to their respective mega-hubs in Memphis and Louisville, to your house.

Some of your houses might actually be in the flight path, for better or worse. The first chapter of *Aerotropolis* focuses on LAX and Washington DC's Dulles. The former is described as a potentially great airport that, over 70 years, has become hemmed in by a growing city and now hampered by cranky neighbors. The latter was once the middle of nowhere but is now a magnet for corporate offices; the Dulles corridor is one of the biggest "downtowns" in the country. At Dallas-Ft. Worth, the Las Colinas luxury home development caters specifically to bigwigs who need to catch a flight to Frankfurt right now.

The glaring problem with *Aerotropolis* is that the authors never really explain what "an aerotropolis" is supposed to look like. Is it literally a city built up around an airport? It is just an idea, like 'creative city'? Should it include certain uses and take certain forms? Is it whatever John Kasarda says it is? And what comes first, the airport or the city (the latter seems more likely)?

*Aerotropolis* answers none of these questions clearly. So it's hard for planners, for instance, to know what to do

about their aerotropolitan ambitions. At some moments, they dub every city with an airport economy to be an aerotropolis, in one way or another. At other times, they imply that there is some ideal aerotropolis out there, such as the new city of Songdo in South Korea, that perfectly, seamlessly merges the advantages of urban agglomeration with those of cheap, fast jet travel. They praise cities like Dubai and moan about cities like Los Angeles, London, and Bangkok, but ultimately, the only proper aerotropolis seems to be the one that Kasarda himself helped design.

And that's the most maddening part of *Aerotropolis*. At some times, we're cruising through the terminals of Singapore and Shanghai. At other times, we are confronted with full-on advertisements for the brilliance that is John Kasarda. Unique in the annals of non-fiction, *Aerotropolis* refers to its own author in the third-person, and it does so as if anyone cares. Lindsey is the book's actual author, while Kasarda – a professor of business who has been developing the aerotropolis concept (whatever that is) and advising cities for decades – positions himself as the star of the book, like Richard Florida with Platinum Elite status. Except John Kasarda is no Richard Florida.

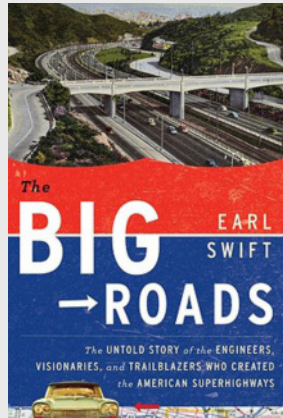
Kasarda would be better off presenting his ideas and leaving it at that. Instead, ham-fisted examples of self-promotion abound – without much real insight for planners who might want to find out how to get on board with the global economy.

## Books of the World cont.

**JUST IN CASE** you thought that suburbanization of the 20th century was a joint venture between God, the invisible hand, and a pot of gold delivered by the Freedom Fairy, Earl Swift's *Big Roads* might make you think again.

As it turns out, the interstates and other superhighways that gave life to the suburbs were not preordained. They did not design themselves, and they certainly did not build themselves. Swift gives voice to all those lanes of concrete that we take for granted now but were, in their day, one of the most audacious feats of engineering and public finance in human history.

The story of America's highways starts later than that of America's automobiles, and therein lay the challenge for early road-builders. Not long after the turn of the century, auto companies had hit upon the basic formula for the car, and combustible promoters like Carl Fisher – a former bicycles salesman turned founder of the Indianapolis 500 – told Americans to buy them. But for every early auto, there were dozens of stories of getting stuck in the mud, spooking horses, or worse. One particularly harrowing off-road journey was attempted by a certain Army lieutenant named Dwight D.



### *The Big Roads: The Untold Story of the Engineers, Visionaries, and Trailblazers Who Created the American Superhighways* by Earl Swift Houghton Mifflin Harcourt

Eisenhower, who participated in the first ever cross-country convoy in 1919. Cannonball Run, it was not.

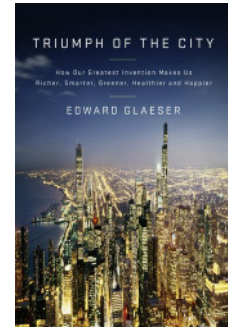
If there's anyone who doesn't like Ike, it's Earl Swift. Though the Interstate Highway System bears Eisenhower's name and is generally cred-

ited to him, Swift's gives credit to the forgotten engineers who envisioned a national road system while Ike was scarcely out of Basic Training.

The heroes of big roads, if highway-building can be considered heroic, are Thomas MacDonald and his successor Frank Turner, the engineers who led the federal effort at the helm of the Bureau of Public Roads. Both dull and exacting, nearly to the point of parody (MacDonald responded only to the name "Chief," and then with as few words as possible), neither makes a great protagonist for a national epic.

In the absence of human drama, Swift delves deep into the policies and funding schemes that first led to the system of U.S. "routes" and eventually to the cohesive interstate system that was codified in the 1956 Federal-Aid Highway Act. Swift covers both the national-scale questions of how many transcontinental highways would be built and how much money Washington would contribute, to the local questions and, particularly, those dark instances in which urban highways did as much to segregate cities nationwide as Jim Crow laws ever did. All told, the government committed 750,000 eminent domain takings in the construction of the interstates.

Swift himself takes a neutral position on the aesthetic value of mega-highways. But his main point is, that for better or worse, those roads didn't get there by accident. And, as a result, neither did the houses, families, and suburban angst that followed them.



### *Triumph of the City* by Edward Glaeser Penguin Press

**IN A PREVIOUS ERA**, Harvard professor Ed Glaeser, bedecked in his trademark three-piece suit, might have been the one of the technocrats out there with his slide rule and transit, "scientifically" deciding just how much of a neighborhood to knock down. But, today, urban planning's very own Don Draper has put quantitative analysis to a far more humane use. If Jane Jacobs wrote from the heart, Glaeser writes decidedly from the head. But he reaches much the same conclusions as Jacobs did: cities are wonderful and, most importantly for Glaeser, cities create value. Much of the data analysis – not to mention the poetic connections between Renaissance art, the Golden Age of Athens, and call centers in Bangalore – is intuitive to contemporary progressive urbanists. True to his conservative manner, Glaeser does not call for radical re-imagining of cities. His arguments imply that everything from historic preservation to urban agriculture to congestion pricing can be valuable only insofar as they support a city's ability to nurture ideas and increase prosperity. See original *CP&DR* Review, Vol. 26, No. 8, April 2011 [↗].

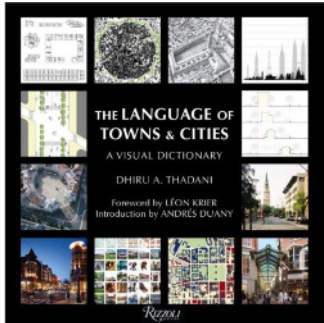
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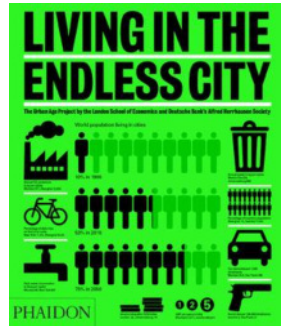




*The Language of Towns and Cities: A Visual Dictionary*  
by Dhiru A. Thadani  
Rizzoli

**THIS IS THE GIFT** that keeps on giving. *The Language of Towns and Cities*, an extensive glossary of planning and architectural terms, couldn't be read in one sitting, or even in one year. Lushly illustrated with photos, maps, and diagrams, it can remind planners of why they do what they do, and it can teach non-planners a little bit of the vocabulary that often makes planning so inaccessible.

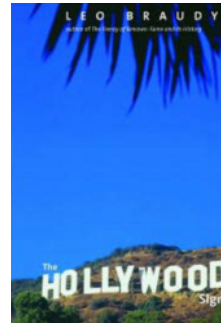
The metaphorical use of "language" to describe architectural form is often a cop-out, invoked when a designer or critic actually has nothing to say about a building. Indeed, "visual language" is an oxymoron. But this book takes language literally, with entries on everything from accessibility to fenestration to "parking: off-street automated system" to zeitgeist. Eminent architects and urbanists including Andres Duany, Doug Kelbaug, James Howard Kunstler, and Robert A.M. Stern contributed entries to this monumental coffee-table edifice.



*Living in the Endless City*  
The Urban Age Project  
Phaidon

**THE GROWTH OF** the world's urban population – famously topping 50% in 2007, presumably never to reverse course – has also occasioned the growth of books about that urban population. Exhibit 1 was *The Endless City*, published in 2007 to celebrate and theorize that global tipping point, and now comes its companion doorstop, *Living in the Endless City*.

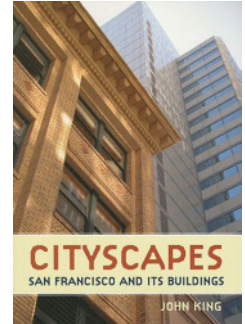
*Living in the Endless City* offers 430 pages of arresting photos, bold graphics, and statistics exploring what it means for humans to live side-by-side by the tens of millions. While its predecessor focused on six cities on four continents, *Living in the Endless City* mutes its ambition by focusing on only three cities: Mumbai, Sao Paulo, and Istanbul. Why those three, and why so few, is unclear. Among the images of skylines, graffiti, and traffic are essays by urban scholars – Saskia Sassen, Bruce Katz, and Richard Sennett among them – all trying to explain what this moment means and how humans are going to cope with cities that just won't stop growing.



*The Hollywood Sign*  
by Leo Braudy  
Yale University Press

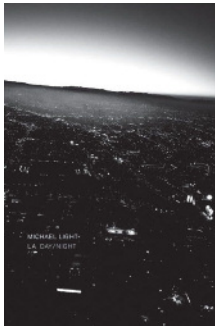
**CONSIDER THIS** for a moment: The single most famous landmark in the nation's second-largest city is not a skyscraper, a museum, a seat of government, or even a home. It is a sign. The semiotic implications are, to say the least, probably too much for the typical starlet's mind to grasp. Or even the typical professor, for that matter. Was there ever a more potent symbol of Los Angeles' superficiality?

For all the theorizing we can do about the Hollywood Sign, Leo Braudy's little history of a big sign adds a nice footnote to the saga of glitz that is Hollywood. Braudy acknowledges that "Hollywood" is a place, an industry, and an idea all wrapped into one, and he does a nice job explaining how the sign fits into all three. His account ranges from the early 1900s, when it was a dusty outpost, to the arrival of movie moguls, to the "Hollywoodland" real estate boom, and onward. He chronicles the sign's deterioration in the 1970s and the campaigns to save the sign, when the movie industry has shown rare flashes of civic pride. As it turns out, something two-dimensional can reveal stories that are more than skin-deep. Even in Hollywood.



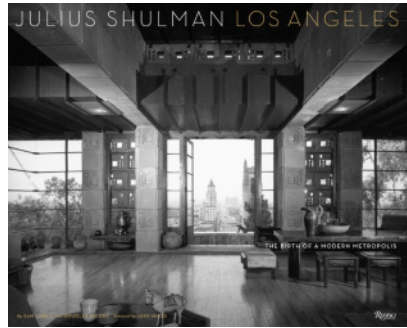
*Cityscapes: San Francisco and its Buildings*  
by John King  
Heyday Books

**CITYSCAPES** is the opposite of *The Hollywood Sign*. In his introduction, longtime *San Francisco Chronicle* architecture critic John King notes that San Francisco is often considered greater than the sum of its parts, often overshadowing individual architectural works that punctuate its liberal Victorian splendor. Hence, the book's title. King's mission in *Cityscapes*, though, is to see the trees for the forest, by highlighting 50 structures that he considers quirky, iconic, and uniquely San Francisco. King includes superstars like the Transamerica Pyramid and de Young Museum, but also reserves equal love for BART stations, beaux arts apartment buildings, houseboats, and an odd pile of logs called "The Spire." Pocket-sized, much like San Francisco itself, *Cityscapes* is a splendid handbook to California's most urbane city.



*L.A. Day/L.A. Night*  
by Michael Light  
*Radius Books*

**IF JULIUS SHULMAN** captured Los Angeles as a work in progress, then fellow photographer Michael Light has attempted to capture it as a finished product. As his title suggests, Light's monograph of aerial photos comes in two parts: a series of photos of Los Angeles lit by the sun, and a series in which the city fades into points of light against the darkness. So much has been made of the "sunshine and noir" theme over the years that it's hard to read too much into Light's work. Judging by the eastward tilt of the shadows, his daytime photos all appear to have been taken in the late afternoon, when the light gets soft and the horizon turns into a white blur. His subjects are the industrial nervous system of the city: rail yards, warehouse districts, freeway interchanges, and oil refineries. From his helicopter, the Los Angeles River is the city's spine. As for the city at night, it's neat to think that even when streets are reduced to receding pinpoints and buildings become black silhouettes, Los Angeles can still be recognized as no place other than itself. Light's ambitious photos are accompanied by a brilliant essay by *L.A. Times* book critic Michael Ulin. Of the day, Ulin writes, "this light...sucks the nuance out of everything, reddering(rendering? reddening?) the landscape as desiccated, dry" but then realizes that this lifeless image of L.A. is "nothing more than a trick of the light." At night, though, there are no tricks – and this is where planners should pay attention: "you cannot walk alone at night in Los Angeles...if harm befalls you, you are irrevocably on your own. This does not mean that L.A. is an unsafe city, just an honest one."



*Julius Shulman*  
*Los Angeles: The Birth*  
*of a Modern Metropolis*  
by Sam Lubell & Douglas Woods  
*Rizzoli*

**PREVIOUSLY REVIEWED** in *CP&DR*, *Julius Shulman Los Angeles* assembles a stunning collection by Los Angeles' signature photographer. Though the debate will forever rage about the spiritual, psychic, and even economic benefits of mid-century modern architecture, no one can deny that the severity and straight lines of the rational age look gorgeous through Shulman's lens. The collection reveals, however, that Shulman was not just a fashion photographer. He was not concerned only with Neutras, Eameses, and Lautners sauntering down the runway. Some of the more humdrum selections from his vast archive reveal a deep fascination with the development of Los Angeles and of the relationship between all those space-age buildings and the natural landscape on which they were placed. Come to Los Angeles for the masterpieces, but stay for the tract homes, factories, and sun-bleached schoolyards of Los Angeles in its heyday.

*Los Angeles in Maps*  
by Glen Creason  
*Rizzoli*

**IT'S PRETTY SAFE** to say that *Los Angeles In Maps* is a required part of any L.A. enthusiast's collection. Starting with an 1857 map of the San Gabriel Mission, ending with the *L.A. Times'* attempt to create a definitive map of every L.A. neighborhood, *Los Angeles in Maps* presents 70 historical maps with accompanying essays for each. The collection not only offers striking glimpses into Los Angeles' urban development, but also into the history and culture of map-making itself, with everything from spare maps of housing tracts and sewage networks to whimsically illustrated maps of literary landmarks, murals, and "sunshine fruits and flowers." Google maps may tell you where you are in Los Angeles, but *Los Angeles in Maps* tells you where Los Angeles has been.



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## >>> Development Envisioned Around DesertXpress Station

— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

While the obvious attraction of Sin City awaits at the line's northern terminus, its southern terminus doesn't offer quite the same degree of glamour. The City of Victorville is known as the center of the high-desert Victor Valley, just over the Cajon pass from the Inland Empire. Like its sister communities on the other side of the pass, Victorville has been devastated by the economic downturn and the collapse of the housing market. But the advent of DesertXpress has some thinking that a new, genuine real estate boom could be coming to the city.

"I think it's transformative from the standpoint that it's going to put Victorville on the map from the standpoint of it being really the first HSR on the West Coast...of any significance in the entire nation," said Victorville Mayor Brian McEachron. "A lot of that should spur future development in and around our city and will benefit all the cities and towns here in the high desert."

Currently, two sites are being considered for the southern terminus of DesertXpress. The more southerly site is farther from the center of town but has fallen out of favor because it abuts the city's landfill. Regardless, both sites have been included in the expansion of the city's sphere of influence, which was approved by the San Bernardino County Local Agency Formation Commission in 2010.

DesertXpress is now reportedly seeking \$4.9 billion in federal transportation loans. Even with such a daunting price tag, some believe that the project is viable, in part because the train has strong support in the Las Vegas area.

"I think it's real, mostly because it has a very large private sector commitment to get it done. It's not like the high-speed rail California, which is essentially federal and state and looks like it's going nowhere," said Husing.

If the the line goes forward, it could eventually lead to an annexation of the land surrounding the high-speed rail station and the development of a brand-new town center which, planners say, could eventually be the home up to 70,000 people. Victorville's current estimated population is 115,000.

Planning for the station and its surrounding area is likely to follow a far different strategy than that for the stations envisioned for the statewide high-speed rail system. Most of those stations, including San Francisco's Transbay Terminal and Los Angeles' Union Station, are in big-city downtowns. Whether Victorville can entice travelers to stay a while — between the time they park their cars and the

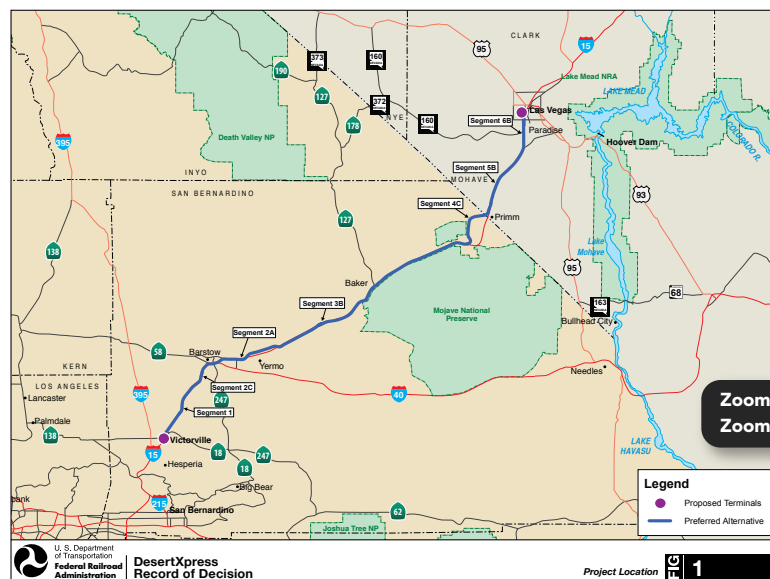
time they board the train — and whether the vibrancy of a station will be enough to bring life to what is currently a plot of scrub brush remains to be seen. (The current Amtrak station in Victorville is located in the downtown.)

The Federal Railway Administration's record of decision does not predict that the station in Victorville would spur much development because "unlike other rail lines, the Project would primarily serve non-work trips between the two stations; use of the rail line for frequent

comment for this story.

While DesertXpress is reported to be planning a surface parking lot that could hold up to 15,000 cars. DesertXpress has promised that the Las Vegas "experience" will begin in Victorville, but whether that means neon lights and showgirls, city officials are hoping that there will be some land left over for rail-oriented development.

"I think a train station in that area could spur a lot of development that would (otherwise)



DesertXpress would travel the 185-mile route between Victorville and Las Vegas in under two hours.

commute trips is expected to be minimal... Although anticipated to be small, there is potential for the Project to result in beneficial TOD effects within the vicinity of the stations."

That analysis, however, may underestimate the ambitions of DesertXpress' developers and the city. City officials say that it will and are already planning for it in conjunction with Transit Real Estate Development Co. (TRED) — the real estate development arm of the Las Vegas-based company that is developing DesertXpress. The agreement between the city and TRED was the subject of a lawsuit brought against the city in 2008. Stakeholder groups claimed that the agreement was a back-room deal that gave the company the right to develop the station and the surrounding area without a proper competitive bid or request for proposals process. That suit settled, however, and the developer agreement remains.

DesertXpress company officials declined to

have taken a lot more years if it weren't for the train," said the city official.

The city had already begun preliminary discussions of the planning and engineering necessary to link the southern site into the city's infrastructure; the northern site is four miles from current city boundaries and therefore will require a new round of studies and discussions on the part of the city.

"Because we expanded our sphere of influence to the north of our city to include land that would ultimately encompass not only the station but also the surrounding development," said McEachron. "We've done a lot of pre-planning with that organization and zoning."

McEachron said that the city has master-planned the annexation area for a full build-out that could evolve into a multifaceted community, with commercial, retail, multifamily housing, and amenities such as parks and paseos.

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 11

## >>> High Desert Cautiously Optimistic About Bullet Train

— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 10

“The commercial core that we have planned around it would allow an adequate band of development around the train station,” said a Victorville city official who requested that his name not be used. “The train station would be the core. But there is a band of commercial development, enough for shopping, hotels, conference centers and things like that. Outside of that ring, we’re thinking possible Victoria Gardens-style multifamily buildings.”

Victoria Gardens is an upscale lifestyle and shopping center in Rancho Cucamonga, on the southern end of the Cajon Pass.

While DesertXpress will be designed to serve the transportation needs of eager partiers, it may also affect transportation and employment patterns in Victorville. McEachron said that the construction would generate 28,000 jobs in San Bernardino County, plus jobs that would be associated with the train’s eventual operation. That means that area residents, many

of whom have suffered in the recession, would not have to go over the Cajon Pass for work.

“The primary earners are commuters down to places like Ontario,” said Husing. “So this will add to the local job base.”

Despite the enthusiasm and development opportunities, some in Victorville are wary of scheduling any ribbon-cuttings just yet. While Victorville has reaped the economic benefits of nearby Southern California Logistics Airport, other seemingly ideal megaprojects have come and gone.

“I think at the end of the day is that the challenge that the High Desert region has...always have projects like this on the horizon, and they don’t happen,” said Joseph W. Brady, president of the Bradco Companies, a commercial leasing brokerage based in Victorville. “I’d love to see a bunch of development out there, but I’m also realistic. I’m not going to be a part of convincing people to speculate on land that may

or may not happen.”

Brandy and McEachron both said that the ultimate ambition is for DesertXpress to eventually traverse the Antelope Valley and connect with the planned California High-Speed Rail station in Palmdale. But with the state system facing an uncertain future, many stakeholders in Victorville will be happy just being the portal to Las Vegas.

“If they can push this thing forward and put the money in the ground and people use it, then God bless them, because everybody’s going to win,” said Brady. ■

### > Contacts:

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John Husing, Economics & Politics, Inc., [john@johnhusing.com](mailto:john@johnhusing.com)

Brian McEachron, Victorville Mayor, 760.955.5000

Victorville Planning Division, 760.955.5135

## >>> Planners Hope Cars, Peds Will Get Along on K Street

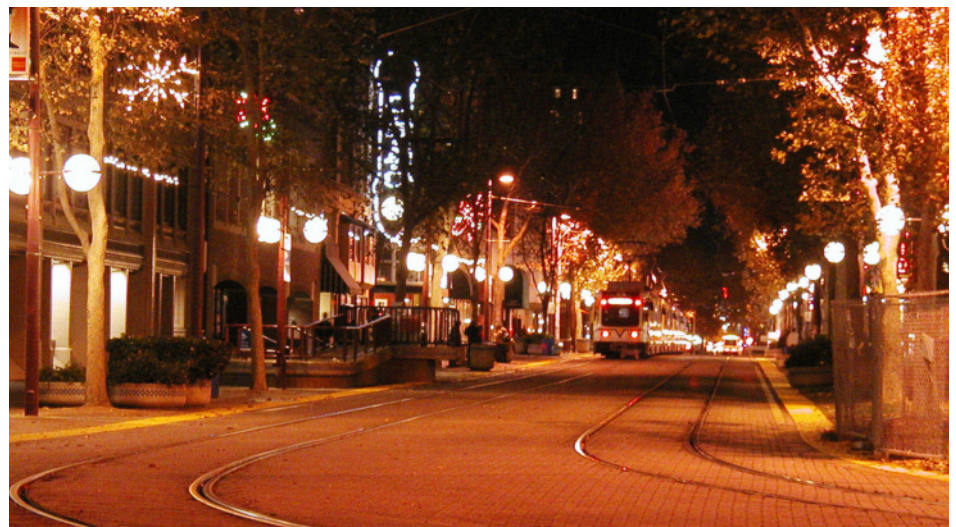
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a traffic planning point of view. So it never really got traction. This time around, the sun, moon, and stars aligned, and here we are.”

The new K Street features extra-wide sidewalks and only two lanes of traffic, which is shared between vehicular traffic and a segment of the city’s light rail system. K Street therefore is not expected to become a major thoroughfare but will nonetheless restore what planners consider to be a balance between pedestrian friendliness and the activity that naturally comes with cars.

“It’s not enough for a city to simply close a portion of its streets to vehicular traffic; the land uses and streetscape must be reconsidered to accommodate pedestrian activity and safety,” said Jessica Schmidt, a planner who has conducted research on pedestrian malls.

The failure of the K Street Mall stands in stark contrast with successful pedestrian-only streets across the country. Burlington, Vermont; Aspen, Colorado; and Boulder, Colorado, have all created successful outdoor spaces in the hearts of their respective downtowns. And, Santa Monica’s bustling Third Street Promenade – the gold standard for pedestrian malls – dispels the notion that Southern Californians refuse to walk. Meanwhile, New York City has fa-



NEIGHBORHOODS.ORG

Streetlamps, holiday decorations and the Sacramento Light Rail on K Street Mall made for a picturesque night scene prior to its reopening to vehicular traffic. The only things missing were people.

mously closed off stretches of Broadway to traffic, creating instant urban plazas with little more than paint and inexpensive outdoor furniture.

However, like many other pedestrian malls – including those in Redding and Fresno – failed to hit on the right formula. Rather than

attract pedestrians seeking an unimpeded stroll, K Street repelled them with its emptiness.

Indeed, without a thriving commercial district in the first place, a pedestrian mall cannot create foot traffic. It reflects the surrounding

— CONTINUED ON PAGE 12

## >>> Cities Bid Good Riddance to 1960s Pedestrian Malls

— CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

environment but is not a catalyst for change. In the case of Sacramento, everyone who should have been visiting K Street was at home on the outskirts of the urbanized area.

“You not only have the competition from the suburbs but you also have the general decline of the downtown,” said Sid Garcia-Heberger general manager of the Crest Theater, a historic movie theater and performance space.

Heberger said that without incidental traffic passing through K Street – enabling drivers to, for instance, see the Crest Theater’s marquee or the display windows of shops – some Sacramentans hardly knew that there was a street they could walk down. And at nighttime, without the lunch crowds from nearby offices, K Street was nearly empty.

“Property owners and business owners have wanted visibility for their businesses for a long time, and after 42 years we’re able to give them that visibility,” said Leslie Fritzsche, downtown development manager for the City of Sacramento. “People don’t even know that they’re there.”

Despite the success of some pedestrian malls, the story of K Street is hardly unique. Pedestrian malls arose at a time when populations were shifting dramatically towards the suburbs, and planners did not necessarily know how to maintain organic urban places as they emptied out.

“Many downtowns were closed to vehicular traffic to try to recreate suburban shopping mall conditions in an urban setting and Main Streets were unable to compete with their newer, shinier counterparts,” said Schmidt. Indeed, in Redding the city put a roof on the mall so that it completely mimicked a mall.

Planners in many other cities have come to the same conclusions as those in Sacramento did and already taken down their bollards.

“I think that pedestrian malls were a bit of a cliché when they were implemented in the 1960s,” said Steve Davies, Sr. Vice President at the advocacy group Project for Public Spaces. “Most have been retrofitted in some way or another.”

Are Sacramento planners committing heresy by inviting traffic? Davies insisted that the demise of pedestrian malls does not contradict the movement towards pedestrian-friendly environments that many urban planners are advocating and that new laws, such as Senate Bill 375, are promoting.

“There’s nothing wrong with cars. It’s all about a balance with cars,” said Davies. “Streets



JOHN PASTOR

A typical Friday evening on the K Street Mall, shown here February 18, 2011, is devoid of pedestrians and cars. City officials hope that reopening it to automobile traffic will invigorate the downtown area.

are multi-functional places. They have to serve a variety of uses for light rail, pedestrians, cars, bicycles....it’s a mix that needs to accommodate all sorts of diverse functions. It’s not all sitting on benches and looking at trees.”

Davies noted that even with density and activity, an entirely closed-off street does not necessarily appeal to pedestrians, who may consider the space to be too open.

“There’s something psychological,” said Davies. “When you look at how people actually walk along pedestrian malls, they cling to the edges and the storefronts like it’s this ghost street in the middle.” He noted that Santa Monica’s Third Street Promenade includes a “fake street,” which runs down the middle and gives pedestrians a defined space in which to walk.

The design of the new K Street attempts to strike a balance between the space occupied by cars and trains and the space open to pedestrians.

“We wanted to make sure that the pedestrian experience wasn’t changed and that they still had opportunity for wide sidewalks and all of the aesthetics that a wider sidewalk provides,” said Fritzsche.

The re-opening of K Street is not expected to spur traffic – foot or otherwise – all by itself.

The city has struck an agreement for a major mixed use development in the 700 block, and officials are also hoping to revitalize the suffering Westfield mall, itself a remnant of 1960s urbanism, at the foot of K Street.

“We certainly would like them to do a little bit more and turn it inside-out more so that it’s facing the ‘letter’ streets more effectively,” said Fritzsche. She said that the arrival of a car dealership and the expansion of a fitness club are positive signs.

In the meantime, stakeholders on K Street are eagerly waiting to see how Sacramentans respond to the resurrected street.

“We definitely are going to have some learning curves. I think people are not quite used to the idea that it’s a street,” said Heberger. “Overall it’s pretty exciting to look out and see cars going by.” ■

### > Contacts:

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## A Decade into Downtown Revitalization, Cities Face Tough Decisions

**DOWNTOWN LOS ANGELES'** residential population nearly tripled between 2000 and 2008. There are now about 45,000 people who call Downtown home, including my wife and I, who recently celebrated the anniversary of our move to Downtown (or DTLA as it's become known among locals). We are, in many ways, exactly what planners had in mind when they began to promote downtowns as residential neighborhoods. In Los Angeles, the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance, enabling developers to convert older commercial buildings into apartments and lofts, is credited with sparking this movement.

My wife and I rely on public transportation to get to work and share one car, which we drive primarily on the weekends. We dine at a wide variety of restaurants, watch the latest movies at a first-rate theater, enjoy diverse cultural events, walk to our church, and go to the gym without driving. These benefits of downtown living are obvious and have certainly helped to attract people like us to Downtown. However, now that we are more than ten years into the rebirth of Downtown, the area's evolution remains unclear. Whether Downtown can keep its existing residents in the long-term and draw in new ones will depend to a great extent on the provision and improvement of critical amenities like schools and parks. Two recent community meetings highlighted the divergent paths that Downtown Los Angeles – like other revitalized downtowns from Oakland to San Diego – might follow.

On November 3, 2011, a group of neighborhood churches hosted a town hall meeting for residents who wanted to learn more about schooling options available in the area and discuss ways to make Downtown more kid-friendly. According to a recent study by the Downtown Center Business Improvement District, over 18% of Downtown residents either have kids at home or plan to start a family soon. It was clear that contrary to public perception, there are a number of quality public and charter schools within close proximity to Downtown in neighborhoods such as Chinatown and Elysian Park. However, some South Park residents expressed a desire for a new elementary school within walking distance from their homes. It is an understandable desire. People live downtown so that they can abandon their cars. Having to make two round-trip drives per day to pick the kids up at school defeats the purpose.

A week later, City Councilmember José Huizar hosted "The Future of Your Downtown." Contrary to the big picture feel of the event title, the meeting was actually focused on two related planning initiatives: Bringing Back Broadway and the L.A. Streetcar. Bringing Back Broadway is the effort to revitalize Broadway, one of the birthplaces of vaudeville and

film, and one of the city's oldest, most storied corridors. The proposed L.A. Streetcar is an approximately 4-mile system that would serve areas including Bunker Hill, Grand Avenue and the Music Center, Historic Broadway and the Historic Core, South Park, LA Live, and the Convention Center.

As a Downtown resident, I certainly like to see exciting new projects. However, a cohesive vision of the future of Downtown appears to be missing. By this, I mean that there are numerous planning efforts happening in DTLA, but they seem to be considered in isolation rather than together comprehensively (the same could probably be said for the other California cities that are planning streetcar lines, see *CP&DR* Vol. 25, No. 21, Nov. 2010 [↗]). Tellingly, the issue of schools was only briefly mentioned at this meeting when a member of the audience asked about the potential to convert unused historic commercial buildings on Broadway to charter or public schools. As well, this meeting was generally more concerned about attracting visitors to DTLA rather than maintaining or increasing its residential population.

DTLA can be both a vibrant residential community and a successful tourist attraction; the two visions can complement rather than conflict with each other. However, much more resources and attention have been given to projects designed primarily to attract visitors like Bringing Back Broadway, the L.A. Streetcar, and even a professional football stadium. In order to create well-rounded urban centers in Los Angeles and elsewhere, planning efforts must focus on maintaining and growing resident populations. This means the provision of quality schooling and recreational options must become priorities in Downtown. My sister often gives me props for living the true urban life. I am convinced that more people will continue living this urban life or try it for the first time when they are assured that DTLA does not just offer good restaurants, shops, and entertainment, but also great schools, parks, and other vital amenities.

Planners, developers, and civic leaders deserve credit for the massive efforts they have put forth to make old city centers viable residential areas. But planning is a perpetual, generational project. It is not enough to look ten years back and marvel at how far we have come. We also have to look ten, or twenty, years ahead and decide what sort of life downtown dwellers want for themselves and – by then – for their children.

– CLEMENT LAU | DECEMBER 6, 2011 ■

*Clement Lau is a planner and freelance writer based in Los Angeles.*

"It's said that great minds think alike.

Sometimes great firms do, too."

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## SCAG Members Join Hands Over Draft SCS



**FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER**, civic leaders in Southern California have been touting “regionalism.” They insist that an area as interconnected as Los Angeles and its satellites really ought to coordinate how it grows and what it invests in. This sort of rhetoric usually goes no further than sparsely attended final panel discussions at conferences about leadership or land use or some such. It’s hard to “be regional” when everything from county boundaries to uncooperative public officials keep everything in its respective silos.

Last week, however, Southern California finally got something to be regional about.

At its regional council meeting Dec. 1, the leadership of the Southern California Association of Governments unveiled its draft Sustainable Communities Strategy and Regional Transportation Plan [↖]. The SCS was crafted by SCAG planners to respond to the demands of Senate Bill 375, the 2008 law that requires urban regions in California to coordinate their land use and transportation planning in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In the two-month comment period to come, SCAG members and other stakeholders will no doubt grouse emphatically about this or that detail in the RTP. But if last week’s event is any indication, the advent of the SCS may mark a new day in regional governance. (Bear in mind that this “region” has a larger population, and has more political subunits, than most nation-states do.)

As if all that pent up desire for regional cooperation has finally found

a worthy project, city representatives and other stakeholders who offered their comments overwhelmingly supported the spirit of the RTP and exhorted their colleagues and counterparts to cooperate for the good of SCAG and of the plan itself. More than one speaker compared SCAG favorably to the California Legislature and to the U.S. Congress. They said that SCAG and its constituents can prove that regional governance can get things done when others have failed.

For a few moments, it almost felt as if the SCAG region was not part of a bankrupt state and an indebted, politically fractured country. But, of course, it is. So all the optimism and accord may not be able to obviate the fact that implementing the RTP and re-organizing land use for a region of 12 million people may cost a ducat or two. Where they will come from is open to debate.

But SCAG may be off to a good start. It, like its fellow “Big Four” MPOs, clearly has a renewed sense of purpose and a common goal. And now that SB 375 is on the books, there was no sign of the bitter debates over per capita emissions goals – largely between suburban and urban representatives – that complicated the goal-setting process that the California Air Resources Board underwent this time last year.

Now if only Congress could follow SCAG’s lead.

– JOSH STEPHENS | DECEMBER 5, 2011 ■

