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DESIGNS FOR A NEW CALIFORNIA
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PUBLIC AFFAIRS AND UCLA EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

THE FUTURE OF MOBILITY
HOW WILL LOS ANGELES GET AROUND?

EDITOR'S

NOTE

BLUEPRINT

A magazine of research, policy, Los Angeles and California

“THE JETSONS.” “CHITTY CHITTY BANG BANG.” “STAR WARS.” “BLADE Runner.” From lighthearted to dystopian, these and countless other fragments of modern culture hold a technological fantasy in common: They assume a flying car.

For those of a certain age, the flying car has stood as a marker of the future, a symbol of aspiration and liberation — the expansion of freedom into a third dimension. Once that car was finally here, drivers would have the liberty of controlling their movement not only left and right but also up and down.

This has particular resonance in Los Angeles — and thus Hollywood, where most of those films and programs were made. For, as we all know, Los Angeles is the home of the freeway. No city is more attached to its freeways for getting around, and none has grown up more in relationship to its freeways — their impact on commerce, communities and culture is fundamental to how this city came to be.

But the freeways that were so formative have now become an anchor on the region’s ambitions. Can a car culture be compatible with mitigating climate change? Can the sense of freedom that comes with driving oneself be found on trains? Even such basic matters as family structure begin to feel the strain when cars and traffic put so many residents so far away from their workplaces. And then there’s traffic.

Here’s Step 1: If Los Angeles is to grow healthier and safer, it must give up some of its reliance on cars and freeways.

Fair enough. Even car enthusiasts see that the age of the freeway is passing. But figuring out what comes next, Step 2, is more difficult. It’s one thing to observe that a freeway-based society has problems, but it is another

to solve the problems. If the freeway is Los Angeles’ mobility past, then what is its future, and how do we get there?

There is no shortage of intelligence being devoted to that question, and this issue of *Blueprint* sets out to survey some of the thinking. As always, our work is guided by two objectives: to introduce research to policy makers and, at the same time, to remind researchers of the real-world limitations of cutting-edge science.

Both camps have much to learn. Those who fashion policy need to think big — not to settle for carpool lanes or hybrid vehicles when the Earth is rising to a boil. At the same time, those who look beyond the horizon need to remember that it takes more than a nifty invention to change the way society is organized. Trains today are faster and more efficient than anything their inventors could have imagined at the dawn of the 1800s, but riders who once happily gave up horses to ride the rails now hesitate to board a Metro car with a homeless person.

Imagining transportation’s future can be fun. Building for it requires laws and regulations and infrastructure. A flying car is no good without a place to land.



JIM NEWTON

Editor-in-chief, *Blueprint*

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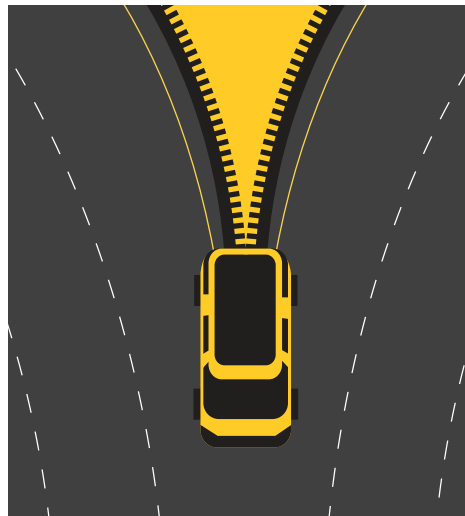
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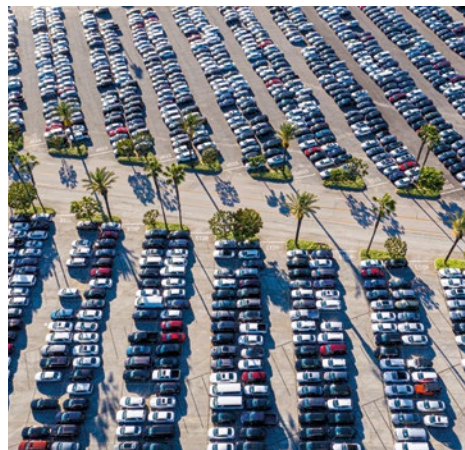
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LANDSCAPE BLUEPRINT



NOMA BAR

L.A., THE NEW TWO-PARTY CITY

With no Republicans left, city politics divide between Left and Lefter.

CALIFORNIA IS A LOCKED-AND-LOADED BASTION of the Democratic Party. The 46.6% of state voters registered Democrat is nearly double the 24.4% who identify as Republican. The last time a GOP candidate won a statewide race was 18 years ago.

In Los Angeles, the lean to the left is even heavier. Just one of five county supervisors is a Republican. In the city itself, exactly zero of the 18 elected officials bear an R. Even being a former Republican can be an albatross — just ask Rick Caruso, who spent \$109 million on his campaign but got trounced by Democrat Karen Bass.

Yet despite, or perhaps because of, all this, Los Angeles is slowly becoming a two-party city — just not in the way you expect.

Democrats dominate local politics, but there is an increasing challenge from the left. In the last two election cycles a trio of incumbent City Council members got bounced — before that it had been 18 years since a sitting council rep lost. There are serious challenges for two more council seats in this month's elections.

City races are nonpartisan, and the new wing does not fall under a specific party banner. But local political observers clearly see the gulf, and the upstarts get a few different tags, among them Democratic Socialists, or even straight-up Socialists. Progressives may be the most common label, although the *L.A. Times* came up with the more-apt Super-Progressives. Whatever the term, since 2020 many voters have had more choice than just traditional centrist Democrats.

Why is this happening? Several reasons. The first stems from a change in voting dates. For decades city elections were held in odd-numbered years. Over time turnout dwindled to embarrassing levels — just 23.2% of voters participated in the 2013 mayoral runoff.

In 2015, elections were shifted to even-numbered years to align with state and federal cycles. This changed the face of the electorate, which had long been dominated by older, white voters who were disproportionately homeowners. The number of people lured by the chance to vote for governor or president made the rolls flush with a younger, diverse populace, including many more renters.

Consider consecutive races for City Council District 4: In 2015 about 24,000 people voted in the runoff election. In the 2020 runoff, nearly 133,000 cast a ballot.

“AS CITY POLITICS MOVE TO THE LEFT, MONEY FOR POLICE COMPETES WITH RESOURCES FOR THE UNHOUSED.”

That aligns with a second change: the emergence of a wave of candidates adept at social media and abetted by grassroots groups that seemed to have cracked the code for exciting young or disenfranchised voters. This can mean not only casting a ballot but volunteering to knock on doors or otherwise help out.

These candidates and groups share a progressive ideology. That can encompass many things but often is built on a couple cornerstones: less money for police and a desire to shrink the law enforcement ranks; and more resources directed to housing and serving people experiencing homelessness, and a related aim to halt “sweeps” of tent encampments, even when their presence frustrates neighbors.

The first shift occurred in 2020, with the pandemic in full effect and in the wake of the George Floyd social justice protests (this came after progressive mold-breaking by Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and New York Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez). Although the District 4 was represented by David Ryu, a centrist Democrat and the first Korean American on the council, he was challenged by Nithya Raman, an urban planner born in India and educated at Harvard and MIT. Each sought to convince voters that they were the true progressive — I titled an article about the contest “Left and Lefter.” Raman rolled to victory.

On that same November ballot, county voters elected George Gascón as district attorney, opting for his modern take on criminal justice reform. Gascón, part of a national wave of progressive DA candidates, beat a more law-and-order incumbent.

More change followed. In 2022, veteran

council members Gil Cedillo and Mitch O’Farrell were felled by, respectively, Eunisses Hernandez and Hugo Soto-Martinez, both first-time, far-left candidates who championed cutbacks in policing and railed against the city’s handling of the homelessness crisis.

The momentum continues. In March, Ysabel Jurado, a tenant rights lawyer who was endorsed by the Democratic Socialists of America-Los Angeles chapter, finished atop an eight-person field in District 14 and faces incumbent Kevin de León in the runoff. In the San Fernando Valley’s District 2, Jillian Burgos finished second, besting five other candidates, and is up against former state Assemblyman Adrin Nazarian. Both Burgos and Jurado are supported by another progressive, Kenneth Mejia, who was elected city controller in 2022.

None of this is to say that the greater Los Angeles political structure has shifted hard left. Mayor Bass is a mainstream Democrat who favors growing the police department. The council is dominated by traditional Dems. Residents of a Westside council district in 2022 rejected a progressive candidate.

Still, the change is undeniable. Republicans long lost political relevance in Los Angeles, but come election time, many voters today have an actual choice.

— *Jon Regardie*

FIRST PERSON STEPPING AWAY FROM DANCE

My move from ballet to school was hard. I started a nonprofit to make it easier for others.

MY FINAL STEP AWAY FROM THE STAGE WAS

easier than it is for many. There wasn’t a career-ending injury that forced me to stop dancing. I wasn’t fired. It was my choice to walk away when I felt ready. But coming to the ledge of leaving the job that I had sacrificed so much for was nerve-racking. It was as hard to walk off the stage as it had been to walk onto it.

I joined the *corps de ballet* of Los Angeles Ballet in the fall of 2016 and was eager to jump into community college classes right away. I knew that my dance career — thrilling as it was — would not last forever, and that I would need an education when it came time for me to give up the pursuit of my dreams. By the time we’re professionals, most dancers are painfully aware that our careers can end in a chance slip-and-fall. It comes with the territory when you stand on your toes for a living.

But ballet companies don’t encourage dancers to plan for their futures. To the dance company,



COURTESY OF THE ENCORE FUND

college courses are a distraction, and they don’t want distractions. They want dancers who are living, breathing and sleeping ballet; anyone who devotes less to the work, or thinks beyond it, is suspect. And so dancers tend to seek their education quietly, even secretly.

When I eventually decided to pursue a career in sports medicine, I began to work toward a biology major, taking the necessary sciences on Santa Monica College’s campus in the evenings after long rehearsal days. I found that college courses only added to my ballet skills, each enriching the other. My ballerina-by-day and student-by-night life continued until COVID-19 shuttered the performing arts.

When the pandemic hit, the remainder of our spring season was canceled. We were offered ballet classes to “stay in shape” over Zoom, but dancing in my apartment wasn’t sustainable, especially with thin floors and a downstairs neighbor. The silver lining of the two years I was unemployed was that it gave me the opportunity to double my academic course load.

On a whim, I applied to an Ivy League school and was accepted. I was overwhelmed and relieved at the chance to move beyond dancing and into a new life.

The relief, however, quickly soured into desperation when I read my financial aid offer. When I asked the financial aid officer how she expected someone with an income level considered to be below the poverty line to take on a quarter of a million dollars of debt, she answered nonchalantly, “Our students just go to the bank.” That was not an option for me.

I searched for anything that would help me pay for this chance: second-career scholarships, young-adult-starting-over-please-help scholarships. I could find nothing that met my circumstance. Goaded by my sister, I decided to create an organization of my own.

“AFTER THE CURTAIN COMES DOWN, DANCERS OFTEN HAVE NOWHERE TO GO.”

In the spring of 2021 I started the Encore Fund. We provide annual scholarship awards and mentorship opportunities to professional dancers taking their own steps away from the stage and into higher education opportunities. Our goal is to make the transition away from the professional dance industry less daunting for dancers looking to start or continue their higher education.

Since we began operating, the scholarship applications we’ve received have provided insight into the experiences of professional dancers. I’ve learned that most dancers have other interests they want to pursue. I’ve also discovered that many dancers find it difficult to leave the profession and go to school because the low wages and high demands of the job make it difficult to make the leap. And I came to appreciate how hard it is to tap traditional supporters of the arts to help with this problem. Audience members support dancers when the lights are bright, but when the curtain comes down? No one pays attention to where these dancers go.

I continued to dance professionally for two seasons, up until I received my UCLA acceptance. An aid package and my California residency were enough to make it possible for me to attend.

I’m not the only girl who dreamed of being a ballerina. I realize how lucky I was to realize that dream. But I also am not the only young person to seize that opportunity and then feel trapped by it. I hope the Encore Fund will help many others find their way from the arts to higher education.

Dancers deserve more than a final bow.
— *Shelby Whallon*

trucking industry say they are ready to test fully driverless trucks next year.

The future of transportation is here. Carlson, an environmental law professor, steered the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration as a senior Biden official. Now back at UCLA, she is teaching about the path forward for safer vehicles — and a safer climate.

“The computers on board vehicles now are extraordinarily complicated — much more complicated actually than on aircraft,” Carlson told me in a series of interviews. “That means that transportation is really exciting right now, and it also means that it poses real regulatory challenges.”

On that day in May 2022, while Carlson rode shotgun down the Texas highway, she was in the driver’s seat of the federal agency in charge of America’s roadways. She took leave from UCLA in January 2021 to help lead the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), first as

chief counsel and then as acting administrator, during a critical time. As a leading scholar on policies to address air pollution and a founding director of the Emmett Institute on Climate Change & the Environment, she personified the Biden-Harris administration’s commitment to tackling climate change.

It’s no secret that transportation is one of the greatest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, causing climate change and threatening lives. Meanwhile, traffic crashes are a major cause of death and injury. As part of the U.S. Department of Transportation, NHTSA addresses these dual crises by helping to make our vehicles more efficient, less polluting and safer.

“We are at the precipice of two major and significant technological changes,” Carlson said, “electrification and automation.” Nearly a quarter of all vehicles sold in California last year were EVs, and other states are catching up. Thanks to the



→ Ann Carlson with Pete Buttigieg, United States Secretary of Transportation.

↓ Self-driving trucks are expected to play an increasingly significant role in American commerce.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

THE ROADWAY OF THE AMERICAN FUTURE

Cars and trucks and highway safety.

THERE’S SOMETHING INNATELY TERRIFYING about seeing a freight truck barrel down the road with no driver at the wheel.

Ann Carlson experienced this a couple of years ago from inside the cab of an 18-wheeler as it drove itself down a Texas highway. Surprisingly, it didn’t take her long to get comfortable. “The technology is amazing,” said Carlson, who spent the 20-mile ride staring at digital screens displaying upcoming obstacles using LiDAR and radar. A safety driver had joined her as back-up but didn’t once touch the steering wheel. Computers did the driving. Companies revolutionizing the long-haul



COURTESY OF ANN CARLSON

2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, big money is flowing to roadways, public transit and electric charging infrastructure. Working under Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, Carlson tapped those resources to grow her agency's budget by 50% and increase staff from 600 to 750.

The agency oversees thousands of recalls each year. The one that got the most attention during her tenure was a Tesla recall because of problems with its autopilot system. (Ironically, the technology worked well enough to lure drivers into complacency but not so well to avoid crashing.)

“THE COMPUTERS ON BOARD VEHICLES NOW ARE EXTRAORDINARILY COMPLICATED — MUCH MORE COMPLICATED ACTUALLY THAN ON AIRCRAFT.”

Carlson also enacted tougher safety regulations for cars and trucks, including two sets of stricter fuel economy standards. And her agency issued a rule that will require automatic emergency braking on every new light-duty vehicle, including the capacity to detect pedestrians and operate at night, when 70% of pedestrian fatalities occur. It is clear that the future of transportation technology has arrived, but policies and regulations are just catching up.

Her accomplishments came despite roadblocks.

Around the time Carlson rode in the 18-wheeler, she became the target of a conservative dark-money group called the American Accountability Foundation, a tax-exempt nonprofit that doesn't disclose its backers and tries to prevent the approval of Biden administration nominees. It targets “relatively obscure, sub-Cabinet-level political appointees, whose public profiles can be easily distorted and who have little entrenched support,” as the *New Yorker's* Jane Mayer described them.

For months, Carlson led the NHTSA as acting administrator while being vetted to serve as administrator. In February 2023, when President Biden formally nominated Carlson, attacks in conservative media began. Stories on Fox News and elsewhere falsely claimed that Carlson lacked interest or experience in vehicle safety and was trying to “hijack” the agency. Sen. Ted Cruz (R-Texas) fixated on Carlson for her work on strengthening fuel economy standards. Cruz said she and other Biden officials were pursuing “radical and aggressive policies that would be harmful to America's oil and gas industry.”

Carlson withdrew her name from consideration in May 2023, becoming one of several nominees whom the AAF and Cruz, ranking member of the Senate Commerce Committee, helped to tank. “Their aim is to throw sand in the

gears of the Biden administration by targeting sub-cabinet appointees, and to use any means to do so,” Carlson told me. “It's disproportionately women and people of color.”

Such attacks can demoralize rank-and-file employees, while agencies never get to experience the talents of the nominees. This can have a chilling effect if qualified experts think twice about serving in government.

Fortunately for NHSTA, when Carlson withdrew, she was quickly reappointed by Biden in her acting administrator capacity and led the agency through 2023, returning to UCLA last winter.

Back on campus, Carlson is finishing a book on fighting Southern California air pollution and is set to teach a new class called “Regulating the Automobile.” The class focuses on the dual revolution of electrification and automation. How can government accelerate these changes? How do we balance innovation and safety? If one person dies in an automated vehicle, it brings many more headlines than the 40,000 people who die each year on the road because of human drivers. We're hard-wired to fear that driverless truck.

Even if robot EV fleets are where American transportation is headed, Carlson points out that the promise of automation is already realized with features like automated emergency braking and dynamic cruise control lane centering. “And that should produce big safety benefits,” she said, “even as humans stay behind the wheel.”

— *Evan George*

“A LIGHTER LOOK” — ON POPEYE

Rick Meyer's regularly appearing column takes a lighter look at politics and public affairs around the world. This month: “Popeye.”

OVERHEARD ON THE SUPREME COURT STEPS:

“Popeye lives here.”

“Popeye?”

“Yes. These justices are powerful. If they eat too much spinach, they can be dangerous.”

“What do you mean, professor?”

“Well, class, on this tour, here are things to learn. These justices can take people off the presidential ballot, or not. They can grant immunity from prosecution, scrap obstruction-of-justice charges or make someone go to trial. They can cut the muscle out of government agencies. And they can change fundamental rights for all of us.”

“Have they done things like that?”

“Yes, and even more. One of them, Justice Joseph P. Bradley, actually picked a president. He was the Republican who broke the tie on an

electoral commission that put Republican Rutherford B. Hayes into the White House.”

“You're kidding!”

“Not a bit!”

“Where do they get their spinach?”

“They get most of it from the Constitution. Whenever Popeye decides something is unconstitutional, that's the final word. The only way to change it is to convert Popeye or amend the Constitution.”

“Wow!”

“They get some of their spinach from efforts to be collegial, despite deep differences.”

“Isn't that faking?”

“Yes. They do sometimes turn on each other, and sometimes those disputes even become public. But let me read you something retired Justice Stephen Breyer wrote not long ago in the *New York Times*. ‘In my 28 years on the court, I did not hear a voice raised in anger ... nor were snide or personal remarks ever made.’”

“Civility is a good thing, isn't it, professor?”

“Not always. Being nice encourages agreement. But it can fall short of winning the day. In a 1954 decision, *Brown v. Board of Education*, Popeye ordered public schools to end their racial segregation. But Louis Menand writes in the *New Yorker* that when Breyer reached the court in 1994, he believed that discrimination should be banned everywhere government could reach — not just in schools.”

“But he couldn't convince enough other justices?”

“That's right. Not enough spinach. However, it's a superabundance of spinach that has let Justice Clarence Thomas hide behind those marble columns up there, accept extravagant travel, hospitality and other gifts from billionaire contributors to Republican causes — and keep it a secret.”

“He should be impeached.”

“In more than 230 years, only one justice ever has been.”

“Then there are the flags. Too much spinach prompted Justice Samuel A. Alito to allow two flags associated with extremists and embraced by pro-Donald Trump insurrectionists to fly over his home in Virginia and his vacation home on a New Jersey beach.”

“Judges should never show such partisanship.”

“Right! One was an upside-down American flag, and the other was an Appeal to Heaven flag expressing his aggrieved, right-wing views.”

“Judges shouldn't voice theocratic politics.”

“Right. Talk about spinach: Alito did all of this with impunity. More than that, he refused to recuse himself from cases before the Supreme Court relating to Trump. Alito said: ‘I had no involvement whatsoever’ in flying the flags. It was Mrs. Alito.”

“Olive Oyl did it!”

“She eats spinach too.”

— *Richard E. Meyer*

FIRST PERSON GETTING AROUND LOS ANGELES — ON A BIKE

Getting around — and a balm for the soul.

THE OLDER WOMAN WHO BIKES UP AND

down my West L.A. neighborhood is hard to miss. She braids her white hair into pigtails and ties them off with colored ribbons. The ribbons coordinate with her outfits — typically flashbulb-bright pink, red or orange sweats. In the years since she has become a morning fixture, I have never seen her wear a helmet.

At 73, I feel a bit like her when I pedal to the library or meet a friend for coffee: odd, flamboyant, probably reckless.

Cycling can be an act of faith in this car-dense city, especially for women like me with old bones for whom getting “doored” risks a calamitous fracture.

It’s sensible for me to stop riding. But I don’t want to.

Biking makes so much sense here, especially for short trips. Los Angeles is largely flat — 87% of the city’s streets have less than a 5% grade, according to city data. Our weather is famously mild, and it’s far more pleasant and often quicker to bike to my Ralphs for a quart of milk than to drive, especially at rush hour.

Until recently, however, transportation planners have treated L.A.’s bicycle infrastructure

more as a “nice to have” than a realistic alternative to cars and public transit. Moreover, the existing bike lanes, rental city bikes, bike racks and lockers at Metro stations are often poorly maintained or vandalized.

We can do better. A ballot measure city voters approved last March should help.

Nearly half of all trips within the Greater L.A. area are three miles or less, or a 15-minute bike ride away, according to L.A.’s Mobility Plan 2035. Nonetheless, we make more than 80% of those trips in our cars. There are good reasons why — children need to get to school, and it isn’t easy to cart home a week’s worth of groceries on two wheels.

Yet for me and many others, running an errand on a bike can be a balm for the soul. In spring, blooming jasmine perfumes my rides. Red maple leaves crunch under my tires in autumn. Instead of fuming behind a line of cars, I hear the soft whir of my ancient Trek gears, and it makes me feel lucky to be alive.

City planners drafted the mobility plan in 2015 to lure more of us out of our cars. The extensive blueprint, which the City Council quickly adopted, would gradually add hundreds of miles of bike and bus lanes, among other improvements, over 20 years, as each L.A. street is scheduled for resurfacing. The goal is to make travel safer for pedestrians and bus riders, as well as for bicyclists, and to reduce the city’s alarming toll of traffic fatalities — now among the nation’s highest.

But in the past nine years, city leaders have basically ignored Mobility 2035, according to Michael Schneider, who heads Streets for All. Crews have completed only 5% of the plan’s upgrades, according to the advocacy group. COVID was partly

“WHEN RIDERS FEEL SAFE, URBAN CYCLING IS A FUN AND VIABLE WAY TO GET AROUND.”

to blame, as was a lack of coordination between street crews who repave and transportation officials responsible for implementing upgrades as the repaving happens.

Schneider’s group helped put Healthy Streets L.A. on the primary ballot last March. The citizen initiative is intended to force the city to act on its 2015 commitment by allowing residents to sue for noncompliance. Voters resoundingly approved the measure, and it won a majority in every council district.

Long-proposed upgrades to Venice and Hollywood Boulevards are two examples of how things could improve for cyclists like me.

Portions of the existing pockmarked bike lane along Venice Boulevard are being upgraded with new green paint and plastic bollards separating cyclists from cars. Schneider’s group, along with others, hopes to extend these improvements eastward to downtown. A new protected bike lane now runs along Hollywood Boulevard between Gower Street and Lyman Place, and other measures are in the works to slow traffic and safeguard waiting bus passengers.

Not everyone has been on board with these changes, especially when the space for bike lanes and bus boarding islands takes away a car lane. And city budget cuts may again slow progress. Moreover, since compliance may rest on bringing suit, residents with the time and resources to sue likely live in the city’s wealthier neighborhoods. As a result, Healthy Streets L.A. may unintentionally exacerbate existing transit disparities.

Still, I’m far from the only Angeleno who welcomes these improvements.

The success of temporarily opening neighborhood streets to just cyclists, skaters and strollers — regional CicLAvias — demonstrates that when riders feel safe, urban cycling is a fun and viable way to get around. The 53 CicLAvias (and counting) have drawn 1.8 million people of all ages from across L.A. County since 2008.

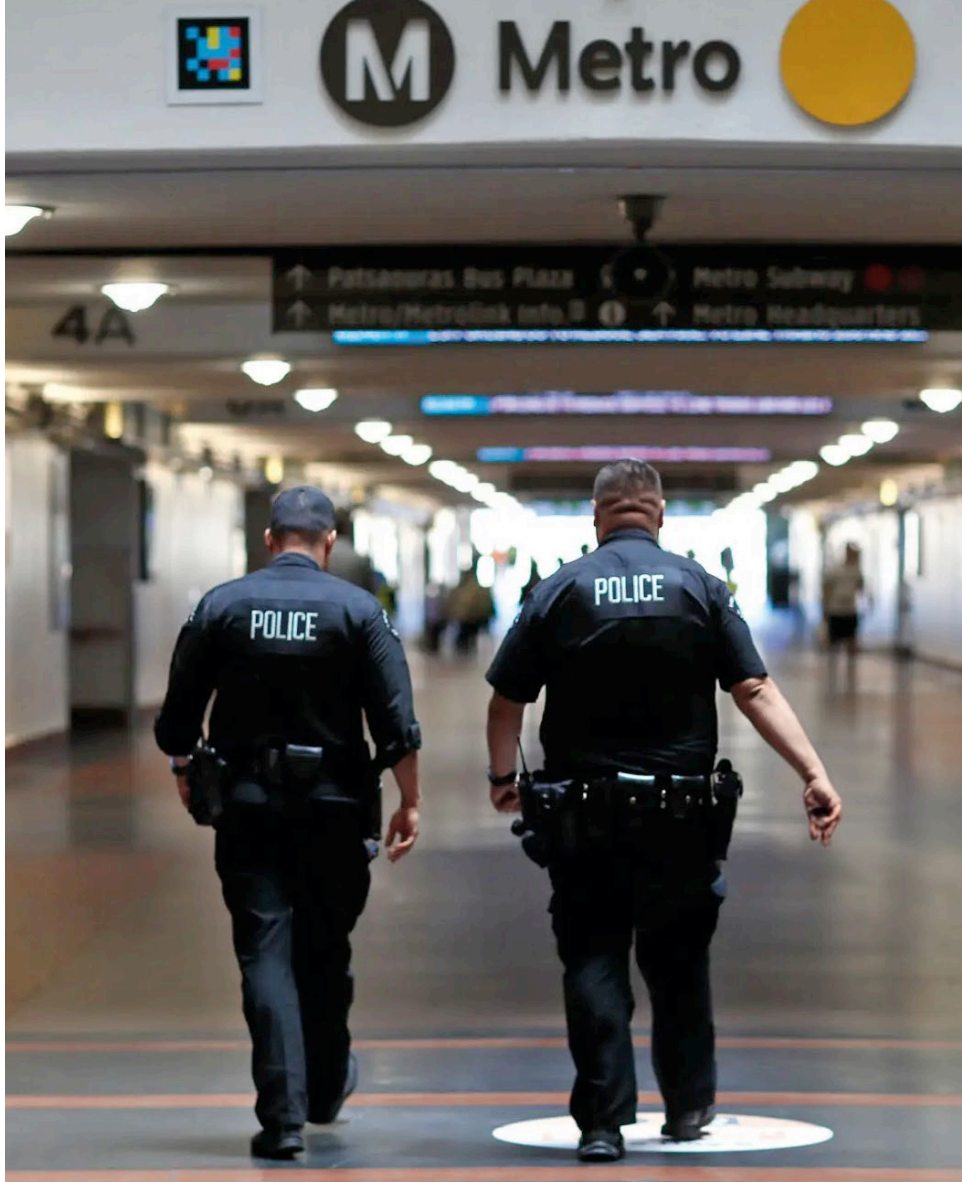
Nor am I and our local pigtailed cruiser the only Boomers in the saddle. I recently joined a Facebook group for cyclists over 70 where, instead of the usual senior kvetching about ailments, 70- and 80-somethings share their triumphs: *Back on the bike following an aortic valve and knee replacement! Selfie with neck brace and road rash after a tumble, but still smiling!*

I aim to be like these folks — minus the emergency room visits. I want to ride into my 80s, carefully but a bit delusional about the inevitable toll of age, and ever grateful to feel the breeze on my face.

— **Molly Selvin**



NOMA BAR



GETTY IMAGES

METRO POLICE: THEN AND NOW

How best to secure the safety of L.A. trains and buses.

“I ONCE CAUGHT THIS GUY VANDALIZING A BUS

and he called me a Keystone Cop,” said the petite, red-headed woman across the table from me. “Well, then,” I told him. “I guess I’ll arrest you with these fake handcuffs and take you to a fake jail.”

I am at an Italian restaurant in Palos Verdes having lunch with Sharon Papa, Metro’s former chief of police, discussing the transportation agency’s fateful 1996 decision to merge its in-house transit police force with the Los Angeles Police Department and Los Angeles Sheriff’s Department. At its height, the MTA police force had more than 500 officers, was the 10th-largest police force in California and the largest transit police force in the nation. But it fell to a combination of money, power struggles and L.A. politics.

Papa was at the center of that. “I won the battle, but I lost the war,” she said, and took a sip of iced tea.

Here in Palos Verdes, the day was breezy and cloudless, just like the days before and after. But

back at Metro headquarters in downtown Los Angeles, more change was brewing.

After nearly 27 years of contracting out policing (currently, law enforcement is handled by the LAPD, LASD, and the Long Beach Police Department), the Metro Board of Directors voted to change course once again and form its own public safety department. The idea wasn’t out of left field — plenty of transit agencies have them (the Bay Area’s BART, Massachusetts’ MBTA and Atlanta’s MARTA, to name a few). And the idea had been the subject of numerous committee meetings and feasibility studies. For Papa, this was familiar ground.

There are many advantages to bringing policing in-house, Papa explained. You can control costs, hire and train personnel, and create your own policies and procedures. You can address new issues as they come up without waiting for the go-ahead. You can tailor your police force to a transit environment, which is somewhat unique, since it traverses multiple cities and jurisdictions.

Moreover, transit policing combines unusual elements: Buses and rail cars create close quarters, but they also are public spaces, and in motion much of the time. They’re used by all kinds of people traveling far from their homes. All of that makes it difficult to extend the policing practices

of other agencies to the specific challenges of patrolling transit systems.

The timing also felt right for a new approach. A series of high-profile violent crimes on the Metro system had shaken the public’s trust in transit. Assaults against bus operators had hit all-time highs (Metro recorded 168 in 2023). And, crucially, the cost of existing policing contracts with the LAPD, LASD and LBPB had been rising precipitously (the FY24 contracts came to \$194 million, a cost increase of 15% over the previous year).

“YOU NEED SOMEONE WHO ISN’T AFRAID TO FIGHT. YOU NEED TO BE A TOUGH COOKIE.”

The contract model came with other drawbacks, too: inconsistent enforcement, lack of oversight, data and reporting delays. Then there were jurisdictional issues. Who would be responsible for apprehending a bus traveling down Wilshire Boulevard, for example, moving from the city of Los Angeles to Beverly Hills to Santa Monica? This problem, Papa pointed out, had been one of the reasons why her transit police force had been created during the 1970s. “Unless the bus stopped and waited for [the police],” she recalled, “officers didn’t ‘chase’ the bus.”

One year after approving a plan to explore creating a new public safety department, the Metro Board of Directors voted to make it official, authorizing a five-year plan to implement an in-house police force. Many staff members celebrated, relieved that weeks of long nights had paid off.

But change will not be easy. Police agencies across the country are struggling with recruitment. Transit police are sometimes seen as less glamorous than municipal forces or sheriff’s agencies, which may make hiring even more difficult. Papa also foresees future political battles not unlike the ones she experienced, such as turf wars with other agencies.

“You need someone who isn’t afraid to fight,” she said. “You need to be a tough cookie.”

Metro faces different issues than it did decades ago. In 1997, there wasn’t even a system for counting homeless in LA County. In 2023, there were 75,518. In 1997, hardly anyone had heard of fentanyl. Today, Los Angeles is facing the largest opioid epidemic it has ever faced in its history. In 1997, Metro only had three rail lines that covered 46.3 miles. Today, it has six rail lines that cover 109 miles, and many more on the horizon. All of those factors complicate policing on the region’s transit systems.

Still, the decision feels a bit like a new beginning — or a return to an old one. History has a way of repeating itself.

— **India Mandelkern**

Fighting for Dignity: Tamika Butler

A transit future for all

WRITTEN BY
MOLLY SELVIN

DIGNITY IS AN IMPORTANT PRINCIPLE FOR TAMIKA BUTLER.

She views dignity as “an inherent right,” one that should guide transportation planning — but often does not.

Dignity means bus stops that have benches and shade trees because waiting for a bus in the 100-degree heat of a San Fernando Valley summer “is not a dignified experience,” she said, especially for riders who rely on public transit.

It also means treating unhoused bus or train riders first, with help and compassion instead of “criminalizing” them by immediately deploying police officers.

Rather than seeing transit planning as a series of zero-sum decisions — cars versus buses, bicycles versus pedestrians — Butler and other young leaders aim to “center planning not just on people who take transit as a lifestyle decision but on people who need transit.”

“Those residents,” she said, “should have the flexibility and freedom and just as full a life in the region as if they had a car.”

A Stanford-trained lawyer and now a Ph.D. student at the Luskin School of Public Affairs, Butler thinks about transportation in new and provocative ways, and has emerged as an influential thinker, speaker and writer with a national reputation. She consults with various local agencies on transportation matters and is considered one of the region’s genuinely original thinkers in this field.

As a Black and queer woman, a mother, a wife, an ardent cyclist and a conservationist, Butler’s life has colored her views on transportation planning, said Seleta Reynolds, L.A. Metro’s chief innovation officer. The two women first met eight years ago when Butler headed the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition. Reynolds is now an admirer and a friend.

“Tamika really doesn’t think of transportation in two dimensions — not just what’s happening in the public right-of-way,” said Reynolds, and those views have sparked controversy.

Butler sees “all the different experiences of people moving through public spaces, as well as the role of law enforcement, transit officials, culture and community. All of it interests her,” said Reynolds — and those interests are frequently leavened by Butler’s hearty laugh.

“She’s been the tip of the spear for a lot of difficult conversations,” Reynolds said, “and she’s paid a high price.” Yet Butler steadfastly believes that we can do better.

BORN IN ALAMOGORDO, NEW MEXICO, WHERE HER AIR FORCE FATHER WAS STATIONED,

Butler grew up a “military kid” in Okinawa, Crete and Las Vegas. She and her family moved to Nebraska, where her parents met and her extended family still lives, just before she started high school. She earned her undergraduate degree at Creighton University in Omaha. There, she found her purpose in activism.

“A lot of the way I think of public service,” she said, “is due to my Jesuit education there.”

When her parents nudged her toward law, Butler applied to 25 law schools around the country. But while visiting Stanford she decided “then and there” to reject any other offers of admission. Stanford, she said, was the “the first place that I felt I could be my full self, not just the country bumpkin.”

Butler now even admits to liking vegetables in addition to her Midwesterner’s fondness for meat and potatoes.

Following graduation, she practiced employment law for a few years with the Legal Aid Society in the San Francisco Bay Area. She moved to Los Angeles in 2015 to be with her wife, a lawyer working



“RESIDENTS SHOULD HAVE THE FLEXIBILITY AND FREEDOM AND JUST AS FULL A LIFE IN THE REGION AS IF THEY HAD A CAR.”

for a large firm. The couple, who live in the View Park neighborhood, now have two young children.

She marked her 40th birthday in July while recovering from COVID-19, watching “Bluey” cartoons on repeat with her kids.

As executive director of the L.A. Bike Coalition, one of her first jobs in L.A., Butler “fell in love with urban planning,” she recalled. “For the first time I had a job where I felt that my wife feels in her job.”

Other advocacy positions with the Los Angeles Neighborhood Land Trust and other nonprofits followed.

In the process, she gained a reputation as a consensus builder, a nimble speaker, and a fierce advocate for racial equity and inclusion, particularly on transportation-related issues.

In addition to her Luskin studies, Butler now runs her own consulting firm for public, private and nonprofit sector clients, focusing on climate and transportation issues along with diversity and inclusion training.

SHE DECIDED ON GRADUATE STUDY DURING A STINT WITH A DESIGN AND PLANNING FIRM.

“Getting my Ph.D. was my overreaction” to a comment from a client that Butler needed stronger academic training to bolster a report that she had drafted.

She is honing her analytic skills at Luskin. Working with UCLA’s Madeline Brozen, deputy director of the Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies, Butler is helping to evaluate a “mobility wallet” pilot program. A joint effort by L.A. Metro and the L.A. Department of Transportation, the pilot provides up to \$1,800 annually in the form of prepaid debit cards that qualified participants can use on buses, rail, ride and bike share and more. The goal is to improve access to transportation in the region. Participants must have an income below certain limits to qualify.

“Tamika is a really special collaborator, because she has such varied transportation experience,” Brozen said, “and she just connects with people very well.

“She’s also just fun to work with.”



“[TAMIKA] WANTS US TO THINK ABOUT THE LIVED EXPERIENCE OF THE PEOPLE IN THE COMMUNITY THAT WE ARE THERE TO SERVE.”

Butler’s Luskin classmate, Sam Speroni, credits her with broadening his intellectual aperture.

A former high school English teacher, Speroni didn’t intend to study the intersection of education and transportation, but he quickly saw important equity issues that “weren’t in the spotlight.”

Unlike many other states, California does not require school districts to provide transportation for students. Until recently, the state also provided districts with relatively little funding for it. Even with a 2022 expansion in state funding for student transportation, more kids in California depend on parents driving them in the family car than in most other states, Speroni said.

“Tamika helped bring those equity issues into sharper focus for me,” he said, adding that he believes his teaching experience has been useful to her.

“Tamika is deeply curious,” Speroni said. “I don’t know that Tamika needed a Ph.D. to be a transportation advocate.” What sets her apart, he said, is that she she wanted to learn about how to do the research. “That’s rare for people to do both at that high level.”

MUCH OF BUTLER’S ADVOCACY IS GUIDED BY A BELIEF THAT TRANSPORTATION POLICY IS A prism through which we can see other all social justice issues, an insight she attributes to former L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti.

Think of the transportation infrastructure — the trains, buses and stations as well as the streets, sidewalks and bike lanes — as a “commons,” she said.

How, for example, should we allocate the 80 feet or so of asphalt on a city street? Where do the lines go for cyclists, drivers and pedestrians who use that space in different ways?

Or, instead of deciding who we should keep out of light rail stations, we should aim to serve residents with more frequent trains and modern and reliably clean restrooms. Mental healthcare workers could be present there as well, along with those who can help connect people with housing, jobs and health care.

She argues that transit planning has traditionally been the province of “a certain person — White dudes of means, without disabilities, engineers.”

In all of that, Butler challenges the notion that planners should just confine themselves to design, Metro’s Reynolds said. “She wants us to think about the lived experience of the people in the community that we are there to serve.”

That means responding to the needs of community members — “the grandmother sitting on her front porch who can tell you everything about people who run that stop sign.” And when a driver runs over a pedestrian and the TV cameras arrive, Butler said, “She tells the reporters, ‘We’ve been saying there’s no crosswalk here to make it to the bus stop.’”

Butler outlined these views at a national conference of urban transportation officials in 2016 in the shadow of the killings of Tamir Rice and Trayvon Martin. She also called for a broader tolerance for cyclists, unable to afford a car, who need to bike to work. Often these are immigrants and African Americans whose presence in White neighborhoods has stoked fear and, she argued, sometimes resulted in arrest for behavior that when committed by White cyclists has not triggered a similar police response.

Butler received a standing ovation, but her comments prompted several attendees to walk out. Angry social media posts targeted her then and in response to speeches she has given since.

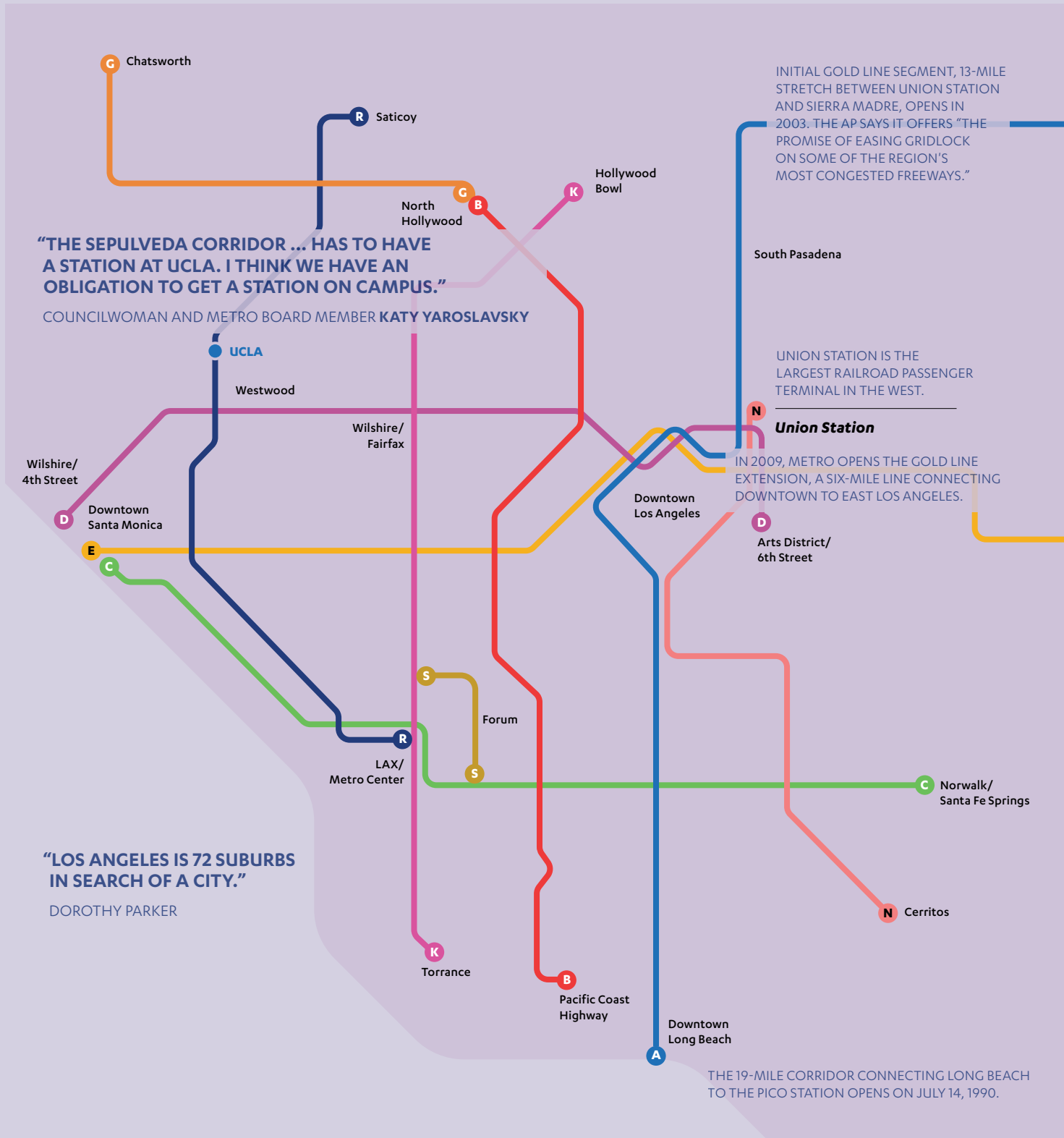
She stood her ground and has continued, even redoubled, her determination to infuse discussions about transportation with an emphasis on the social justice implications of those decisions.

But is the transit future she envisions realistic in an era of persistent public budget cuts? In a region stuck for decades in a long-running debate about freeways and public transit, is it possible to think more broadly and comprehensively about transit solutions and their relationship to social justice?

“It’s absolutely possible,” said Butler. “I’m a Black person in America. There’s a lot that shouldn’t be possible and that my ancestors worked to achieve.” ▶

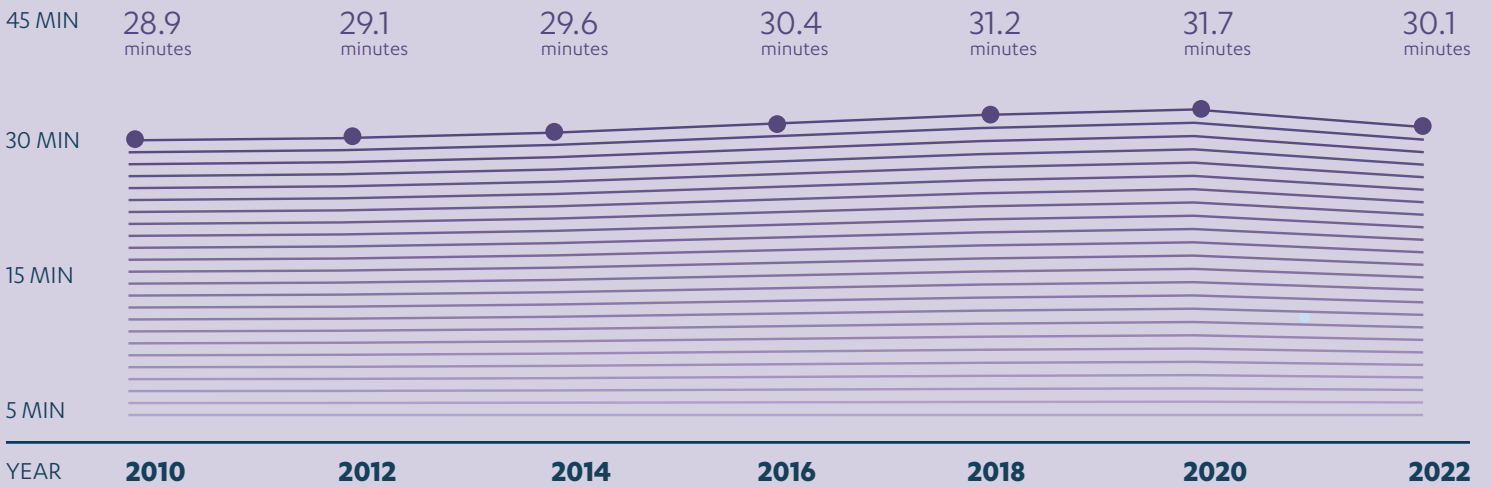
GETTING AROUND LOS ANGELES

THE LAND OF THE CAR COMES TO GRIPS WITH TRAFFIC AND CLIMATE CHANGE — AND IS FORCED TO RECONSIDER



COMMUTING

It will come as no surprise to longtime residents of Los Angeles that commuting has gotten worse over the past decade, notwithstanding billions of dollars of investment in transit systems and road improvements. Below, estimates of average commute times for Angelenos since 2010:



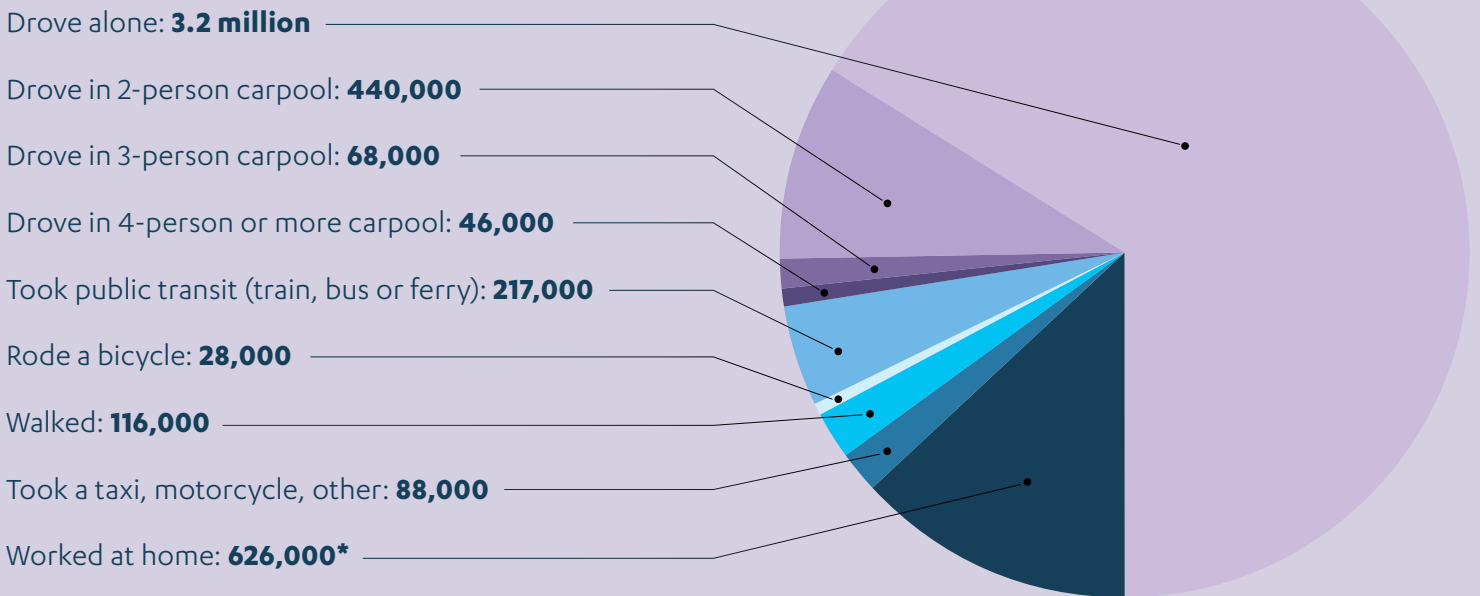
Note: In 2022, 12% of workers spent more than an hour getting to work.

Sources: United States Federal Reserve and U.S. Census

HOW WE GOT TO WORK IN 2022

TOTAL WORKERS: 4.7 MILLION

TOTAL COMMUTERS: 4.1 MILLION



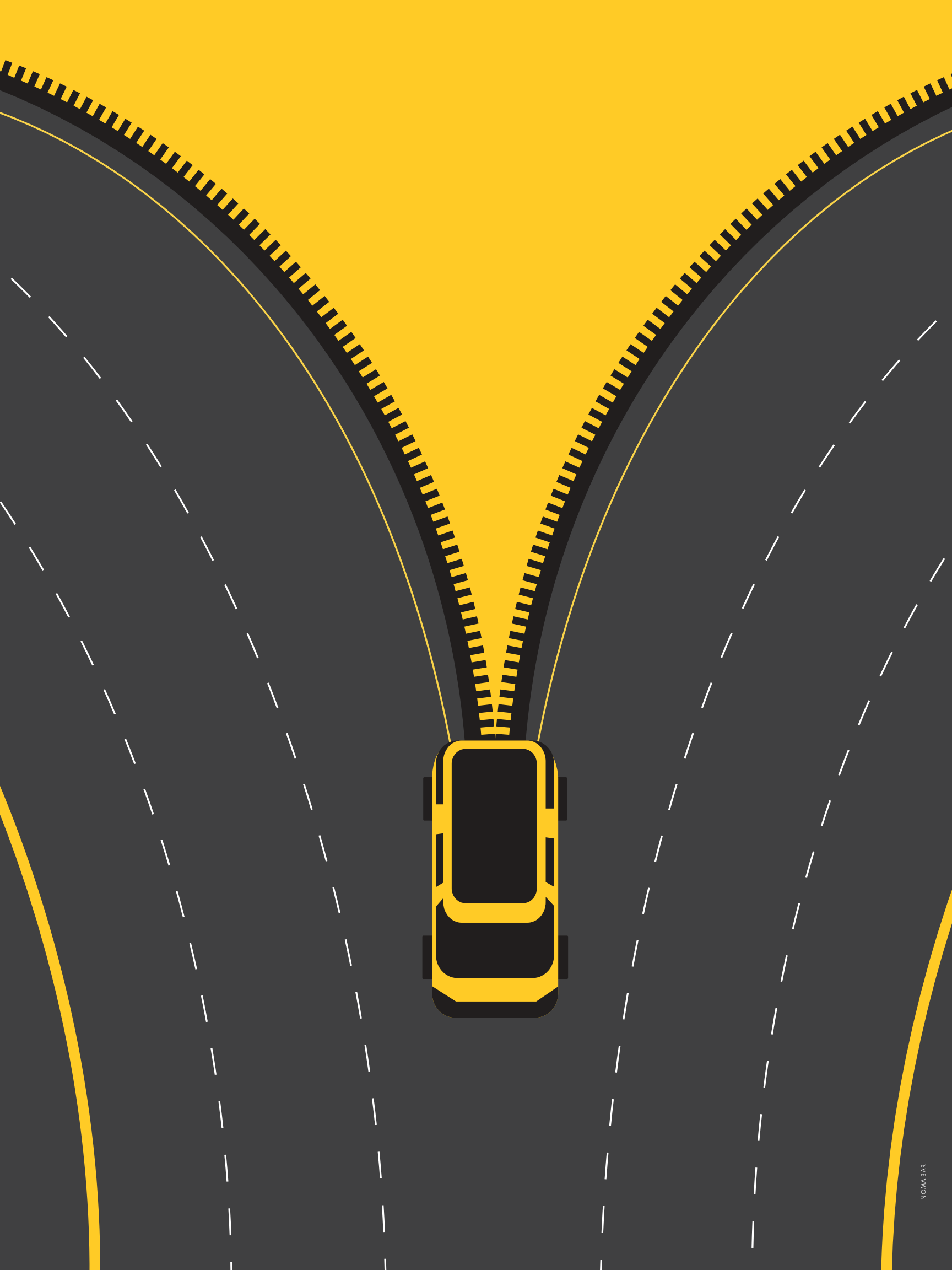
Note: Worked at home is the fastest-growing category in recent years, up from 200,000 in 2010.

Source: Los Angeles Almanac; figures drawn from U.S. Census

Beyond Freeways

**LOS ANGELES MOVES
PAST THE CAR**

WRITTEN BY
JEAN MERL





ISTOCK IMAGES

↑ A northbound view of the 405 freeway during Friday afternoon traffic with Getty Museum, Westwood and Santa Monica mountains in the background.

ADAM MILLARD-BALL SEES THE COST OF OUR “car culture” everywhere. He sees it in curbside bike lanes clogged with parked cars. In sidewalks so narrow that pedestrians waiting for buses can’t avoid being splashed by passing vehicles. In wide, multilane streets hogging space that could be used for housing.

Recently, he sees it in a comprehensive study he led detailing the barrier effects of freeways throughout California. By turning freeway-bisected surface thoroughfares into dead-end streets, freeways limit accessibility for bicyclists and pedestrians. The inconvenience and, sometimes, danger these dead ends create are discouraging and help reinforce the use of cars, Millard-Ball and his colleagues found.

The barriers also have racist and environmental implications.

“The big picture is that we give cars in L.A. and everywhere else in the U.S. a lot of hidden subsidies, including free land to drive on and park on,” Millard-Ball said in a recent interview.

Millard-Ball is a professor of urban planning at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and director of the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies. With training as an economist, geographer and urban planner, he sees part of his role as parsing “the environmental consequences of transportation and land-use decisions.”

He doesn’t buy the common notion that people love their cars and don’t want to give them up for other ways to get around.

“It’s the way we have divvied up the streets; so much of the streets have been given over to car traffic.”
 — Adam Millard-Ball, professor of urban planning

“In reality, people are pretty rational in what they use,” Millard-Ball said. If driving is the fastest, cheapest or safest way to get to their destination, they will drive, he said, but if services are close and easy to get to on foot, they will walk.

THE STUDY, “DIVIDING HIGHWAYS: BARRIER Effects and Environmental Justice in California,” was published earlier this year in the Journal of Planning Education and Research. It provides the first large-scale look at how California freeways impede access in neighborhoods throughout the state. The research demonstrates, in a sample of 100 crossings, how freeways force pedestrians and bicyclists to go out of their way to reach the other side. Too often the freeway crossings — commonly underpasses or stairs — are unpleasant or even dangerous.

The study looked at the distance between crossings as well as the quality of the crossings. Did users have to climb stairs to go over a freeway? Walk through dank and littered tunnels to get under it? Were the crossings next to busy on-ramps and off-ramps, forcing users to endure noise and danger from cars and trucks?

Among examples is the West Adams neighborhood of Los Angeles, where the construction of Interstate 10 resulted in the dead-ending of many through streets at the freeway. People whose destinations are beyond the freeway are required to go as many as several blocks out of their way because of reduced neighborhood “connectivity” caused by the freeway and the resulting dead-end streets.

An earlier study cited in “Dividing Highways” found that high school students in Davis, Calif., were much less likely to bike to school if they had to cross a freeway to get there. Other previous studies have demonstrated how freeways sever neighborhoods, but “Dividing Highways” concludes that “this is just the tip of the iceberg if the remaining streets do not allow pedestrians and cyclists to cross in safety, let alone comfort.”

The study notes that “impacts of freeways on severance are most pronounced in communities of color. Historically, freeways have damaged these communities (the 10 through West Adams, for example, and the East L.A. Interchange in Boyle Heights). Affluent Whites have been largely successful in winning concessions from the effects of nearby freeways, the study says, or in keeping freeways out of their communities altogether.

The ill effects of freeways can be mitigated, the study says, by increasing the number of crossings or making them safer by separating cyclists and pedestrians from vehicles and reducing noise and trash along the crossings. In some cases, officials could take down a freeway. Residents have suggested this for the Marina Freeway, a short (and, some say, unneeded) roadway on the west side of Los Angeles County.

In San Francisco, officials took down a central freeway and replaced it with a street-level boulevard. “It still carries a lot of traffic,” Millard-Ball said,

“but it provides regular street-level intersections.”

The idea of taking down an under-utilized freeway intrigues Millard-Ball, who grew up in England and has spent considerable time in European cities with far less space devoted to roads than in the United States. He was surprised, when he moved here two decades ago, to see how much land serves cars — not only with freeways but also with multilane surface streets, parking lanes, parking lots and parking structures.

“One of the root causes of why housing is so unaffordable is because so much valuable land is devoted to transportation infrastructure,” said Millard-Ball, who came to UCLA from UC Santa Cruz. Previously, he taught at McGill University in Canada and was a transportation planner with a private firm. He holds a master’s degree in geography from the University of Edinburgh in Scotland and a Ph.D. in environment and resources from Stanford University.

MILLARD-BALL RETURNS TO THE UCLA campus this fall after a sabbatical at Yale School of the Environment and at the Mercator Research Institute on Global Commons and Climate Change in Berlin.

He often rides his bike to UCLA from his apartment in Santa Monica. “It’s not surprising that the vast majority of people in L.A. don’t want to walk or take a bus,” he said. “It’s the way we have divvied up the streets; so much of the streets have been given over to car traffic.”

Most other rich countries, Millard-Ball said, “are doing just fine with a lot less.” But much of the United States seems wedded to old design standards, with little flexibility to adapt to such modern realities as the scarcity and high cost of land. He looks at broad boulevards and sees superfluous lanes that could be used for housing.

“Our cities are very keen to identify unused land. They say, ‘Hey, there’s not enough land for housing,’ but they completely ignore this vast reservoir of land which they manage, which is the streets.” Millard-Ball suggests building new streets smaller and allowing buildings along existing wide streets to be extended onto part of the roadway to create more housing.

“There is no reason at least conceptually, why [space taken up with streets] needs to be off limits for housing,” he said. “Many of these local residential streets don’t need to be 50 feet wide. In places like Tokyo, they are as narrow as 12 feet.”

Furthermore, Millard-Ball said, “There is no evidence that people like living on wide streets. ... People prefer to live on narrow streets where cars move more slowly.”

Does every street need to have parking on both sides? Does every street need to have lanes going in opposite directions, no matter how little the street is used? Should we rethink having surface streets with three lanes of traffic in each direction?

Are there other trade-offs that would result in better use of valuable land? ►

The Car of the Future Has Arrived — Almost

UCLA professor sizes up the possibilities, and vulnerabilities, of modern transportation

WRITTEN BY
IRA GORAWARA

GETTING AROUND TOWN IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS IT USED TO BE. AND it's getting harder all the time.

The threats imposed on infrastructure run the gamut — from climate change to cyberattacks to aging systems increasingly prone to failure — forcing a constant evolution of the transportation arteries that course through cities and connect communities. Autonomous vehicles offer promise, but consumers are understandably wary. Trains and buses have historically been greeted, at least in Southern California, with skepticism.

Sizing up that landscape — and fortifying against those challenges — is at the heart of the work of the UCLA Center of Excellence on New Mobility and Automated Vehicles, led by Jiaqi Ma, an associate professor at the UCLA Samueli School of Engineering. Informally known as the Mobility Center of Excellence, it is a hub of interdisciplinary research and innovation, funded in part by a \$7.5-million grant from the federal Department of Transportation, and tackling the complexities of integrating mobility technology, striving for equitable access and advancing environmentally responsible approaches to driving.

Ma's research focuses on crafting sustainable and efficient transportation systems that can withstand the burgeoning pressures of urbanization, climate change and technological advancement. His work, carried out in a lab independent of UCLA's Mobility Center, has positioned him at the cutting edge of smart city development efforts. It also has made him one of the nation's foremost experts on autonomous vehicles, which may — or may not — soon become a significant part of the modern transportation network.

"We're looking at automated vehicles, small infrastructure with the sensing, detection, prediction and decision-making capabilities," Ma said. "We also work on large-scale system analysis — developing data-driven models, machine-learning models — or we stimulate and analyze mobility patterns."

The work puts Ma in collaboration with some of Southern California's most vital transit agencies such as Caltrans and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation. He is also working with backers of the 2028 Olympic Games, which are slated for Los Angeles and whose champions have suggested could be executed "car-free" or close to it.

Quiet yet approachable, Ma received bachelor's and master's degrees in civil engineering from Beijing Jiaotong University. He relocated to the United States in 2011 to attend the University of Virginia, where he completed another master's degree and a Ph.D. in advanced transportation systems, with a focus on connected vehicles. Since his graduation in 2014, Ma has worked



“IN SIMPLE DRIVING CONDITIONS, WAYMO VEHICLES CAN BE SAFER. HOWEVER, A MORE COMPLICATED SCENARIO LIKE NAVIGATING THROUGH A COMPLEX INTERSECTION OR ADVERSE WEATHER CONDITIONS OR A COMPLEX WORK ZONE CAN BE TRICKY.”

— JIAQI MA, WHO HEADS THE MOBILITY CENTER OF EXCELLENCE

← Aerial view of Waymo self-driving car fleet facility in San Francisco. Waymo vehicles are being widely used in that city as researchers examine their safety and effectiveness.

at the Virginia Transportation Research Council and the Federal Highway Administration. He has led research projects worth more than \$20 million.

The University of Cincinnati, where Ma worked from 2017 to 2020, spotlighted him in its Office of Research Strategic Team's Research + Innovation Week.

It credited him for his work "in future-forward fields that help both Cincinnati and UC attract world-class research talent who want to collaborate to solve real-world problems and top-notch student talent who are excited to learn from them and make a difference," said Jennifer Krivickas, senior associate vice president for integrated research at the university.

ONCE MERELY A DREAM OF FUTURISTS, ROBOTIC VEHICLES NOW

prowl American streets, including some in San Francisco and Los Angeles, where the company Waymo has established pilot projects.

"It's a promising technology that is gradually expanding," Ma said. "In the next five or 10 years, we will see a significant increase in deployment of these vehicles." Automated cars could help fill a gap in the regional transportation networks of many cities, he said, getting bus and subway riders the "last mile" to their destinations.

That makes the vehicles valuable not just for their own contribution but for the strength they deliver to other systems.

"Waymo looked at the data and said Waymo is much safer than human drivers. But other researchers say that under other conditions, Waymo will perform worse than human drivers, partially because there's not enough data just yet," Ma said.

Automated vehicles may navigate certain situations better than humans. Autonomous cars don't get sleepy; they don't get drunk; they aren't susceptible to road rage. But they also lack judgment, and they may be vulnerable to a sudden burst of variables. That makes it difficult to offer a single appraisal regarding their safety, he noted.

"In simple driving conditions, Waymo vehicles can be safer," he said. "However, a more complicated scenario like navigating through a complex intersection or adverse weather conditions or a complex work zone can be tricky."

Nevertheless, early studies of automated cars compare them favorably to human drivers. The National Health Service Administration recently concluded that 94% of crashes in automated vehicles are due to, or at least partially attributed to, human errors. Research conducted by KIA, a South Korean automobile manufacturer, found that self-driving cars may be safer than human drivers — or at least might be soon.

"With the sensors and cameras monitoring and guiding, these cars can not only sense their environment but also can anticipate what's coming up ahead, which humans are not capable of," KIA wrote. "They may one day make the world a safer place by eliminating human error and reducing the number of car crashes."

A study published by researchers from the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute, the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute, General Motors and Cruise corroborates KIA and Ma's safety insights as well.

Comparing 5.6 million miles of human ride-hail driving to 1 million miles of autonomous driving in San Francisco, the study found that human drivers had significantly higher crash rates, with 50.5 crashes per million miles compared to 23 for self-driving cars. Humans also caused more injuries and fatalities.

Ma's research into the place of autonomous vehicles within cities has probed not just safety but also efficacy. Even if the cars are safe, they may still have other implications for urban mobility. Do they contribute to traffic or alleviate it? Do they add to emissions or reduce them?

His findings reveal hesitancy toward smart infrastructure, especially sensors and cameras that communicate with vehicles about traffic flow and ramp congestion, amid concerns over traffic jams involving autonomous cars — including a well-publicized mashup in San Francisco, where robot cars squared off in a parking lot, honking at each other for hours and driving residents to distraction.

It comes as little surprise, then, that consumers still are wary.

"(In 2021), we conducted a survey to understand people's adoption and attitudes toward this technology," Ma said. "Compared to 2017, the results hadn't changed — people's attitudes are still skeptical."

But familiarity may eventually soften some of that doubt. The B. John Garrick Institute for the Risk Sciences at UCLA advances research in risk analysis, safety and resilience across complex systems — including autonomous vehicles. Its faculty awarded Ma \$7.5 million to support his research on the impacts of new mobility technologies and automated vehicles.

Ma's work with the Federal Highway Administration also was highlighted by the Department of Transportation, which said that his projects "improve strategic and tactical decision-making for cooperative vehicles operating on connected infrastructure, making the driving experience safer and more efficient."

ROBOT CARS ARE A CURIOSITY WITH GREAT POSSIBILITY, BUT THE

future of American transportation goes well beyond the potential of those vehicles. It is complex, multifaceted and vulnerable.

The Mobility Center's Risk Institute works to identify potential safety hazards, from natural disasters to cyberthreats and aging infrastructure. Through stimulating scenarios, it devises strategies for risk prevention, focusing on both asset management and prioritizing maintenance efforts.

"We have a project looking at hurricanes, working on multiple states in the southern parts of Louisiana, Florida, Mississippi, Alabama, where we are helping them predict the impact of potential hurricanes and the emergency response agency and the Department of Transportation can work together to deploy adequate strategies," Ma said.

Further, the Mobility Center is committed to championing equity within transportation, ensuring that advancements uplift all communities — with a special focus on empowering underserved communities. The future of mobility also includes pedestrians, wheelchair users and scooter riders who often struggle to navigate through urban environments designed for conventional vehicles.

Through the power of advanced sensing and perception technologies, the Mobility Center employs real-time data to improve safety by alerting vehicles to the presence of at-risk individuals.

Ma's work extends to improving transportation access for people living in disadvantaged communities — where unreliable transit options hinder access to jobs and essential services, perpetuating a cycle of poverty that can feel insurmountable.

"We get data, we track them, we quantify this type of accessibility and identify where the problems are," Ma said. "We deal with questions like how to better design the system so people have access to it."

"We talk about new road pollution as well, finding that disadvantaged communities are subject to extra pollution because they live near freeways or congested areas," he added, echoing concerns of activists in Los Angeles and beyond. "That's not right. Our solutions can identify those hot spots and provide digital support, and we have researchers also working on universal mobility programs."

In broader strokes, Ma's efforts are intended to bridge spaces in existing research — to look into the future and imagine transportation not just as tinkering with existing systems but rather in terms of its vast potential and vulnerability.

"Our job is to identify all these gaps, talk to all the stakeholders, communities, to understand what needs to be done, what best practices they need," Ma said. "It's our job to synthesize information — have experts understand information and provide a white paper about critical conclusions to impact society and identify urgent needs." ▀



THE HIDDEN COSTS

Time on freeways is time taken from families

OF COMMUTING

WRITTEN BY
LISA FUNG



EVERY MORNING, JENNA GARCIA RISES around 5 a.m. to get ready for work as a middle school science teacher. The married mother of three children, ages 5, 3 and 2, has about an hour to herself before she wakes up her kids, gets them dressed and fed and prepares their backpacks, water bottles and any other items they may need before heading to the car to go to daycare.

Depending on traffic, the trip from Garcia's home in Corona to the childcare center takes about 15 minutes, with an additional 30 minutes to take each of her kids to their classrooms and get them settled. All told, the drop-off adds nearly an hour to what would otherwise be a 20-minute commute — all before her workday begins.

"At this point, we have it down to a really good science," she said. "My kids know exactly what to do."

Although transportation may not be the most important consideration when choosing childcare, it is central to the parents of the

approximately 8 million children enrolled in center-based care nationwide.

"There is a body of literature that shows that kids really influence people's travel patterns, in particular women's travel patterns," said Evelyn Blumenberg, a UCLA professor of urban planning and director of the Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies. "There's not that much that's known about it, in part because there's no great data sources out there to look at childcare travel."

Transportation scholarship is largely focused on a single destination, predicated on the notion that commuters travel directly from home to work and back. But more than a quarter of all travel involves making a stop on the way to or from work. And, Blumenberg said, nearly 70 percent of working women experience these "trip-chain" commutes.

"For most people — and particularly for women, and women with children — it's not a straight beeline from home to work," she said. "Men do it too, but women are more likely to do

it. Women are stringing together trips and doing household-supporting travel, one purpose of which is to drop kids off at childcare or schools."

The relationship between childcare and transportation has become more pronounced, with 23.5 million mothers with children under the age of 18 in the workforce today, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Studies have shown that the unpredictability of commute time is a source of worry and stress for parents, whose considerable hours at work coupled with long commutes mean less time with their children. Long travel times — to childcare centers and then to work — also may constrain women's employment choices and potentially limit their labor force participation.

For parents like Garcia, whose husband has work hours opposite her own, the trip-chain travel time means she often extends her workday, staying late to prepare for the next day's classes before picking up her children. This allows her to have more quality time with her kids in the evening while her husband is at work.

"It's definitely a well-oiled machine," she said, "and if it breaks down, we all feel the stress of something not happening right."

BLUMENBERG, UCLA DATA SCIENTIST ZHIYUAN

Yao and graduate student Madeline Wander studied access to childcare and childcare travel, using California-specific "ad-on" data from the 2017 National Household Travel Survey, which gather information on travel and transportation patterns, along with confidential data from the California Department of Social Services on licensed daycare centers open between 2010 and 2020.

The researchers were interested in the relationship between the availability of childcare centers and the likelihood that a family with children under age 5 would take advantage of formal daycare. They also studied the question of how the proximity of available childcare affects travel.

The NHTS data included geographic information on where respondents lived, worked and where they traveled to on a single day, in addition to general demographic information. "They wrote in, 'I traveled to a childcare center' or 'to my kids' school,'" Blumenberg said. "And the survey had a latitude and longitude associated with where they went."

The greatest challenge for the researchers was the painstaking process of matching this travel behavior data from the NHTS with the geographic location of the licensed childcare centers. Once they had that information, they could determine travel distances and trip-chain stops for childcare.

The clearest conclusion was that childcare demands weigh more heavily on women. Women were more likely than men to be responsible for escorting their children to childcare, regardless of the number of household workers, household income, race/ethnicity or educational attainment.

Beyond that, the study also demonstrated that childcare and transit are interrelated. The



researchers found that most parents enroll in childcare centers within four miles of their house, with a median drive time of about 10 minutes. “That’s not to say that there aren’t some people who travel longer,” Blumenberg said. “Clearly our study shows that if there’s not enough daycare located close by, you’re going to travel farther.”

Among households with at least one worker, families tended to send their children to centers located closer to their homes than to their workplaces.

And like Garcia, most of the people in the survey traveled by car to take their kids to daycare.

“About 90% of the trips in our dataset were by car; the rest were by walking,” Blumenberg said. “We did not have a single person who used public transit to drop their child off or pick them up from their childcare center.”

Predictably, then, for households without an automobile, formal childcare arrangements can be difficult. “It’s very, very challenging for them

center-based care. “We really do need to be thinking about the supply of childcare,” Blumenberg said. “Who has access to childcare — and hopefully affordable childcare.”

Latino households with young children had the lowest access to childcare of any race/ethnicity, their study found. Latino households make up nearly 39% of households with young children in California, but less than one-third of those use formal care.

“In largely Hispanic neighborhoods, maybe there’s less demand; maybe they prefer a family member to take care of their kids,” Bloomberg said. “Larger literature suggests that may be true, but there’s still limited supply, because if you provide more care in those neighborhoods, including subsidized care, then you tend to get higher rates of use.”

The federal government provides funding and services for children from low-income households through programs like Head Start or Child Care and Development Block Grants. California’s Head

but then they don’t have a spot available for my kids or the number of kids or the age. I know a lot of parents’ experience when it comes to childcare is: Are they available and can they afford it?”

Overall, the researchers suggest the need for additional enhanced assistance not just for families but also for childcare businesses. These subsidies could help improve access to childcare services and would help maintain an adequate supply of such centers, particularly in non-urban areas.

Changes in transportation policy could help improve childcare access in rural or suburban neighborhoods. “It’s much more difficult to provide services in a dispersed area,” Blumenberg said. “Transit doesn’t work very well in outlying suburbs because it takes too long to get places. In some ways, that’s the same dilemma in some of these outlying suburban areas where the people are dispersed. The childcare centers are dispersed. It takes a long time to get to them — and that can serve as a real barrier.”

“THERE IS A BODY OF LITERATURE THAT SHOWS THAT KIDS REALLY INFLUENCE PEOPLE’S TRAVEL PATTERNS, IN PARTICULAR WOMEN’S TRAVEL PATTERNS.”

— Evelyn Blumenberg, UCLA professor of urban planning

to have complex travel patterns,” she said, “so it’s likely forcing them to scramble to think about who’s caring for their kids.”

THE NONPROFIT CENTER FOR AMERICAN Progress reports that 51 percent of people in the United States live in a “childcare desert,” which is a Census tract with more than 50 children under age 5 that contains either no childcare providers or so few options that there are more than three times as many children as licensed childcare slots. In California, that figure is 60 percent overall, with 72 percent in low-income neighborhoods.

Not surprisingly, access to licensed childcare is best in high-income urban neighborhoods with concentrations of well-educated professionals and is sparse in rural areas. Blumenberg and her colleagues also found formal childcare centers in short supply in newer suburban areas as well as heavily Hispanic areas. Childcare options further dwindled, the researchers found, during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many centers closed due to low enrollment, high costs and staffing shortages.

According to Blumenberg’s study, about 50 percent of young children nationwide receive care from non-parents. Of that group, 62 percent — or about 8 million children — are enrolled in formal

Start program is the largest in the nation. These subsidies help improve access in areas where there are fewer formal childcare centers.

“We had speculated that we would see more disparities by income and race,” Blumenberg said, “but subsidized care tends to fill in in some of those neighborhoods.”

But even though families in some low-income neighborhoods may have reasonable access to childcare, studies find that their care options tend to be of lesser quality than in higher-income areas.

AS PARENTS WITH OPPOSITE WORKING schedules, Garcia and her husband had specific requirements that made their choice more challenging.

“We would need childcare earlier than most people would offer, or they would need to be picked up sooner than we were capable of it,” she said. “It really limited who or where we were able to put our kids.”

They had few options in her immediate neighborhood — particularly since they hoped to have all three children in the same facility.

“One of the things I’ve always struggled with when it comes to childcare is availability,” Garcia said. “I’ll get a recommendation for somebody,

Subsidized auto ownership, car-sharing programs and other enhancements are being tested in rural and non-urban parts of California.

It’s tough for women trying to handle complex travel while managing a job and trying to meet the needs of their kids, Blumenberg said. “Despite the growth in female labor force participation rates, there’s still a very gendered division of labor,” she said. “With the travel related to childcare and other household-supporting functions, we really need to think about efforts to have an equitable division of household labor. That would certainly help women manage.”

Garcia says she often arranges her schedule around her children, picking them up around 5:30, then making dinner before settling into their “night routine.”

“Having kids in childcare, it’s a beast. It’s a whole thing — and it takes a village,” she said. “Any parent who has their kid in childcare understands the importance of a routine, and when that routine gets disrupted by sickness or work or a national pandemic, they usually have to pivot pretty quickly, and it can make things pretty stressful. But parents who have their kids in childcare know how to manage those situations because we have to. There’s no other option for us.” ▶

PARKING RULES CHANGE BEHAVIOR

A bill meant for one thing does another

WRITTEN BY
JON
REGARDIE

ON JAN. 1, 2023, CALIFORNIA EMBARKED ON something of a grand experiment in one of its most crucial if overlooked sectors — parking.

That was the day legislation known as Assembly Bill 2097 went into effect. Authored by Laura Friedman (D-Glendale), it eliminated parking mandates within a half-mile of major transit stops. Developers and business owners were free of local rules dictating how many spaces for cars they had to create when building a project.

For many people, the hope was that this would turbo charge housing construction in California. The idea was that the money saved by relaxing parking requirements would allow developers to build more units and get through the approvals process faster. Then there were all the ancillary benefits of less driving and more people riding mass transit.

Two years later, the effects of that change are not precisely what supporters expected, but they are profound. Stubbornly high interest rates and other factors have slowed overall housing development, dampening the potential to quickly reshape the economics of residential construction. But for Eddie Navarette, AB 2097 is a “game changer” for other reasons.

He is known as “Fast Eddie.” His downtown L.A.-based FE Design & Consulting specializes in helping restaurant and bar owners navigate the permitting and zoning minefields that line the path to opening. Navarette said that in the past, the bureaucratic process of satisfying vehicle requirements and getting sign-offs from planning department officials could take months. AB 2097 means there are no parking minimums — the benefits are not limited to housing — and thus, there’s less to evaluate.

“I would say it cut time for most projects by at least a third,” Navarette said recently. “This cuts down fees for [businesses hiring] professionals. It cuts down what the city has to spend on engineers having to evaluate these things. It also puts money back into the prospective operator, who’s starting out on a shoestring budget. That’s like issuing a check right back to them, that 30% of time that they’re saving.”

Seeing this play out is welcome, if not a surprise, to Mott Smith, a Los Angeles developer who has long championed sensible parking reform. This includes making permanent the COVID-era shifts that allowed restaurants to turn some parking spaces — whether street-front or in a lot — into outdoor eating areas. Al fresco dining kept many businesses afloat during the pandemic, but many expected it to disappear once COVID-19 receded.

When Gov. Gavin Newsom signed the bill in September 2022, Smith, who also serves as chairman of the Council of Infill Builders, predicted that restaurant and retail businesses would be among the beneficiaries. In early August, he mused on how well it has worked, particularly in Los Angeles.

“AB 2097 truly made it possible for the city to be very forward-looking in approving permanent al fresco dining,” he told Blueprint.

“To make this work, the other part of this has got to be that the cities provide better public transportation.”
Assemblymember Laura Friedman (D-Glendale)

PARKING IS ONE OF THE MOST MISUNDER-stood aspects of city-building, an afterthought in transportation planning. Seen by many drivers as nothing less than a right — a feeling enhanced by the endless spread of surface lots and towering garages — its impacts have taken decades to recognize. UCLA Urban Planning professor Don Shoup’s 2005 book *The High Cost of Free Parking* was an important contributor to changing that. Shoup’s work revealed how free street spaces or inexpensive meters led directly to congestion and air pollution: Drivers cruised for spots, making traffic the cost of cheap parking.

Housing projects also are the product of parking rules, which impose a minimum number of spaces per unit or resident. Smith is among those who say the basic math was frequently way off. “The zoning code requires us to build more parking than is used,” he said, “even in the most generous of circumstances”

The price is staggering: Friedman noted that in a garage, each parking spot costs \$24,000 to \$34,000 to build, and that can climb to \$65,000 per underground space. The cost, naturally, gets passed on to tenants, often in the form of higher rents. In a city consumed by the high cost of housing, the cost of parking is a major, if underappreciated, contributor.

In November 2022, Michael Manville, a professor of urban planning at the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs, authored an “economic letter” anticipating what AB 2097 would bring. A key was simply understanding the bill: It did not, as some fretted, ban parking anywhere. Instead, it abolished mandates in specific zones, allowing a developer to create as much or as little parking as she or he desired, responding to the needs of tenants and the restrictions of lenders (who might worry that a project with limited parking would have difficulty attracting residents).

In fact, San Diego experimented with that idea in 2019. When the parking mandates were lifted there, the city saw a spike in both affordable and market-rate housing production.

Although other factors have intervened and diminished the housing implications of AB 2097, Manville is bullish on those prospects as well. He and Smith both point to how lifting mandates



allows a developer to be more efficient on a tight urban parcel. For example, a site zoned for 20 units may not be financially viable if parking requirements cut away space and mean just 15 apartments can be constructed. Those extra residences provide the profit, and thus a reason to build.

“What we’re likely to see in the future,” Manville said in an interview, “is some developers taking advantage of this for things they had lined up; maybe not permitted but were planning to permit. They’re taking advantage of the law to not use as much parking.”

He added, “I do think it’s opening up possibilities for both market-rate developers to again make development feasible on some parcels it would not have been otherwise, and affordable development as well.”

Manville will be watching closely. He noted that the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies has hired a postdoc to follow the progress of AB 2097. An early focus involves tracking how different cities interpret the law.

PASSING LAND-USE LEGISLATION IN CALIFORNIA IS NOTORI-ously thorny, with lawmakers having to negotiate with unions, business organizations, environmental groups and others. The first quote in Friedman’s press release announcing Newsom’s signing of AB 2097 stated, “I’ve been working on this for two years now.”

But one of the most interesting components of her work is the long game she’s playing. During an interview in mid-August, Friedman noted that some developers are taking advantage of the opportunity to build less parking, but she seemed equally interested in the doors that the bill can open.

“To make this work, the other part of this has got to be that the cities provide better public transportation,” Friedman said. “Already these zones are near major transit, but it’s true that not everyone is always using only that transit stop.”

It’s a realistic and nuanced take on transportation, and one that is particularly important in Los Angeles, where tens of billions of dollars are being spent on enhancing and expanding the regional bus and rail system but where challenges include the perception of safety. This is augmented by the fact that many Angelenos will instinctively hop in the car for an errand or short drive, never considering if mass transit, biking or walking could suffice.

All of which is a reminder that transportation policy often quickly envelops the full range of issues — from climate change to affordable housing. AB 2097 is a piece of that very complex puzzle.

And the initial returns on that bill, according to experts, are indeed positive; for example, any business that Navarette helps get across the finish line creates jobs, generates tax revenue and enhances street life.

Smith and Manville point out that a number of cities in California have historically used parking mandates as a tool to combat any new development. Smith notes that with AB 2097, some municipalities may have to be more transparent with their opposition to new housing, especially lower-income projects. Still, it’s hard to imagine that a state law will propel an open embrace.

Friedman’s take gets to the idea that even forward-thinking legislation only does so much. As hard as passing a bill is, getting municipalities to improve transit to the point where a substantial portion of the citizenry will choose an alternative to driving may be much more difficult.

But the reasons for doing it, and making AB 2097 a springboard to greater change, are, in her view, essential.

“Every bit of parking we don’t build,” she said, “is environmentally much more sustainable. That’s a tremendous amount of concrete, trucking, fuel, metal, with huge greenhouse gas and pollution impacts. It’s definitely a positive to see parking as a scarce resource and to use it better.” ▶

→ Cars at Dodger Stadium, with downtown Los Angeles in the background.







Connecting Suburbs: The Lessons of Paris

Could Los Angeles copy the Parisian train system?

WRITTEN BY
MICHAEL FINNEGAN

PARIS — WHEN FRANCE BUILT its first railroads, trunk lines jutted out from Paris in every direction. The same radial pattern emerged inside the city when the Paris subway took shape decades later. Today, eight subway lines still converge in one hectic station at the central axis: Châtelet-Les Halles.

Nearly 125 years after this core station opened with art nouveau canopies over its sidewalk entrances, it still functions well despite chronic grumbling among the mobs of riders who hustle through it.

Part of what makes the Paris subway one of the finest in the world is this layout of its main lines as spokes on a wheel. For many of the 2 million people who live in the city, it remains the quickest way to get around. Paris is compact — small enough to fit inside Simi Valley or Long Beach.

But sprawl has created new demands on the system, and the ways which Paris is responding, suggest a future for the city that all but invented sprawl. Paris is now rethinking, and rebuilding, its transit system to account for how the city has grown and spread out. Los Angeles might take note.

More than 12 million people live in the Paris metro area, by far the most populous in the European Union. For decades, Paris has been extending lines further out from the

city center, yet the subway still fails to meet most transit needs of the 10 million people in the suburbs.

Now, however, the subway is undergoing a radical transformation as France builds the Grand Paris Express. At a price of \$40 billion, nearly double initial estimates, it is Europe's biggest and most expensive public infrastructure project.

In a bold break from tradition, none of the four subway lines under construction — the 15, 16, 17 and 18 — will enter Paris. Instead, they will connect far-flung suburbs to one another with trains zooming underneath office parks, sports venues, universities, hospitals and vast stretches of housing. At last, the subway's center of gravity is shifting outward.

The Grand Paris Express is a belated recognition that millions of people both live and work in the suburbs, yet — due to the subway's radial design — waste time commuting through the city center. Many of France's biggest companies, including Renault (automobiles), Orange (telecommunications) and Total (energy), employ huge workforces in the suburbs.

The scale of the Grand Paris Express is immense. France is digging tunnels for 112 miles of new track underground. It is laying another 12 miles above ground, most of it on a viaduct slicing through the Saclay Plateau, a cluster of science and technology businesses and schools south of Paris. The subway project has employed more than 7,200 workers at 170 construction sites, at times dangerous; five people have died on the job.

By the time of the Grand Paris Express' scheduled completion in 2031, 68 new subway stations will have opened, each designed by its own team of architects and artists as a unique economic and cultural hub. The extravagance of the designs could vault more than a few into the top tier of European rail stations despite the obscure locations — Bagneux, Gonesse and Clamart among them. The few well-known stops include La Défense, a dense business district of skyscrapers, and the Stadium of France, the track-and-field arena of the 2024 Summer Olympics.

The goals of the Grand Paris Express would ring familiar to Californians. Draw new riders to public transit. Decongest roadways. Reduce air pollution. Promote density



ISTOCKIMAGES

↑ A train arrives at the Notre-Dame-des-Champs in Paris, a station on line 12 of the Paris Métro in the 6th arrondissement.

and discourage sprawl. Responding to fears of gentrification, the government has promised rent subsidies to many tenants in housing that developers are building near the new stations.

Beyond transit, the project's main ambition is to diminish social

“THE ARRIVAL OF THE SUBWAY CHANGES EVERYTHING.”

—Bernard Cathelain, executive board member at the Société des grands projets.

and economic inequalities that have plagued the Paris suburbs for generations, largely by connecting isolated havens of poverty to schools and job opportunities long out of reach for those without cars. Those, too, are priorities heralded by transit planners in Southern California, having learned hard lessons through the region's long reliance on freeways.

Bernard Cathelain, an executive board member at the Société des Grands Projets, the state-owned company that is building the Grand Paris Express, sees each new station as a means of transforming day-to-day life in the suburbs. “The arrival of the subway,” he said, “changes everything.”

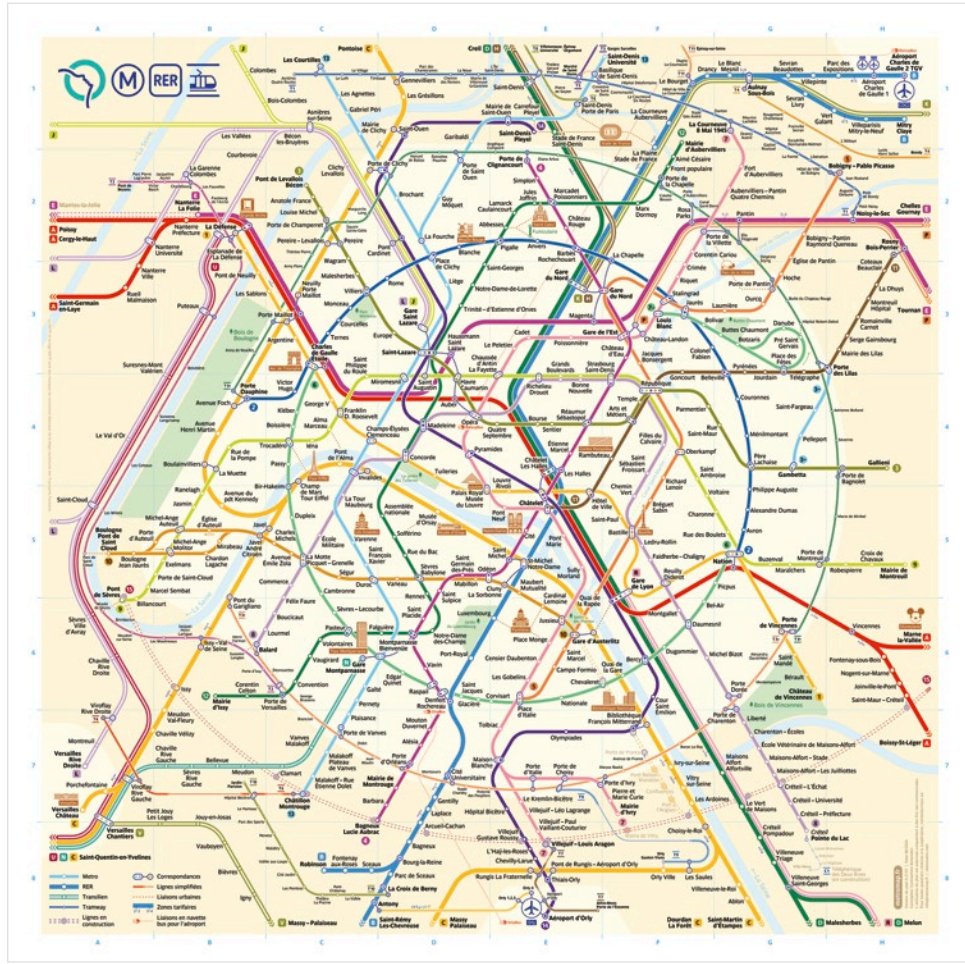
FRENCH PRESIDENT EMMANUEL Macron celebrated the opening of the first seven stations with a ceremony in June at the biggest, Saint-Denis-Pleyel, just north of Paris. It is a short walk from the Olympic Village where

athletes were housed this summer in more than 2,800 newly built apartments in Saint-Denis, one of France's poorest suburbs.

It was fitting that standing alongside Macron was one of his predecessors, Nicolas Sarkozy, who set the Grand Paris Express in motion with a 2009 speech outlining his vision for the project. Political consensus and collaboration have been crucial to moving it forward, starting with a 2010 law declaring that it would serve the national interest. The law set up the Société des Grands Projets to float bonds and build the project. It designated a slew of taxes — now raising \$900 million a year — to pay off the debt by the 2070s.

At Saint-Denis-Pleyel, sunlight penetrates a grand atrium and illuminates platforms where four lines will converge 90 feet below ground. It is the northern terminus of the subway's newly extended Line 14, the last one built to cross the city center.

Line 14 is now the spine of the



RATP GROUP

↑ The Paris Metro map, with its colorful lines and distinct typography, is instantly recognizable and a symbol of the city's efficient transit system.

Grand Paris Express. Its southern terminus, a 40-minute ride from Saint-Denis Pleyel, is a newly opened station at Orly Airport. When the station opened in June, Line 14 became the first to offer a direct subway ride between the city and Orly, France's most heavily traveled airport after Paris Charles de Gaulle, which is already served by the subway.

The next station to open, in December, will be south of Paris at Gustave Roussy, one of Europe's top cancer hospitals and research centers. Tens of thousands of patients are treated there each year. It has long been cut off from rapid transit but will soon be the juncture of Lines 14 and 15, offering direct rides on state-of-the-art automated trains to Paris, Orly and scores of suburbs on all sides of the city. (All four of the new lines will intersect many times with the existing subway, speeding up travel between Paris and the suburbs.)

The larger goals of the Grand Paris Express will be more seriously tested in such places as Clichy-Sous-Bois, an eastern suburb with sky-high unemployment, pervasive poverty and scant public transit. After two teenage boys, Bouna Traoré and Zyed Benna, were

electrocuted at a power substation in 2005 while fleeing police in Clichy-Sous-Bois, riots erupted all over France for weeks in protest against social conditions in poor suburbs.

Planners hope that fast access by subway to jobs, schools and healthcare will improve the lives of people in Clichy-Sous-Bois. That city's mayor was so moved at the subway station's recent groundbreaking that he wept, Cathelain recalled. "It was an enormous emotion," he said.

Architects and artists who designed all 68 of the stations have tailored plans to the distinct character of each neighborhood. The idea is to give suburbs "real urban monuments worthy of a world-class city like Paris," said Valérie Péresse, president of the Île-de-France regional council that governs the metro area.

"It's going to be absolutely magnificent," she said. A conservative who was initially skeptical of the cost (the art budget alone is \$39 million), Péresse came to embrace the high-end design. "It's like a mark of nobility for a suburb to have a station that isn't just a place to pass through but rather a place that leaves an impression," she said.

For a station in the industrial suburb of La Courneuve, architect Pascale Dalix sought to pay tribute to the town's 19th-century factories with handmade bricks in the vaulted ceiling and atrium. She thought the station should serve as a gateway to the nearby Georges Valbon park, the region's biggest outside Paris, so she and artist Duy Anh Nhan Duc covered it with a garden. The rooftop will support seven feet of soil for trees,

“THE IDEA IS TO GIVE SUBURBS REAL URBAN MONUMENTS WORTHY OF A WORLD-CLASS CITY LIKE PARIS.”

—Valérie Péresse, president of the Île-de-France regional council.

bushes and vines cascading down station walls to the street. “I wanted to tie people to nature,” Nahn Duc told an architectural conference in Paris.

In Vitry-sur-Seine, another industrial suburb, architect Frédéric Neau designed the station as a gaping cave with floating escalators dropping into an abyss. Abdelkader Benchamma, the artist who painted the undulating walls, said he was inspired by the caves of Ethiopia, Algeria and France’s Dordogne region “to create a kind of stupor upon arriving in this magic spot, out of place, from another dimension, where you lose your bearings a little.”

One of the Grand Paris Express designers compared its impact to the 19th century layout of the Grands Boulevards that define the Paris cityscape. Another, Patrick Jouin, who oversees selection of station

fixtures, called the attention to aesthetic detail an “expression of the social contract between all of us.”

“I am convinced that with beauty, we bring calm, we respect everyone, and in the end, we are happier,” he told *Le journal du Grand Paris*. “If we had stuck to the functional, we would have tiled platforms and stainless steel surfaces like in an operating room. But on this project, there is a lot of ambition. It goes beyond a pretty curve. It’s about collective well-being.”

The main point, nonetheless, is better transit. When the Grand Paris Express is done, planners say, nearly everyone in the region will live within a mile of the subway. Something similar, Cathelain said, should be within reach for any metro area with comparable resources. “It seems to me that’s not something that Los Angeles couldn’t do as well,” he said. ▸

↓ With over 300 stations, the Paris Metro connects a melting pot of neighborhoods, bringing together people from different cultural backgrounds.



A Pragmatic Voice at City Hall

Katy Yaroslavsky on L.A.'s overlapping challenges —
transit, housing, climate change and more

PHOTOS BY
IRIS SCHNEIDER



LOS ANGELES CITY COUNCILWOMAN KATY Yaroslavsky is a moderate in today's L.A. politics. A thoughtful champion on climate change who brings needed urgency to that issue, she cut her policy teeth as an environmental and cultural advisor to County Supervisor Sheila Kuehl. Yaroslavsky's 2022 election to the council marked her leap into elected office, and she is now at City Hall, where issues have a way of piling on top of each other — homelessness is about housing but also about jobs and mental health and addiction. Transportation, the main subject of this interview, quickly drifts into development, economic opportunity, public safety and climate change.

At City Hall, which has become markedly more ideological in recent years, Yaroslavsky is a pragmatic liberal. Her approach to making the region's transit system safer — she sits on the Metro board — includes improving outreach to unhoused people on buses and trains as well as “hardening” stations and involving police where needed. She acknowledges that the region's reliance on commerce makes the port invaluable, while also lamenting the pollution that the port produces.

And she already has found herself in the complicated politics of homelessness, where basic humanity and the need for protection can sometimes trigger angry constituents who resent bringing shelters to their neighborhoods.

Hers is, of course, a familiar name in Los Angeles civic life. In fact, she sits at the junction of two L.A. families dedicated to serving this area. Her father-in-law, Zev Yaroslavsky, represented the council's Fifth District from 1975 to 1994, as she does now. And her mother, Laura Plotkin, was the chief deputy in Kuehl's district office when Kuehl served in the state Legislature.

Yaroslavsky recently spoke with *Blueprint* editor-in-chief Jim Newton in the councilwoman's brightly lit, colorfully decorated City Hall office.

Blueprint: Why are we here? You've done work at the county and as a lawyer. What drew you to this office as a place to represent your city or your community?

KATY YAROSLAVSKY: I've had a varied career. I started off in the private sector, and I knew very quickly that I wanted to be doing policy work. ... I worked at Latham as a land-use lawyer for five years or so and then did Coro [a prestigious public affairs fellowship] as a 30-year-old ... , and I used that to pivot into the work I wanted to do, which was climate policy work. ...

I had known Sheila [Kuehl] because my mom had been her district director when I was a kid. ... She called me up out of the blue and offered me a job. She said, “I need a person who can do this and this.” [climate policy and the arts]. I said, “OK, I can do that.” ...

We got Measure M passed [that parcel tax, approved by voters in 2018, which pays to capture stormwater runoff and improve the region's water conservation capacity]. For me, that was my first experience on a campaign and putting together what became the thing on the ballot. It was so exciting, and it was so impactful. Measure W is a billion dollars every few years for something that most people don't even understand. They don't understand what stormwater is, but they understand why we need to green communities, which is why it got almost 70% of the vote. But it was that experience that told me: “Oh, I want more of this. I want to be able to work on big things. And I think the best way to do that is to continue in government.”

So one day I just happened to ask, “I wonder when [Councilman] Paul Koretz is termed out?” It turned out the timing was actually pretty good. It was going to be in three or four years, and I just started moving down the path of “maybe I'll do this thing” and do climate work at the city. ...

At the time I had two kids [she now has three], and I'm from here. And I want to stay here. And I want this to be a place where my kids can grow up and want to stay here. So as a lifelong Angeleno, I thought it would be a good opportunity to make the most impact.

BP: And how has the experience of being here compared to what you thought it would be?

KY: First of all, it's an incredible honor and privilege to represent the Fifth Council District. It's a really smart, engaged, diverse constituency.

BP: Challenging, too, I would guess.

KY: You have to be on your A-game. And your team has to be on its A-game.

And it's also frustrating because the bureaucracy of the city is so profoundly broken and under-resourced. The disconnect between what

so clearly needs to be done and the tools and resources we have available to us — and the lack of coherent governance to solve these really thorny issues like homelessness, public safety, public health — it’s infuriating.

BP: It’s been a source of frustration for as long as I can remember.

KY: When it comes to transportation, for as much criticism as people like to throw at Metro, at least you have a coherent governance structure for what you’re trying to solve. If you’re a smaller city, maybe you don’t like how the representation shakes out, but the governance works. And that’s evidenced by the fact that we keep building the infrastructure that’s really complicated and hard to build.

Are there challenges around public safety? Of course, but those are minor compared to the governance challenges that we’re facing in homelessness.

BP: What does that it mean to you, here in this building, to be a centrist?

KY: I’m a centrist in the context of this body, specifically. I’m not a centrist when it comes to national politics.

BP: A centrist in L.A. is a liberal anyplace else?

KY: Yeah, right. I am pretty close to being in the middle of this body. ...

I think I’m more pragmatic than ideological. I’m interested in problem solving, and part of why this local position was interesting to me was because it’s nonpartisan, and therefore you can focus on the issues ... and work with people all over the place.

And it was much less politically charged when I decided to run than it is now. That’s where social media has played a large part. ... Local politics wasn’t highly ideological or philosophical. It feels different [now], and yet ... everybody’s interested in problem solving. It just depends where they are coming at it from.

BP: I don’t want to seem nostalgic, because there were plenty of problems here when I first came to this building. But there did seem to be an ethic of problem solving then [in the early 1990s] that was less ideological than it is today. At least, it seems that way from the outside.



↑ Yaroslavasky at her desk during a meeting of the Los Angeles City Council.

KY: It certainly feels that way sometimes on the inside, too. I’m trying to get away from that. My office is having conversations with some colleagues where we have shared priorities and interests. We’re talking with Nithya [Raman, councilmember for the Fourth District] about climate work and sustainability, for instance.

When there are lean times like we have now budget-wise, it does force you to be smarter and more strategic about leveraging county, state and federal dollars. We’re having conversations with Nithya and others about how we bring those resources here — Traci [Park, councilmember for the Eleventh District], around the Olympics. Those conversations are happening, and they’re starting to be ongoing, because I’m so frustrated with this bureaucracy. ... We have the Olympics coming in four years, [and we need to] go straight to the feds and try to get some money ... for projects, for beautification.

BP: From the transportation perspective, what needs to done to be ready for the Olympics? There’s been talk of a “car-free Olympics.” I don’t really know what that means, or whether that’s possible, but as you look at it now, are you satisfied with where we are?

KY: I think there are two ways that we as a region could approach this. We could focus on temporary solutions: “Wilshire is going to become a bus-only lane!”

BP: For two weeks.

KY: Right. And we could fairly easily get everyone around on bus and bike and whatever. And create thoroughfares that are only for official mass transit.

Or, we could do a hybrid of that where we also use the Olympics to accelerate a lot of the work that we know we need to do anyway, around “first-mile, last-mile” [that’s City Hall for the improvements needed to get transit riders from stations to destinations] around connectivity, around bus and bike lanes. And we should do that. Otherwise, it would be a waste. My position is that the Olympics will be a failure if we don’t leverage it to go get what we need.

BP: Otherwise, it’s just a two-week event that comes and goes.

KY: And that we spend all this time on, and what’s there to show for it? We’re not building big things, which I think is great. We don’t need more stadiums right now. But we do need safe streets, and safe intersections, and protected bike lanes, and ... a safe Metro system.

And we aren’t focused on that in this city right now. We haven’t been because of the fund-

“THE BUREAUCRACY OF THE CITY IS SO PROFOUNDLY BROKEN AND UNDER-RESOURCED. ... IT’S INFURIATING.”

ing issue and for a variety of reasons. But I think that if we can get that infrastructure in place, it'll make it easier for us as a city to be complying with things like CHIP [the Citywide Housing Incentive Program, which commits the city to creating more affordable housing and creates incentives for developers to build more dense housing close to transit stations].

Not everyone is going to ditch their car. Not everyone should be expected to. But if, after the Olympics, if 5% more people are walking or biking to get to the grocery store, or get a cup of coffee, or pick up their kids, then that's huge. And they will only do that if they feel safe doing it.

BP: Is that a hard infrastructure challenge, as opposed to an ongoing expense such as policing Metro, that you wouldn't expect the Olympics to be able to cover?

KY: Yes. We're obligated under Measure M [the county's half-cent sales tax for transportation improvements, passed by voters in 2016] to build that out, that first-mile, last-mile piece or to pay for it to be done. ... And that's a couple hundred million dollars for the city of L.A. alone.

So let's go get money and do it.

BP: And what is the "it"?

KY: Bike lanes, enhanced lighting, safer intersections, bike share, curb cuts, medians — all that stuff that makes it safe and easy for people to get to the Metro stations from within a mile.

BP: Following up on your comment about safety: How big an issue is safety on Metro? And how much might it affect ridership?

KY: I think it's THE issue right now, THE most important issue. What's the point in spending billions of dollars on a piece of infrastructure if people don't use it because they don't feel safe? It was starting before COVID, but COVID accelerated the falling apart, the deteriorating of safety.

It is moving back in the right direction. ... People have been connected to housing and services in the system, which I think is great. And I think it's important that we harden the system, too. If you're just there to take a nap, or shoot up, or use the bathroom, we need another place for you. You can't be there.

One of the things I'm interested in is activating the stations. There are other ways of providing less active safety by having more eyes and ears around. So, cafes, newsstands, restaurants even. These are all ways that other places in other parts of the world activate their stations.

For example, in Tokyo ... you go to the main station, and some of the best restaurants in the city are there, underground, and some of the

best shopping in the city is there. We're not there. We're a generation or two away from there, but we can move towards that. We should, because a lot of people would rather have a café with people sitting at tables than have an armed police officer.

BP: You mentioned Tokyo. I know you were in Paris recently, too. Are there cities that are doing this better than we are? And, more specifically, are there things that we can learn from other cities that we can bring to L.A.?

KY: I would say that there are places like London, where it's easy to find a bike, where bike share works. Paris is a compact city compared to L.A., and so thinking about what we're doing abo-

“ARE WE PUTTING HOUSING ON TOP OF OUR STATIONS? ARE WE PUTTING DAY CARE CENTERS ON TOP OF OUR STATIONS? COMMUNITY SPACES? RETAIL?”

veground and around stations is as important as what we're doing in the system itself.

Are we putting housing on top of our stations? Are we putting daycare centers on top of our stations? Community spaces? Retail?

BP: There's a sense in which all these things relate to each other...

KY: Yes. One of my frustrations with the governance here is that we have all these different committees. Everything is everything. ...

I've suggested to some colleagues, "Why don't we do some joint committee meetings where we talk about the intersection of transportation

and housing policy?" Part of it is we have to go to council, which is why I think we ought to have the option of going down to fewer meetings a week so we can try to have more substantive conversations.

BP: When you talk with constituents about what they want, how does that conversation compare to the conversation here? Are the things they care about the same things that you spend your time here, as a council, talking about?

KY: Often, but, coming back to District Five, a lot of who we hear from are homeowners associations, some of the neighborhood councils and activists. And we hear from labor sometimes. And constituents who are unhappy about homelessness or public safety one-offs.

But we're not hearing often from individuals who would take that transit, or who would benefit from the affordable housing, because they're too busy trying to figure out where their kids are going to get childcare.

So, yes and no. One of the things we're focused on is: How do we create the space in all of our schedules and time [for] people who don't normally interact with government? One of the things I'm often struck by is that I'll be talking to people and they'll say, "Things are pretty good. There's just this one thing I need some help with."

Everyone's upset about homelessness. Nobody's happy about response times at LAPD. Beyond that, it's preferred parking distracts, or this, or that, and most people just aren't focused.

BP: I've never been to a dinner party where someone mentioned preferred parking districts. I've long been struck by the fact that there's a conversation among people in L.A., and there's a government conversation, and sometimes they overlap, but a lot of the time they don't seem to. Ideally, you'd want those to be the same, for someone to say, "Oh man, it took me an hour to get here tonight. Maybe I should talk with my councilwoman about traffic."

KY: That doesn't happen much.

BP: Homelessness might be the exception.

KY: Homelessness, yes. And what we need to do is figure out how to get a handle on that so we can start to think about some of this other stuff that is hugely important for a livable city.

I don't know what percentage of our time, or my staff's time, is spent on homelessness, but it's significant. And that's what it has to be right now, but I'm looking forward to us making sufficient progress on it as a city, state and country. I think that's going to require federal intervention. I think it's going to require state action.



↑ Yaroslavsky in her City Hall office.

We need to change laws. And mental health and addiction and criminal justice reform. All sorts of things. ...

BP: On transportation, is it possible to fundamentally change this city to the car? Is that necessary, and is it possible?

KY: It's both necessary and possible. As I said, not everyone is going to ditch their car, nor should they. My 79-year-old mom isn't going to start taking the bus unless she has to and it works for her. ... But some percentage of people will want that option, and we need to provide that option.

As we build more housing, which we are obligated to do by the state, and which we clearly need — particularly affordable and low-income housing — there are going to be more people coming here. And they're going to need to get around. And our streets are pretty busy.

And also, it's a joy to take a walk to the coffee shop, or to ride your bike to grab dinner or see a friend.

We absolutely need to. And because L.A. isn't as spread out as we all think it is — I mean, sure, if you wanted to ride your bike from Woodland Hills to San Pedro, that would suck — but there are a lot of trips that are under 1 1/2 miles. It's significant; no one likes sitting in traffic. ...

So I think it's absolutely necessary and doable. It will solve a lot of our climate challenges and quality-of-life frustrations, too.

BP: How are we doing as a city with respect to climate change and clean air goals?

KY: Pretty bad. Some of it we have control over, and some of it we don't. There's a lot of progress we've made since the '70s, but our port generates a lot of direct and indirect pollution. We have oil drilling in neighborhoods, still. We don't make it easy to put solar on your home. We still import a lot of our water. And most people still drive everywhere.

We have a lot of work to do. It's hard because we need to balance commerce with communities. And there are some very powerful interests that are invested in keeping things the way they are.

For example, at [one of my first council meetings] I brought a motion to create a climate action and adaptation plan for the city, which is basically an implementation plan for all the stuff we know as a city that we need to be doing. ... Most if not all big cities have some version of a climate action and adaptation plan, and we don't. Which is nuts.

So one of my big pushes in this past year's budget was to get \$1 million to hire a consultant to do the damn plan. And the fight was crazy. We got it through, and it's happening, but grudgingly.

BP: Sorry. What was the opposition?

KY: Oh, "It's a million dollars. We don't want to tie our hands. Shouldn't that money be spent on homelessness?"

We need to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time. We need to be able to do that.

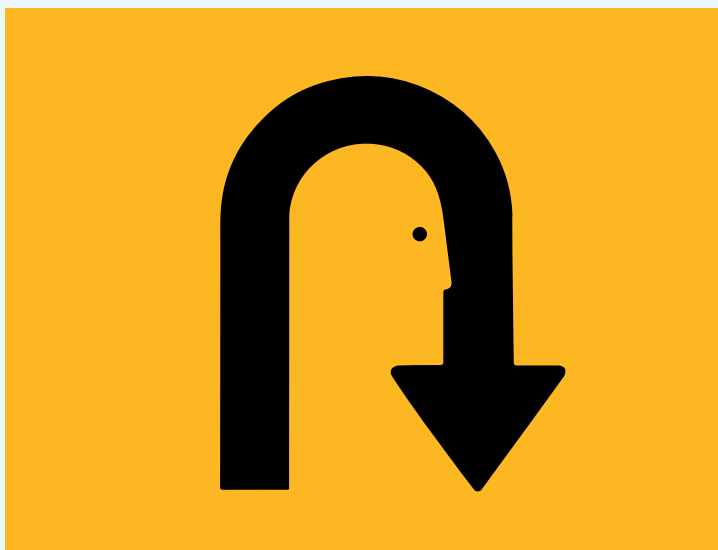
BP: Even if that's difficult, there's a part of me that's encouraged to hear that this kind of conversation is happening behind, or in addition to, the conversation about homelessness — that all other work hasn't stopped while the city focuses on homelessness.

KY: We have to, right? Imagine 30 years from now, if we don't figure this stuff out, and you turn on the faucet, and nothing comes out. It's existential.

It's human nature to focus on whatever is right in front of you, on the crisis du jour. Which is why we haven't, as a planet, figured out how to tackle climate. So much of that work is now happening at the city and regional levels because it's not happening at the national level. ...

That's a huge part of why I ran, is to do this work. We're still doing it. ▶

CLOSING NOTE: TOWARD TRANSIT THAT WORKS



NOMA BAR

LOS ANGELES IS THE BIRTHPLACE OF THE FREEWAY AND, WITH IT, many unintended consequences. When the 110 freeway first connected Pasadena to Downtown, it was designed with sweeping curves, meant to give joy to those who used it. That idea, of freeways as a source of beauty and relaxation, has not worn well.

Freeways allowed L.A. to grow and gave commuters the chance to live in suburban enclaves while working in concentrated office areas. They opened trade routes, connecting the ports to train hubs in the Inland Empire. They were vital to commerce and mobility.

They also destroyed neighborhoods, exacerbated racial tensions and poured out greenhouse gases that are plummeting the planet toward an existential crisis.

And so, Los Angeles today is confronted with myriad transportation challenges. It takes too long to get anywhere, and the city's favorite method of doing so — the private car with a single driver and no passengers — is wasteful and polluting. Metro runs trains and buses, but concern about unruly passengers sometimes keeps other riders at bay. Urban sprawl means

that many commuters spend an hour or more every day getting to and from work, time that could otherwise be spent with families, or reading, or hiking — or, frankly, doing anything other than being stuck in traffic.

Those are at the heart of our transportation woes, and they are familiar to anyone who lives here. If there is good news, it is that some of this region's better minds are trying to ease those very problems. Their work, presented in this issue of *Blueprint*, suggests that it does not have to be this way.

Tamika Butler rides a bike — and advocates for solutions that advance not just improved traffic flow, but also equity. Adam Millard-Ball, author of a comprehensive report on freeways and their effects, envisions alternatives to the corridors that have defined modern Los Angeles. Jiaqi Ma, an associate professor at the UCLA Samueli School of Engineering, sees promise in autonomous vehicles. Evelyn Blumenberg, a UCLA professor of urban planning, imagines what parents could do if they spent less time driving and more with their children.

Those are reminders that transportation planning is meaningful on several levels. As a matter of innovation, it produces such novelties as cars that drive themselves. As a matter of policy, it requires lawmakers and planners to consider how those cars will get around, and how trains, buses and bikes contribute to the overall task of keeping a place moving. And as a matter of domestic and intimate life, it affects such poignant concerns as how children grow up.

Improvements can be made. Look no farther than Paris, where *Blueprint's* intrepid contributor, Michael Finnegan, reports on what happens if a place looks broadly at a transportation challenge and invests to address it. There, the region is spending \$40 billion on a revamped transit system that will allow commuters to travel from suburb to suburb without passing through the center of the city. The Grand Paris Express, as it is known, may have lessons for Los Angeles.

Los Angeles may never be easy to navigate. It is too big, too spread out, to offer the convenience of Manhattan. But trains and autonomous vehicles and even bikes may take the strain off freeways and offer a more sustainable future. Maybe one day it will even be possible to enjoy the ride again from Pasadena to Downtown.

— **Jim Newton**



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SOMETHING TO SAY?

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