

**SMART GROWTH ISSUES  
FOR CETAP  
September 1999**

**Traffic Congestion is the County's Second Most Serious Problem**

- According to the June 1999 Public Opinion Survey of Riverside County, traffic congestion is the second most serious problem that the County faces. Protecting open space is ranked eleventh in seriousness.
  - If CETAP truly is a bottom-up, public-driven process, then the seriousness that the public gives to problems in the County must establish CETAP's priorities.
  - Since time is limited, the above priorities must focus the emphasis given to achieving various planning outcomes.

**Smart Growth/Transit Will Not Reduce Traffic Congestion**

- The SCAG 1998 Regional Transportation Plan forecasts a 110 percent population increase between 1994 and 2020 for the Western Riverside Subregion. Anthony Downs in *Nation's Cities Weekly*, July 26, 1999 used automobile per capita factors of between one and 1.28. That means that Riverside County can expect a 110 to 141 percent increase in the number of vehicles on County roadways by 2020.
- Between 2020 and 2040, Riverside County is projected to grow by 60 percent, according to the California Department of Finance. Using the automobile per capita factors given above, between 2020 and 2040, the County can expect the number of vehicles on roadways to continue to increase by 60 to 77 percent.
- Downs writes that transit serves one to two percent of total trips, and 3.5 percent of work trips. In addition, while the Commerce Department reports that between 1980 and 1990, spending on transit more than doubled, the Census Bureau reports that during the same period, the percentage of Americans using public transit fell to 5.3 percent from 6.4 percent, the percentage of Americans car pooling fell to 13 percent from 20 percent, and the percentage driving alone to work increased to 74 percent from 65 percent.
- Given the above statistics, if a complete transit network were provided to serve projected growth in Riverside County, and the network tripled the percentage of commuters using transit, the reduction of automobiles due to transit use would be offset by the population growth. In other words, an emphasis on transit improvements would mean that traffic congestion in Riverside County would increase by approximately 100 percent by 2020, and by approximately 200 percent by 2040.
- Transit/smart growth/compact growth will not reduce traffic congestion, and will not resolve the second most serious problem facing the County.
- To place emphasis on transit/compact growth without solving traffic congestion is saying to the public that their second most important issue is not as important as their eleventh most important issue and that CETAP's priorities are not the public's priorities.
- Therefore building a transit network must receive consideration only after traffic congestion has been reduced. Smart growth is a distraction from eliminating traffic congestion.

### **Transit is Too Expensive**

- According to Robert T. Dunphy in *Urban Land*, July 1996, when light rail capital investments are converted to a cost per daily round-trip rider, light-rail systems cost between \$10,000 and \$64,000 per daily rider. As a basis of comparison, the transit agencies in the lowest-cost cities made an investment roughly equivalent to the cost of a Honda Civic for each regular rider, whereas, in high-cost cities, the investment equaled the cost of a BMW.
- TEA-21 provides \$42 billion in transit funding over a six-year period. The Census Bureau reports that up to 30 million people live in poverty and of those, 26 percent don't own a car. For perspective, it would be less expensive to buy a Geo Metro for every poor person in America without a car than to significantly increase current levels of federal transit funding.
- Thomas Pickrell in his 1990 report *Urban Rail Transit Projects: Forecast Versus Actual Ridership and Cost* found that almost without exception, decision makers had relied on ridership projections that ultimately proved far too high and cost projections that proved far too low.
- Transit funding often is spent in irrational ways. Many new subway and trolley lines are simply drawing passengers away from existing bus routes. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, June 29, 1993, in Los Angeles, the \$900 million Blue Line, which was forecast to cost \$200 million, carries barely more than the ridership of just one of the bus lines that parallel the trolley route, and is slower than an express bus service that it replaced. Los Angeles expects to spend \$4.5 billion for the 17.4-mile light-rail Red Line.
- In Portland, recent light-rail proposals are projected to cost \$100 million per mile, enough to build several miles of four-lane freeway, yet existing light-rail lines carry fewer people than a single freeway lane.

### **Transit Ridership**

- When the Northridge earthquake destroyed roadway connections to work, the MTA provided the transit infrastructure for mobility to work, and ridership increased. Yet when roadway connections were restored, and the availability was equal between transportation modes, people chose to go back to the automobile mode of transportation.
- The National Transit Database reports that fewer people are using mass transit now than when the federal government began subsidizing transit in 1975.
- Therefore, increased availability of transit is not going to serve more than one to five percent of trips, current or forecast.

### **Transportation Funding**

- Transportation funding is limited.
- According to Downs, public transit currently receives 25 percent of all transportation funding but serves only one to two percent of total trips.
- Funding must be reallocated on the basis of trips served, in order to solve traffic congestion.
- Existing highway funding can be supplemented as needed with impact fees by directly linking needed new improvements with the expected number of new trips to be generated by new development.

### **Transportation Goals**

- Instead of planning for Levels of Service E-F on freeways and highways for the next 20 years, use the funding presented above to plan for Levels of Service (LOS) B, thereby enhancing the attractiveness and competitive advantage of the County in the region.
- Instead of spending transportation dollars on capital improvements that fail to serve projected traffic and that result in increased congestion and smog (e.g., HOV lanes, exurban transit), plan roadway improvements for LOS B.

### **Transit Planning After Traffic Congestion Has Been Eliminated**

Transit planning should be appropriate to the density of the area being served.

- In urban settings where the planned densities and demographics provide for sufficient transit ridership, transit services should be planned. Lane Kendig in *Urban Land*, June 1992, estimates that densities of over seven dwelling units per acre are needed to make transit viable.
- In exurban settings where planned densities are too low to support transit, planning should address sufficient roadways.

### **Studies Needed**

- Smog produced by freeways and highways operating at LOS E-F versus LOS B.
- Energy use on freeways and highways operating at LOS E-F versus LOS B.
- Energy cost for vehicles on freeways and highways operating at LOS E-F versus LOS B.
- Difference between energy cost for vehicles on freeways and highways operating at LOS E-F versus LOS B, and cost to improve freeways and highways to LOS B.
- Loss in productivity due to hours spent in traffic delays.
- What will be the LOS on freeways and highways by 2020 by spending 25 percent of the budget on transit to build planned transit improvements?

### **Smart Growth (as defined by the environmental community)**

- Smart growth requires higher densities to make transit work (over seven dwelling units per acre average). Based on public opinion surveys, residents want "good planning," but are concerned about "higher density," and certainly do not choose to live in higher density areas. Development must be concentrated in nodes (within 1/4-mile of a transit stop, which is roughly an area of 125 acres).
- Smart growth will not reduce traffic congestion, but will protect open space and habitat.
- Smart growth is as much social engineering as it is transportation engineering.

### **Responses to Common Smart Growth Arguments**

- *Since the 1940's, cities have been planned and built around the automobile.*

Actually, suburbs first formed around the commuter rail station, then around the automobile.

For a long time, people have desired lower density, single-family homes away from the squalor of the city. People enjoy the mobility and personal freedom afforded by a car.

Telecommunication has allowed the decentralization of employment. Development dispersed in response to the demand for lower densities and the reduced need to centralize work activities.

- *Auto-related land use planning has reduced our options.*

Public spending on transit is over eight times greater than it was 30 years ago. As stated above, when the Northridge earthquake destroyed roadway connections to work, the MTA provided the transit infrastructure for mobility to work, and ridership increased. Yet when the roadway connections were restored, and the options between modes were equal, people chose to go back to the automobile mode of transportation.

“Growth boundaries and compact development” doesn’t sound like a choice of options.

- *Auto-related land use planning has caused congestion, so that now it takes more time than before to carry out our daily activities.*

Policies of the 1960's, 1970's, and 1980's to neither plan for nor accommodate additional vehicle trips have caused the congestion and delays. Highway Trust Fund dollars were diverted to other programs or not fully spent. As transportation planning became linked to social engineering, a deliberate effort was made to stop roadway construction, thereby creating congestion that was hoped to be so unbearable that people would stop driving. In addition, a frequent complaint about land use planning is the lack of coordination between planning departments and between planning agencies. Only recently has development permitting been linked to transportation planning to provide needed supporting infrastructure for new trips being generated by development.

It takes more time now to carry out daily activities because anti-auto planning designed the highway system to be that way. In addition, there are more trips per household today than there were 30 years ago, going to a myriad of destinations.

Traveling by auto is still faster than using transit. Transit typically takes two to five times longer for the same trip. Mobility means being able to come home from work, take the kids to soccer, drop off clothes at the dry cleaner, go to the gym, and pick up groceries, all on the same journey. The number of transfers required to do the same journey by transit makes transit too time-consuming and unworkable. To say that all of these activities can be concentrated within 1/4-mile of a transit stop (125 acres) is unrealistic.

- *Sprawl is consuming important farmland.*

The U.S. Department of Agriculture reports that the amount of cropland is virtually identical to 50 years ago. Farmland is not disappearing. The government still pays \$1.7 billion annually to farmers to not farm their land. Much of the land in farms that has been “lost” is now forest land.

- *Sprawl causes people to be segregated by income and age.*

People choose to live near people like themselves and move accordingly (e.g., Chinatown, Monterey Park, Little Saigon, and Santa Ana). People prefer to live near neighbors of similar

income rather than similar race (e.g., Beverly Hills and Brentwood). It is not likely that retirees in Hemet or in Winter Park, Florida feel segregated.

By providing only compact development, the County would fail to provide the type of housing that would attract executives and move-up buyers, and would thereby lose the capability to attract clean, higher income, high-tech businesses.

- *Sprawl has produced a lack of affordable housing.*
  - Growth boundaries for cities increase the housing prices within them. Demand for housing from in-migration, population increase, and reduced household size puts pressure on prices. Portland, because of its growth boundary, has become one of the five least affordable housing markets in the United States. Housing costs in Portland are rising much faster than in rapidly growing but less regulated Western cities such as Phoenix, Las Vegas, and Salt Lake City. For many cities, some low-income urban dwellers are being priced out of the market. Renters, meanwhile, see potential living space disappear as landlords sell their rental homes and turn their apartments into condominiums. A future affordable housing crisis (requiring more public housing) awaits cities with growth boundaries.
  - Preventing development on large areas of land reduces the supply of residential units and increases prices. Development is increasingly prohibited on large areas of land set aside as sensitive hillside, prime agricultural, fragile desert, wetlands, or sensitive species habitat.
  - Government regulations increase the cost of housing. In Orange County, government regulations add \$110,000 to the cost of an 1,800 square foot home. In Dallas, land development regulation adds 16 percent to the cost of a lot relative to unzoned Houston.
  - Affordability can be improved by increasing the supply of housing, decreasing the cost of housing, or increasing incomes.
  - Density bonuses for providing affordable housing increase the supply of affordable units. Design standards can prevent an institutional appearance.
  - Reduced land costs - land assembly by a public agency, sold at below-market prices increases the supply of affordable units.
  - Increasing incomes - a tax exemption for people up to a threshold income and an overall tax reduction would increase disposable incomes.
  - Subsidized rent distorts the housing market by keeping the market at an inflated high price.

- *Sprawl prevents livability.*

- In a 1999 survey conducted by the National Association of Homebuilders, 77 percent of respondents opposed building single family homes at higher density. A survey for *Professional Builder and Remodeler* magazine found that 78 percent of consumers prefer to live in single-family detached houses.
- Higher densities would generate more local congestion, since the same number of vehicles would be concentrated in a smaller space.
- The real threat to livability comes from typical hyper-environmentalist objectives: (1) minimizing the amount of land used by humans; and (2) discouraging the use of automobiles and other human activities that they feel are harmful.

- *Sprawl is too expensive a pattern of development to provide future public services.*

For years, the Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) has required incorporating cities to demonstrate that they can fiscally provide needed public services. Public services are not provided in a giant regional, hub-and-spoke; they're a decentralized mosaic.

- *Main Street, the corner store, and public squares have deteriorated due to sprawl. There is a loss of place.*

Government programs and social engineering, such as urban renewal and welfare have increased crime and squalor, causing the deterioration of the public squares. Sprawl is the result of people fleeing the cities for the suburbs. Zoning that prohibited the mixed-use development found in cities has created the loss of a sense of place. Government after providing years of subsidized mortgages now says that Smart Growth is the answer; the source isn't credible.

- *Rather than designing towns so that we can walk to work or to the store, we have separated uses into homogenous single-use enclaves. We have clustered retail into malls and big-box stores. Businesses are clustered in business parks and campuses.*

Zoning has created single-use enclaves by prohibiting mixed-use development. Malls have provided highly convenient shopping that's out of the weather with free parking that's close to stores. Big box retailers have made goods more affordable to more people. Telecommunications has allowed businesses to locate in the country. It's ironic that environmentalists, trying to get people to better respect nature, are alienating people from nature by advocating higher density, urbanized environments.

- *We need to find an alternative to the single occupancy vehicle.*
  - There are more trips per household today than there were 30 years ago, going to numerous destinations, making car pooling less feasible and making the use of public transit time-consuming and inconvenient.
  - The automobile is a faster, safer, more comfortable, more flexible, more convenient, and often cheaper form of transportation. People are behaving rationally to choose that mode.
  - Public transit carries only one to five percent of all trips.
  - Two-thirds of commutes are between suburbs, in patterns that look like spider webs, as opposed to central city commutes with hub-and-spoke patterns. The best form of public transit may be a dial-a-ride.

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