

Los Angeles Times | OPINION

LOCAL U.S. WORLD BUSINESS SPORTS ENTERTAINMENT HEALTH STYLE TRAVEL OPINION SHOP

EDITORIALS OP-ED LETTERS OPINION L.A. TOP OF THE TICKET READERS' REP

TRENDING NOW STATE OF THE UNION | PETE SEEGER | SOUTHWEST AIRLINES | UKRAINE | GRAMMYS | SHARE IT NOW

Search



OP-ED

Rail alone can't reinvent L.A.

New growth — jobs, housing and retail — around stations and corridors is essential to making new transit projects worthwhile.

Comments 44 Email Share 284 Tweet 65 Like 219 +1 10



A Metro train passes by the groundbreaking ceremony Tuesday for the new Crenshaw/LAX line at the Expo/Crenshaw stop. The new line will connect the Expo and Green lines. (Los Angeles Times)



Pasadena looks to slow down. Will it work?



Who's to blame for Santa Monica's traffic hell? Readers weigh in.



From Santa Monica, the lament of an 'urban villager'



San Francisco's bus wars are a proxy fight against gentrification



Building a better transit option to LAX



Brown's bullet train? It's going nowhere with many Times readers

See more stories »

By Ethan N. Elkind

January 27, 2014

With the Crenshaw/LAX light-rail line groundbreaking last week, Los Angeles now has three rail transit projects under construction — an example of how the city is leading the country in a rail renaissance. The "city that destroyed cities," as GQ recently described L.A. for pioneering auto-oriented development, has been planning and building a multibillion-dollar rail network, thanks in part to up to \$13 billion in local sales tax funds from a successful 2008 measure.

But these billions risk being wasted if city leaders do not promote, and residents do not allow, new growth around rail stations and corridors. Why? Rail is expensive to build, operate and maintain compared with other forms of transit. It only becomes cost-effective with high ridership. And the best way to boost ridership is to locate new jobs, housing and retail near stations.

Focusing development around rail provides multiple benefits. It allows the region to accommodate new residents and natural population growth without building endless subdivisions on open space and worsening traffic and air pollution. It can reduce the high cost of housing by boosting in-town supply, making it easier for businesses to attract and retain talented employees. Finally, rail-accessible development can create convenient, walkable neighborhoods that meet the growing demand among millennials, childless professionals and empty nesters to move "back to the city" — as many recent urban success stories attest.

PHOTOS: Is Gov. Jerry Brown saving California or ruining it?

But the modern history of rail and land development patterns shows that politics and economics conspire to prevent new growth around rail. Decision-makers typically locate rail lines in less dense or developable areas to save costs and accommodate powerful interest groups around the region, running lines through blighted areas or along freeways to save land-acquisition and construction costs and to minimize neighborhood objections.

As a result, many rail station locations, such as on the Blue Line to Long Beach or the Green Line along the Century Freeway, lack opportunities for new development. Creating a market in these areas requires public support to spark demand and lower developer costs. And in rail-rich areas with high demand for housing, such as Hollywood and soon West L.A., well-heeled neighbors can afford to challenge land-use plans and fight new projects, pushing growth into the exurbs and driving up housing costs for everyone.

To reverse these historic trends, Angelenos should insist on three policy changes. First, no dollars should be spent on rail lines or stations without a minimum number of houses or jobs located within walking distance, or at least local plans in place to meet these goals. Second, state and regional governments should provide funding for local plans for rail-oriented growth and help support and maintain the associated infrastructure, such as sidewalks and parks.

Finally, state and local governments should help promote well-designed "catalytic" real estate projects in neglected areas to spark revitalization and unlock private investment, such as through revolving loan funds and tax-increment financing.

Los Angeles once inspired the world with a glamorous vision of an auto-oriented life. But with a changing market, growing population, worsening traffic and lost open space, the region has begun to reinvent itself with rail-oriented success stories in downtown Los Angeles, Koreatown and North Hollywood, among others. But these successes shouldn't mask the missed opportunities and ongoing

Connect

Recommended on Facebook Like 772k

- At least four Marlboro Men have died of smoking-related diseases 2,638 people recommend this.
- Grammys 2014: Red carpet arrivals 33 people recommend this.
- Grammys 2014: Live posting on the

advertisement

One of these plagues is not like the others

State of the Union: What to expect

Folk icon, activist Pete Seeger dies at 94

Divorces rise as economy recovers, study finds

Ads by Google

Square® Stand - Now \$99
squareup.com/Stand
Set Up A Point Of Sale In Minutes. Order Your Square Stand Today!

Vons® Gas Rewards
vons.com/Gas-Reward
Earn Rewards to Start Saving Up To \$1 Off Per Gallon at the Gas Pump.



Photos of the Day [More »](#)

Most Viewed Latest News

- Ukraine prime minister resigns; parliament cancels anti-protest laws 01/28/2014, 6:41 a.m.
- Daft Punk: Inside the helmets 01/28/2014, 6:00 a.m.
- Review: Alfredo Ramos Martinez, champion of ordinary people, revisited 01/28/2014, 6:00 a.m.
- One of these plagues is not (genetically) like the others 01/28/2014, 6:00 a.m.
- Big rig crashes on 10 Freeway in Pomona slow eastbound commute 01/28/2014, 5:59 a.m.

challenges to maximizing rail investment. Only concerted action will right past wrongs and put the region on a new path to creating livable, convenient and connected neighborhoods around rail.

Ethan N. Elkind researches and writes on environmental law with a joint appointment at the UC Berkeley and UCLA schools of law. He is the author of the new book "Railtown: The Fight for the Los Angeles Metro Rail and the Future of the City."

Copyright © 2014, Los Angeles Times

Comments 44 Email Share 284 Tweet 65 Like 219 +1 10

MORE FROM THE TIMES

- 'Anchorman 2' box office: What happened?
'Inevitable': As Jahi McMath deteriorates, brain-death case nears end
How to torment telemarketers
George Clooney puts Tina Fey on notice after Golden Globes joke
Sundance 2014: George Takei just wants peace with William Shatner

FROM AROUND THE WEB

Grid of sponsored content by Taboola including: Must Have Appliances Being sold For Next To Nothing, Millennials Are Changing The Wine Industry Parade, Homeowners Are In For A Big Surprise...

VIDEO

Southwest Airlines announces fir... Los Angeles Times Jan 27, 2014



AdChoices

Ads by Google

Advertisement for LAX Airport Parking-\$4.49 and Experience Virgin America.

Comments (44) Add / View comments | Discussion FAQ

aida.realtor at 3:17 PM January 27, 2014
Just an FYI, large scale residential and commercial complexes aka TODs (Transit Oriented Developments) are currently under construction in close proximity/adjacent to numerous rail stations.

Reedman Bassoon at 10:50 AM January 27, 2014
There would be plenty of money for roads if transit didn't siphon off money collected from the gas tax.

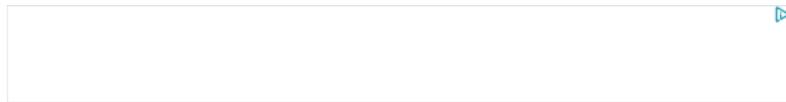
FurryBalls at 10:09 AM January 27, 2014
I voted against the 30 year extension of the Metro sales tax and will continue to do so until Metro demonstrates they will use my (aka Taxpayers) money more efficiently.

Comments are filtered for language and registration is required. The Times makes no guarantee of comments' factual accuracy.

Premium content. Unique experiences. Exclusive offers. Only with Membership Start now



Photos: Photos: Photos: Photos: Photos: Surfers Pete Cachuma Polo and Grammys ride Seeger | Lake: luxury 2014: waves 1919-2014 'It's just empty' China After-parties California coast



Corrections Digital Services Media Kit About Us Contact Us

Los Angeles Times

Burbank Leader | Coastline Pilot | Daily Pilot | Huntington Beach Independent | News Press | Valley Sun | KTLA | Hoy | Baltimore Sun | Chicago Tribune | Daily Press | Hartford Courant | Los Angeles Times | Orlando Sentinel | Sun Sentinel | The Morning Call | Terms of Service | Privacy Policy | About Our Ads | Copyright 2014

A Tribune Newspaper website