UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies

REPORT SUMMARY

Transit-Oriented Los Angeles: Envisioning an Equitable and Thriving Future

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In the last 15 years, Los Angeles County has spent billions of dollars – with billions more still expected – to transform the way people move around the region. Backed by large voter mandates in 2008 and 2016, Los Angeles is advancing a vision where people favor public transportation, walking, and cycling over private automobiles. Such a transformation requires land use changes to support transportation investments thereby allowing more people to live near stations, and foster amenity-rich, flourishing neighborhoods.

Transit-Oriented Los Angeles: Envisioning an Equitable and Thriving Future, conceived and written in collaboration with LAplus and Urban Land Institute's TOLA committee, describes how higher amounts of housing capacity near LA Metro stations can create positive outcomes like higher transit ridership, more housing supply, and lower impacts on the environment. Released at ULI-LA's "Transit-Oriented Los Angeles" November 2018 conference, this summary provides an overview of the report's goals, content, and recommendations.

GOALS

With Los Angeles County experiencing the largest rail transit expansion in the nation — but declining ridership — as well as housing and homelessness crises, the report and the event itself, sought to contribute to conversations on the future of transit, urban planning and housing policy in the LA region. People often react to transit-oriented development based on fear of change and dislike of density. Part of this resistance stems from the fact that the concept of "density" is rarely explained in a way that relates numbers to residents' daily lives. In response, the report explains the relationship between higher residential densities and outcomes like transit ridership, housing supply, and affordability; neighborhood amenities; and sustainability. The report identifies potential density targets for achieving the most co-benefits between land use and transportation. To further illustrate how density is more than just a number, the report introduces personas representing people living close to transit and imagines how their lives might be enhanced through increased station-area housing density. In so doing, the report arms the public and policymakers with both information and stories to help them better align land use and transit.

The report combines:

1. Literature review on the existing relationships between density and transit ridership, housing, neighborhood amenities, and sustainability
2. Research on existing conditions near seven Metro stations
3. Analysis of how the station areas and residents' lives could change if zoning were updated to allow more homes and residents
4. Recommendations for local jurisdictions

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- Allow residential uses in commercial zones.
- Increase residential density limits in multi-family and mixed-used zones to thresholds that tend to support higher transit performance.
- De-emphasize the importance of single-family zoning in station areas and consider allowing duplexes or fourplexes throughout half-mile station areas.
- Lower or eliminate parking requirements in station areas.
- Adopt strong density bonuses with inclusionary zoning to encourage more market rate and deeded-affordable homes.
- Strengthen tenant rights in transit-adjacent areas being rezoned to protect vulnerable renters.

Findings from the literature review include:

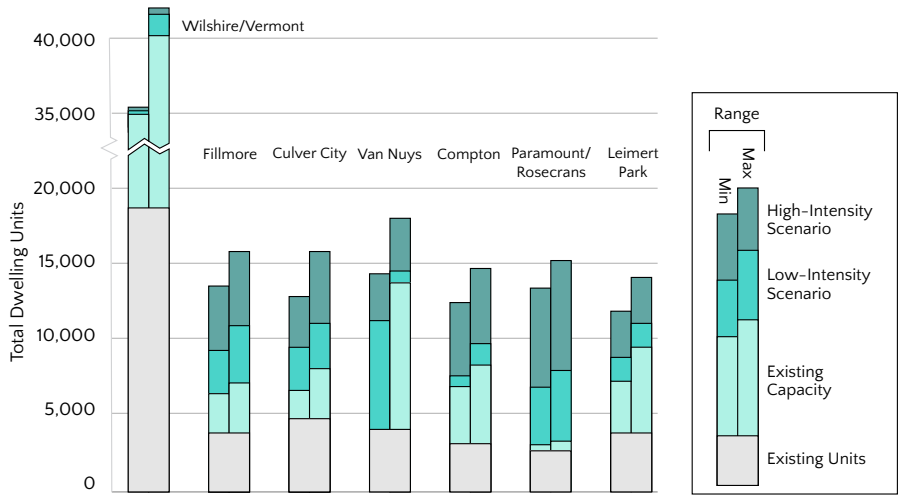
- There are population density thresholds above which different types of transit perform better.
- People living close to transit ride transit more.
- Building more homes can slow or reduce housing costs.
- People living close to clusters of businesses walk more.
- People living in denser parts of the LA region drive less.

The centerpiece of the *Transit-Oriented Los Angeles* report is original research on existing zoning, land uses, housing capacity and other economic and demographic trends within a half-mile of seven Metro transit stations (**Table 1**). These case study stations were chosen to reflect the diversity of transit types and land use contexts that exist in Metro's service areas, as well as the social diversity of LA County. Chosen stations represented a mix of transit types (light and heavy rail and bus rapid transit), jurisdictions and land use contexts. Five are existing stations, one is under construction, and one station is in planning phases.

Table 1. ***Case study characteristics.***

	Jurisdiction	County Subregion	Station Area Type	Top two land use types (by % area)	Line(s)
Wilshire / Vermont	Los Angeles	Metro Center	Urban Center	Commercial, High-rise residential	Red/ Purple
Fillmore	Pasadena	San Gabriel Valley	Suburban neighborhood	Low-rise residential, commercial	Gold
Culver City	Culver City / Los Angeles	Westside	Urban neighborhood	High-rise residential, Low-rise residential	Expo
Van Nuys	Los Angeles	San Fernando Valley	Suburban neighborhood	Low-rise residential, commercial	Orange
Compton	Compton	Gateway Cities	Urban neighborhood	Low-rise residential, Public facilities	Blue
Paramount/ Rosecrans	Paramount	Gateway Cities	Suburban neighborhood	Low-rise residential, Industrial	West Santa Ana Branch
Leimert Park	Los Angeles / Unincorporated LA County	South Los Angeles	Urban neighborhood	Low-rise residential, High-rise residential	Crenshaw/ LAX

Figure 1. ***Existing and projected case study station area housing capacity.***



The report authors applied a set of future conditions to each case study area and analyzed potential resulting changes. After applying a set of changes at two different intensities (lower and higher levels), the authors calculated how much more housing capacity could be added to these areas. Changes included:

- De-emphasize single-family zoning: Allow duplexes in the lower-intensity scenario and fourplexes in the higher-intensity scenario. Notably, duplexes could also represent a single family home with an accessory dwelling unit.
- Allow mixed-use zoning: Permit housing development in all commercial zones.
- Deprioritize underutilized industrial parcels: Rezone legacy industrial zones which are often relics of historical freight rail service, and which are no longer important jobs sources.
- Tie density to distance from transit: Concentrate the densest level of development closest to the station itself, with a density that "steps down" with increased distance from the station.
- Create internal consistency within the station areas: Bring multi-family parcels to the highest level within each station area.
- Reduce barriers to multi-family development: Reduce lot width, lot area, and parking requirements.

The results demonstrate that by applying changes to the underlying zoning in station areas these case study areas — and other LA region Metro station areas like then — could see significant increases to their housing supplies (**Figure 1**). While we found that the largest gains in housing production would come in larger-scale apartment buildings, a great deal of additional housing can come in building types that are significantly smaller in scale. Overall, the major investments in the regional transportation system necessitate changes like those proposed in this project to effectively house and move people and realize the growing region's full benefits.