



Los Angeles Daily News - 08/13/2007

Our Opinions

## **Squandered resources for Ventura Boulevard**

### **A good idea for traffic improvements goes bad**

A long time ago, Los Angeles City Hall had a good idea (it does happen from time to time).

The idea was to ask developers along Ventura Boulevard to contribute money to a fund that would offset the added traffic from those developments by building new parking lots, widening roads, and improving traffic signals at problem intersections along the busy San Fernando Valley artery.

It was a good idea that went bad from disuse.

As for the \$5 million collected under by the city since 1988 as part of this fund, **exactly none of it has ever been used to make traffic flow better** down this heavily congested corridor.

**None.**

In fact, of the \$1.5 million of the fund spent so far, most of it went to pay for administration costs. Only a fraction - \$140,000 - was spent on anything substantial. That is, assuming one considers trees and some street furniture as substantial.

Admittedly, the rules for using the funds are strict. But that doesn't absolve the city's leaders of their negligence in extracting money for a good cause - then never using it for its stated purposes.

Ultimately, this was a case of **false advertising**. And the developers who paid those fees - with the understanding that the money would be used to improve traffic - have as much right to be angry with the city as do all the Ventura Boulevard-adjacent residents, motorists and businesses.

Only now, under some scrutiny and being prodded by elected officials, will the city transportation

department start working on coming up with ways to ease rules to spend that much-needed money. The city wasted these resources for years, when it could have used them to improve traffic long ago. It's a shame that City Hall couldn't have spent the money 20 years ago, when it would have bought so much more than it can now. As it is, traffic is so jammed in sections of the road that the money will come too late to do much good.

But that doesn't mean the city shouldn't try.

**City Hall should put a moratorium on new Ventura Boulevard development until it comes up with a plan to collect - and use - traffic mitigation fees in a timely manner.**

It's time for City Hall to turn Ventura Boulevard traffic fixes from just a good idea into some good transportation policy.

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## **L.A. mayor signs downtown housing law**

Developers have incentives for creating taller buildings

BY RICK ORLOV, Staff Writer

Hoping to fire up a residential building boom in downtown Los Angeles, Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa signed a measure Monday streamlining city zoning law and offering developers incentives to build bigger buildings in the city's urban core.

The measure creates an urban planning zone for downtown that runs from the Harbor Freeway to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and allows residential developers to construct larger buildings if they provide units for low-, moderate- and work-force-income residents.

It also establishes basic regulations eliminating setbacks and other existing zoning requirements, which have generally been waived for new construction.

"We are getting rid of the archaic suburban model that demands large yards and setbacks and developing an urban model ... of wider pedestrian-friendly streets, green space and ground-floor retail and commercial developments," said Councilwoman Jan Perry, who represents the downtown area and championed the change.

The ordinance is designed to build on momentum created by developments including the Grand Avenue project and L.A. Live.

"We need to rethink what the city looks like. We need to grow smart, we need to grow green, we need to grow in a way that addresses mixed-use development along transportation corridors and in places like downtown," Villaraigosa said.

The signing ceremony was held at Ninth and Flower streets, where developer Sonny Asanti is building twin 28-story towers in a \$350 million project. It will have 624 units when completed, all designed to sell at the median market rate of \$450,000-\$550,000, Asanti said.

While he is not taking advantage of the ordinance's incentives, Asanti said he believes it will contribute to providing more affordable housing downtown.

"What downtown offers now and will offer is a menu of housing for first-time homebuyers to get into the market and more upscale housing as well," Asanti said.

But while city planners back the measure as part of "smart growth," some questioned whether the city's infrastructure can handle any influx.

"It might be one of those things of 'be careful what you wish for,'" said Jack Kyser, chief economist at the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp. "A lot of people look at downtown and say the density can be handled easily. But, along with the growth comes other concerns.

"Where are we getting the police and fire services that will be needed? Where are the schools to support a new urban population. Everyone says we need more housing and we do, but it doesn't solve all our problems."

Gerald Silver of Homeowners of Encino said the measure will help alleviate pressure to boost development along Ventura Boulevard but raises other concerns.

"This measure has some benefits to the Valley by concentrating new growth downtown," Silver said. "But, in the broader picture, I don't know if we can support an increase in the density like this.

"They can put in the housing, but where are we going to get the water and power to sustain people? I see a real lack of infrastructure to support the housing."

He also said it is unclear whether the new zoning law could be applied to areas such as along the Orange Line.

City officials said each area of the city would have to be studied to determine whether the zoning changes would apply to allow more high-rise construction.

But Villaraigosa said the measure is designed to deal with the housing crisis in the city and state.

"The projections are we will grow by the size of two Chicagos in the next 20 years," he said. "We are going to have growth. The question is how do we accommodate it? "If you look at New York and Chicago, London, Rome, Tokyo or Shanghai, they are all going vertical. We need to do that to accommodate our growth."

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Los Angeles Times - July 27, 2007

Los Angeles Daily News - Sept. 6, 2006

It doesn't work Re "Transit 'villages' for L.A.?" (Sept. 4):

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's plan to cluster high-density housing along transit corridors is the same utopian pipe dream that has been around L.A. for at least 40 years and which was implemented in Century City in the early 1970s.

Premised on the idea that residents of such housing would use public transit rather than their cars, every independent study I have seen shows that it doesn't work, particularly in L.A., where the population is so mobile. People live where housing is available and they take the best jobs they can get regardless of whether public transit is available. We just end up with more traffic congestion and a poorer quality of life. And the transit corridor property owners and developers make fortunes off the upzoning even though the public transit never gets built, as happened in Century City.

- Jack Allen Pacific Palisades

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Los Angeles Daily News - Sept. 15, 2006

## **Quack medicine**

Re "Not a pipe dream" (Sept. 10):

Alexander Friedman's letter argues that an increase in mass-transit ridership justifies Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's plan to build high-density high-rise housing on transportation corridors. However, that argument fails to show that people who live in that type of housing will use public transportation, and studies show they don't.

It is that type of muddled thinking that got the city into the mess it is in now. Los Angeles is like a

400-pound man dying of congestion of its arteries. To cure it, the mayor is prescribing that the patient take steroids to put on an additional 100 pounds. That is quack medicine, which will only make the patient suffer more and die sooner.

- Jack Allen  
Pacific Palisades

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If you would like to share you opinion with others, please email to:

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If after reading the above, you may wish to send your opinion to the following:

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