

# In LA, traffic remains an ongoing calamity

Los Angeles County residents can empathize with the traffic pain that Bay Area residents are suffering this week with the destruction of a crucial freeway artery.

The tanker-truck fire that melted a connector ramp between Interstate 80, just east of the Bay Bridge, and Interstate 580 is going to be a long-term headache for commuters. More than 35,000 vehicles use that ramp every day.

In other words, for Bay Area residents, life is going to be a lot like it is all the time here in L.A.

Los Angeles may not have had a fiery freeway collapse to call attention to its roads, but the region has a traffic crisis

## At issue

■ Should traffic congestion in the L.A. area be considered a problem as serious as Bay Area traffic woes in the wake of the freeway collapse?

nonetheless. The equivalent of a freeway meltdown happens — figuratively, in terms of inconvenience and congestion — every single day.

It's L.A.'s biggest problem.

That's not hyperbole. Loyola Marymount's Center for the Study of Los Angeles recently asked 1,400 L.A. residents to rank their concerns. Traffic

was No. 1 on the list — before even terrorism, housing, health care, global warming and gangs.

Traffic in L.A. is a logistical crisis. But the city's elected and appointed officials aren't acting as if it is. Indeed, they are too busy channeling their political energy into their usual priorities of crafting generous contracts and deals for the unions, contractors and special interests who support them.

But for most of us, traffic issues are the greatest drain on the local quality of life, worse even than City Hall's issue of the moment, gang violence. For most people, even those who live in gang-infested neighborhoods, gangs are a

sporadic problem. Gang members tend to kill other gang members; only when innocents get in the way does the greater community take notice.

But traffic is relentless, something that affects every person in the region — whether they drive or not — daily. There's nothing abstract about being stuck on the Harbor Freeway, late for your son's soccer game, or sitting on a slow-moving bus as starting time at work comes and goes.

Yet rather than responding to congestion as the crisis it is, transportation officials in L.A. are actually pursuing policies to make traffic worse. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority, for

example, is sinking massive resources into building a Westside subway at the expense of more pressing projects that would deliver a far greater return on the investment. Meanwhile, the MTA pursues a fare increase so steep that it's expected to drive some public transportation users into cars.

After Sunday's explosion and freeway-ramp collapse, Bay Area and state authorities moved quickly to find solutions. Monday was declared a free public-transportation day, and the governor declared a state of emergency.

Here in Los Angeles, we, too, have a crisis on our hands that demands swift, immediate attention.