

"SMART GROWTH" IS PART OF THE SOLUTION FOR CALIFORNIA. BUT "SMART GROWTH" (as L.A. city planners define it, which is mega-density nearly everywhere) IS NOT:

Read the story in the June 1st L.A. Weekly:

"What's Smart About Smart Growth? L.A. City Hall's plan for the future expects you to give up the yard, the car - and learn to love density"

<http://www.laweekly.com/general/features/whats-smart-about-smart-growth/16507/>

AN EXCERPT: "On low-rise commercial avenues and boulevards like Ventura, La Brea and Pico, developers suddenly found that by adding housing, they could blow past the growth limits voters established under Proposition U (In 1986). Prop. U, after all, only capped the size of commercial and industrial buildings.

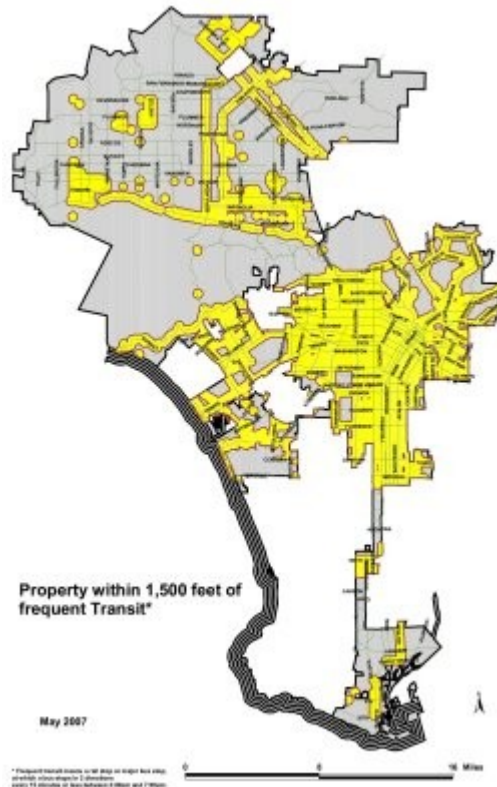
The results can be seen all over the city, with construction pits and steel girders marking where the development rules have abruptly changed...County Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky, who campaigned for Prop. U, has a more skeptical view, saying the Department of City Planning found a way to circumvent the electorate.

"There's nothing elegant about busting the limits that have been in place on the Westside, that I got in place in my district," Yaroslavsky says. "And it isn't elegant to the people who thought they were protected by the restraints we put in place 20 years ago in those neighborhoods."

Eight thousand housing units — accommodating thousands of new residents — have been approved in the past three years using the new smart-growth zoning, says Jane Blumenfeld, a 16-year veteran of the planning department. To help her employees understand where she believes that zoning makes sense, Blumenfeld created a map that shows every place in Los Angeles that sits within 1,500 feet of a major transit stop — that is, a transit stop at which a bus or train arrives every 15 minutes during afternoon rush hour...

The map is, to put it mildly, jarring. On it, nearly every boulevard north of the Santa Monica Freeway and south of the Santa Monica Mountains and Hollywood Hills appears as though it could be converted to smart-growth zoning. A huge swath of South Los Angeles and several pockets of the San Fernando Valley are also prime candidates.

Why? Because nearly every boulevard has a bus. "We want to build housing near transit, as opposed to building it where there's no ability to reach transit," says Blumenfeld, who oversees citywide planning strategies. "South of the mountains, there's pretty much transit everywhere."



(click on map to enlarge)

OUR RESPONSE:

David Zahniser's article was right on!

It's simply obscene that some of L.A. City's elected officials and city planners think that we can continue to pack millions more people into L.A. and then solve the added traffic problems with more buses. That they believe nearly every major street in L.A. should go high density shows they have no connection to the residents of this town.

This kind of urban apocalypse doesn't need to happen. We don't have to convert our communities into wall to wall highrises. We also don't have to let our state be 500 miles of sprawl, from San Diego to Sacramento. We could instead be a state with a 1000 mile long mega-park system from Oregon to the Mexican border with permanently preserved farmland greenbelts around every major city, with connected open space rings that link the entire state together. Think it can't happen? It already is. Read the success stories on our website, <http://www.connectingcalifornia.org>.

Communities and cities around California are not falling for the mantra that "growth is always good". Instead many are drawing lines and saying no more paving of our farmland and wetlands or chopping down our forests. The growth that they choose to allow is targeted for city centers. Most of the rest of this state doesn't want their towns to look like L.A.—wall to wall concrete. And as a lifelong L.A. resident, I'm tired of this town looking like that too. We can and must retrofit this city to make it more liveable—but livability and economic vitality can happen without opening the floodgates to mega development everywhere.

Smart Growth has been discredited as a believable urban strategy simply because, as Zahnizer points out, the phrase has been misused so much by developers that it has no meaning. Smart Growth in practice is often Dumb growth.

Smart growth has as its base the core belief that growth can never be stopped. It's a disease that has afflicted politicians in this region for decades: the belief that continuous growth can always be accommodated. Smart Growth as a concept simply ignores major realities: our streets are full and there's no more room to add more buses; we are losing our water supply due to growth elsewhere and due to global warming; paving over even more of our city and building ever higher is no guarantee that elected officials will stop our city from sprawling into Bakersfield or Las Vegas. Growth is a never ending circle of problems needing solutions that create their own set of problems. When you widen a highway, does traffic get better or does the city use this as an excuse to approve more developments which then fills up the space, creating the need for even more widened roads?

Smart growth is championed by developer think tanks whose propaganda is ever changing: sometimes we're not building enough office and industrial buildings. After they get their way, they say we're not building enough housing for those who'll work in all that "needed" industrial space. The growth cycle continues.

It's hilarious that so many advocates of a dense L.A. live in low or ultra low density neighborhoods far away from the traffic disasters they are pushing for. I remember how in the 1990's the president of the Playa Vista company, Nelson Rising, lectured residents that "the era of the single family quarter acre home is over". He, of course, lived 20 miles away from his massive project in a multi-acre mansion in La Canada.

Playa Vista was originally sold to the west L.A. community on the promise that there would be streets full of ground floor retail with apartments and condos on top to encourage "walkability" and to discourage the 7000 new residents from having to leave the project and jam up area traffic. "Live, work and play in Playa Vista" was the promise. But with their promised mixed-use neighborhood 95% done, instead of 22 mixed use buildings we have 3. Smart growth was a sales pitch that never came true.

Smart Growth for our region is simply no solution as long as politicians continue to refuse to consider limits on development and population growth. Some development boosters say a city that doesn't grow will die. What a load of crap! Slowing down or halting growth is not stagnation, it's stability. It's living within our means.

In L.A. we need to change our civic planning policies to deal with existing needs not future developer needs.

Let's convert vacant office and warehouse space into affordable housing. L.A. has a surplus of jobs space compared to existing housing, urban planners keep telling us.

Let's build elevated light rail lines alongside every freeway; no more added traffic lanes for cars, buses and other polluters. Elevated means the land below can be parks for our existing residents, which are in real short supply in L.A., or treatment wetlands for urban runoff (as Judith Lewis described in her L.A. Weekly cover story last November, <http://www.laweekly.com/general/features/the-lost-streams-of-los-angeles/14973/>). The rail lines will not compete with cars for space on the roads, and if the rail

lines go everywhere the freeways go, we have the potential to remove a lot of traffic from the freeways. As long as we have rail links and stops at the major job centers, we can make rail be competitive with solo car driving.

Finally, let's halt sprawl by finishing the greenbelt around Los Angeles that has been created by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Let's buy the Tejon Ranch, the biggest proposed sprawl development between L.A. and Bakersfield to the north. Let's choose to live within our means rather than continue to burst at the seams.

Rex Frankel, Director, Connecting California