

# Traffic Congestion Costing \$12 billion a Year

GuestWords

By *Wendy Greuel*

I invited a group of policy makers, business leaders, and community activists to the first Mobility 21 Coalition meeting in the Valley on May 21st so that we could address one of the greatest challenges facing our city: traffic.



The average Angeleno spends 93 hours per year stuck in traffic. The most recent study showed that our region loses approximately \$12 billion each year due to traffic and congestion. We cannot afford to lose so much money from our economy each year.

One obstacle we discussed is finding funds to improve transit in Los Angeles. Declining tax revenues, bureaucracy, and decades of shortchanging our infrastructure investment have left us without sufficient funds to upgrade surface transportation. It is clear that elected officials do not have all the answers, and involving businesses and community members in the search for solutions is crucial in getting out of this mess.

At the conference we also discussed the Los Angeles Strategic Transportation Plan, through which we hope to harness the private sector's penchant for innovation to reform the way we tackle transportation. With this plan, we can prioritize our projects so that we can fund them more effectively. Along with the LAEDC we have formed a coalition to fund a \$750,000 study that will include modeling and sector-specific implementation plans.

I want to be clear, however, that the government is not abdicating its role as policy maker and under-writer. At the state, county, and city level, we have a long list of accomplishments. We've seen the overwhelming success of the Orange Line, which some of our Mobility 21 conference attendees took to the conference. We've broken ground on the Expo-line, and we are extending the gold line. We've synchronized 75% of our traffic signals, installed 250 left hand turn signals, banned construction during rush hour, and created anti-gridlock zones which increase fines for illegally parking during rush hour.

Although these are significant accomplishments, we can no longer afford to tackle these problems in a silo. If we change our approach and implement comprehensive reforms, we can make Los Angeles more livable. This conference was a crucial step in the right direction; as we invite businesses and community members into this traffic discussion, we will begin to get Los Angeles moving again. (Wendy Greuel is Councilwoman for the 2nd District and Chairs the City Council Transportation Committee.) ■