

A Vision of a More Livable Los Angeles For Everyone:

Briefing Paper of the Alliance for a Livable Los Angeles, January 2003

As we move into the new millennium, Los Angeles faces a myriad of difficult land use challenges. We are suffering from a desperate housing shortage, a freeway system approaching gridlock, a transportation system at war with itself, and an imperative need for more neighborhood open space, schools and libraries. Simultaneously, we have a unique, time-limited opportunity to apply active community principles to numerous City planning efforts. The approval of state and local bonds ensures that substantial public investment in schools, parks and affordable housing are in our future. Public transportation projects are expanding, including the recently completed subway from downtown to the San Fernando Valley, the Gold Line light rail from downtown to Pasadena scheduled to open in July 2003 as well as the addition of "Rapid Bus" routes along major thoroughfares. Collaboration is now essential among the City's land use planners, the school district, the housing developers and the Metropolitan Transportation Agency to create more compact, livable neighborhoods in areas with good public transportation service.

In this briefing paper, the Alliance for a Livable Los Angeles¹ summarizes key planning problems and potential solutions. The Alliance is a diverse group of organizations with backgrounds in affordable housing, environmental justice, faith-based communities, transportation equity, economic and community development, and land use planning. The mission of the Alliance is to help make Los Angeles more livable for everyone, by creating more affordable housing, transportation options and neighborhood open space and ensuring that residents have a say in the decision-making

¹ Alliance for a Livable Los Angeles members include: ACORN, California Futures Network, California League of Conservation Voters Education Fund, Central City Neighborhood Partners, Environmental Defense, Livable Places, Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, New Economics for Women, Southern California Association of Non-Profit Housing, Pacoima Partners, United Food & Commercial Workers Local 770, and the Urban & Environmental Policy Institute (Occidental College).

processes, especially low-income residents who are too often left behind. With this perspective in mind, we hope this paper will initiate a healthy dialogue about how we can help each other build a more livable Los Angeles for us all.

Why Sprawl Is NOT the Answer

The model of suburban development that has defined the Los Angeles metropolitan area is no longer sustainable. We've learned the hard way that building more freeways to reach more new housing tracts in the high desert, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties is causing our collective quality of life to suffer. Too many of us spend more time driving and sitting in frustrating traffic jams, further diminishing our already poor air quality. Meanwhile, the safety, comfort and efficiency of Angelenos who walk, bicycle and take public transportation too often take a back seat to moving and parking private cars. In addition, with our focus on the private space of suburban homes, we have failed to create the parks and public gathering places needed for our increasingly dense neighborhoods.

Relatively inexpensive land and political support for development propel suburban sprawl and make housing and retail construction on the urban fringe profitable. At the same time, the high cost of land in urban areas, neighborhood opposition to sometimes incompatible development, low-performing schools, toxic wastes, and general disinvestment in cities make urban infill development expensive, often prohibitively so. Additionally, our post-Proposition 13 tax structure leads local governments to pursue the sales-tax generating retail development that further increases sprawl. At the same time, housing construction is discouraged even though we have a severe housing shortage. We cannot continue to build out, creating a situation where people working in the Los Angeles area must commute from farther and farther away. Rather, we must find a way to make infill development easier and our urban core more livable for residents, thus reducing the growth pressure on everyone in our region and creating a viable regional future.