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The Urban Environment

Los Angeles Set for New Urban Transformation

- Urban Livability Topic of Upcoming National Rail-Volution Conference in Los Angeles

By *ROGER SNOBLE, Chief Executive Officer*

Los Angeles has undergone a series of transformations in its long history involving transportation and urban development. Today, at the dawn of the 21st Century, L.A. County – indeed, all of Southern California – is experiencing a new urban transformation, one that is both multi-modal and multi-ethnic, and it's again leading the region to reinvent itself based on new imperatives.



Metro CEO Roger Snoble

A brief look at history proves the point. When the Southern Pacific Railroad arrived in 1876, there were barely 8,000 residents living in the city of Los Angeles. Thirty years later, in 1920, Los Angeles boasted one of the most extensive electric trolley systems in the nation, and the population reached half a million people. This electric trolley transit system laid the foundation for growing several L.A. County cities.

By the late 1950s the electric trolleys were totally dismantled and by the late 1960s, one of the nation's largest freeway systems now defined Los Angeles and Southern California. A growing population quickly made Los Angeles the second largest city in the United States. It has taken 20 to 30 years for these major developments to transform the region.

Today, we are experiencing a new urban transformation, and once again transportation is playing a fundamental role. The difference this time is that the challenges are far more daunting, the variables are much more complex, and the urgency to take action is far more critical. The potential, however, to affect positive outcomes and the resources to implement changes and direct an urban renaissance in Los Angeles and Southern California are within our reach.

An ideal laboratory

Our region is an ideal laboratory to test new tactics and strategies to integrate transportation and urban development. Simply put, if building livable communities through transit can be accomplished in Los Angeles, it can serve as a model for other growing cities throughout the country faced with similar challenges.

Metro has done much to revitalize urban communities along its transit system. Metro is expanding its urban rail system and consolidating into a core urban rail mass rapid transit system connected to an extensive local bus network. This network is also interfaced with bike routes and pedestrian corridors. Reconnecting communities and offering mobility alternatives through transit has been a major aspect of planning the expanding Metro system.

This year Metro is hosting Rail-Volution, Sept. 19-22. This international conference, first launched in Oregon in 1995, will bring together a diverse group of people from around the world to discuss cutting-edge ideas for reinventing our communities through transit.

Everyone – from concerned citizens to business leaders, academics to elected officials, planners to transit operators – is invited to participate in this year's conference.

Variety of conference sessions

Conference sessions will be focused on educating attendees on the importance of smart land use decisions, the social and economic benefits of transit-oriented development, the environmental benefits of expanded transit usage, and how the policies of smart growth and livable communities can contribute positively to their overall quality of life.

Metro will also be providing mobile workshops that give participants an opportunity to visit many fascinating transit-oriented projects within the Los Angeles area. Proposed transit-oriented development tours are scheduled for Hollywood, Pasadena, East Los Angeles, Long Beach, the San Fernando Valley and Claremont Village. Other mobile workshops planned are Metro Rapid Tours, walking and bike tours.

Now is the time to discuss policy and programs needed to create livable communities within the Los Angeles County Area. We encourage everyone to learn about the rich and diverse resources that a world city like Los Angeles can muster to reinvent itself for a better quality of life for all Californians.

Please visit the Rail-Volution web site at www.railvolution.com for additional information.