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Symposium organizer and Metro Director of Countywide Planning & Development Robin Blair told attendees, "We want a city that improves the quality of life and the quality of health of its residents."

Metro's Pedestrian Symposium Includes Public Health, 30/10 Funding Discussions

By Laura Kloth
Staff Writer

(May 13, 2010) "Placemaking" and "obesity crisis" became the buzz terms of the day during Metro's 2010 Pedestrian Symposium, as city planners, architects and local officials shared ideas with public health representatives to improve L.A.'s "walkability" score, largely agreeing that well planned neighborhoods should include pedestrian-friendly streets complete with accessible public transit.

In his welcoming remarks, Metro CEO Art Leahy said he was enthusiastic about the "slow" revolution occurring in Los Angeles County.

"The revolution that has occurred seems slow unless you've been here for a long time," he said, contrasting the empty corridors of Union Station of than 30 years ago when he drove a bus for Metro, with today's environment.

Additional rail lines have become a reality thanks to funding from Measure R and now the potential funding from the proposed 30/10 measure, Leahy added, inviting guests to ride the trains, and enjoy the stations.

Essentially, the Metro Board has backed the 30/10 Initiative that seeks advanced funding from the federal government to construct 12 major rail projects in 10 years. The idea is to ramp-up the effort to improve the Southland's air quality and lessen the dependency on foreign fuel.

"We're excited about what's going on and

the contribution Metro is making. We look forward to working with all of you to advance our common goals,” Leahy said.

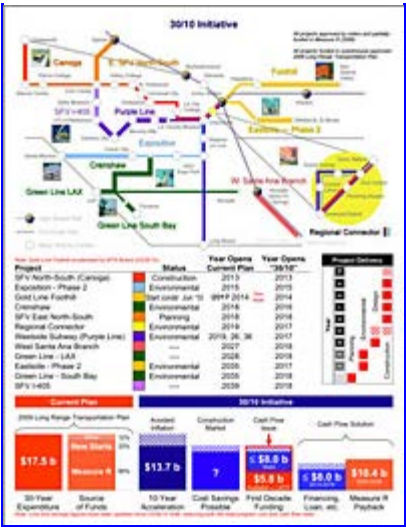
Symposium organizer and Metro Director of Countywide Planning & Development Robin Blair told the audience that this year’s symposium included a health component because studies show that the more “walkable” a city is, the lower the obesity rate for its inhabitants.

“We want a city that improves the quality of life and the quality of health of its residents,” he said.

Doug Failing, Metro Executive Director of Highway Programs/Interim Chief Planning Officer, talked about L.A.’s “pro-vehicle” history depicted by many as a sprawling metropolis full of congestion where “the last thing you wanted to have to do was have to walk.”

But times are changing, he said.

“We have a unique opportunity in the next 10 years to really remake what is a world class city here in Los Angeles. It will happen because of your input and attention,” Failing said.



Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa made the case for the 30/10 initiative before Congress on May 13 by urging the federal leaders to back the measure to help Los Angeles save millions, create thousands of jobs and help the environment. Click on image for larger view or [PDE](#).



Panelists spent part of the symposium discussing ways to better optimize the walking environments of the city while incorporating transit to create a healthier community.

Citing examples of good placemaking, Fred Kent, president of the New York-based Project for Public Spaces, (PPS) presented slides of successful urban streets and neighborhoods filled with joyful pedestrians including a Buenos Aires street he frequented that could be likened to L.A.’s Venice.

- See Project for Public Spaces list of "[The 20 Best Neighborhoods In North America](#)"

Kent said pedestrian-friendly streets "have enormous benefits since they not only help the local economy, they also enhance community interaction while promoting health because people enjoy walking on them."

Calling it "a massive movement" that's "happening right in front of our eyes," he said "the transformation is phenomenal and we need a whole new generation of people to redefine the streets of the future and all we have to do is get them out there practicing it."

Blair indicated that Measure R monies are funding some \$30 million in pedestrian-friendly projects this year, and funded another \$36 million in the 2009 Call for Projects process. In addition over \$5 billion dollars of discretionary transportation funds will be distributed to cities through the Measure R cities formula.



Move LA Coalition member Gloria Ohland, who worked extensively to get Measure R passed, said she was confident the 30/10 initiative would get federal support.

Move L.A. Coalition member Gloria Ohland, who worked extensively to get Measure R passed, said she was "confident" the 30/10 measure would garner federal support.

"I really do believe that we are going to get the money from the federal government to accelerate all these projects," she said. "There is no other region in the country that passed three half cent sales taxes for public transportation. We are really a self-help county."

Stating that "something that big and that bold" has really captured the attention of Congress, she said, "We're the kind of place that the government should want to reward because we are not asking for handouts. All we're asking for is a loan."

The day-long symposium, which was expected to receive more than 300 participants, was organized by some 20 Metro staff members under the leadership of Metro Executive Officer Diego Cardoso.