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LA weighing plan for more density along Expo Line through Westside

It would put "housing exactly where we need it, which is close to transit"

By **Alissa Walker** | [@awalkerinLA](#) | Jun 25, 2018, 1:05pm PDT | 92 comments



A plan to allow denser residential development around five Expo Line stations on the Westside could set an important precedent for how LA might tackle its housing crisis.

The [Exposition Corridor Transit Neighborhood Plan](#) will be vetted Tuesday by the Los Angeles City Council's planning and land-use management committee.

Five years in the making, the plan mostly focuses on allowing for taller, mixed-use building on major streets and changing zoning to allow housing and offices to be built in industrial areas within a half-mile of the train stations in Palms, Westwood, and West LA.

In addition, zoning would be changed to allow multi-family development in a neighborhood of about 200 single-family homes south of the Bundy station, an area nicknamed the "Bundy Triangle."

The Expo Line plan is important, says [UCLA](#) urban planning associate professor [Paavo Monkkonen](#), because it will offer Angelenos a chance to see that changing zoning to allow more housing units to be built does not mean, as some opponents have described it, instantly "[demolishing](#)" neighborhoods.

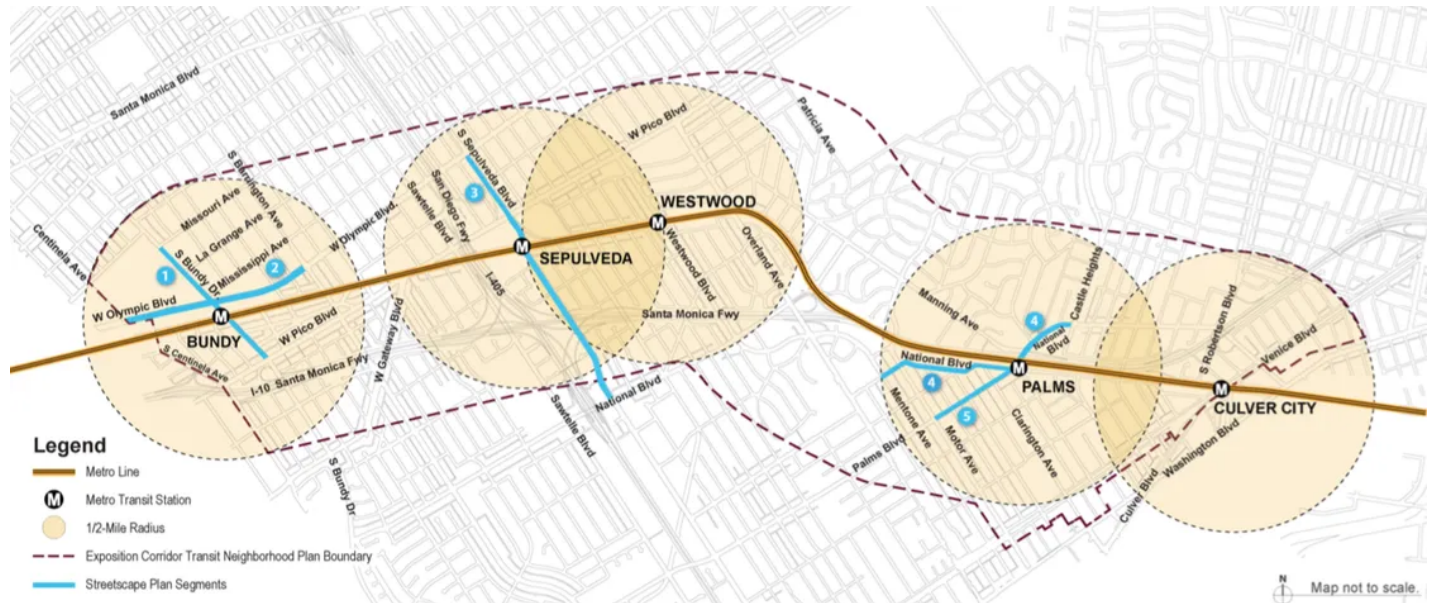
"Look at how often a single-family home sells on a block. You'll have a gradual change, not some crazy transition overnight," he says. "But we need some proof-of-concept model because it has never happened, really."

The plan estimates that 4,400 and 6,000 new housing units and between 9,400 and 14,300 new jobs could be added across the entire plan area by 2035.

"I'm pleased that the planning department has been working to put housing exactly where we need it, which is close to transit," says Los Angeles City Councilmember Mike Bonin, whose district encompasses the Bundy station.

Anything built in the plan's newly designated area would be eligible for affordability incentives—that align with Measure JJJ's [transit-oriented community guidelines](#)—which vary by project size.

New buildings could also “unbundle” parking, meaning the number of parking spaces required per project would not be based on the number of housing units. Because parking is expensive to build, that could potentially make rents cheaper for those who choose to live without a car.



In addition to the zoning changes for a .5 mile radius around each station, several major streets would see streetscape improvements under the plan. | City of Los Angeles

Bonin says he will introduce two changes to the plan on Tuesday. He wants to strengthen the affordability requirements to include more low- and very low-income units, including making clarifications which would allow new developments to be permanent supportive housing.

He also wants to recommend allowing more housing units to be built close to new workplaces. Particularly in the industrial zones which have never had housing built there before, Bonin wants developers to be able to add even more residential units as part of new creative industry or live-work designations.

“This is an area of town that has a lot of renters who have expressed to me their concern about housing affordability and instability—who work on the Westside and are having trouble staying on the Westside, and are not happy about hour-long commutes,” he says.

Bonin echoed concerns that the priced-out commuters who have been forced to move east have created excruciating traffic on the Westside.

Councilmember Paul Koretz, who represents the other four stations in the plan, understands the need for more affordable housing and jobs proximate to transit, says spokesperson Alison Simard. “Our office has been working closely with the community groups and now Councilmember Koretz supports the changes in the plan where the changes make sense in their respective neighborhoods.” In addition, she says, Koretz wants to see permanent supportive housing in the plan area and only California native plants used in landscaping.

However, Koretz has not historically supported the idea of changing zoning to allow more housing in his district.

“I don’t think people want to see significant rezoning around single-family neighborhoods whether they’re near transit or not,” Koretz [told the *Los Angeles Times*](#) earlier this year when being interviewed about a state bill that would have allowed denser development near transit.

Koretz, who has proposed a [major climate initiative](#) to make LA carbon-neutral by 2025, has suggested a [better way to reduce emissions](#) would be to eliminate fossil fuel-powered vehicles and gas stations in the city first.

But environmental groups such as the National Resources Defense Council, which [supports](#) the Expo Line plan, say that building denser housing near public transit is one of the most powerful tools to [address climate change](#).

“Failing to allow for more housing near the new Expo Line stations will exacerbate traffic and greenhouse gas emissions, accelerate displacement in vulnerable neighborhoods, and undermine the city and county’s investment in the Expo Line,” NRDC mobility and climate advocate Carter Rubin wrote in a letter to city councilmembers.

The Palms and South Robertson neighborhood councils also cited environmental benefits in letters supporting the plan.

The only neighborhood council to oppose the plan, the Westside Neighborhood Council, lists multiple concerns, including the potential of more—not less—traffic congestion.

“We are against overly aggressive upzoning that would result in a localized population surge that is far more than the Expo Line can support,” Terri Tippit, chair of the Westside Neighborhood Council, wrote in a [statement](#).



West LA's [Martin Expo Town Center](#) project sits within a half-block from the Bundy station and exhibits some of the affordable housing and walkability goals of the Expo Line plan. | Courtesy of Martin Expo Town Center

The plan is the first transit-oriented initiative to come before the council since it [unanimously voted to oppose](#) SB 827, a state bill which would have allowed four-and five-story apartments and condos to be built within a half-mile of major bus and rail stations, even if the property were zoned for single-family homes.

A wide coalition of local groups [opposed the SB 827 bill](#) due to concerns about displacement and called on the city to make its own plan for adding more housing near transit. One of those groups was Alliance for Community Transit-LA, a coalition of 35 organizations, which supports the Expo Line plan.

“The need for inclusive and affordable transit-oriented development is undeniable,” ACT-LA wrote in a letter to LA city councilmembers. It says the plan is “an important and timely opportunity to prioritize equitable, inclusive transit-oriented development.”

The Expo Line plan is different from SB 827, mostly because city planners have sculpted the zoning changes so they don't affect rent-stabilized buildings, and, with the exception of the Bundy Triangle, most single-family homes.

Leaving so much of the single-family zoning intact, however, has led some to argue that the plan doesn't go far enough to add housing in an affluent part of the city where increased development would not end up displacing homeowners.

“If Los Angeles is serious about addressing the housing crisis, we must take advantage of every opportunity to legalize housing where it's currently illegal, and we must do it now,” Nick Burns, westside advocacy coordinator for Abundant Housing LA, wrote in a letter to city councilmembers. “Not in some community plan update years from now or in some heretofore unannounced special plan. Now.”

West of the Culver City station, there are dozens of neighborhoods made up of single-family homes that would be untouched by the plan.

“We need to figure out how to upzone single-family neighborhoods, especially on the Westside,” says UCLA's Monkkonen, who has been studying how the city can overcome local opposition to adding more housing units.

Seattle, for example, has spent the last few years systematically upzoning neighborhoods across the city in an effort to add more housing density.

Monkkonen suggests automatically upzoning all LA's single-family parcels to support four-plex development across the city. He says that would help alleviate some of the inequity around zoning changes and housing development, which are currently concentrated in lower-income neighborhoods with high numbers of renters who might be displaced.

“Other neighborhoods have to step up and do their part,” Monkkonen says.

This story has been updated to include a statement from the office of Councilmember Koretz.

