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# TOWN HALL

LOS ANGELES

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## The Los Angeles Traffic and Transit Problem

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A REPORT BY

THE REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SECTION

ARTHUR B. GALLION, *Chairman*

FEBRUARY, 1947

# The Los Angeles Traffic and Transit Problem

THE LOS ANGELES traffic and transit problem has become so acute that one cannot enter the downtown district or drive on a major thoroughfare without wondering, "Why doesn't someone do something?" Comfort can be taken from the fact that the problem is common to all the large cities of the nation. Hope and determination, as well as comfort, should arise from the fact that Los Angeles has a better opportunity than most cities to tackle the problem effectively. But delay will destroy our present advantage; as population density rises and open areas are built up, the possibilities of effective action will diminish and the cost of necessary action will increase.

An effective attack upon the problem is possible, but a final solution is not to be expected. A permanent solution is no more possible than is a permanent fit in the shoes of a growing boy; each improvement in traffic facilities invites an increase in the traffic burden. To the degree that we can move more people from where they are to where they want to go, and do so with a minimum of cost, delay, and irritation, we can say that we have effectively attacked the problem. Until Los Angeles stops growing and changing, we cannot expect a final solution.

The traffic and transit problem has many elements. These include: freeways, and—since freeways can't be built overnight—the best use of existing streets, mass rapid transit, off-street parking facilities, and the financing of whatever plans are agreed upon. The purpose of the present report is to provide a broad perspective of these various elements for the average citizen, rather than to duplicate the many technical and engineering reports available for examination by the specialized student.

## EFFECTIVE USE OF PRESENT STREETS

SINCE the construction of even the initial phase of the proposed freeway system will require several years, early alleviation of traffic congestion requires the most effective use of present street facilities. Much can be done, and fortunately much is being done.

Among the suggested, planned, or already accomplished steps for improving the use made of present street facilities are: eliminating on-street parking in downtown areas, making certain streets into one-way streets, moving the dividing line on congested boulevards during peak traffic hours, eliminating left-hand turns at some intersections, installing better traffic signals at important intersections, rerouting some transit lines, and staggering work hours to flatten out the morning and evening traffic peak.

Wise application of such measures depends upon adequate traffic engineering. The problems remain the same in principle but change, often rapidly, in detail. The office of the City Traffic Engineer should be equipped with such staff as may from time to time be necessary for surveying the problems in detail and making recommendations which, based upon demonstrable fact, can be protected against attack by adversely affected special interests.

The elimination of on-street parking in the downtown district offers an example of conflicts of interest which arise when new regulations are proposed. Parking on both sides of a six-lane street reduces to four the number of lanes usable for traffic flow; backing into and moving out of curb parking spaces cause delays in the flow of traffic in two of the remaining traffic lanes. For this reason, the City Traffic Engineer and others have proposed that on-street parking be entirely prohibited on downtown streets. Such parking has already been sharply curtailed, particularly during rush hours, and fines imposed on violators have been substantially increased, a step necessary to enforcement.

The elimination of on-street parking is affected by the availability of off-street parking facilities, a problem discussed below. Whether elimination of off-street parking can be carried further now or may have already been carried too far is a question raised by a traffic court judge, who says he wants to see the streets "given back to the people," and who claims that congestion is caused by cars lining up in the streets while they wait to get into parking lots. To what extent on-street parking should be allowed at the expense of traffic flow is a question which should be settled not by slogans but by engineering study through which each factor can be weighed in relation to others.

Problems of conflict between one factor or interest and others arise in connection with the creation of one-way streets, the elimination of

turns, etc. It is not within the scope of this report to make recommendations upon the desirability of any one of these steps on any particular street or at any selected intersection. It is important that our present streets be used at maximum efficiency; as to particular steps for reaching this goal, decisions should be based upon careful, adequate, and continuously up-to-date traffic engineering studies.

#### OFF-STREET PARKING

THE FINEST possible system of freeways from shoreline to mountains would be to an extent wasted if the freeway user who wished to do business in the downtown district could not find a place to park when he got there. Off-street parking is a problem of other built-up areas as well as of the central business district. In the latter area, the problem is more acute and is of greater general concern to the whole metropolitan area of which it forms the hub.

At present, there is a conservatively estimated deficiency of ten to twelve thousand off-street parking spaces in the downtown area. As the population of the metropolitan area grows, still more parking spaces will be needed, while at the same time an attendant increase in land values would make retention of present parking lots more difficult.

The inter-relation of all aspects of the traffic problem is illustrated by the question of off-street parking. If all people now entering the downtown district on business came by private automobile, assuming the present average number of passengers per car, the area of parking space required to accommodate their cars would be greater than the total area of the district, including land now used by streets and occupied by buildings. It is apparent that increased travel in street-cars and busses (the mass transit phase of the total problem) rather than in private automobiles has an important bearing upon the need for off-street parking facilities.

To provide additional parking space and to prevent present parking space from being diverted to other uses, it would be possible for the city to condemn needed land. For two reasons, this seems a last rather than a first resort. It would add a new function to an already complex city government structure. The direct cost of condemning the land and the indirect cost of removing land from the tax rolls would be borne by all of the taxpayers, not solely by those who would benefit from the condemnations.

The creation of a Parking District Authority is also legally possible. If the problem cannot be dealt with by private efforts, this may prove necessary and desirable.

The line of attack now being prepared against the off-street parking problem is a private corporation, sponsored by downtown property owners and business interests. Leaving the problem of parking in the area north of Second Street to the Civic Center authorities, the aim of this corporation is to aid in providing ten thousand additional parking spaces in the area south of Second Street. The corporation may buy, or lease, and operate parking lots, and may build and operate garages. The lack of unimproved land in the downtown district indicates that parking vertically, in garages, will be necessary. Of the ten thousand additional parking spaces, it is contemplated that three thousand would be open air, forty-five hundred would be in garages, and the remaining twenty-five hundred in a garage to be built under Pershing Square.

The Pershing Square garage, patterned after the garage built just before the war under San Francisco's Union Square, will presumably be built and operated by a separate corporation. Assuming that construction and operating costs can be brought into line with prospective revenues, second mortgage money is expected from interested merchants and property owners, first mortgage money from banks and other financial institutions. Operation of the garage will require one-way streets on Fifth and Sixth Streets, already planned, and discontinuance of the use of Pershing Square as a bus terminal. As in San Francisco, the park above the underground garage can be preserved.

The Zoning Ordinance of 1946 contains requirements that new buildings provide minimum parking areas. These requirements will assist in keeping parking facilities abreast of the need for them as new areas are more intensively developed. It is important that these requirements be maintained and enforced.

#### FREEWAYS

THE FREEWAY program for the Los Angeles metropolitan area has the agreement and support of all who are affected by the program and have studied it, particularly the county, the City of Los Angeles, and the suburban cities. Long-term plans call for 613 miles of freeways, with a projected cost of a billion dollars or more. Priorities in an initial

ten-year program have been given to 165 miles of freeways to cost \$300,000,000. Routes have been agreed upon and on several routes acquisition of right of way has been substantially completed.

An important feature of this initial phase of the freeway program is the system of by-passes around the central downtown area. Surveys show that about half of the cars entering the downtown district have no destination within it but are going from one side of the metropolitan area to another. The proposed by-pass system would enable such cars to go around the downtown district. Remaining on the freeways, they would gain time and would avoid becoming involved in and adding to the congestion of downtown streets.

The main features of the freeway program having been agreed upon, questions remaining include the question of combining bus and train operation with the freeway program and the question of financing.

#### MASS TRANSPORTATION

UNLESS the freeway program is paralleled by a program for the improvement of mass transportation facilities it will create a problem almost as big as the one it solves. Downtown streets and parking facilities can never be made adequate to the situation which would exist if everyone came to the downtown district by private automobile. The building of express highways, unaccompanied by improved mass transportation facilities, tends to bring about just this situation; the proportion of people using private automobiles for their daily travel, already 50% here as compared with 15% in New York, will increase still further. Better and faster mass transit must go along with better and faster express highways.

It is estimated that an addition of about fifteen per cent to the cost of the freeway program would provide right of way necessary for rail lines in the dividing strip of those freeways where rail lines are appropriate. It is also believed that incorporating this feature in the freeway program would approximately double the program's effectiveness. The value to motorists of having adequate mass transit facilities, since they alleviate traffic congestion, is demonstrable although not easily measured. Yet, under present legal restrictions, gasoline taxes could not be used to buy such right of way (excepting to the extent to which a dividing strip of the required width is necessary as

a highway safety feature). Nor have other methods of financing been found. Unless such other methods of financing are found, a relaxation of present legal restrictions on the use of gas tax money for this purpose appears both desirable and justified. A large part of sums devoted to such use could in any case be recovered from franchise fees, etc. Planning agencies have, in some instances, failed to emphasize the importance of developing mass transportation facilities as a part of the freeway program. It is believed that this development is essential and merits more positive consideration.

Certain other improvements in mass transportation as an adjunct of the freeway program are necessary and are in the process of study and development. Limitations on the possible extent and use of street space along with the desirability of increasing use of mass transit vehicles dictate the probable necessity of one or more subways for both rapid transit and urban transit use in the downtown area, with connections from these subways to the proposed center malls or rights of way on the most important freeways approaching this area. Transportation engineers have recommended a four-lane subway under Broadway and studies as to the feasibility of four-lane or two-lane subways are continuing. Also, the conversion of certain streets into one-way streets dictates the necessity of replacing existing streetcar lines by rerouting motor coach or trolley coach lines, particularly on 5th and 6th Streets and 8th and 9th Streets, since these streets have been designated for one-way use leading to and from the proposed by-pass system of the freeways. In conjunction with proposed reroutings and substitution of motor coach and trolley coach lines for streetcar lines, elimination of traffic hindrances created by left-hand turns is being considered and carried out.

#### FINANCING OF FREEWAYS

THE PROPOSED freeway program including the 165 miles of freeways for this area has been the matter of an extensive investigation covering a two-year period by a Joint Fact-Finding Committee on Highways, Streets, and Bridges of the California Legislature. This committee was created by Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 27 of the 56th Legislature and was directed to study and analyze all facts relating to public highways, roads, streets, and bridges of California and to report to the 57th Legislative Session which convened in Sacramento on the

first Monday of January of this year. The reports of this committee and their recommendations indicate the necessity of added financing to present highway revenues if the construction program is to be carried out. These reports suggest possibilities of increasing revenues for this purpose by means of increasing gasoline taxes, registration fees, user taxes, and ad valorem taxes. The Governor of the State of California has indicated the importance of the subject by calling a special session of the Legislature to run concurrently with the 57th regular session for the principal purpose of considering the matter.

Our consideration of this subject has indicated both the necessity and reasonableness of the proposed freeway program in this area. It is probable that savings in the cost of present motor vehicle operations and reduction in losses resulting from accidents would more than balance the cost of the freeway program. As one student of the problem has said, "We are already paying for freeways without having them."

The proper method for raising necessary added revenues is a very complex and involved subject, to be determined only after giving adequate consideration to all of its state-wide phases. We believe that the proceeds of any added taxes for this purpose should be earmarked solely for the proposed program and should be imposed for a limited number of years. To assure expenditure of the proceeds in the metropolitan areas whose automobile owners are paying the largest part of the tax and where the major need exists, provision should be made for allocation of the proceeds within counties in proportion to their automobile registrations. It is believed that there should be modification of present restrictions against use of funds for necessary mass transportation facilities.

#### SUMMARY

THE TRAFFIC and transit problem is organic in character. Rather than remaining fixed, it is constantly growing and changing; its various aspects are closely inter-related. To keep abreast of the problem and to keep traffic congestion from strangling the movement and business of the city, adequate and continuous traffic engineering is necessary.

City government must be supported in its regulations to speed the flow of traffic, elimination of turns, restriction of on-street parking, etc.

Off-street parking in the downtown district can probably be provided by the co-operation of private interests, without city condemnation and ownership of parking lots or the creation of new governmental agency in the form of a Parking District Authority. Public approval should be given the proposed Pershing Square underground garage, assuming that it is made subject to fair and appropriate agreements and controls.

The construction of the freeways, upon which affected interests in the metropolitan community appear to be in agreement, will be a major contribution to better traffic conditions. These freeways are necessary and reasonable, and adequate financing should be provided for their accomplishment.

Mass transportation facilities, part rail and part bus, must be developed along with the freeway program. The integration of rapid transit and local rail and motor coach service improvements with the freeway design and construction is essential and can be accomplished now with proper planning. A part of this integration will require subways for mass transit use and conversion of present facilities in order to make possible one-way traffic routing on various streets.

REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SECTION

*The Section's Meeting Record During This Study*

- MARCH 13, 1946—*Speaker:* J. E. Havenner, Traffic Engineer, Public Safety Department, Automobile Club of Southern California. *Subject:* "We Can Solve Our Traffic Problem. WILL WE?"
- APRIL 19, 1946—*Speaker:* K. Charles Bean, Chief Engineer and General Manager, Board of Public Utilities, City of Los Angeles. *Subject:* "The Importance of Mass Transportation in Solving Our Traffic Problem."
- MAY 3, 1946—*Speaker:* Carl Bush, Assistant General Manager, Downtown Businessmen's Association. *Subject:* "The Problem of Parking Space—Traffic's Downtown Bottleneck."
- MAY 24, 1946—*Speaker:* Ralph T. Dorsey, City Traffic Engineer, Los Angeles. *Subject:* "Making the Most Effective Use of Our Present Traffic Facilities."
- JUNE 13, 1946—*Speaker:* Lloyd Aldrich, City Engineer, Los Angeles. *Subject:* "The Freeway Program and Its Relation to the Traffic Problem."
- JULY 16, 1946—*Subject:* "Lifstream of the City"—A General Electric film on the traffic problem, supplemented by comment by Stanley H. Lanham, General Consultant and Traffic Manager, Los Angeles Transit Company.
- AUGUST 1, 1946—*Speaker:* Harrison R. Baker, Member, State Highway Commission; President, Pasadena City Planning Commission. *Subject:* "The State Highway Department and the Metropolitan Traffic and Transit Problem."
- OCTOBER 23, 1946—*Speaker:* Milton Breivogel, Principal City Planner. *Subject:* "Summary of Section's Information on Traffic and Transit Problem; Discussion of Section's Future Agenda."
- NOVEMBER 13, 1946—*Speaker:* E. E. East, Chief Engineer, Automobile Club of Southern California. *Subject:* "Recommendations of the Collier Committee's Consultants on California's Highway Problem."
- DECEMBER 11, 1946—*Subject:* "The Section's Report on the Traffic and Transit Problem."
- JANUARY 8, 1947—*Speaker:* John M. Peirce, Economist, Western Oil and Gas Association. *Subject:* "Financing Freeways."
- JANUARY 22, 1947—*Subject:* "Reconsideration of the Section's Report on the Traffic and Transit Problem."

MEMBERS WHO ATTENDED ONE OR MORE MEETINGS OF REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT SECTION DURING STUDY PERIOD

Arthur B. Gallion, *Chairman*

Alexander, Robert E.	Gleason, George	Merchant, Francis O.
Apter, David	Golsan, Page	Miller, William B.
Arkush, J. Robert	Gorman, Joseph G.	Moreland, Watt S.
Baer, Herman L.	Hackstaff, John D.	Mowder, Fred L.
Barnard, Archer F.	Harbach, Edwin	Palmer, Edwin O.
Barrett, Vernon	Harper, Allen D.	Pattee, Howard
Belknap, Raymond H.	Harrell, Harrell J.	Rowan, George
Bell, Ralph J.	Hayward, Roger	Ruck, W. F.
Bennett, Charles	Hervey, William R., Jr.	Ryan, George P.
Benson, George C. S.	Hetherington, P.	Schuchardt, William
Bernard, Robert J.	Hofeller, Eugene D.	Snyder, C. C.
Berzer, Maurice	Hubon, I. A.	Stebbins, A. E.
Bouton, Edward	Huntley, Earl W.	Story, Harold H.
Breivogel, Milton	Jeffries, Lawrence	Utt, Max Eddy
Bryant, Drayton S.	Johnson, Reginald D.	Vandenburgh, John
Burrows, R. D.	Jones, Alfred	Van Wart, Roy M.
Bushnell, John D.	Ketcham, Ronald M.	Verleger, P. K.
Campbell, Donald	Lefferts, E. B.	Wall, Henry V.
Carey, John G.	Lunden, Samuel	Weinhold, H. B.
Chase, Frederick A.	Mack, C. C.	Wigmore, George T.
Collins, D. J.	Mann, J. A.	Woods, D. W.
Eliot, Charles W.	Manning, P. R.	Zahn, Otto J.
FitzGerald, C. Grattan	Mansfield, Allen	
Fox, C. J., Jr.	Mansur, Everett B.	

# How the Members Voted

Members' Ballot on the Report:  
"The Los Angeles Traffic and Transit Problem"

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I approve the report	Yes 438	No 7
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I favor continuous and adequate traffic engineering study	Yes 453	No 2
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I favor handling the downtown parking problem through:		
(a) private efforts	Yes 339	No 35
(b) city condemnation of parking space	Yes 84	No 190
(c) creation of a Parking District Authority	Yes 257	No 76

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I approve in principle of the underground garage at Pershing Square	Yes 439	No 23
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I favor an extensive freeway program	Yes 441	No 7
To be financed in part by:		
(a) added tax on gasoline	Yes 396	No 38
(b) increased tax on trucks	Yes 381	No 33

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I favor bus and/or rail transit operation in conjunction with freeways	Yes 429	No 20
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I favor use of gas tax money to finance added right of way for such operation, authorized by constitutional amendment if necessary	Yes 411	No 41
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