



Solutions for Easing the Traffic Congestion in Los Angeles

James C. Wisda, Senior Vice-president, Business Development and Planning, Pardee Homes

ZONING AND PLANNING

Ultimately, the cause of the traffic needs to be addressed and the long-term solution is in the hands of the City of Los Angeles and the surrounding cities. The current Los Angeles County master plans and zoning encourage low-density development and suburban sprawl, and these exacerbate the traffic problem. If you build housing in Santa Clarita for downtown Los Angeles workers, then they have to travel 30 miles each way each day.

So the long-term solution is to change the master plans and zoning around the current traffic corridors, even in the face of local resident opposition. Zoning within ½ mile of any subway stop and any high-volume bus stop should encourage higher density residential development as well as more commercial and office development. And in these locations, every commercial and office development should include a residential component.

I just visited Hong Kong and at every train stop there was high density employment and residential development. Very few people needed to own automobiles. When I flew back into Los Angeles it was apparent that along Wilshire Boulevard there is a tremendous opportunity for higher density employment and residential developments. The same situation is available along every major traffic corridor in Los Angeles County.

FREEWAYS

Control Caltrans' work schedule by placing time limits on their work permits. Require Caltrans to complete each freeway in a specified time. For example, the widening 405 freeway has been under construction for several years. First, the construction-induced bottleneck was in the South Bay and it has worked its way almost to Westwood because Caltrans uses minimal crews and only works on a section at a time. They seem to do this at all freeways. Why doesn't the City or County require them to submit a complete improvement plan and a short time table so they have dedicate more resources to one freeway at a time?

Why are hybrid cars allowed to use carpool lanes? Carpool lanes were built to induce people to drive fewer cars to reduce congestion and emissions. These lanes were paid for from gasoline taxes. It makes no sense to give special access to single-occupant vehicles that pay the least amount of taxes, but whose owners can afford to pay extra for the car and extra for the sticker.

No new taxes for freeway usage because they do not work. We just had a de facto tax through the oil price increase and it did not reduce freeway traffic. The tax will only hurt the poorer workers who have to travel the freeways to get to their jobs.

SHOOT THE TRAFFIC ENGINEERS

All traffic engineers add an extra margin of safety to the published standards for traffic signal design that already includes a safety margin.

The streets are not congested the intersections are congested. If we can take one-half of one wasted second out of each traffic signal cycle, we can add thousands of hours driving time.

Why do the traffic signals stay red when there is no one coming in any of the other three directions?

Why can't we make a left turn at the end of the cycle after the left turn indicator turns red, but the rest of the signal remains green? It would allow one to two additional cars to turn left each cycle.

Why not establish a traffic hotline to let the City and County know when a certain traffic signal is not adjusted properly. For example, Sepulveda Boulevard northbound from the South Bay moves along nicely each morning until it reaches 77th Street, where it can take ten minutes and six or seven traffic signal cycles to travel from Manchester Boulevard through 77th Street because of the length of the signals. At the same time, the cross traffic on 77th Street is rarely backed

up for more than one cycle. In the past, I tried to notify the City traffic department, but I was unable to talk to anyone.

GET RID OF THE NASCAR MENTALITY

These suggestions are designed to reduce the NASCAR mentality our drivers have adopted and to reduce the number of traffic accidents that exacerbate the congestion.

Hire more traffic officers and CHP to write tickets and change the mentality from "NASCAR I am racing you" to "Let's all get there in one piece together in the fastest possible time". Ticket speeders, weavers, and slow drivers. Each traffic officer should be able to pay for his/her salary by writing tickets. At the same time, additional parking officers and tow trucks can keep the No Parking areas clear during rush hour.

Why not set the traffic signals to allow traffic to proceed at a certain speed without hitting a red light for at least one mile? The synchronization could be variable to change with the morning or evening traffic flow. However, to make the system really work, the speed needs to be posted so everyone would know that it makes no sense to speed and weave.

GET PEOPLE OUT OF CARS

It makes no sense to build subways in Los Angeles. We live in an area with earthquakes, highly expansive soils, and high water tables. Therefore, the cost of building a subway line is prohibitive, and the maintenance problems

are astronomical. In addition, Los Angeles is so spread out that virtually thousands of subway lines would be needed to serve the needs of the City properly.

Use the subway money to buy buses. Use the subway maintenance money to subsidize the buses. The LA City buses cost too much. For example, on Santa Monica Boulevard the LA and Santa Monica buses compete for riders from Santa Monica to UCLA. The Santa Monica buses are full, more frequent, and much less expensive. The LA City buses are almost empty. We can almost afford to give free rides on the LA City buses instead of building billion dollar tunnels and paying the interest on those billions of dollars annually. Thousands of new bus lines can be added to serve all the communities in LA County.

The recent addition of longer bus routes with fewer stops is a great step in the right direction, and should be supported and expanded.

Change the building codes to restrict the number of garage spaces in each new dwelling. Make it so expensive and onerous to own a car that people use the public transportation. Why should houses in the suburbs be allowed to have four cars on their property and add to the congestion when most of the in-city dwellings have two car garages? Intentionally creating a parking nightmare like San Francisco will lead to better use of public transportation.