



## L.A. Ideas

Michael Storper, Professor, UCLA School of Public Affairs

### Densification

The main problem with LA's urban process is how to achieve densification, in a way that is compatible with mobility, and without generating too much political opposition .

- a) the main boulevards are the principal opportunities for densification.
- b) they provide opportunities for "connecting tissue" in a city where emphasis has been placed on many little "centers," but not the connections between them;
- c) to do this, they need physical improvement concepts over long stretches of them – including streetscape (sidewalks, plantings, median plantings, and possibly construction of bicycle and transit lanes that are separate from traffic lanes) – and where the identity of long boulevards would link different neighborhoods.
- d) they can be financed by boulevard improvement corporations, something like business improvement districts, but in this case over long stretches of the major boulevards
- e) the densification can be residential and/or mixed use – something like 3-4 stories.
- f) there is a problem with parcel assembly. But it is not as big as many claim it is. Optimal scale for densification developments need not be the mega-developments that are currently preferred...for example, the median size is something now about 60-70 units (quite big), whereas it can be eco-

nomically done in 10-15 unit buildings....requiring smaller parcels and less problems of assembly.

- g) but there will need to be some financial incentives for this, probably involving ratios of parcel size to built surfaces, and reducing some heavy infrastructure requirements (such as how many parking spaces, etc) for smaller projects.
- h) design standards are crucial to making densification acceptable – setbacks, streetscape and overall quality of the building.
- i) integrating transit stops with improved boulevards is critical – my colleagues have shown that "designed" transit stops attract those reluctant to use transit, and they need to be close to home, feel protected and sheltered.

### Governance.

The second main problem in LA is its political institutions. There are numerous reforms to be achieved, but there is one big one: LA County 's Board of Supervisors is not capable of governing LA County. There needs to be a real legislature for LA County, which has the population of many large states and medium-sized countries; this will provide the basis for coalition building which currently does not exist. In addition, the executive branch of the county needs reform and rebuilding. I can't provide a blueprint for this, this is the general idea.