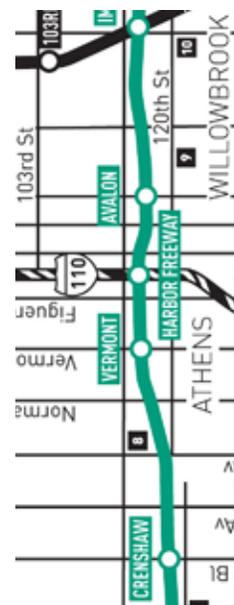


VERMONT GREEN LINE STATION Transit Oriented Development

Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program



Los Angeles

September 2010

About the ULI Los Angeles Technical Assistance Panel

In keeping with the Urban Land Institute mission, Technical Assistance Panels are convened to provide pro-bono planning and development assistance to public officials and local stakeholders of communities and nonprofit organizations who have requested assistance in addressing their land use challenges.

A group of diverse professionals representing the full spectrum of land use and real estate disciplines typically spend one day visiting and analyzing the built environments, identifying specific planning and development issues, and formulating realistic and actionable recommendations to move initiatives forward in a fashion consistent with the applicant's goals and objectives.

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Executive Summary

The Metro Green Line opened in 1995 and has 14 stations along its 20-mile long route from the City of Norwalk west to the City of Redondo Beach. The Green Line is entirely grade separated and for most of its route it follows the median of the Glenn Anderson Freeway (I-105). The Green Line Vermont Station is located in the unincorporated community of West Athens-Westmont. The County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning, through its proposed Transit Oriented Districts Program, seeks to utilize the existing assets of the Vermont Transit Station to revitalize the West Athens-Westmont community by improving pedestrian accessibility and attracting smart, green, and sustainable transit oriented development.

The Department of Regional Planning engaged the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Los Angeles District Council in a Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) to study ways to maximize development opportunities for the Vermont Station and the surrounding community. The TAP was convened at the Audrey and Sydney Irmis Youth Activity Center on March 26, 2010, utilizing experts in architecture, planning, development, and market economics to determine the main challenges and opportunities, offer solutions, and develop a roadmap for success for the Vermont Station.

The TAP evaluated the area within a half mile radius around the Vermont Station, encompassing an area the County established through its zoning code in 2005 as a Transit Oriented District (TOD), and found numerous opportunities and challenges. While the Vermont Station TOD has seen very little new development since its establishment, the larger half mile radius study area has recently benefited from significant public investments, such as new County



facilities along Imperial Highway and the expansion of Los Angeles Southwest College. The TAP developed a strategic plan to enhance the Vermont Station's sense of arrival and utility by creating a connecting network of attractive pedestrian corridors stretching from the station into surrounding residential neighborhoods, along commercial corridors, and to schools and civic facilities. Making the Vermont TOD a focal point of community identity is one of the primary goals of this TAP.

The TAP believes an opportunity exists to create a community center at the Vermont Station by expanding the street level plaza and improving the pedestrian and transit user experience. In addition, the TAP recommends treating the station as an anchor for two active nodes—a proposed mixed use urban center to the north at Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway, and a smaller neighborhood-serving center to the south at Vermont Avenue and 120th Street. Because the community suffers from a lack of open space, an enhanced linear park along the Vermont Avenue median would help serve as the backbone that connects these two active nodes. New housing and mixed use infill development between these nodes can bolster retail and pedestrian activity along the Vermont Avenue corridor, and a green connector along the existing Union Pacific rail right of way immediately south of the station can create east-west pedestrian and bicycle linkages.

It is the TAP's concern that the Vermont Station and adjacent neighborhoods lack a unified identity and is not a recognized destination center. Currently the community assets feel detached and isolated. As a result, the County is urged to improve both the efficacy and design of the station to establish a sense of place, improve connectivity from adjoining neighborhoods, and ultimately invigorate the West Athens-Westmont community.



Vermont Station users wait to make their transit connections

Assignment & Process

Key Issues

The County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning requested that a TAP be convened to study the Vermont Station and to offer ideas and a plan for future investment and development in the station area. The Department of Regional Planning identified the following objectives the TAP should consider while addressing the future of the Vermont Station and surrounding community:

1. Examine strategies and opportunities to enhance the connections and linkages between the community's assets. The West Athens-Westmont community is comprised of a strong coalition of community members that are committed to working proactively with the County on revitalization efforts. There are strong opportunities to strategically enhance the connections between community assets, such as Los Angeles Southwest College, the Audrey and Sydney Irmas Youth Activity Center, churches, and schools, via improved pedestrian linkages and transit access to the Vermont Station.
2. Consider strategies to maximize the full potential of the Vermont Station TOD to establish transit and pedestrian supportive

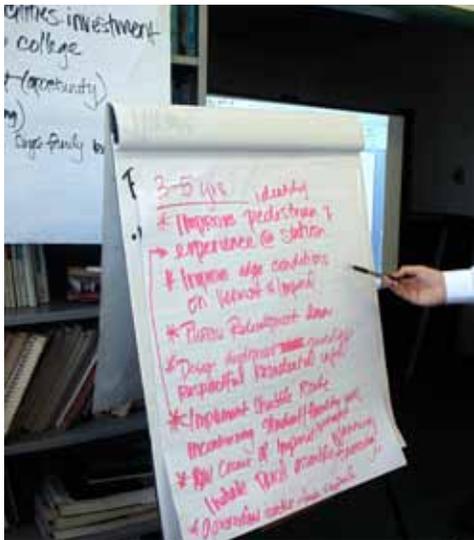
development, improve pedestrian access to transit facilities, improve public safety; create new economic and housing opportunities; and reduce congestion and greenhouse emissions by decreasing vehicle miles traveled.

3. Consider a strategy for meeting the Vermont Station's potential through coordinated efforts by the Los Angeles County Economic Development Corporation, Metro, County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning and Department of Public Works, City of Los Angeles, Los Angeles Southwest College and other private and nonprofit developers, as well as community stakeholders and residents.

The Department of Regional Planning requested that the TAP consider the following key issues when studying the Vermont Station:

- Specific urban design and infrastructure improvements that can be implemented to improve pedestrian accessibility to the station and connecting bus transit, to address safety concerns, and to create within the surrounding neighborhoods a greater sense of community ownership and connection to the station.
- The degree to which significant community assets need to be leveraged to spur community and economic development and work as a catalyst for development at the periphery of the Vermont Station TOD.

- Approaches to better integrate and link the community's existing assets with the Vermont Station TOD.
- In lieu of private investment, public funding mechanisms that Los Angeles County can utilize and leverage to spur desirable development and redevelopment activities at the Vermont Station TOD and surrounding community.
- Potential implementation strategies.



The panel's brainstorming for the implementation phasing



Panel members discuss their understanding of the study area

TAP Process

ULI representatives met with representatives from the Department of Regional Planning to determine the scope of the panel assignment. The panel members were selected based upon their ability to address the stated objectives for the program provided by the client. Prior to the day-long program, panel members reviewed background materials prepared by the Department of Regional Planning.

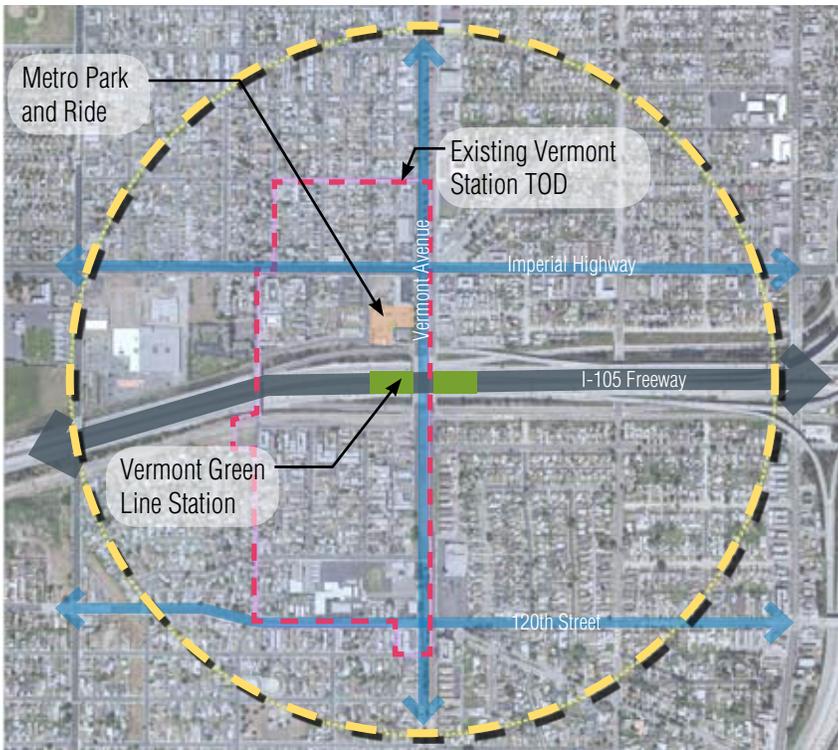
The TAP process is a day-long event. In the morning panel members tour the study area with representatives and later meet with key stakeholders, work through an intensive analysis on the specified issues, and present their findings to the general public.

TAP Panel of Experts

ULI convened a panel of professionals who represented a variety of disciplines connected with land use and real estate development, such as architecture and design, real estate development, economic analysis, and development financing methods. Members were selected with the intent of convening a robust array of professional expertise relevant to the County's objectives for the study and who had local working knowledge of the sub-region where the study area was located. All panel members were volunteers and were not compensated for their time.



Audrey and Sydney Irmas Youth Activity Center—site where the Vermont Green Line Station TAP was convened



Half mile radius study area for the Vermont Green Line Station



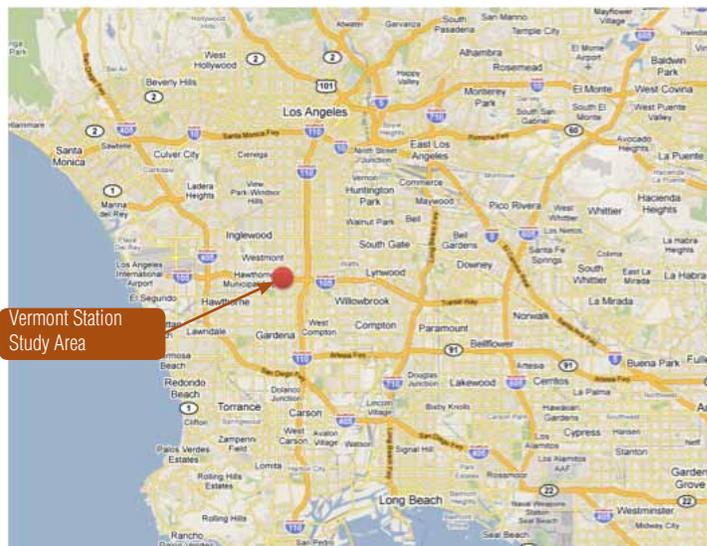
Station users may use the nearby park and ride lot on Vermont Avenue



Panelists tour the study area

Background

The Vermont Station TOD has experienced very little new development activity since its inception and the Department of Regional Planning believes that the work of the ULI Los Angeles District Council TAP will create a successful plan to make the Vermont Station TOD a model for transit oriented development in Los Angeles County. The TAP utilized best practices of transit oriented development and the expertise of its members to evaluate the conditions of the Vermont Station TOD and to formulate the recommendations of this report.



Regional location of Vermont Station study area

In 2005, the County of Los Angeles established the Vermont Station TOD in the West Athens-Westmont community, a 3.1 square mile unincorporated area with a population of more than 41,000 residents. The northern and eastern borders of the community are adjacent to the City of Los Angeles. To the west are the cities of Inglewood and Hawthorne, and to the south lies the City of Gardena. The Metro Green Line Vermont Station boarding platform is physically located in the I-105 freeway median below the Vermont Avenue overpass. The eastern portion of the station is under the jurisdiction of the City of Los Angeles and the western portion is within the jurisdiction of the County.

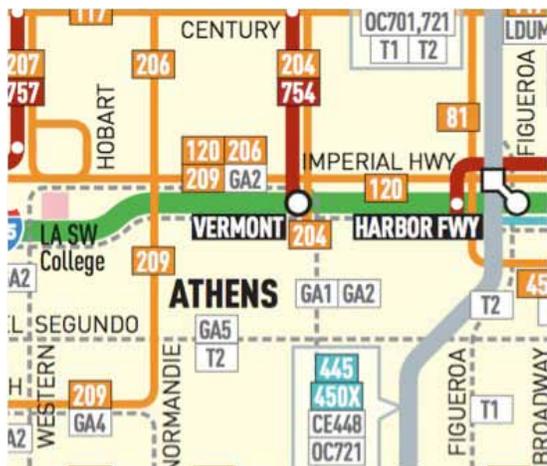
The Vermont Station study area is a one half mile radius around the station, the boundaries being 110th Street to the north, 123rd Street to the south, Figueroa Street to the east, and Normandie Avenue to the west. Existing land uses in the study area consist of low to medium density residential neighborhoods with commercial and public uses along Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway. Vermont Avenue is an underperforming commercial corridor with many shallow lots, which has facilitated the conversion of many commercial parcels to non-commercial uses such as multifamily low rise buildings and churches. Along Imperial Highway is the recently completed County complex that includes the new Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department South Los Angeles Station and a Public Works branch office.

An underutilized 155 space park and ride lot located north of the station on Vermont Avenue is Caltrans owned and Metro operated. A consent decree established during the planning of the I-105 freeway requires that free parking be maintained adjacent to the station and this lot serves that purpose.

The West Athens-Westmont community is comprised of two Census Designated Places (CDP). The West Athens CDP has a population of 9,100; 2,100 families; and nearly 2,000 persons per square mile. Ethnic composition is made up of 10% White, 65% African American, and 23% Latino. The Westmont CDP has a population of about 32,000; 7,100 families; and about 5,500 persons per square mile. Ethnic composition is made up of 12% White, 58% African American, and 29% Latino.

The average weekday ridership at the Vermont Station is approximately 2,000 riders eastbound, and 1,200 westbound. The Vermont Station offers connectivity to surface transit along Vermont Avenue in both directions. Connecting bus lines along the Vermont corridor include the Gardena Bus Line 2, Metro Bus Lines 204, 206, 209, and the Metro Rapid 754. (see image below). According to Metro, the average daily bus boarding's (connections from the Green Line) are 998 (northbound) and 688 (southbound). The community is also serviced by the Rosewood Smart Shuttle operated by the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works.

Currently there is no open space located within the Vermont Station TOD. The nearest park, Helen Keller Park, is located about one mile south of the TOD. Chester L. Washington golf course is one of the largest open space parcels in the West Athens-Westmont community, but it is not linked to the Vermont Station



Bus routes serving the study area

TOD for ready accessibility by transit users. Los Angeles Southwest College boasts some of the best sports facilities in the state. In 1984 the site was selected by the Olympic Committee to be an official training facility for participating athletes. Today, however, it is only available for student activities and private groups able to pay for facility use permits.

History of the Metro Green Line

The Metro Green Line is an east-west light-rail line in the Los Angeles County Metro Rail System connecting the City of Norwalk with the City of Redondo Beach. The Green Line was established as part of a consent decree signed by Caltrans to allow construction of the I-105 freeway. The Green Line was originally conceived to serve bedroom communities along its alignment for the now defunct aerospace industry. Construction of the Green Line began in 1987 and it opened in 1995 at a cost of \$718 million. It has an average of nearly 40,000 weekday boardings. The present extent of the Green Line is often criticized for its lack of direct connection to major terminus points, such as to the Los Angeles International Airport and to the Norwalk/Santa Fe Springs Metrolink station.



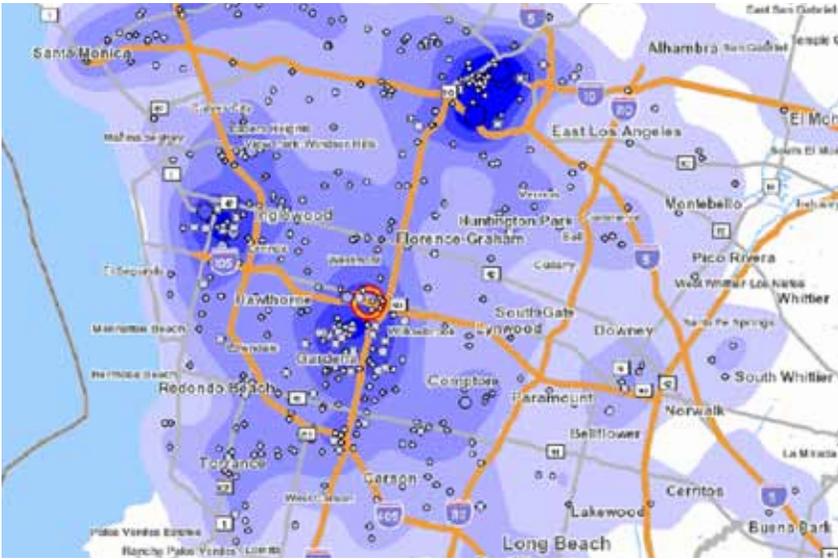
Vermont Station information kiosk

County of Los Angeles Transit Oriented Development Initiative along the Metro Green Line

In 1998 the County of Los Angeles Department of Regional Planning began a program to develop Transit Oriented Districts at the Metro Green Line Stations in its unincorporated communities—the Vermont Station in West Athens-Westmont and the Hawthorne Station in Lennox. The Regional Planning staff engaged the local community to develop the Draft Green Line Transit-Oriented Districts Land Use, Housing and Economic Development Strategy Report (Green Line Strategy Report). The report provides the overall land use vision, development goals, and objectives for the Green Line Station TODs, and serves as the foundation for updates to the County's Transit Oriented Districts Ordinance. Minimal new development has occurred in the Vermont Station TOD since its establishment in 2005. Only thirteen permits have been processed and from that yielded just two new single family residences. The County is concerned about the lack of development in the TOD and has committed to further examining how transit oriented development strategies may be tailored for the TOD to increase opportunities for successful development.

County of Los Angeles Transit Oriented Districts Program

The Department of Regional Planning is completing a comprehensive update to the County's General Plan. The General Plan Update includes the proposed Transit Oriented Districts Program, which is a major component of the County's regional strategy to increase affordable, multifamily housing opportunities. The Program is also intended to meet local and State climate change goals to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve air quality through land use and transportation strategies that are pedestrian friendly and reduce vehicle miles traveled. The Program further demonstrates the County's commitment to community and economic development through smart growth.



Range of employment centers that study area residents commute to for work



Multifamily housing stock within the study area



Single family housing stock within the study area

Analysis

Demographics and Employment

Approximately 12,000 people live within a one half mile radius of the Vermont Station, comprising roughly 3,300 households. Overall, household sizes in the station area are quite large, with an average household size of 3.7 persons, as compared to the County average of approximately 3.0 persons per household. Local median household incomes, on the other hand, are lower than the County average. Demographers estimate that the 2009 median household income in the Vermont Station area was around \$34,000, versus \$54,000 for Los Angeles County.

The U.S. Census Bureau indicates that the average unemployment rate for the West Athens-Westmont community is slightly more than 20%. The average unemployment rate for the County is just over 13%

There are approximately 900 jobs in the Vermont Station study area, half of which are in the public sector. These public sector jobs are primarily related to education or social services. Of private sector jobs, roughly 40% are retail-oriented, and most of these are in food stores (e.g., the local Ralphs grocery store) or fast food restaurants. Relative to the number of households in the Vermont Station study area, local jobs are very scarce. The local jobs-to-households ratio is 0.28, while the same ratio for Los Angeles County is 1.39. Generally, a low local jobs-to-households ratio, such as that for the Vermont Station study area, indicates that residents must commute outside of the community to other parts of the region for work. This may also indicate that the Green Line may still serve its originally intended purpose of providing a transit commuting option to non-local jobs for bedroom communities along its alignment, such as West Athens-Westmont. Information from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that local residents work in areas as far away as downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach.

Residential Market Conditions

Almost half (1,600) of the estimated 3,400 residential units in the Vermont Station study area are single family detached homes, and most of these are well maintained. Two thirds of the remaining 1,800 units can be found in low-rise buildings containing fewer than 20 units each.

In 2009, renters comprised 65% of the area's residential market, which is higher than the County average of 52%. Few recent residential developments exist in the study area, with the exception of a couple of relatively new multifamily properties. Thus, the Vermont Station area represents a challenging environment for private sector investment in residential real estate development in particular. Private developers are likely to require development incentives and public assistance as part of a clear public sector commitment in the area.

Retail Market Conditions

Although little to no office or industrial space exists within a half mile radius of the Vermont Station, some retail space does exist. This retail space is, however, quite limited. With the exception of a Ralphs grocery store located at the corner of Vermont Avenue and 120th Street, most retail space exists in either old strip centers or "mom and pop" stores along Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway.



A new County of Los Angeles facility is within the study area



View looking north on Vermont toward the park and ride lot

Findings

The local Ralphs grocery store has proven to be a strong retail draw to the area, however, it is clear from demographic data that most retail expenditures by local residents occur outside the study area. In fact, with the exception of local grocery stores and gas stations, all other retail expenditure categories show a significant leakage outside the half mile radius of the Vermont Station study area. Although this leakage might normally suggest an opportunity for new development, local household incomes and expenditures likely limit new retail development in the near- to mid-term. Add to that the cautiousness of most retailers following the recent economic downturn and it becomes clear that any retail development would likely be long-term in nature. An initial analysis does, however, reveal a potential market opportunity for a sit-down restaurant in the area. Very likely, such an establishment would be located in high-traffic areas such as the corner of Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway.



Gateway entry to the Vermont Green Line Station

A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis was conducted to evaluate the Vermont Station and surrounding community. Strengths and weaknesses explore internal aspects of the project or elements that can be controlled or changed by new development. Opportunities and threats evaluate external influences that can affect the project. Most opportunities and threats are beyond the control of those associated with the project, such as factors relating to the economy like interest rates or loan availability. From the site visit, stakeholder interviews, and additional site research, the TAP determined the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats for the Vermont Station TOD study area.

Strengths

The existing transit station and established infrastructure, as well as involved community stakeholders provide a good opportunity for effective localized planning in the Vermont Station TOD. Recent investments by the County, including a new Sheriff's Station, and the proximity to Los Angeles Southwest College provide incentives to maximize connections to the Vermont Station. Wide streets, such as Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway, allow for sufficient traffic flow and bus connections. The Ralph's grocery store on Vermont Avenue south of the Vermont Station provides a local market for the community, while the well-maintained, relatively dense and stable single family residential population provides a user-base for the light rail transit system.

Weaknesses

Traditional mixed use and dense TOD development conflicts with the preexisting single-family community character of the neighborhood. The current station design is visually unattractive and uninviting, and being located at the Vermont Avenue underpass exposes riders to unwelcome levels of noise and pollution. The lack of wide sidewalks and neglected streetscape along Vermont Avenue inhibits pedestrian access to the station from neighboring residential areas. The station area lacks a clear sense of identity or central nodes where commercial activity occurs and pedestrians gather. Shallow commercial lots along Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway near the station pose a problem when identifying and assembling parcels for redevelopment. The consent decree requiring the availability of the park and ride lot limits the redevelopment potential of that site, and the Union Pacific railroad corridor south of



The width of Vermont Avenue provides an opportunity for streetscape enhancements

the I-105 freeway acts as a barrier between residents south of it and the transit station. Community members state that local crime and lack of safety discourages pedestrian activity in the station area.

Opportunities

Despite weaknesses, opportunities are prevalent. The width of Vermont Avenue provides a major opportunity for streetscape enhancement and traffic realignment. Vacant and underutilized lots within one quarter mile of the station provide excellent redevelopment opportunities and potential. The park and ride lot is severely underutilized and could be improved to enhance its function through improved safety measures as well as considering strategies to integrate other appropriate uses while at the same time maintaining the 155 parking spaces required by the consent decree. There may also be opportunities to reconfigure and synchronize the local shuttle route to maximize service and improve community linkages to the rail station. The Ralphs grocery store could be redesigned and expanded to intensify the use by attracting additional tenants and expanding the store front along both 120th Street and Vermont Avenue. This parcel has the potential to be a strong anchor for the southern part of the TOD area. Connectivity with Los Angeles Southwest College could be enhanced, and improvements to the Vermont Station could create a more aesthetically pleasing and inviting portal.

Threats

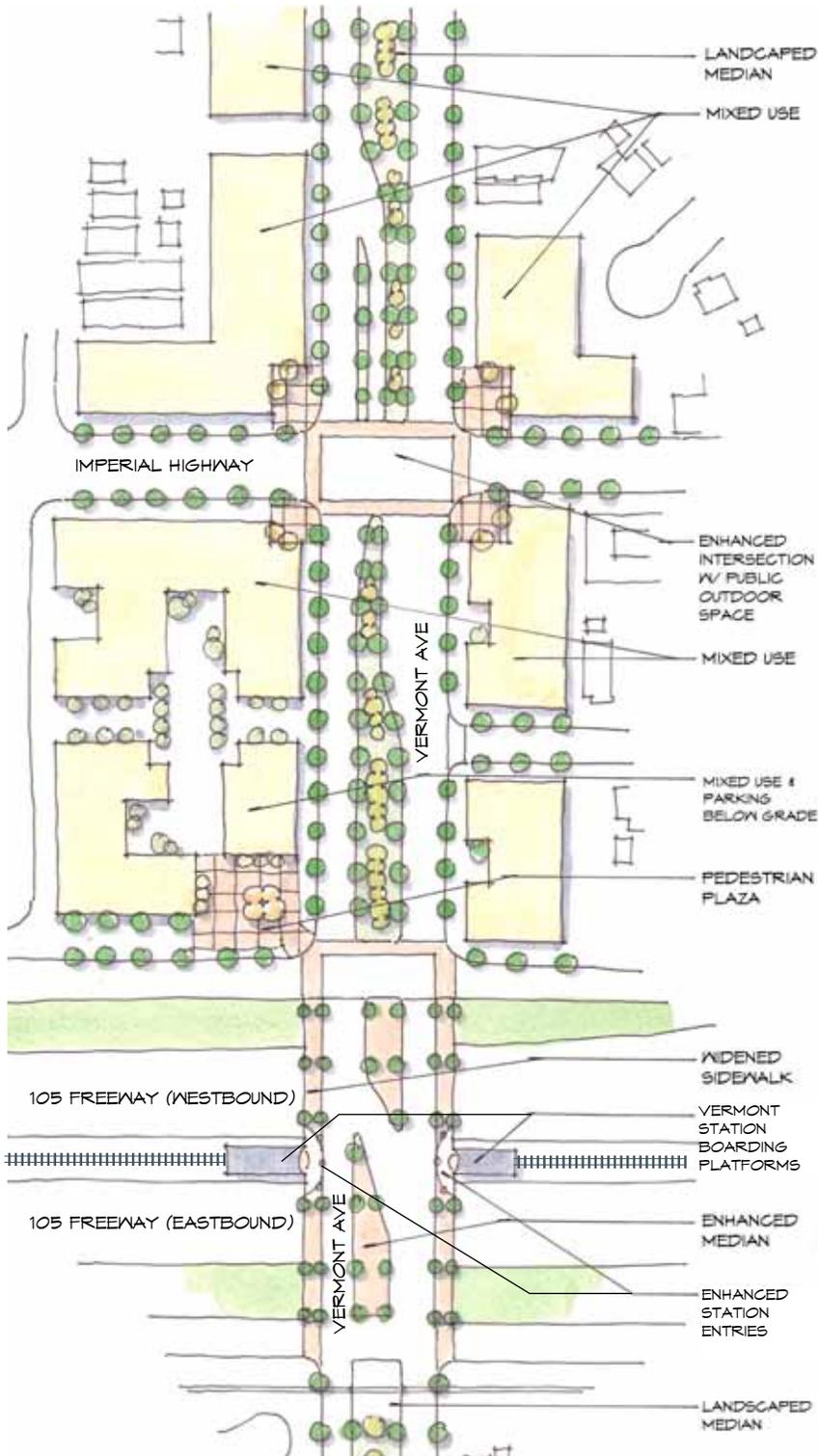
Threats to these opportunities are strong. There is a non-existent market currently in place to support transit oriented development in the Vermont Station area. Funding for transit service can be volatile, sometimes leading to unexpected long-term decreases in funding availability. Added to this, the fact that sales tax revenues are down, there is instability in available public money and private investment. These economic factors threaten to prevent any potential projects from getting off the ground. Additionally, some members of the existing community are resistant to change and may not embrace all the proposed improvements to the TOD. Public funding for housing is also restricted, as it can be difficult to secure funds when building housing within 500 feet of a freeway.



Vacant lots within the study area provide excellent redevelopment opportunities

Recommendations

“Building on a sense of place and creating a pedestrian friendly transit station”



Vision for a more pedestrian friendly Vermont Station TOD

Vision

The West Athens-Westmont community does not have a prominent and recognizable community center. The TAP's vision is to create a community identity through the enhancement of the Vermont Station and its surrounding amenities. This commonly held identity can encourage private investment and community building and would serve to enhance the economic opportunities for its residents. The West Athens-Westmont community can share a common gathering place that would consist of the Vermont Station, a Vermont Avenue linear park, and a new urban mixed use node.

Vision Strategies

The Vermont Station TOD area has a number of existing community assets, and there are opportunities to further develop “nodes” and a greater sense of place at existing commercial centers in the TOD. The TAP recommends developing and strengthening the links between these assets and nodes by creating an identity that bridges the gap created by the I-105 freeway while preserving and protecting the existing single family neighborhoods. The TAP identified the following four strategies to improve the Vermont Station TOD to bring about the vision for a transit and pedestrian hub that will increase ridership and enhance community character:

1. Develop the Vermont Avenue I-105 freeway overpass and the Vermont Green Line Station into a multi-modal plaza, reducing the excessively wide center median and expanding the sidewalks to link the community north and south of the freeway.
2. Improve the Vermont Avenue median into a linear park to create a sense of identity and place for the community.
3. Encourage transit supportive higher density mixed use development at the existing commercial nodes while buffering and protecting the existing single family neighborhoods.
4. Improve internal circulation systems within the community to increase linkages with the transit station.

Strategy 1: Develop a Multimodal Plaza

Develop the Vermont Avenue freeway overpass and the Vermont Green Line Station into a multi-modal plaza, reducing the excessively wide center median and expanding the sidewalks to link the community north and south of the freeway.

Vermont Avenue features an exceptionally wide right-of-way of 170 to 180 feet. The median island, which was a former railroad right-of-way, is 60 feet wide. The Vermont Avenue freeway overpass provides bus stops and bus layover zones for Metro and Gardena Transit lines, as well as various shuttles. Because Vermont Avenue needs no more than 100 feet to accommodate all its lanes of traffic as well as curbside parking, the excessive right-of-way provides many opportunities for developing pedestrian-oriented space.

This plaza should be developed with an attractive landscaped space with amenities for people gathering before boarding the train. Currently, riders wait for the train above the platform to avoid the deafening environment caused by the I-105 freeway. Expanding the sidewalk and building a plaza at street level above the platform provides a safe, public space for members of the community. Enhancement of the Vermont Station entry portal itself, as it is unappealing today, will create an inviting and more pleasant experience for transit users.



Street furnishings are a feature of vibrant pedestrian streetscapes

Strategy 2: Improve the Vermont Avenue Median

Improve the Vermont Avenue median by developing a linear park to create a sense of identity and place for the community.

The TAP recommends retaining the wide median to accommodate a new linear park as the station area lacks significant open space. In addition to improvements of the Vermont Avenue freeway overpass, converting the existing median into a linear park will create open space the community can use and benefit from, while at the same time creating an identifiable landmark for the West Athens-Westmont community. However, because providing a linear park on the freeway overpass would be economically infeasible due to structural limitations, the TAP recommends narrowing the striped median on the overpass and transferring that width to the sidewalks adjacent to the Vermont Station entrances on each side of the overpass.

The 10 foot sidewalk on the overpass's east side and the 15 foot sidewalk on the west side could each be widened to 22 feet. No traffic capacity would be lost with the narrowing of Vermont Avenue. The median islands immediately to the north and south of the I-105 freeway would be narrowed only a slight amount to allow for the traffic lane transitions, as shown in the sketch highlighting the panel's recommendations (page 13). The wider sidewalks immediately adjacent to the Vermont Station entrances would offer an excellent opportunity to provide for street beautification, as well as amenities for transferring bus riders.



Existing streetscape conditions along Vermont Avenue

Strategy 3: Encourage Higher Density Mixed Use Development

Encourage higher density mixed use on existing commercial nodes to create transit supportive commercial uses while buffering and protecting the existing single family neighborhoods.

There are opportunities for planning transit-related mixed use development at the Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway intersection. The close proximity to the Vermont Station, the commercial zoning of the area, and the larger dimensions of the properties make the location appropriate for such development. South of Imperial Highway, along Vermont Avenue, where the existing Metro park and ride lot is located, is a particularly good location for this type of development given its immediate proximity to the station. For instance, a mixed use development could be established with a parking basement that provides parking for new residents and for current users of the park and ride spaces. Appealing commercial space could be provided at the first floor, possibly enclosing a plaza with opportunities for outdoor dining, and convenience retail. In conjunction with the proposed widening of the Vermont Avenue sidewalk at the station entry, such a plaza could make a pleasant location for waiting for transit. Multiple stories of residences may be planned for the levels above the first floor.

Similarly, other parcels at the Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway intersection have good potential for transit-related mixed use buildings. Some commercial space should be retained on the first floors, and interesting entry lobbies and outdoor plazas have the potential to further encourage pedestrian activity at the intersection.

Another consideration is to cul-de-sac or re-route the existing diagonal street (Southwest Boulevard) at the northeast corner of the Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway intersection to create more useable space. Furthermore, the TAP recommends intensification of development on properties at the northeast intersection of Vermont Avenue and 120th Street to create a neighborhood-serving node. Connecting this node with the Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway node with multifamily and/or mixed use development would establish a pedestrian corridor extending north and south from the Vermont Station into the community.



Pedestrian friendly streetscapes are business friendly

Strategy 4: Coordinate Local Community Shuttles to Increase Linkages with Vermont Station

The Vermont Avenue corridor is a major arterial served by public transit that links the West Athens-Westmont community to neighboring city centers in Los Angeles County. Investing in additional public or privately operated shuttles, jitneys, or share taxis to and from the Vermont Station will allow for improved circulation within the community and greater use of the station. For example, students of Los Angeles Southwest College commute from neighboring cities accessible to Metro light rail transit. There is a large concentration of students residing in Inglewood and Hawthorne, both of which have a Metro Green Line Station. Shuttling students from Los Angeles Southwest College to the station can create incentives for student and faculty use; hence reducing the amount of traffic and greenhouse gas emissions within the area.



Panel recommendations for an improved pedestrian experience along Vermont Avenue

Implementation

A Road Map for Success

Introduction - Phasing Strategy

The ULI TAP recommends a comprehensive strategy of public realm improvements and public and private development projects that capitalize on the presence of the Vermont Station and will enhance the economic vitality and livability of the surrounding West Athens-Westmont community. Recognizing that the community is largely developed and the importance of preserving and enhancing existing residential neighborhoods, the strategies are focused on selected infill and re-use sites and public rights-of-way.

While the vision encompasses a broad spectrum of actions that would be implemented over a number of years, there are important strategies that can be initiated in the near term. These short term strategies plant the seeds for transformative change. The TAP recommends a phased approach to implementation of its recommendations based on its understanding of current and projected funding opportunities and market conditions.

The TAP's implementation actions are divided into three phases:

- Phase I: Years 1 - 5
- Phase II: Years 6 - 9
- Phase III: Years 10 and beyond



Panelist Eric Olsen sketches out the team's vision for a successful TOD



Existing conditions diagram

LEGEND

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Station | Government Center |
| Vermont Avenue | Schools/Colleges |
| Commercial (Imperial Hwy) | Neighborhoods |
| Retail Nodes | |

Goal 1: Create a Vibrant Multi-Modal Station Plaza

The immediate Vermont Green Line Station area should be improved to create a more inviting environment for transit users and as an attractive amenity for surrounding commercial districts and residential neighborhoods.

Actions

- The width of Vermont Avenue affords the opportunity to reconfigure travel lanes, expand sidewalks, install landscaping and streetscape amenities, and add small food or retail kiosks that contribute to the sense of a pedestrian transit-plaza.
- Redesign the entry portal, access stairways and elevators, and train boarding platform to improve their visual and physical quality and buffer transit users from excessive levels of noise and pollution.
- Sidewalks along both sides of Vermont Avenue should be widened and improved to make them attractive places for pedestrians to walk, patronize local businesses, and enjoy their community. The addition of trees, landscaping, benches, pedestrian-scaled lighting, public art, and wayfinding signage are illustrative of the types of such improvements.

Goal 2: Improve the Pedestrian Experience

The pedestrian experience along Imperial Highway and Vermont Avenue needs improvement to facilitate usability and safety.

Phase I

Years 1 - 5

Actions

- Improve the image and character of Imperial Highway by reconstructing and landscaping its median, currently separated from travel lanes by painted lines.
- Restripe Vermont Avenue north of the I-105 freeway to accommodate bicycle lanes that would tie into the bicycle lanes proposed by the City of Los Angeles further north along Vermont Avenue.
- Additional study is needed to determine whether restriping could be accommodated with the existing 44 to 45 foot wide southbound cross section on the County's side of Vermont Avenue or whether the median would have to be narrowed 3 to 4 feet to accommodate wider lanes. The City of Los Angeles northbound cross section (54 to 55 feet wide) can easily accommodate a bicycle lane and could even include a protected bicycle lane in some segments. To accommodate bicycle lanes south of the I-105 freeway, the median would have to be narrowed by 5 to 8 feet on each side to accommodate the same cross section as proposed north of the I-105 freeway.

- Redesign sidewalks on the west side of Vermont Avenue to:

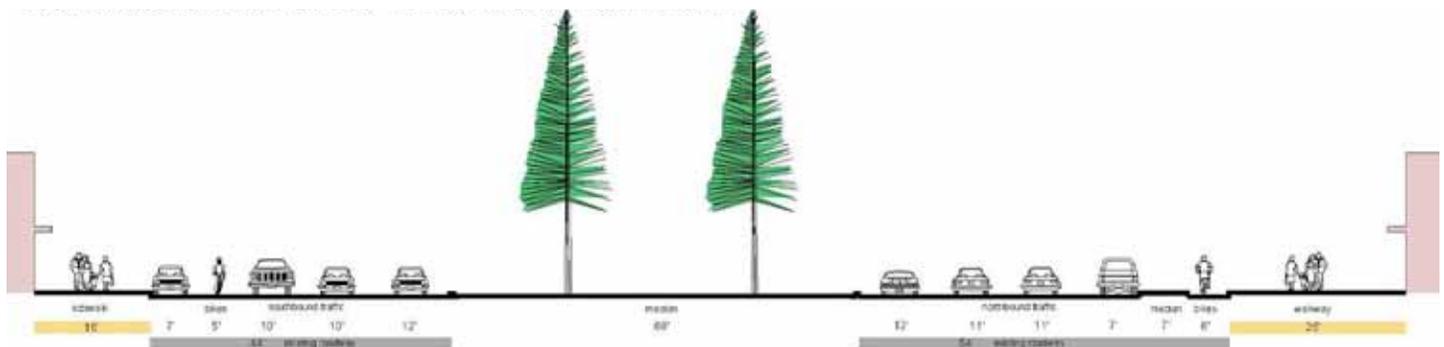
Provide 8 foot wide stormwater infiltration parkways and 7 to 8 foot wide walkways.

Plant large-scale open-canopy street trees an average of 30 to 40 feet apart in the center of the new stormwater infiltration parkways.

Add pedestrian-scale street lights to provide supplemental illumination at night and community identity during the day time.

Over time, attract new ground floor uses in existing buildings and new development projects to provide ground floor commercial activity oriented to the sidewalk. New development projects may set back a few feet to provide more space along the sidewalk for outdoor commercial activities, including outdoor dining.

- Coordinate with the City of Los Angeles to provide similar improvements on the east side of Vermont Avenue since a "double-sided" street is more likely to succeed in attracting new development and activity than a single-sided street.



Existing cross section of Vermont Avenue north of the Vermont Green Line Station

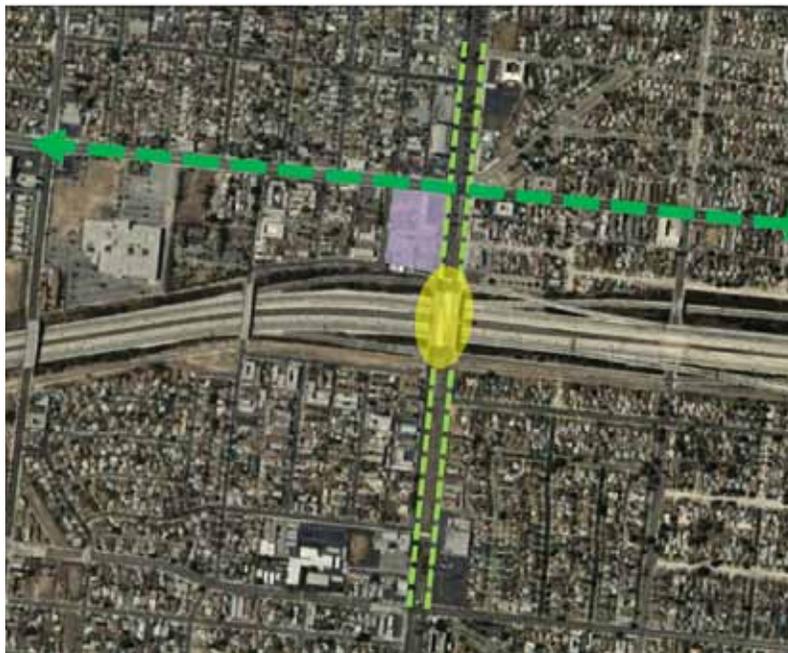
- The sidewalk on the I-105 freeway overpass is currently an average of 10 feet wide, narrower than the sidewalks to the north and south. The sidewalk on the west side is approximately 12 feet wide, while the sidewalk on the east side is approximately 8 to 10 feet wide. To provide safer, more comfortable access to the Vermont Station, the sidewalks can be widened to 18 to 20 feet. Using a far more gradual rate of transition than is currently provided where the median narrows at 120th Street, the median could be gradually narrowed by up to 5 feet on the west side and up to 8 feet on the east side, starting less than 100 feet north and south of the I-105 freeway ramps.

Goal 3: Develop a Mixed Use Transit Supportive Node at the Southwest Corner of Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway

The County should pursue the designation of the station area, commercial corridors, and other appropriate properties as a Redevelopment Project Area. This would provide additional tools and incentives for property acquisition, and roadway, streetscape, and other improvements.

Actions

- Consolidate and redevelop the properties at the southwest corner of Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway for commercial uses and/or mixed use projects with housing located above or behind ground level retail uses. The northern parcels are underdeveloped and southern parcels contain a Metro park and ride lot. Cumulatively, these provide sufficient acreage for the development of one or more projects of the intensity and scale to induce redevelopment of parcels surrounding the intersection, as well as to establish a robust center of community activity, which is now absent.



Phase I implementation diagram

LEGEND

- Station Improvements
- Mixed Use Parcels
- ➔ Imperial Highway Median Improvements
- Vermont Avenue Streetscape Improvements

Displaced parking spaces from the Metro lot would be consolidated into a new parking structure where spaces are shared with adjoining development.

- Initiate processes leading to the assembly of the properties, oversee the preparation of a development plan, and develop a financing program.
- Develop guidelines for the design, scale, and character of new housing to be constructed and for the renovation and improvement of existing housing in the residential neighborhoods. These should ensure that changes in the neighborhoods are respectful of and positively contribute to their distinguishing character and qualities.



A transit supportive node would facilitate seamless transfers for riders

Goal 4: Increase Public Amenities

Additional public-oriented uses should be developed at the County Government Center and within the station area.

Actions

- Additional public-oriented uses should be developed at the County Government Center. This could include work-force housing for employees at the site, reducing commutes from outlying communities, and additional amenities to serve adjoining neighborhoods.
- Implement a shuttle route to provide access to and from the Vermont Station to Los Angeles Southwest College, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's South Los Angeles Station and adjacent civic facilities, and other key destinations within the West Athens-Westmont community. The route can be adjusted over time to serve newly developed projects.



Ralphs grocery is a significant asset in the Vermont Station study area

Goal 1: Expand Mixed Use Transit Supportive Development at the Intersections of Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway, and Vermont Avenue and 120th Street

By this time, it is assumed that commercial and/or mixed use projects would be constructed on the southwest block of the Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway intersection, as well as at adjoining blocks northwest, northeast, and southeast of the intersection. These projects would provide a mix of uses and scale of development contributing to a sense of a defined center of activity and identity for the surrounding community north of the I-105 freeway and cumulatively, with intensified development at the intersection of Vermont Avenue and 120th Street, would create a robust, complementary array of pedestrian-friendly community assets, businesses, and housing types throughout the TOD well served by rail and bus transit.

Actions

- Close Southwest Boulevard on the northeast corner of the Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway intersection to create a cul-de-sac, and consolidate properties fronting onto Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway to accommodate a public plaza surrounded by cafes and other pedestrian-oriented uses. These may be integrated into mixed use structures that transition in scale and height with adjoining single family neighborhoods.
- Intensify properties northeast of the intersection of Vermont Avenue and 120th Street for neighborhood-serving commercial and/or a mixed use development projects with housing located above or to the rear of ground level commercial uses. This may involve reconstruction of or additions to the existing Ralphs grocery market, with possible expansion on properties to the east of the existing site. Redevelopment of this site, in conjunction with

Phase II

Years 6 - 9

the County facilities and school to the west, would establish a distinct activity node serving residential neighborhoods located south of the I-105 freeway.

Goal 2: Develop Additional Housing

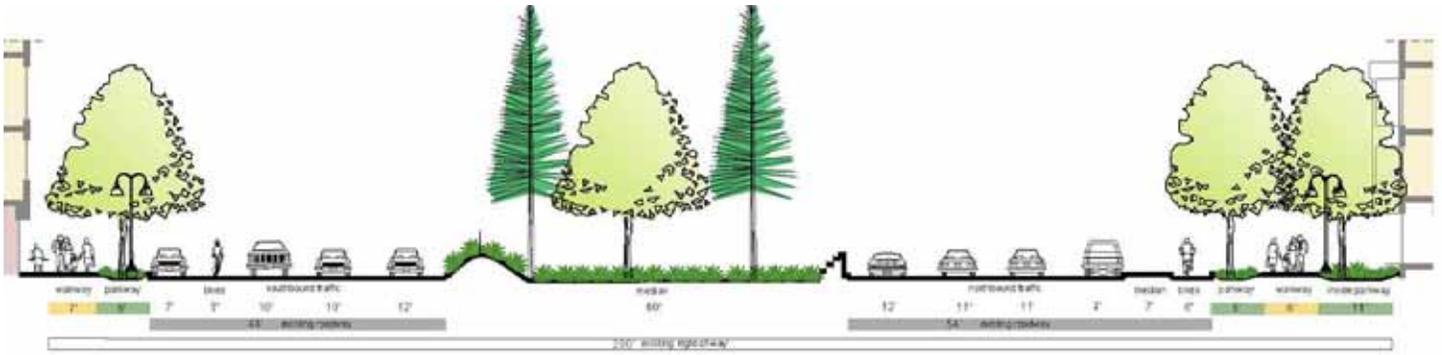
Properties fronting onto Vermont Avenue from 120th Street north to Vermont Station contain multifamily residential uses that would be retained or intensified by additional housing in single use structures or buildings with ground level retail uses. Establishment of a Redevelopment Project Area, initiated in Phase I, sets the stage for improvement with increased development of market rate and mixed income housing. In today's economy, while there is a lack of private investment, the absence of market demand can be overcome by induced demand through economic incentives.

Actions

- Include mixed income projects in the transit oriented district that include subsidized low-income, moderate-income, and middle-income workforce housing. Among other incentives, two types of funding sources will be particularly useful:
 - Low income housing tax credits – LIHTC – for rental housing
 - New markets tax credits – NMTC – for for-sale housing
- The TAP recommends that the County intensify housing production in mixed use projects. The County is encouraged to take advantage of the presence of schools, chain groceries and other community-serving retail within the Vermont Station study area to attract new residents. The area can serve as a bedroom community for the major employment centers in the Los Angeles County southern basin. Opportunistic sites include housing production at the southwest corner of Vermont Avenue and Imperial Highway and the northeast corner of Vermont Avenue and 120th Street.



Phase II focuses on developing vacant and underutilized parcels for additional housing and infill



Model cross section of Vermont Avenue with streetscape improvements including a linear park in the median

- The County should also consider the feasibility of encouraging and promoting employer-assisted housing production by large employers, public or private, that exist or may locate within the study area.
- Vacant and underutilized properties west of Vermont Avenue between Imperial Highway and the I-105 freeway, that are adjacent to the County facilities complex (which includes the new Sheriff's Department South Los Angeles Station and a Public Works branch office) on Imperial Highway would be intensified for multifamily residential housing. Characterized by its existing mix of unit types and densities, infill projects would provide additional housing opportunities for residents in proximity to the Vermont Station and be located and designed to achieve greater consistency with community character. It is recommended that an east-west landscaped pedestrian pathway be established midway between Imperial Highway and the I-105 freeway to foster walking and as an amenity for adjoining housing development.



The width of the existing medians lend themselves to creating a linear park



A linear park creates useable open space that complements transit oriented development

Goal 3: Construct a Linear Park

Action

- Redevelop the Vermont Avenue median as a linear park to serve adjoining residential neighborhoods and as an amenity for the commercial and mixed use projects located along its length. The median can be redesigned as a park, similar to the linear park proposed by the City of Los Angeles further north along Vermont Avenue. The median north of the I-105 freeway is 60 feet wide, while the median to south is 80 feet wide. With a 10 foot side berm/low fence and landscaped buffer along each median curb line to separate median park users from traffic, the activity zone at the center of the median would be 40 to 60 feet wide. This width is adequate for a variety of passive and active recreational activities.



A linear park serves as a visual buffer for a busy roadway



Conceptual drawing of a linear park with landscaping and other improvements

Phase III

Years 10 and beyond

Goal 1: Continue to Increase Community Amenities and Linkages

Action

- Improve the Union Pacific Railroad corridor parallel to and along the south side of the I-105 freeway as a pedestrian and biking trail linked with adjoining residential neighborhoods. Landscaping and other improvements would enhance its visual quality as an edge and amenity for adjoining residential neighborhoods.

Goal 2: Continue Infill Development

Action

- Develop additional commercial and residential infill projects consistent with the image and character of the community.



Phase III buildout of Vermont Station TOD

Public Use Facilities/School	Residential Infill
Cul-de-Sac	Linear Park
Pedestrian Oriented Neighborhood Village	Pedestrian Pathway



A linear park can become a community asset



Linear parks serve as excellent pedestrian linkages



Initial concept of a pedestrian oriented neighborhood village



A linear park in the Vermont Avenue median would create new green space and pedestrian amenities adjacent to Vermont Station



Examples of linear parks are explained by panelist Patricia Smith



TAP members discuss their recommendations at the public presentation

Funding Sources



Panelists preparing the public presentation of recommendations

Funding Sources

There are numerous funding sources available to the County and other agencies for enhancements to the transit station and the surrounding areas. Due to time constraints of the one day panel format, greater detail and focus on the funding sources was not included in the scope of the assignment. Strategies to attain and utilize these revenue streams will be highlighted in a forthcoming report from ULI Los Angeles.

Below is a short list of sources that the County should explore:

- Metro Call for Projects
- SCAG Compass Blueprint (Planning Studies)
- County General Fund Capital Projects
- County CDBG Funds
- Revenue Bonds
- Certificates of Participation
- Assessment District
- New Market Tax Credits
- Other Federal Funds
- Other State Funds
- Foundation Funding
- Private Bank Financing
- County Loan Programs
- County Business Loan Program
- County Development Loan Program
- County Business Expansion Loan Program
- County Float Loan Program
- County Technology Loan Program
- County Section 108 Loan Program

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- Jack Daniels, Los Angeles Southwest College
- Dan Rosenfeld, Office of Supervisor Ridley-Thomas
- Henry Porter, Community Liaison
- Bill Johnson, Community Development Commission of the County of Los Angeles
- Blair Babcock, Community Development Commission of the County of Los Angeles
- Alex Kalamaros, Joint Development Program, Metro
- John Zeigler, County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works
- Vicente Aguilar, County of Los Angeles Department of Public Works

Acknowledgements



County staff introducing the TAP's public presentation of recommendations

Panel Members

Panel Chair

Jeffrey Lambert, AICP

Community Development Director, City of Ventura

Mr. Lambert is the Community Development Director for the City of Ventura. He grew up on the East Coast and received his Bachelor of Arts from Clark University in 1985. He received his Master of Planning from USC in 1988 and his membership to the American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) in 1990. Mr. Lambert has an extensive planning background; he started as a Planning Technician in March 1986 in West Hollywood. In 1988 he started working for a consultant company representing clients on land use matters. Later he joined Kaiser Permanente where he managed real estate assets, obtained approvals for new and expanded medical facilities for the Southern California Region, and represented the organization before local public bodies such as planning commissions and city councils.

Panel Members

Karl Fielding

Environmental Planner, PBS&J

Mr. Fielding is an Environmental Planner with PBS&J, an environmental consulting firm. He is responsible for conducting research and assisting in the preparation of environmental documents and technical studies for environmental impact reports. This research has ranged from analyzing project-specific environmental issues to interpreting and applying local, state, and federal land use policies and laws. Mr. Fielding has conducted CEQA and NEPA research and analysis on a wide variety of projects, including the California High-Speed Rail Project EIR/EIS, San Francisco to San Jose Section; and the Exposition Corridor Transit Project Phase 2 for the Metro Exposition Line Construction Authority in Los Angeles, California. Mr. Fielding is also an active member of the Association of Environmental Professionals (AEP) and the Urban Land Institute (ULI), having served as Programs Chair for ULI LA's FutureBuild LA in 2009 and currently serving as Program Director for FutureBuild LA in 2010.

Ehud Mouchly

Principal, READI, LLC

Mr. Mouchly is the owner of Los Angeles-based READI, LLC, a real estate development and investment management company. He has over 30 years of experience in development, redevelopment, asset management and financing of sustainable infill projects, workforce housing and employer-assisted housing, master planned communities and mixed use development. Over the years he has held senior management positions with development organizations, home building companies and consulting firms. He has been an active ULI member for many years and has served as Council Chairman, Vice Chairman and District Council Executive Committee member. He is an occasional author, instructor and speaker on real estate matters in the U.S. and overseas, and serves as an adjunct professor in the MRED program at USC.

Walter Okitsu

Managing Director, Crain & Associates

Mr. Okitsu is the Managing Director for Crain & Associates and has worked in the traffic engineering and transportation planning field for over 28 years. Crain & Associates specializes in transportation consulting services related to land development and transportation improvement projects. Mr. Okitsu holds an M.S. in Engineering from the University of California, Berkeley, specializing in Transportation Engineering (1981); a B.S. in Civil Engineering from California State University, Los Angeles (1994); and a B.S. in Mathematics-Computer Science from the University of California, Los Angeles (1979). Licenses and certifications include: Professional Civil Engineer (C52655), State of California, 1994; Professional Traffic Engineer (T1406), State of California, 1985; Professional Traffic Operations Engineer (PTOE) certification from the Transportation Professionals Certification Board; and Professional Transportation Planner (PTP) certification from the Transportation Professionals Certification Board.

Eric Olsen, AIA LEED AP

Principal, TCA (Thomas P. Cox: Architects, Inc.)

Mr. Olsen is a Partner in TCA's Los Angeles-based office, specializing in master planning, urban design, and architecture for high-density housing, mixed-use, and TOD environments. Mr. Olsen is an award-winning design architect, with projects recognized by the AIA and the Congress for New Urbanism, among others. His 15-year experience at TCA includes architectural team leadership from planning through construction of a variety of high-density housing typologies and densities. Eric holds a bachelor's degree from UCLA and a master of architecture from California State Polytechnic University, Pomona. His most recent project is Westgate Pasadena, a sustainably designed, mixed-use TOD in Old Pasadena.

Patricia Smith, ASLA, AICP

Principal, Patricia L. Smith

Ms. Smith is a principal at Patricia Smith and has more than 25 years experience providing urban design, planning and landscape architecture services to private and public sector clients. Her recent focus has been on: urban design guidelines for existing urban environments where infill development at higher intensity must be integrated into the existing fabric and landscape improvements in the public domain as they relate to adjacent development; streetscape improvements, including street trees and other pedestrian amenities, pocket parks and landscaped medians; parks; and school landscaping, converting asphalt to play fields and natural landscaping. She has also worked with CRA/LA, and the City of Los Angeles Departments of Planning, Transportation, and Public Works to develop new street standards for downtown Los Angeles and a new specific plan for Warner Center that combines development standards and street standards to create "complete streets."

Alexander Sundquist
Senior Consultant, RCLCO

Mr. Sundquist is a senior consultant based in the RCLCO Los Angeles office. Alex has provided market-driven recommendations and strategic planning advice on a wide variety of high-profile real estate developments, including: luxury condominium high-rises in Los Angeles, large-scale mixed-use projects in Las Vegas, pioneering master-planned communities in Phoenix, high-rise office-condos in Miami, and resorts and branded hotel residences in a number of U.S. markets. A native of Sweden, Alex has lived in seven different countries and visited approximately 30 others. He received a Master's in Business Administration from the UCLA Anderson School of Management, as well as a Bachelor's in Neuroscience from Pomona College. Alex is an active member of the Urban Land Institute's (ULI) Young Leaders Group.

Woodie Tescher
Principal Technical Professional/Planning + Urban Design, PBS&J

Mr. Tescher brings more than 30 years of award winning urban design, planning, and public facilitation experience to PBS&J and oversees all urban planning and design programs throughout California. He has completed projects for a diversity of public and private clients, often involving the coordination of multidisciplinary teams in challenging, complex planning and design assignments. Mr. Tescher is recognized for advancing the state-of-the-art in developing planning and design approaches that enhance environmental sustainability, neighborhood livability, and commercial and community center vitality, including pedestrian-oriented, transit-oriented, mixed-use, live-work, and traditional residential neighborhoods. Mr. Tescher is Project Manager for the City of Los Angeles General Plan Framework and New Community Plan Implementation Program. The Program involves the preparation of the framing policy document for all General Plan elements and the City's 35 community plans. The Plan implements a smart growth strategy transforming the city's historic patterns of sprawl by directing growth into approximately three percent of the city, preserving single family neighborhoods and intensifying lands in proximity to transit stations and underused commercial corridors and centers and industrial districts. PBS&J and Mr. Tescher currently are consulting with the City of Los Angeles in developing a template for the content, organization, and format of community plans for consistency with the General Plan Framework and to address compelling current issues such as climate change and sustainability.

Panel Members

John Waldron
Principal, W+W Architects

Mr. Waldron is a partner at Waldron + Waldron Architects, and brings over 25 years of experience in the design, planning and entitlement of complex mixed-use infill projects both domestically and internationally. He does this by developing win-win projects for his clients and the communities they build in. Each project is shaped by their environment and formed around unique places for the community and the people they serve. Specializing in retail, multifamily, mixed-use and transit oriented developments, John works with clients, cities, agencies and communities to design projects that meet the financial objectives of the client, while at the same time blending into and embrace their location and environment. He does this by developing common project goals and objectives among the projects stakeholders and then working towards building consensus on a project. These projects have varied greatly in size and location; however, they all shared the common challenge of developing a new project within an established community and, adding value through thoughtful design and the development of unique people places.



TAP Panelists (left to right) - Eric Olsen, Woodie Tescher, John Waldron, Patricia Smith, Jeffery Lambert, Ehud Mouchly, Ronald Altoon (guest of the panel), Alexander Sundquist, Karl Fielding, (not pictured: Walter Okitsu)

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Established in 1936, ULI is a nonprofit education and research institute with over 40,000 members across the globe –1,500 here in the Greater Los Angeles area. As a nonpartisan organization, the Institute has long been recognized as one of America's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

The membership of ULI Los Angeles represents the entire spectrum of land use and real estate development disciplines. They include developers, builders, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, lenders, academics and students. Members of the Urban Land Institute in the counties of Los Angeles, Ventura, Kern, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara are automatically members of ULI Los Angeles.