

**Smart Growth Technical Session I:
LOS Methodologies: Barrier to Infill?**

ABAG Conference Room B, 101 Eighth Street, Oakland
8:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m., Friday, November 14, 2003

SESSION NOTES

ATTENDANCE

Presenters:

Tilly Chang, Planning Manager, SFCTA
James Daisa, Consultant, Kimley-Horn and Associates
Rebecca Kohlstrand, Consultant, EnviroTrans Solutions

Participants:

Chris Augenstein, Principal Transportation Planner, VTA
Elizabeth Deakin, Professor, UC Berkeley's Department of City and Regional Planning
Scott Edmondson, Senior Planner, San Francisco Planning Department
Henry Hilken, Principal Environmental Planner
Melissa Joshi, Community Planning Chief, California Department of Transportation
Nashua Kalil, Senior Planner, BART
Valerie Knepper, Planner/Analyst, MTC
Sherman Lewis, Advocate, Hayward Area Planning Association
Joan Malloy, Planning Manager, City of Union City
Michael Moore, Community Development Director, City of Petaluma
Jose-Luis Moscovich, Executive Director, SFCTA
Jeff Orway, Property Development Manager, BART
Janet Stone, Livable Communities Director, Greenbelt Alliance
Laura Stuchinsky, Director of Transportation and Land Use, SVMG
John Templeton, Transportation Supervisor, City of Concord
Jeffrey Tumlin, Partner, Nelson\Nygaard

ABAG Staff:

Alex Amoroso, Principal Planner
Patrick Duffy, Regional Planner
Michael Houston, Planning Aide

SESSION ACTIVITY

Introduction (9:10)

Participants introduced themselves.

Amoroso welcomed participants and presenters, provided project background, led introductions, and outlined guidelines for discussion.

Presentation 1: “CEQA and LOS: Environmental Benefits vs. Unintended Consequences” (9:20)
by Rebecca Kohlstrand

Presentation Highlights

Background:

- CEQA manages congestion with primary focus on volume-to capacity ratios.
- All trips start and end as pedestrian trips, pedestrians impacts are ignored.

Solutions:

- CEQA offers flexibility – we can create a broader framework
- Promote a multimodal framework
- LOS is not necessarily a barrier. It’s easy to work around.

Questions & Answers/Comments

Malloy raised the issue of historic land-development and street networking. Contrasting land-use patterns exist in older communities (such as Oakland) and newer communities (such as Pleasanton). Street grids in older cities allow for traffic dispersion. Newer, outlying communities have fewer ways of getting from one place to another (that’s why roads are over-burdened).

Deakin claimed design issues and land-use as key issues. Under current zoning, separated housing and commercial land-uses cause inefficiencies.

Moscovich echoed Deakin’s concerns. We must break out of Calvinist zoning laws because currently we lack organic connection between different uses.

Deakin condemned the recent emergence of cookie-cutter zoning. Older communities have housing on major corridors because historically, the predominant method of travel was transit and walking.

Kalil appreciated the insertion of CEQA positives and suggested focusing a white paper on “using the rules of the game” to reap positives of CEQA in addition to fighting negatives.

Moscovich mentioned many people’s preference for smaller, well-designed homes in central communities over larger homes in the suburbs. Societal issues are a big barrier, because many clearly prefer larger homes, but lets publicize examples such as those highlighted in Sarah Susanka’s Not so Big House.

Deakin pointed out the critical importance of the quality of local school districts. This is one of the biggest considerations of families when they choose communities in which to live .

Presentation 2: “Level of Service in Transit Oriented Districts: Service for Who” (9:40)

by James Daisa

This presentation was presented at RailVolution Conference and is an outcome of work done with VTA’s Manual of Best Practices for Integrating Transportation and Land Use Community Design and Transportation Practices.

Presentation Highlights

Problems:

- LOS emphasizes auto performance and the impact on other modes is unmitigated.
- Suburban environments have an easier LOS to meet.
- EIRs focus on auto impacts.

Solutions:

- Create a multimodal LOS and performance standards.
- Reconcile subjective as well as objective levels of service (current LOS methodologies measure quantifiable data).
- Refer to model cases to help problem (e.g. State of Florida, Landis, City & County of San Francisco).
- Use “person capacity.”
- Checklists and point-credit methods for infill development

Questions & Answers/Comments

Ordway thought Daisa’s data for residential trip reduction was very low at least from BART’s perspective. Consultants tend to aim low to be conservative, so that the numbers are sure to be applicable in everything. This is dangerous because it affects LOS determinations. BART is doing work that suggests much higher trip reductions even in suburbs.

Daisa said he needs more and better transportation research data area.

Ordway reported that more work needs to be done especially for retail and commercial areas.

Malloy asked for clarification on the tables in the presentation.

Edmondson pointed out that the multimodal system would be a total shift—the effects of which cannot be assumed without the policies being put into place.

Stone said that the research is very important because the public is skeptical of potential improvements. Greenbelt Alliance’s endorsement program has a number of criteria developers have to meet by promoting density around transit. We need a lot of them in order to make a big impact.

Joshi announced CalTrans Community Planning Grants -- a new program. Multimodal assessments are currently underway. CalTrans plans to continue crusading for multimodalism.

Ordway pointed out that lower densities score better on CEQA and LOS because they are assumed to have a lower environmental impact.

Tumlin pointed out that the methodology outlined in the presentation doesn’t penalize lower densities.

Daisa mentioned that the development community is happy with the methodology because they can get higher value projects around transit which are more profitable. Projects also get points for design attributes. Daisa will provide a full version of the partial draft check list shown in the presentation.

Deakin pointed out the assumption that everyone drives and affirmed that the numbers are very low. You will likely double or triple your trip reductions. Parking policies are ludicrous and need to be addressed.

Presentation 3: “Transportation Level-Of-Service Methods in San Francisco: Issues and Opportunities” (10:15)
by Tilly Chang

Presentation Highlights

Background:

- San Francisco is currently assessing its right-of-way problems.
- The City benefits from having a mature transit system.
- There is a need to change the premise by which measurements are made to reflect what modes people are using today.
- SFCTA is trying to advance awareness of benefits of non-auto modes.
- Legal challenges are always a fear.

Solutions:

- To see “before-and-after” effects, SF is doing pilot trials for reversible projects.
- Looking forward to doing Master EIRs for classes of projects”
- Infill Opportunity Zones are available through 1636.

No Questions or Comments

Closing Discussion:

Edmondson claimed LOS can be fixed by implementing CEQA’s existing features far beyond the project level. (regional level → county level → city level → neighborhood level → project level)

Moscovich recommended that reform proposals not be made apologetically. Reforms should be presented as a better way of assessing capacity rather than as an “alternative” to the status quo.

Tumlin claimed that CEQA is the single largest barrier to good land-use, and suggested that ABAG publish a handbook that presents local jurisdictions with case studies/examples of successful infill in spite of current CEQA barriers. He also proposed developing a legislative strategy to circumvent current CEQA barriers.

Moore urged consideration of public policy barriers in addition to technical barriers. He cited Petaluma’s recent promotion of mixed-use and infill development. Through a public process, Petaluma adopted a statement of Overriding Considerations in its EIR, so development can take shape more quickly, and with less community opposition.

Daisa would like to see a “technical toolbox” with uniform EIR methodologies agreeable by all in a region, subregion or county.

Kohlstand offered an alternative view by suggesting that CEQA is not the problem because local jurisdictions hold a great deal of power in spite of the CEQA mandate.

Lewis suggested that plans to eliminate or drastically reform CEQA are unrealistic. He claimed progress can be made by extending SB1636 to CEQA consideration and joining forces with existing efforts being made by the Bay Area Council and various corridor projects throughout the Bay Area.

Deakin proposed reforming LOS to measure accessibility rather than transit deficiencies. Penalize poor accessibility of pedestrians, bicyclists, etc. If ABAG documents models, UC Berkeley students could work on this.

Moore suggested not trying to eliminate CEQA, but changing/adding new questions to it.

Kohlstrand proposed using Census data to showcase desirable densities throughout the Bay Area.

Lewis proposed getting CEQA checklist.

Moscovich cautioned against efforts to make radical reforms. He suggested adding things, rather than deleting or changing existing content. He contended that packaging reform as a superior, cost-effective way of facilitating development is the key to success.

Edmondson echoed Moscovich by pointing out that the checklist is merely a guideline, not mandate. Let's improve the checklist by changing the focus away from mere protection, to restoration and improvement.

Templeton reminded the group of physical barriers of old planning (e.g. wide streets, narrow sidewalks, etc.). He cited a recent project in Concord in which an entire lane of traffic was eliminated which still left them within LOS.

Kalil reported on the Warms Springs SEIR

Knepper announced MTC is starting a TOD opportunity study (Caltrans) with CMAs and ABAG. MTC is considering adoption of transit-supportive land-use for transit expansion. There is language in CMP Statute that says there should be consistency with Highway Capacity Manual. MTC could support regional approach...

Stone announced TALC's support of MTC's land use policies and TALC's lobbying plans to Bay Area cities. She suggested we work to alter CEQA to give transit-use points—the inverse of what it does now.

Hilken claimed that political will is still key. Efforts should be made to alleviate the concerns of risk. He also reiterated the importance of collecting model public involvement processes and developments as case studies.

-End of Session Content

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NEXT STEPS

Value of the session will be in its ability to develop a plan and act on it

Need to address the needs and concerns of opponents in order to strengthen case, but not until our message is strong and unified

Need a mission statement that reveals our practical motives

Develop a summary of Next Steps

Compile a bibliography of reference materials/resources

Moscovich volunteered to present issues to CMA Association in January 2004.

Need a mission statement that reveals our practical motives

EVALUATION AND IMPRESSIONS

Good mix of participants, presenters

Good policy capsule

Good emphasis on solutions rather than problems

Presenters should develop summaries/outlines to accompany presentations

Need to address the needs and concerns of opponents in order to strengthen case, but not until our message is strong and unified