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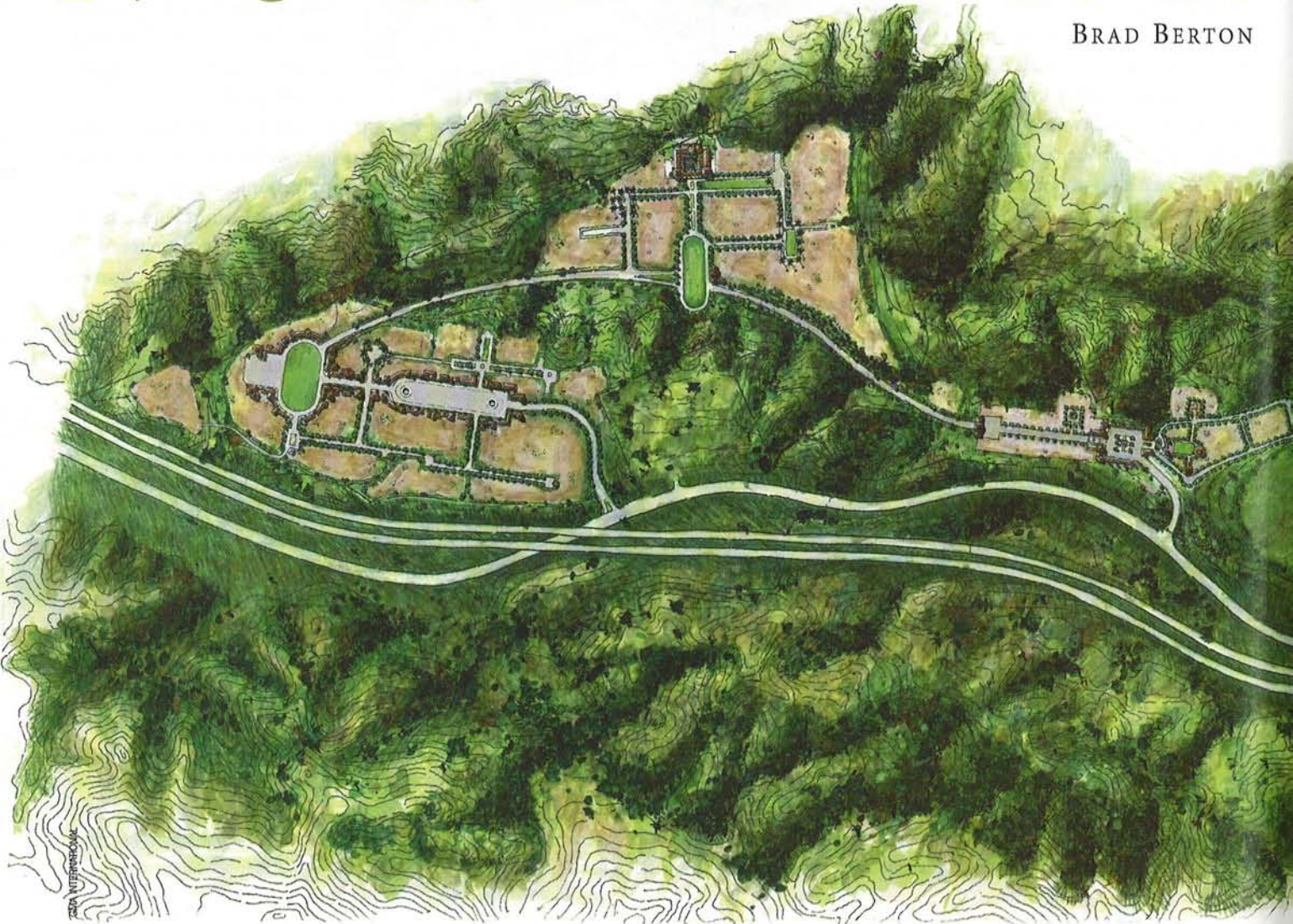
A master-planned community proposed for Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley intends to be a

A bevy of smart growth planning elements is being incorporated into a master-planned community proposed for 555 mostly hilly acres along the northern fringe of the San Fernando Valley in Los Angeles County. But in an area plagued by the nation's worst traffic congestion—not to mention its most polluted air—developers are in for a knock-down battle with the NIMBY crowd no matter how transit-oriented a plan they present. The Valley is home to longtime activists who even oppose transportation infrastructure improvements for fear of attracting additional development and traffic.

One key selling point for the \$2 billion Las Lomas project, which includes some 5,800 residences and more than 2.5 million square feet of commercial, retail, and civic space, is the likelihood that Los Angeles County's population will increase by 20 percent to roughly 12 million over the coming decades,

N O R T H E R N

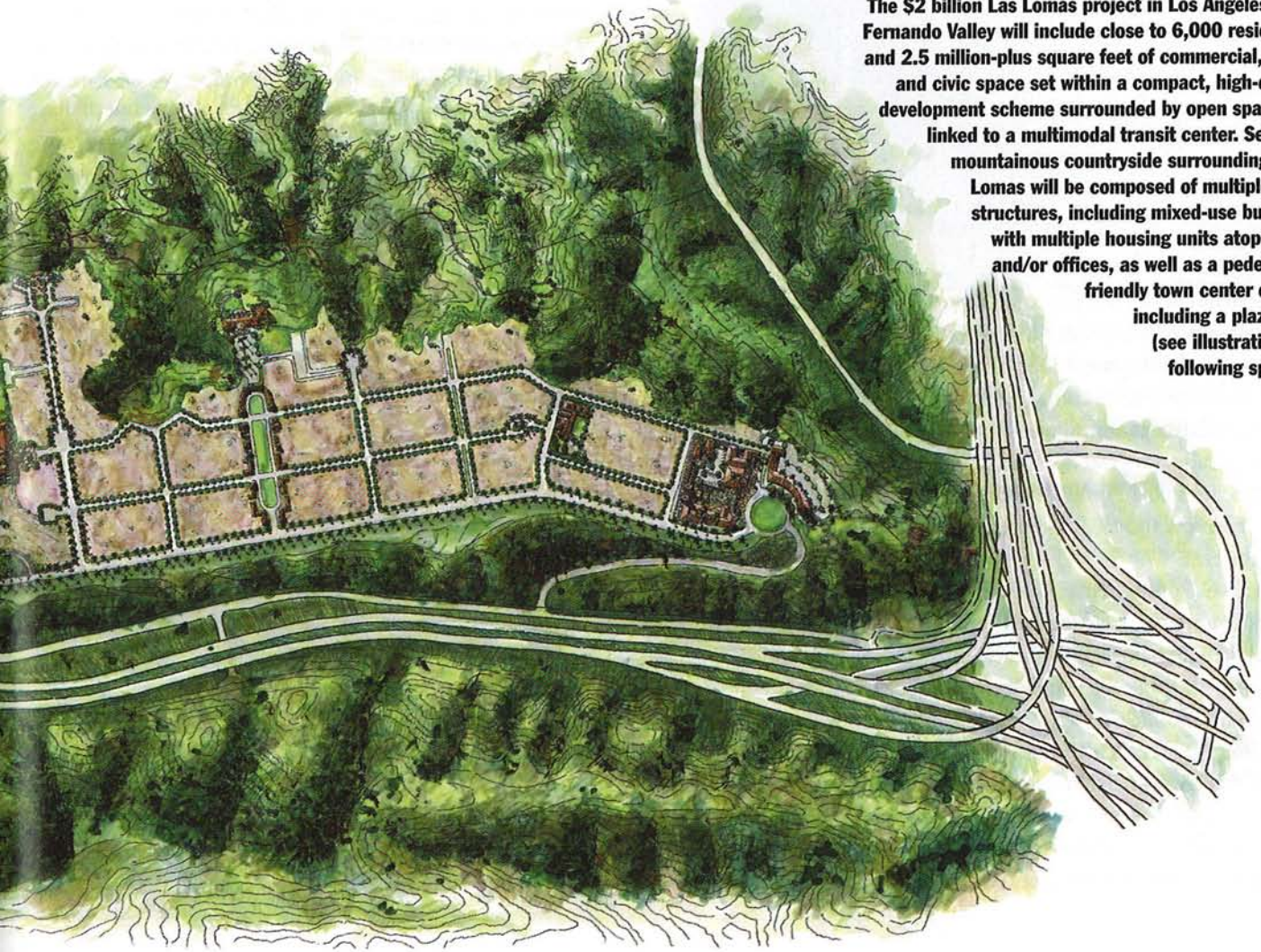
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smart growth, transit-oriented development—but first it will have to address intense NIMBYism.

intensifying an already critical housing shortage. In addition, developer Las Lomas Land Co. LLC has plans to incorporate numerous transit-oriented development (TOD) strategies into the project. Among them: the community will be built near a densely populated area rather than pushed farther into the metropolitan fringe; employment centers will be sited near homes; walking and biking will be promoted, with village hubs linked by trails to residential neighborhoods; mixed-use buildings will be incorporated, with housing located above retail and office space; an internal trolley system will be provided within convenient reach of all housing; and a multimodal transit center is being developed where the Metrolink commuter rail line runs through the property, and where a proposed state-spanning, high-speed train is likely to be located. Smart growth strategies to be employed at Las Lomas include a mix of land uses; a compact, high-density development scheme; a variety of housing options; provision

G A T E W A Y



The \$2 billion Las Lomas project in Los Angeles's San Fernando Valley will include close to 6,000 residences and 2.5 million-plus square feet of commercial, retail, and civic space set within a compact, high-density development scheme surrounded by open space and linked to a multimodal transit center. Set amid mountainous countryside surroundings, Las Lomas will be composed of multiple-story structures, including mixed-use buildings with multiple housing units atop stores and/or offices, as well as a pedestrian-friendly town center district including a plaza area (see illustrations on following spread).

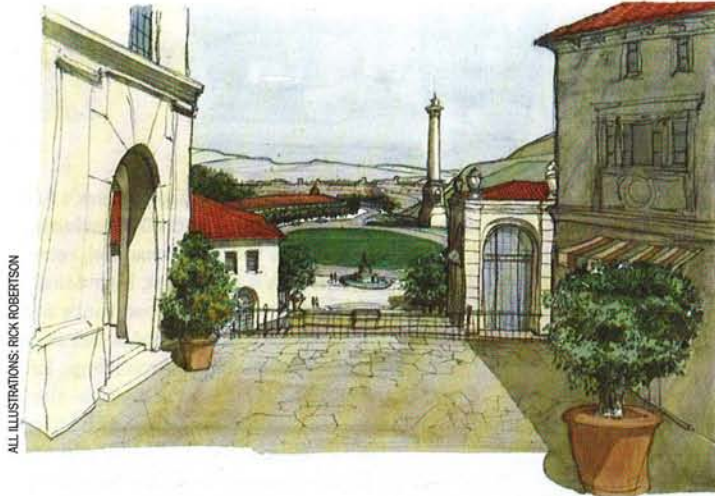
of schools and public space and facilities; and preservation of open space and wilderness.

However, opponents see the development differently. The characterization of Las Lomas as transit-oriented development is a “deception,” contends transit activist Bart Reed, due mainly to its inevitable impact on adjacent street and freeway traffic. “They’re trying to twist the meaning of smart growth,” insists Reed, who lives in nearby Sylmar and heads the Transit Coalition, a citizen activist group advocating improvements in transportation infrastructure, mass transit, and transportation alternatives. While the Las Lomas property, located in unincorporated Los Angeles County, is a mile or so from surrounding residential neighborhoods, Reed and other detractors expect that its location at the Golden State Freeway (Interstate 5)/Antelope Valley Freeway (State Route 14) interchange will exacerbate congestion on the jammed highways. The Califor-

to Los Angeles, and as such are aiming for landmark architecture offering some “thereness,” as Robertson puts it. High-density villages amid mountainous countryside surroundings offer ample opportunity to accomplish this, he adds. The often multitiered villages, including Las Lomas’s signature town-center plaza area overlooking I-5 at the east end of the property, would feature multiple-story structures, including mixed-use buildings with multiple housing units atop stores and/or offices.

In addition to residential, retail, and entertainment space, the Las Lomas plan calls for commercial and research and development buildings totaling 2.3 million square feet, a luxury hotel, as well as civic structures such as police/fire stations and public schools. Half the property is to be maintained as open space, with much of the area restored to wilderness in an effort to preserve a wildlife corridor linking the Santa Susana and San Gabriel mountains. A greenbelt-type buffer would parallel the property’s 2.5 miles of I-5 frontage.

The developers also intend to take advantage of the existing Metrolink Antelope Valley rail line, which runs through the property and the adjacent freeway interchange. In cooperation with the L.A. County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), a multimodal transportation platform or station is planned to connect the Metrolink line to MTA and Santa Clarita Transit buses and, in time, the proposed Las Lomas internal streetcar system. The development company expects to continue working closely with the MTA on the plan for the Las Lomas trolley system, which the MTA most likely would own and operate. Getting the internal trolley and other mass-transit elements operating early in the

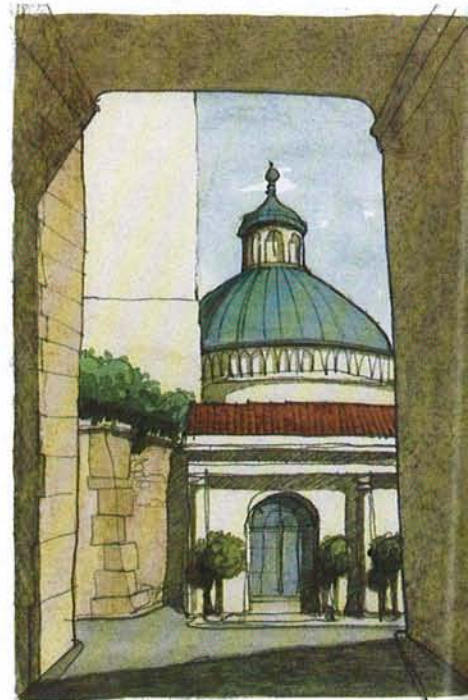


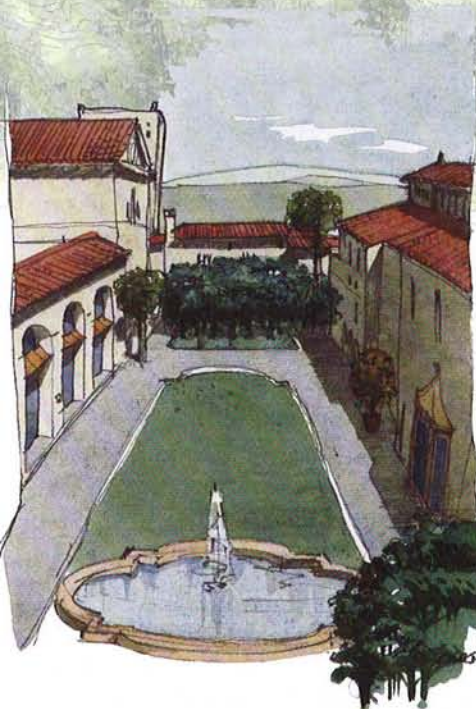
ALL ILLUSTRATIONS: RICK ROBERTSON

nia Department of Transportation reports that the adjacent stretch of I-5 already handles more than 225,000 vehicles on an average day. Veteran development lobbyist Steve Afriat, likewise, characterizes Las Lomas as “a transportation nightmare,” adding, “Anyone who believes in sound transportation planning would look at [the proposal] with great care and scrutiny.” The city of Santa Clarita, located immediately north of the Las Lomas site, hired Afriat after Las Lomas Land Co. requested annexation of the property by Los Angeles.

Las Lomas proponents insist that the project offers opportunities to demonstrate how forward-looking TOD and smart growth elements might help California accommodate its inevitable population growth, while also encouraging use of mass transit and reducing automobile use. The proposed plan—now in the earliest entitlement stages, as is the annexation request—calls for a series of complementary neighborhoods connected through an extensive system of trails and parks to be developed over perhaps 20 years.

Las Lomas principal Dan S. Palmer, Jr., and architect Richardson Robertson III say they envision Las Lomas as a northern gateway





process is critical for Las Lomas's success, stresses Palmer. Farther down the road, he adds, the site seems a natural for a stop on the high-speed rail line potentially paralleling I-5.

According to Robertson, the Las Lomas plan will expand on new urbanist principles with its wide spectrum of uses and the internal

transit system's connection to multiple external transportation modes. While residents will have convenient access to outside transit—and those living outside the community will be able to frequent the destination-class town center district—Las Lomas “is completely self-contained,” he says. “You could live there and never have to leave.”

While it might be a bit of a stretch to characterize the sloping, mostly undeveloped Las Lomas property as an actual infill site, the proposed project incorporates numerous planning elements that public and private sector smart growth advocates are aiming to advance. For example, a recent report from the statewide coordinating committee of the ULI California Smart Growth Initiative cites goals such as infill development, mixed-use configurations, housing and school construction, open-space preservation, and multiple transportation choices. The committee also recommends that municipalities meeting these guidelines be given priority in state infrastructure funding.

In addition, an extensive report on the relationships among rail transit, land development, and telecommunications—prepared by the Mineta Transportation Institute at San Jose State University's College of Business—identifies a half dozen characteristics defining



what an ideal TOD would provide, including enhanced mobility and environment, pedestrian friendliness, alternative suburban living and working environments, neighborhood revitalization, public safety, and public celebration, i.e., civic and other public places such as a plaza. Advocates characterize such planning strategies, the report notes, as “the antidote to the sprawl model of urban form where large-scale, low-density, single-function tracts are integrated over relatively long distances by the single-occupant vehicle.”

Such sprawl-busting strategies have become public policy in states like California. Regionally, the TOD policy of the Southern California Association of Governments aims to locate a significant share of new housing and jobs within walking distance of transit stations or major bus corridors. At the state level, California's smart investment policy supports compact, mixed-use developments adjacent to rail and bus stops. More specifically, it calls for efficient, higher-density land use policies that meet these goals: supporting



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transportation options besides more freeways and roads; bringing homes, schools, workplaces, services, and retail shops closer together; diversifying the mix of housing within individual neighborhoods; focusing communities around civic places; and protecting environmental resources.

Given Los Angeles's overtaxed transportation infrastructure, these smart growth concepts are not lost on the MTA and its chief executive, Roger Snoble. When Las Lomas Land Co. approached the MTA about planning a development heavy on nonauto transit options, “it was music to our ears,” Snoble recalls. “This is a way we'll be able to accommodate growth in the future—by creating quality living spaces that aren't auto dependent and don't destroy a lot of habitat. We can't continue with our old ways of [suburban-fringe developments] that depend on the freeways.” Las Lomas is a natural site for a multimodal transportation hub aimed at meeting local and commuter transit needs, Snoble adds.

While the Transit Coalition's Reed acknowledges L.A.'s chronic housing shortage and the traffic-mitigating benefits of mixed-use

development projects like Las Lomas, he believes the city should develop real estate more intensely along existing transit corridors before green-lighting further expansion into hillsides and open space on the scale of Las Lomas. Reed also believes that developers typically are required to offer far too little when it comes to actual improvements of transportation infrastructure systems. To wit, he suggests that the Las Lomas team should foot the bill to develop a new transit station, add freeway lanes, and even provide additional rail service. While noting that gasoline taxes fund the bulk of California highway improvements, Palmer says he would prefer to wait for the first draft of the Las Lomas environmental impact report, due for completion by midyear, before discussing mitigation measures.

Given the vehement opposition to other large-scale development proposals in the area, Reed's position may well be on the moderate side. Its transit orientation and smart growth emphasis notwithstanding, Las Lomas inevitably will face "a huge amount of resistance," cautions veteran planning/development official and consultant Larry Kosmont. Citizens and public officials will scrutinize the development's impact on long-term water supplies and, especially, traffic, adds Kosmont, who heads the Los Angeles-based Kosmont Cos. real estate and economic development operation. "And environmentalists will come out of the woodwork" to oppose a development slated for a large, heavily sloped chunk of open space, he adds.

Even before Las Lomas's environmental review is at full bore, the county's Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) apparently will need to decide which city, if any, will annex the site. Palmer stresses that a Los Angeles annexation would help to assure long-term water and power supplies. But Afriat says the developers have applied for annexation to a jurisdiction where they expect the entitlement process to be easier than would be the case in immediately adjacent Santa Clarita. Further, Las Lomas residents are more likely to use parks, schools, libraries, roads, etc., in Santa Clarita rather than in Los Angeles, Afriat argues. He also stresses that Santa Clarita has not taken a position formally opposing Las Lomas as proposed, and would give the development a fair hearing. However, the city's new mayor, Cameron Smyth, vowed to fight the Las Lomas proposal at his mid-December swearing-in ceremony, and that same month the city council voted to launch annexation of the property to block the project. Kosmont notes that LAFCO typically would weigh factors such as land use, adjacency, and service delivery in making its annexation determinations. LAFCO says it has no time frame for a decision on the matter because the competing applications for annexation are still incomplete. But even if Palmer should win annexation by Los Angeles, the project will not necessarily be in for smooth sailing: a majority of the candidates vying to represent the Las Lomas area on the Los Angeles city council say they oppose the project as proposed.

"The closer a project is to the city, the longer it seems to take to secure approvals," continues Kosmont, who adds that he would not

be surprised if it takes five or even ten years for Palmer and company to garner final permits. Indeed, plans for nearby master-planned communities Ahmanson Ranch and Newhall Ranch—likewise slated for the Valley's outer fringes—have been in the works for a decade or more and have yet to secure final approvals, he notes.

Celebrity-led opponents and even local municipalities continue to pound away on the legal front at Washington Mutual's plans for Ahmanson Ranch just across the county line in Ventura County—despite numerous open-space, tree planting, and other environmental concessions, as well as avid support from the likes of former U.S. Housing and Urban Development Secretary Henry Cisneros and former U.S. Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt. Also, after years of efforts by environmentalists and even Ventura County to stall, stop, and/or downsize Newhall Land and Farming's planned 20,885-home Newhall Ranch north of Las Lomas in the Santa Clarita Valley, that development continues to face legal challenges. Although Los Angeles County has approved the new community and progress has been made over the past couple of months on the issue of long-term water supply, new issues have arisen.

Meanwhile, transit officials continue to seek solutions and the funding to alleviate the Los Angeles area's worsening traffic congestion—an effort that has been criticized as being balkanized when it comes to intra-agency cooperation. In addition, California's \$20 billion-plus fiscal budget deficit seems certain to hamper near-term efforts. However, multijurisdictional coordination is improving noticeably as local and regional transit and planning authorities look to finance much-needed projects such as light-rail development, carpool lane construction, and airport expansion. Accordingly, the MTA and public and private groups continue to devise various land use planning and transit-specific means to ease local traffic problems—or at least keep them from getting much worse.

Some advocate new and improved transit systems, including widened, double-decked, and extended freeways that feature carpool and reversing lanes, plus various rail/subway lines, and dedicated bus and trucking routes. Others suggest that devoting additional resources to expanded and enhanced bus service would be a more effective approach, augmented by making southern California more bicycle and pedestrian friendly.

Meanwhile, according to a report released in November by the Public Policy Institute of California, three out of four Californians continue to drive to work—alone—while only one in 17 commutes by public transit. In fact, nearly as many walk or bike to work—one in 20—as take a bus, subway, or train. ■

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