

## **Panel – Mobility and Access**

**Panelist:**

**Cathy Bechtel**

**Project Director**

**Riverside County Transportation Commission**

Good morning. Okay. It's almost lunchtime, but we'll get through this. Thank you for your patience.

I'm here this morning to talk with you about the Riverside County Transportation Commission's efforts to improve mobility in our county. And we have quite a task ahead of us.

I am going to focus a bit on our participation in a landmark planning effort similar to Chris's with integrating land use, transportation, but also environmental planning, and doing it in an area the size of over 2,500 square miles, larger than many East Coast states.

So first let me start by explaining our agency and our mission. The Riverside County Transportation Commission, we were created in 1976 and we are the County's primary transportation agency. I have 29 different bosses. We have representatives on our board, one elected official from every city in the county, as well as all five Boards of Supervisors. And we are a separate legal entity from the County.

We are not the County of Riverside. We do not have land use authority. And not having that land use authority is oftentimes a challenge in

implementing some of our plan changes.

One of our primary responsibilities is to administer the Measure A half-cent sales tax. We originally had that approved back in 1989. It was reauthorized in 2002 and will run through 2039. And with that half-cent sales tax, we project to earn over \$8,000,000,000. So a lot of money is on the horizon for transportation improvements.

In addition to the Measure A funding, we also are responsible for the highway and transit funding allocation of those dollars. And then we get involved in call box, three-way service patrol. People always think of us that all we do is build freeways. And that's not our only responsibility. We do coordinate very closely with the bus agencies. We are a member agency of Metrolink, and we have a number of commuter assistance programs. Now, all of our responsibilities are focused on improving mobility.

As I mentioned, we have lots of work ahead of us and many, many challenges. This snap shows projected traffic volumes in the year 2020. On I-15 in Corona, which many of you are familiar with, there's projected increases of 130 percent by 2020. It's already a mess out there.

In the area of Murrieta and Perris along the I-215, we are projected to see increases of 100 percent. And the majority of our freeways are already operating at Level of Service F, which means, you know, they're congested, close to gridlock.

And so how do we improve mobility and address a projected growth that's coming, and do it as quickly

as possible?

Well, we have RCIP to the rescue. RCIP is Riverside County Integrated Project, which was initiated by the Riverside County Board of Supervisors back in 1999. It was recognized very early that land uses and infrastructure decisions are often driven by environmental issues. We have had many, many projects that have taken five to ten years to go through the environmental process. And then we get all the pressures to do something much more quickly.

So what the County did, they took the lead on developing a new integrated project. And it included a new general plan for the entire county, a Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan for the western part of Riverside County, watershed planning, a special areas management plan, and a transportation corridor plan. RCTC, the agency I work with, we took the lead on the transportation element.

Now, our overall transportation strategy was to promote job growth. We wanted to keep people in Riverside County. So many of them are traveling on the 91 to Orange County and L.A., and it's taking hours. And so we worked on the transportation element, and it included looking at how to improve transit as well as what new freeway corridors were necessary to address the projected growth.

Now, we had to do this in a very cooperative way. That's really necessary. Collaboration. Getting people all at the table. We had a 30-member committee that met on a monthly basis, sometimes every two weeks, that included representatives from the environmental groups, building industry associations,

local agencies. Everybody had to be at the table to say what it is they wanted to see in the future. And it was identified that we needed four new transportation corridors. And these are all in different stages of development right now. But the linchpin of the integrated project, what would make it work, was really the Multi-Species Habitat Conservation Plan. It's a large-scale conservation effort to meet the requirements of the Federal and State Endangered Species Act, and it covers all western parts of the County. All 14 cities signed on, and the County. It was a lot of work. It took over three years to complete. Weekly meetings with U.S. Fish & Wildlife, California Department of Fish & Game. But you needed to have everybody at the table. And we did get a plan signed.

Now, the plan was designed to protect up to 146 endangered and threatened species, and it covers an area of over 1,000,000 acres of which 500,000 acres of open space will be conserved. It was determined very early on that -- no offense, but -- we don't want to be Los Angeles. We don't want to be Orange County. We have a lot of open space. We needed to protect that. And there needed to be a cohesive planning effort completed. And there was a lot of support because we had a lot of support from our elected officials.

And when this plan was being developed, we were reauthorizing our half-cent sales tax, and what we did is included in the half-cent sales tax was the identification of \$153,000,000 of transportation money that will be used to help with the mitigation and to purchase conservation land. So we will be working on that. And that's a contribution that RCTC will be

putting forward over the next 30 years.

Now, there are many benefits from the MSHCP. The whole goal is supposed to streamline the process. It doesn't, you know, let us ignore the Endangered Species Act. We need to do that, we need to follow all the rules, but we need to streamline the effort and provide proactive planning. The big plus is it will include an additional 153,000 acres that will go into conservation.

Now, the County of Riverside, they were the lead on the general plan. A general plan hadn't been done in the County since the early '80s, so it was woefully out-of-date. And they wanted to be more proactive and include, you know, the public. They had over 20 Vision E workshops throughout the County. And the new general plan included the use of clustered development to encourage compact development and preservation of open space. And the plan also encouraged development of community centers, which, as you have heard this morning, you know, is the integration of housing and retail and office space. Again, a strong desire is they did not want sprawl in Riverside County.

Now, this is kind of a snazzy slide, all the animation. One of the elements of the general plan was the use of a transit oasis concept. And the idea in Riverside County, in Western Riverside County, there's not a lot of high densities to be able to support the use of public transit. But there's the opportunity to include concepts in future development in these unincorporated areas to have a system of local circulators that would go around the new communities, pick up people, take them to a central

site so that they could then pick up an express bus or the Metrolink train to complete their regional trip.

We are still in the very, very early stages of this. The Corona Metrolink station could be an early transit oasis. I mean, it has the Metrolink train. It has express buses serving there. The Corona Cruiser provides a local circulation, and that area is building up. So that's an early transit oasis.

Again, it's very important to have the support of the local agencies that have the land use authority to really encourage the type of development to allow the transit to work in Riverside County.

Now, our plan got a lot of attention in Washington, D.C., and Sacramento. And that's good. It was recognized very early on under President Bush's executive order for environmental streamlining. It was one of the first seven projects noted because of the size. And because of that, we have had a lot of assistance from Washington, D.C., which always helps in getting money, getting support, working with the resource agencies. So it's been very positive. All the plans are developed, and we are in the process of acquiring conservation land. Almost 36,000 acres have already been placed into conservation.

Now I will quickly go over some of the RCTC supportive efforts, what we're working on. As I mentioned in the beginning, we do administer the half-cent sales tax and we support rail funding, express bus and commuter assistance programs. We have a whole department focused on commuter assistance. We provide van pool subsidies, carpool subsidies, bus

pool subsidies. And we mentioned early on about you have to educate the students early. You have to educate the kids on alternate ways of getting around. We do have a mobile classroom that goes out to all of the local schools to let them know about the different services that are available.

We are also, as I mentioned, a member agency of the Metrolink system. And we are working on implementing an extension, the Perris Valley line. We are awaiting approval to initiate preliminary engineering on that. And this map here shows the proposed stations. Again, all those station sites are not approved yet. As was mentioned earlier, there was a question from Ms. Pepper that not all the communities want a rail station in their backyard. So there's a lot of work that is needed to properly site those stations and work with the community.

So that's something that we do hope to have the Perris Valley line open by 2010, and that's something that adds a very important project to the commission.

Also, in Riverside County, RCTC owns and operates our rail stations. In San Bernardino County, the local cities do. Same thing in Orange County. But RCTC decided that we wanted to own the stations. So we have had a lot of people coming to court us about developing, having some joint development at our station sites. And the Commission has listened to that. We recently developed some joint development guidelines. And we are talking with a number of different firms about opportunities to develop at our rail stations. We just got into an exclusive

negotiating agreement with one firm to do some joint development at our La Sierra station.

Here's just a quick rendering of what could be in La Sierra. Here's another picture.

And that's it. I went over everything very quickly. I just wanted to leave you with some contact information. We have a lot of Websites that can give you some background on the integrated project as well as the RCTC programs.

Thank you.  
(Applause.)

DR. BLAKELY: Question? Comments?

I am Leticia Pepper, and I was the person who asked the first question about the compatibility of freight trains with these programs. And I live in a neighborhood of about 3,000 households next to UCR. I have a couple of comments rather than a question.

Cathy Bechtel said that not everybody wants a transit station in their backyard. If people thought they were going to have a transit station they could walk to that wasn't going to bring a lot of traffic into their existing community, if they thought that the transit station was not going to provide the land use authority that a transit village district has to use eminent domain to take people's low-density suburban homes, and if they thought that the transit station was not going to result in freight trains coming through their neighborhood all night long, they would welcome it.



But the problem with these programs is that they bring in other things besides nice things we see in the picture.

And one of the things here -- and you mentioned specifically you don't have land use authority -- is that we are concerned that commuter rail lines bring with them transit village districts which the legislature adopted that makes low-density use blight. And we still would like our low-density suburban neighborhoods.

So that's my comment. Thank you.

MS. ALLISON: Did you want to speak to that, Cathy?

MS. BECHTEL: We have our challenges ahead of us. And so --

MR. HAMASAKI: I am Les Hamasaki.

I wanted to talk about sustainable development in terms of the energy, solar energy, as part of the overall development, because in this area we are going to have to keep up with all the developments coming in, and to provide electricity to these millions of people that are moving in is a challenge. So I urge you to look at energy, primarily solar energy, as a source to provide these transit stations.

MS. BECHTEL: And actually we agree with you. At our La Sierra station, we have partnered and we have some solar panels that provide the parking and

a shade for the cars, but it also generates the energy for that station. So that is something that was implemented in just the last few years.

DR. BLAKELY: That was a very smart thing.  
Another question?

MS. GARCIA: Leanne Garcia with the City of Grand Terrace. And I want to talk about jurisdictional lines. I think all of us drive the freeways, and we don't know where the county line ends. And Grand Terrace is right across the way in San Bernardino County and we have some challenges getting our transportation agencies to work cooperatively.

And so, Cathy, I wonder if you could address how can we get the transportation agencies that want to take care of their 29 bosses, if you will -- and San Bernardino has the same challenges -- and when people just want to move from one place to another, how do we work on those regional challenges and get the agencies to work together?

MS. BECHTEL: You are absolutely correct. We have to think regionally. And we are fortunate that, you know, in Riverside County, we have done that. Now we have to reach out to our partners in San Bernardino County and Riverside County.

Again, just because there's a county line there, that doesn't stop the trips. We have been very fortunate in the last few years to really build a strong relationship with Orange County, which we didn't have a few years ago. And we have done a lot of very proactive planning. We do have that same

relationship with San Bernardino County. It's slowed down a little bit recently, but we do have a bi-county committee made up of policy members from both counties. And in the last few months, there's obviously been a lot of issues that have been raised that identify the need to reinvigorate that committee. And it's my understanding that that's going to be happening.

DR. BLAKELY: As you know, I do a lot of work in China, and only one person makes the decision there, and so coordination is pretty easy. But it has some downsides too.

MR. VASQUEZ: Hi. My name is Miguel Vasquez. I work for the environment and I am currently working on a contract with the Riverside County Planning Department as an area planner.

My question for Cathy is very specific. As you know, in the Riverside County Integrated Plan, there are provisions for the development of community centers. Now, the community center overlay has specific guidelines for TODs. One of those community centers, primarily the large one in the plan, is an associated Menifee area.

So my question to you is do you see that there will be a new station line running from Perris to Temecula, in the 215 corridor?

MS. BECHTEL: For a rail system?

MR. VASQUEZ: Yes. That is correct.

MS. BECHTEL: Hi, Miguel.

Actually, we are looking into that. There

has been a lot of interest in doing proactive planning for rail extensions. As I mentioned, RCTC owns the San Jacinto branch line, but once you get to South Perris it starts going east. So we are actually just finishing up a study looking at the feasibility of going farther south. And we are doing that study as well as looking at the I-15 corridor and looking at the rail feasibility there.

So I think that there's the need for that. It always comes down to money, especially with a rapidly developing area when you don't have the rail right-of-way preserved. So that's what we have to work on very closely with our partners at the County.

MS. ALLISON: Thank you.  
Anybody else?

DR. BLAKELY: I can remember when we were selling those rail right-of-ways. Why? Donate them. You only got to buy them back at a lot higher cost. Anybody else?

MR. TROYA: Yes. I have a question. My name is Joe Troya, and we are one of the sponsors, a proud sponsor of the conference.

One question that I have is what incentives are you doing for private developers to build around your areas, around the corridors, and encourage them? Because you do a great job in the communities with the political side, but the private side, what are you doing to reach out to those guys who have those kinds of projects?

MS. BECHTEL: I don't know if it's

necessarily the Transportation Commission that will be providing those incentives. I think that we are starting to move towards partnering a little bit more.

One thing, in our Measure A, we do have a pot of funds for economic development, and there is something that could be partnered with the local agency to encourage improvement of the interchange, improvement of the development. But I think what you are suggesting is really more of a land use issue.

MS. ALLISON: Other questions? Comments?

DR. BLAKELY: Portland has done some very creative things to provide incentives. For example, they provide people who have located near transit-oriented development, they buy some kind of a right-of-way subsidy and subsidize the developer's cost of putting that development in that location. I don't know exactly how it works, but it's really very creative.

MS. SCHUENWALD: Hi. My name is Courtney Schuenwald. And my question is actually for all of our panelists that are up there. I was curious to know if there's a specific preference that you are finding among people for a certain type of transit whether it be more fixed route lines, such as a light rail or a BRT, or more of a loose route such as bus lines and things like that.

DR. BLAKELY: Do you want to try that, Chris?

MR. AUGENSTEIN: Sure.

That's a really good question. I think traditionally the industry has believed that light rail is by far -- light rail and trains in general, but light rail in the scheme of things is more valued by folks. One of the things that we are doing in Santa Clara County right now is we are doing a comprehensive operations analysis that has a market segmentation study as well. And so we are trying to find out not only what kind of transit services that people riding transit like, but we are also trying to find out what the other 95, 97 percent of the trip-making public, what they like, what they like about transit.

And we are finding a lot of people do really like the idea of BRT. We opened up our first BRT line in Santa Clara County, and in the corridor that it travels in almost immediately we had a 17 percent increase in ridership in the corridor. No reduction to the existing lines are there. It's all new trips. All new riders in the corridor.

So I think the jury is still out, but I think BRT is getting tremendous support from the public.

When you look at L.A.'s lines, the line that goes down Wilshire Boulevard, I think they're running half-minute headways now or minute headways, which is an indication of how much demand there is for that kind of service. And buses often penetrate communities better than a light rail line. Plus, they can be implemented at much lower cost. And frankly now the technologies for BRT have actually caught up in the concept of BRT with signal timing, real-time information. Those kinds of things are making BRT a much more attractive service and gaining a lot more

attention throughout the country.

DR. BLAKELY: I would just like to add one thing to what Chris said. We are doing some BRT in Sydney, and we are finding that you have to do an interesting stop, a real stop. It can't be just, you know, a bench. You have to have some density at that stop. You have to do many of the same things you do with light rail, but you have the flexibility of different kinds of intersections, different kinds of modes intersecting the same location that you don't have with the rail system. And that's why I emphasized flexibility earlier on.

I think a rail system is very good from Point A to Point B, but it's all those points in between that you've got problems. And if you can get high density between points, you are really good. But if the density is low, it doesn't work.

MR. AUGENSTEIN: One of the things to add to that is when we researched this topic, we are finding that BRT lines can have the same effect of attracting higher density development at these BRT stops. So the idea of transit-oriented development is very much a part of the BRT line.

DR. BLAKELY: But it has to be a real stop. It can't be just a bench, because the developer is not going to go near it unless he or she sees a real stop there with all the amenities and everything, including the grocery store, et cetera. It has to be a real stop.

Seattle has an interesting one where the bus actually stops under the apartment building. And

that's a very interesting, innovative approach.

I would like to ask questions to anyone on the panel now. Any closing questions do you have to anyone on the panel or myself? I am standing between you and lunch, so I know they will be brief.

MR. CUTNER: I am Robert Cutner with R.E. Associates Architects, and my question is more for Marc.

In terms of security for the neighborhood, how does the transportation changes you are doing in Playa Vista where you are pulling the parking away from the street -- or the streets away from the front doors, is that creating a greater sense of security by keeping more people out there within the community on foot and being able to basically monitor what's going on just as on a casual basis?

MR. HUFFMAN: I think it does. By, you know, putting the cars underneath in secured parking, you know, obviously, you're increasing the security, you know, to your vehicles, to your property. But also by putting those, you know, doors and windows right, you know, on the street and increasing the eyes on the street and increasing pedestrian activity on the street, you do create at least a perception of a sense of security.

And as a result of that, there was -- last year there was a report done -- and I can't remember which station it was, but -- about, you know, single moms being a big increase in homeowners in Los Angeles. And they found that there are a lot of single mothers that were moving to Playa Vista



specifically because of that. So that definitely is a good point.

DR. BLAKELY: We are going to take one more and that's it.

MS. MEHTA: Mitra Mehta. I work with Riverside County's Planning Department.

We are trying to incorporate TODs in some of the areas of Riverside County. And every time I talk about a TOD in front of my decision-makers, they are a bunch of people who are questioning if the government uses that are -- here are the supportive -- are going to be supported by the housing that you are creating here or you are creating, you know -- this is not truly a job/housing balance kind of mixed use, but you are creating high-end housing.

And if you have had any experience in this arena, and is there any research anywhere that we can point for and find out some additional information? Because TODs are becoming really challenging, especially when they are in low-income areas. And so any thoughts from anyone on the panel?

DR. BLAKELY: Well, there is some research. There's an organization -- I am trying to think of the name of it -- in Oakland, California, that's done research on transit-oriented development at every level of density and the things you need to have there and how it works at different levels of density.

And I'm blanking on the name of the organization, but they put out some very good studies.

MR. AUGENSTEIN: The Center for  
Transit-Oriented Development.

DR. BLAKELY: Yes. The Center for  
Transit-Oriented Development. They have some very  
good work. They have a Website. And I think the work  
is excellent. It links back to some of the stuff the  
Department of Transportation has, another Website. So  
more and more research is being done in these areas.  
So I would urge you to look at that research.

I want to thank you all for being so attentive,  
and I hope this session worked for you.

(Applause.)

MR. NORBECK: I just want to say involving  
transportation, a lot of these communities we have,  
such as what were spoken about today, we've got to  
start documenting the actual improvement on our energy  
sector qualifier. California has taken a leadership  
role in the reduction of Co2, and the President and  
potential future presidents, candidates, have all  
argued for that. And this is a way of doing it, but  
we need to be able to document it. So you've got to  
do it with data. And it's one of the things that the  
Blakely Center is involved in.

(Applause.)