

Panel – Mobility and Access
Theme Setter:
Edward J. Blakely
Executive Director for Recovery Management
City of New Orleans

We are going to talk with you about transportation and transit-oriented development. So we are going to run this a little bit like an Oprah show. And our moderator, Juliann Allison, has the microphone right there. And what we are going to do is I will make an opening presentation. And then I'll have our first panelist make a little bit of a presentation, Marc Huffman. And then Juliann will dive into the audience and take some questions. And then we'll have our next presenter, and then we'll dive back in the audience, and back and forth like that. Much like an Oprah show. I haven't had that much time to watch television, and so if I don't do this right, you will understand.

So there's a bit of a rail evolution going on in the country. And this rail evolution, I heard someone comment earlier about freight trains and things being part of the transit-oriented development. It's almost like sustainability. When I hear some general talking about Baghdad and saying, "This is going to be a sustainable attack," I wonder about the term "sustainability" anymore. So every term can be raw; "hijacked," "environmentalist," "sustainability," and so forth. So let's not make the mistake of allowing transit-oriented development to be hijacked. It does mean something, and it means that transit and

development are commingled.

And now there's "transit-oriented" and there's "transit-related development." And that's where the transit is not necessarily directly with the activity. It's located nearby. But in transit-oriented development, it's commingled. That is, the transit system sometimes runs right through the building.

And then there's "transit-adjacent development"; something is going by and people can take advantage of it. And that usually has some parking with it.

We are going to talk about all three forms here, because we have people who have been involved in all three of these forms, and they are going to be able to let us know how they're doing it in their particular jurisdiction.

So Marc Huffman has been working in Playa Vista, and that's a project that I have been somewhat associated with, which is a development that was aimed at being transit-friendly and transit-oriented and walkable and so forth.

And Chris Augenstein is from San Jose, a project that I visited recently, that has some transit-oriented and some transit-adjacent depending on the location.

And we have Cathy Bechtel here with Riverside County Transportation Division, where they are planning a lot of this. Some of it has come to fruition, some of it is transit-related, but Riverside

County has a long way to go.

When I was a kid -- and this goes back so long ago -- you could actually take a streetcar from Redlands, California, all the way to Santa Monica. And streetcars all over the city without an automobile. So those of you who are in the audience, raise your hands who remember those days. I see there aren't very many of us. So we are considered a species that should be protected. So don't mess with the three of us. We have tags on us.

So even the President says we've got to get out of this gasoline habit. And we really have to get out of it. That's not to say the automobile shouldn't be part of the transportation system. It's just how we use it. We don't need to use it to go and buy a quart of milk. We need the automobile for those bigger trips, the longer trips. And some trips it's required when you are getting a bunch of groceries and things like that, but just the kind of trip that you are going to work and that vehicle is going to sit all day, it isn't needed.

And so transit-oriented development and transit-related or transit-adjacent development is selling now. People want that alternative. Some people have gone down from five cars in the family to three. A real sacrifice. Others, like my wife and I, went cold turkey. We went to zero. I do not own an automobile.

(Applause.)

Ali knows how hard that was. And I even drove a gas guzzler. But I don't anymore. And in New

Orleans, I will be walking and biking to work just to set the example.

So I think it's important for us to use what we have. And the real estate community is speaking to this, because people are moving into facilities where they can use a transit system.

So the first principle is we've got to start with the street. What kind of streets are we going to have, and will those streets accommodate a transportation program? They should be a platform, as San Jose and many of our other cities, for a mixed use of transportation. It can be a guided bus, it can be a light rail, or some other form of multi-passenger transit system. And everybody has to get in the act here. We are going to have to start growing people who know how to walk to school, as unusual as that sounds, people who know how to walk to do things. And we are going to have to get them into the act.

This is a transit-oriented development in Mountain View. The transit system is right behind this development. These houses are very close together. But that transit-oriented development allows these people pretty much to go down to one car. And they can get to work quite easily in a nice development that is in close and safe.

This is a development in Plano, Texas. Started out like this. And then on the left-hand side of the screen, you see the opposite.

The idea here is that we are transforming the space. Not just adding transit, but a total transformation of the space, making it a lot more

friendly space, a space that people can walk to, they can recreate in, and they can live nearby. And that's the idea of a transit-oriented development. It's connectivity.

This is in Dallas. And imagine people in Dallas riding a transit system. I want you to get in that space. But they're doing it. And they're doing it quite well. And they're using the existing old rail lines and other lines that they're putting in in order to make transit development work well.

And it brings you this: You know, the community. And that's what we're for. We're trying to build communities. That's what we're trying to do at Dos Lagos. That's what Ali's a principal on. Building communities. Not just a bunch of houses. And the transit system helps to build that community. Because where you have that density around the stop, you can have a nice place to meet and drink.

And people shouldn't be left out in the cold in the transit system. There are too many of our systems that don't have good places for people to meet. They're not clean. They're not friendly. They're not interesting. So we have to build an entire system. And just calling something, because there's a bus stop, a transit-oriented development is not enough. It's an entire systems approach. And everything on it needs to be good-looking.

This is Dallas again. This is the walkway to the transit system. It's good-looking.

So a transit system has to be a lot of things. And it has to move faster than a car. It has

to be faster than the automobile for that long haul, or you won't use it. It has to be comfortable. It has to have good fares and people have to be friendly on it. That's very important. The fare has to be something that recognizes kind of the threshold cost of what people would pay to be on it. And we're going to have to subsidize the rest. But we subsidize the automobile pretty heavily. So that's not a problem. And it needs to be something that you can get on and off of quickly.

This is the Denver model. And it needs to be something – this is San Jose -- that enters a place where you want to go, not to a place you don't want to go, but the place you want to go.

This is Downtown San Jose.

And it needs to be something that is flexible. It has to be a mix of modes. You cannot do it just by the light rail alone. And I know there's a light rail fetish around the country. Everybody who's running for mayor is running for light rail. But light rail is not the only solution. A good bus system might be a better solution, as long as it's fast, flexible, clean, and friendly. And it has to have a housing component.

This is Washington, D.C. Very high density on their transit system, where there's a light rail and a bus system joined in Arlington. And you need to mix the heavy rail and the light rail together.

Again, this is near San Jose. It doesn't have to be mutually exclusive. And people get into these arguments, "Should we have heavy rail? Should

we have light rail?" You can have both.

And, again, it has to be good-looking. The whole system has to look good. And it's going to take a lot of coordination across all sectors, the nonprofit sector, the public, the elected officials, citizens like you. But let's not look at this as the fix. The real fix is the land use pattern that was talked about in the last session. If we don't have a good land use pattern, we can't get there. There's no way that a transit system is going to drag houses to it. The houses have to be put in the right place. So we have to rethink how we're doing things in order to get there. And as our suburbs are aging, that gives us that opportunity, because we are rebuilding them, remodeling them.

So we need to look at the master plans of our cities to see if we can re-gear that city to make it a different place. We have reached that critical age where most of our suburban areas are 50 or 60 years old. We are beginning to rebuild. Let's rebuild in a smarter way, not just on the old bones.

And in New Orleans, we have this opportunity. But we also have a very good transit system in New Orleans. We just have to revive it and make it work. And every mode of transportation is okay, bicycles, whatever, but they need to connect in places. And some places in Europe -- many of you have been there -- there are bicycle racks that really work. You can put your bicycle in an enclosure, it's got a number on it, you come back, it's all locked up and so forth. It doesn't matter if it rains or snows. It's in good shape. So we have to make this a smart, friendly system.

Now, even in Washington, they know there's a long way to go. And all of our public officials are on the horns of a dilemma. So just make sure it doesn't get you in the wrong part of the anatomy.

So I am going to turn it over to Marc right now so he can talk a little bit about a housing project that you can relate transit to, and then we will go out in the audience, we will come back, and we will go back and forth.

(Applause.)