

Panel – Mobility and Access
Panelist:
Marc Huffman
Vice President of Entitlements
Playa Vista

I want to start by giving everybody, particularly people who aren't from Southern California, a brief overview of what Playa Vista is. Brief. Relative.

Playa Vista is a project that's old Howard Hughes property. It's about 1,100 acres of property in West Los Angeles. There we go.

Back when Howard Hughes died in the mid-'70s, his heirs started planning for this property, started planning for the development. And everything that you see, including all the green space towards the western side of that slide, was planned for development at that point. Again, there was just this massive development that was known as Century City in the wetlands.

We have undergone a series of re-planning exercises. I think we're on the third or fourth development team. And my company came on-line back in the late '90s to develop this. And the project is less than half of what it was. In 2003, we sold about 600 acres of that 1,100-acre project to the State of California for permanent preservation of open space. So in consequence, the development has been scaled back to about 30 percent of the land.

Again, we are just a little bit north of Los Angeles International Airport, near Marina Del Rey, in the heart of West Los Angeles.

The site was the headquarters of the Hughes Aircraft Company. This shows the Spruce Goose. Howard Hughes hated that name, Spruce Goose. He called it the Hercules, the H.K.-I, but it shows it being rolled out of the hangars back in 1946. Those hangars still remain. We use them for filming. We lease it out to film and television production.

And this shows sort of the heyday of Hughes Aircraft. It had the world's largest private runway at that point in time. And you can see all those cars parked there. There were about 6,000 people working at the facility all the way through the late '80s.

And this is a shot from about a year ago, showing the project under development. We are about two-thirds of the way done with our Phase I residential community. Real excited that our office community, it's a mixed-use project. It has residential, retail, office, parks. You know, live, work, shop and play all in the same place.

So the commercial is really starting to kick into gear, and the community is really starting to emerge. There are about 4,000 people that live there.

The community plan, if you look at sort of the center of that plan, you will see sort of a reddish-orange block. That is the mixed use part of the community. This is where the grocery store and the restaurants are going to be, with apartments on

top of it, and a community center. Focal point of the community. There are about two dozen parks that are going to be there.

The yellow is primarily residential, and the orange over on the right side is primarily the commercial units.

This shows, you know, the typical project here, Playa Vista, ground-level retail with loft condominiums above it fronting on a park where we have concerts, summer concerts in that park.

Our first full-service restaurant just opened so people can walk to go have dinner, have a drink after dinner. There's a Coffee Bean there. Drycleaners, laundry, beauty salon. All the neighborhood-serving retail walking distance to your house.

I mentioned about two dozen parks. Everything from passive uses like a chess park or parks where we're going to have farmer's markets and arts fairs to active playing fields, basketball courts, tennis courts, Little League fields, soccer.

We have a public library that was built by the city within the project. We are in the process of building a fire station. There's a police drop-in station and a community center. So everything that you would need within the community is here. It's within walking distance or, you know, a short tram ride or bicycle.

One of the things that we really wanted to do was to emphasize the diversity of housing styles at

Playa Vista. We didn't want all of the buildings to look the same. So we brought in different builders, we brought in different architects, to make sure that, you know, you got that diversity.

Our average densities are around 40 units an acre, so it's an urban density. But with a full range. You've got, you know, 10 or 12 units an acre, clustered, single-family, all the way up to 80-units-an-acre apartments.

We do have some office space. We are going to have more in the future. We do want to be a mixed-use community that provides the opportunity to live and work in the same community. Electronic Arts, a video game maker, is headquartered there. They have a Southern California headquarters there. This incidentally is where our office is also.

And sustainability is a huge priority at Playa Vista. We are building a 51-acre wetland system, a natural storm water treatment system, which includes this freshwater marsh that's been complete. It naturally cleans the water for both Playa Vista and the surrounding community before it goes out to Santa Monica Bay and provides habitat for birds. There have been, I think, about 200 species of birds that have been observed there since we completed that.

So what are we doing on mobility? The first thing, the big thing that we are doing is creating homes near job-rich employment centers. Deepak's presentation, he talked about L.A. County had a jobs/housing ratio of 1.3 to 1, so 1.3 jobs for every housing unit. In West Los Angeles, that ratio is nearly three jobs for every housing unit. So it's an

incredibly jobs-rich area. So what we are doing is bringing a place for people to live closer to work. And just story after story after story about people who used to live in West Covina and worked at Sony Studios, and now they have a five-minute drive to work instead of a two-hour drive, things like that. So we're reducing commutes.

As an example of that, one of the stats that I just wanted to point out is the City of Santa Monica, because I can't resist the opportunity to pick on Santa Monica here. In 1980, Santa Monica had 4.3 million square feet of office space. In 2006, they have 10.7 million square feet of office space. So they built over 6 million square feet of office in the last 20, 25 years. Since 1980, the population of Santa Monica has actually gone down. So all of those people, all of those jobs in that new office space are people commuting to Santa Monica. And that is why traffic is so bad in Southern California, because we are not balancing jobs and housing, and that's what you have to do.

You can't just bring the housing to where the jobs are. You have to bring a diversity of housing to where the jobs are. If you just provide luxury housing, you are not providing the work force housing for, you know, your secretaries and your policemen and firefighters and nurses. So Playa Vista, you know, we have everything from a very low, low and moderate income rental program, to a work force program for sale, and we sell houses starting in the \$300,000 range all the way up to the \$2,000,000 range. So you have to bring a diversity of housing to provide the housing for everybody.

On traffic and transportation, we do have a \$125,000,000 program that includes a lot of physical improvement. But more importantly, on transit, we are expanding major bus lines within the area. We bought Santa Monica a Big Blue Bus, five buses to start a rapid bus service on Lincoln Boulevard, which is the major north/south corridor along there. And so that's been very successful. We're also going to be buying five buses for Culver City to start the same kind of rapid bus service on Sepulveda and connect along Jefferson. We started a beach shuttle service two summers ago that's been very successful, and that's growing into a partnership with L.A. County and possibly some other jurisdictions to provide an overall shuttle program within our area to get people out of their cars.

And then the last sort of alternative transportation we have is we have a fleet of zero-emission GEM vehicles. These are these neighborhood electric vehicles. The one that's up there, we have zero-emission pizza delivery in Playa Vista.

That's it, Ed.
(Applause.)

MS. ALLISON: So what do you think?
Everyone moving to Playa Vista? Anyone moving to Playa Vista? Any questions for Marc?

Be sure to give us your name.

STEVE VANDENBERG: Hi. My name is Steve Vandenberg. I am with the Southern California Association of Governments.

I don't live in Playa Vista, but in Venice nearby, and I am wondering if you've done any surveys or research as to where people who live in Playa Vista are working and how

much people who live there are using the transit opportunities that you're working on, because I can tell you that the perception in the neighborhood is that the mobility has gotten a lot worse between Santa Monica and Playa Vista.

MS. ALLISON: Excellent question. One of the things the Blakely Center will be looking at in the next year.

MR. HUFFMAN: The answer is it's a little too soon to be doing that. We do have sort of anecdotal evidence in talking to residents depending where they're moving from when they are moving to Playa Vista. We haven't done anything statistically valid at this point. I could tell you that we do do surveys on, like, the Electronic Arts employees, as they are required to because of their AQMD regulations and things like that. And that shows a higher-than-typical ratio for, number one, people -- there's a good chunk of them that live at Playa Vista and just walk across the street to work. There's a good chunk of them that are using transit.

We did extend a bus route into Playa Vista, also a metro route along Jefferson that you will see people just standing out in front of, ready to get on that bus. There is a good chunk of people using it.

And as far as a beach shuttle goes that takes people who otherwise would be parking their car in Venice when they go to the beach, about 2,000 people each summer have ridden it, so that's about 2,000 people not parking in Venice.

MS. ALLISON: Thank you.

DR. BLAKELY: One of the things -- while you are searching for the next person -- only 16 percent of our trips are work trips. Only 16 percent.

MR. CHIU: My name is John -- oh, sorry.
My name is John Chiu, representing Caltrans District in San Bernardino.

I would like to express my comments on the Santa Monica situation that said that they're job rich and poor housing. And that may be due to rent control. Since rent control regulation, they have lost 5,000 rental units in the past -- in 2005. So do you agree with that or not?

MR. HUFFMAN: You will get no disagreement from me on that.

DR. BLAKELY: He is a staunch capitalist.
Rent control -- I lived in New York City that has rent control, and rent control is really good for rich people. Some people have great apartments in New York, paying \$500 a month. Fantastic.

MS. ALLISON: Anyone else?

DR. BLAKELY: Any questions?

MS. MEHTA: What is the ridership on your BRTs, Bus Rapid Transit?

MR. HUFFMAN: I am not really the right person to ask that question, because Santa Monica picks the bus runs, and I don't really have any statistics.

DR. BLAKELY: But maybe you can talk about that, one of you, about BRTs.

Any more?

MS. BILLINGTON: How long did it take to complete the whole Playa Vista project? I lived in Playa Del Rey up until 1985, and I never got to see the redevelopment, but we heard it talked about for probably 20 years.

DR. BLAKELY: I was in diapers when they started, to give you some idea.

MR. HUFFMAN: Apparently, you could still take the Red Line from San Bernardino –

DR. BLAKELY: We used to take the Red Line right past it.

MR. HUFFMAN: The answer is it's still under construction. I think we started construction in earnest probably about 1999 or 2000. So it's been about six years to get to where we are now. And we think that it's probably going to be another five or six years before the project has been built.

MS. MAY: Hi. Bonnie Montoya May. Since Ed said that only 16 percent of trips are generally work-related, are you considering expanding your zero-emission fleet to allow residents to do daily errands, their shopping, you know, maybe within a 5- or 10-mile radius? Have you tried that yet?

MR. HUFFMAN: Again, it's a little early for that. What the community will include when it's completed is the shuttle service that we've started,

which is a greenfield shuttle that will circulate throughout the community and give people the ability to pop on the shuttle and go to the grocery store, restaurants, and so forth.

It's also a very walkable community. I really didn't emphasize that, you know, in my overview, but, you know, we really emphasize pedestrian friendly streets. We buried the car. There is no surface parking. It's all subterranean, so you are not going to see garages when you're walking down the street, or, you know, cars. You are going to see people's front porches and windows and things like that.

The zero emission, the neighborhood electric vehicle program, is also a real interesting one as we allowed people to purchase those when they buy their unit, they purchase them and put them on their mortgage. So far only a handful of people have done that at this point because you can only take those things on streets up to 35 miles an hour, so you can't go outside of the community onto the major streets. So once the village is completed and there's a destination for them to go to, we think people will really start to take advantage of that.

MR. NORBECK: Ed has been called to a higher thing, so I was asked to take over to be the moderator, so -- sorry about that.

Our next speaker is -- and I am sorry here, because I just got up here -- Chris Augenstein, Transportation Plan Manager for VTA Development & Congestion Management.