



August 20, 2007 Meeting Report

by
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Councilman Greig Smith

RENEW L.A.

After Decades of False Starts, is L.A. Ready to Recycle?
Councilman Greig Smith thinks so.

Governments love acronyms, most of which are eminently forgettable. But RENEW L.A. is one you should remember. It stands for Recovering Energy, Natural resources and Economic benefit from Waste for Los Angeles. It's the brainchild of Valley councilman Greig Smith, who hopes by maximizing recycling and reuse, L.A. can eliminate 93% of the waste currently filling its landfills.

"We want to be a zero waste city," says Smith, a USC graduate who studied smart growth and waste management alternatives at Germany's University of Dortmund while working for then councilman Hal Bernson. "L.A. still will have landfills, but we don't want to fill landfills with trash that can be recycled."

Over the coming 20 years L.A. hopes to build six trash conversion plants that emit zero pollution and largely are powered by the trash that's being converted. Requests for proposals were published some time back and a number of companies have responded. From that number the city hopes to select four companies to do the work. Environmental groups working in cooperation with the Department of Sanitation will make the selection.

Trash can be converted by different means, says Smith. Some companies use heat, others employ water and chemicals. One process produces a glass-like char that can be used to make asphalt. Another results in a grayish charcoal that combines well with cement. A Third process transmogrifies trash into something akin to yard compost. "We're not reinventing the wheel," insists Smith. "The technology we select will be used somewhere else in the world. Indeed, all these conversion technologies are operating efficiently everywhere in the world except America."

Smith's vision calls for larger, 1,000-ton conversion centers because of cheaper economies of scale. Many will be sited next to freeways to minimize trash trucks using city streets. In the past city politicians fought to keep anything related to trash out of their districts, but Smith thinks these non-polluting conversion facilities will be accepted. Says Smith: "Everything's political but this Council is the most environmentally active in history. The world has changed over the past four years and now people say this makes sense."

(The Valley VOTE Board of Directors voted overwhelmingly to support RENEW L.A. in October of 2005. See Press Release

at www.valleyvote.org)

A Bridge Too Far

Residents of Los Angeles often feel like they are characters in an old episode of *Father Knows Best*. Except the fathers in this sitcom are authoritarian city fathers who work far away from the neighborhoods they purport to represent. Five years ago, the Valley, Hollywood and San Pedro tried to escape from the plutocracy dominated by soft-palmed politicians and their property development bankers. Alas, poor San Pedro never even got on the ballot.

Had it succeeded it might now have a better chance to holding off developer Bob Bisno who desires City Hall's blessing for a 61-acre residential development called Ponte Vista that consists of 1,950 condominiums. Ponte Vista will boost San Pedro's population by 8.5% and give it a population density greater than the borough of Manhattan much to the distress of Andy Mardesich, who heads a group called the San Pedro & Peninsula Homeowners Coalition. Mardesich told his tale of woe to Valley VOTE this week. The gist of his message: If it can happen to us, it can happen to you.

"We have a paradigm in this city that all development projects are good in terms of more jobs and increased tax revenue," says Mardesich. "Developers rely on us believing this false assumption. Density housing is not in the best interest of San Pedro or Los Angeles."

RENT CONTROL: Turn of the Screw

Why should ordinary citizens care if owners of apartment buildings are restricted when it comes to the rents they can charge or the percentage of capital improvement costs they can pass on to their tenants? Should single-family homeowners concern themselves with municipal rules that make it nearly impossible to evict a tenant?

"Yes," says Valley VOTE Housing Committee Chairman **Vic Viereck**. "Based on the Los Angeles Rent Stabilization Ordinance, capital improvement work needed by apartments does not generate enough cash flow on its own to qualify for a loan to finance the intended work," says Viereck, adding that "failure to be able to properly maintain apartments leads to deterioration of the building and the quality of its occupants. That affects the neighborhood."

Besides diminishing the potential tax base, more calls to the police and City Attorney's office affect how our tax dollars are spent. With incentive destroyed, investors look elsewhere to invest in housing.

"As a result of less investment money going into apartments, affordable housing advocates (who promote rent control) push elected officials to build subsidized apartment buildings," Viereck observes. "From all evidence I have seen, the subsidized buildings are more expensive to build. Both site acquisition and construction are higher."

Affordable housing apartments, owned by nonprofit corporations, also benefit from property tax exemptions of up to \$20,000 per corporation. While homeowners directly pay property tax, tenants in such buildings pay little to none. For such buildings, other taxes are also reduced.

Concludes Viereck: "The City of Los Angeles \$100 Million Trust Fund already drains taxes from the public, and last year's Measure H funds buildings that generate continually increasing tax exemptions. Even tax proposals for more police are a casualty."

Hey Hey Ho Ho! Stage II Jets Have Got to Go

Hours before Valley VOTE convened this week, the LA Board of Airport Commissioners (BOAC) approved a timetable for the removal of Stage 2 jets from Van Nuys airport. Starting January 1, 2009 aircraft causing take off noise of 85 dBA and above will be banned. Under the new guidelines, noise levels will continue to drop until they reach 77 dBA in 2016.

The situation at LAX is less positive. Historically 80% of the runway incursions occur on the south side of the airport. Because the southern runway complex is often closed for repairs, traffic on the north side of the airport has increased causing a number of close calls. FAA air traffic controllers blame overwork for the near misses.

LAWA and those favoring LAX expansion want to spend billions to move the runways further north for greater runway separation to improve safety. The change, reports Valley VOTE Executive Committeeman **Denny Schneider** would devastate the Westchester-Playa del Rey business community while increasing noise and pollution.

Schneider and others believe there are less invasive, less expensive measures such as runway status lights, improved communications, and even increased spacing between aircraft to minimize the consequences of human error.

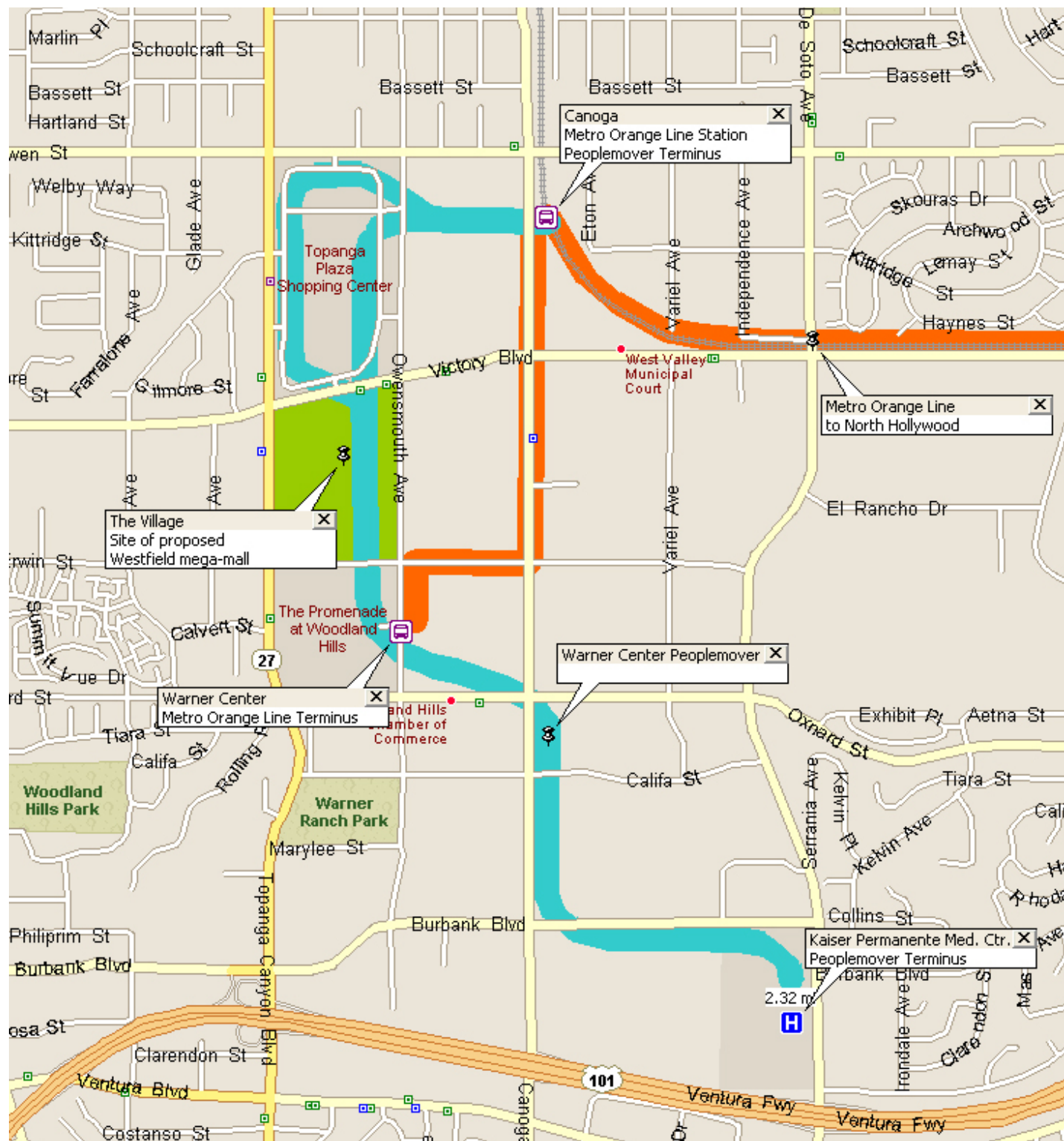
In May 2007, several groups conducted safety assessments. Each concluded that safety is compromised when airport operations are expanded, and that greater separation is needed. Two years ago, the FAA decided LAX runways are safe. But now it's asking for increased separation. "If you evaluate the cause of the actual incursions you'll find each resulted from pilot error or controller error," says Schneider. "None would have been alleviated by greater runway separation. The FAA says it wants more runways everywhere. If it feels LAX is unsafe, then the FAA should close down the north runways."

Says Schneider: "Its time to stop blindly throwing money at problems! Unless the real causes of the incursions are found we could actually be enhancing the chance of a catastrophe."

For more information: www.RegionalSolution.org

Is There a People Mover in Your Future?

The Westfield Development Company recently announced its intention to build a new mega-mall called *The Village* that will bridge its existing *Topanga Plaza* and *Promenade at Woodland Hills* malls in Warner Center. How can a billion dollar development of this size possible mitigate the increased traffic? Transit Coalition executive director **Bart Reed** proposes the company build a people mover to link the three malls with the Orange Line and other points of interest in the vicinity. "The people mover could resemble those in use at the Las Vegas and DFW airports," says Reed. "By linking to the Orange Line it could attract people to the mall who wouldn't have to use their cars."



People Mover (in blue) connects three malls with two Orange Line stations and the Kaiser Permanente Medical Center

Let's Twist Again Like We Did Last Summer

Following up on last year's gala party, Valley VOTE Membership Committee chairman **Richard Leyner** is planning a second Valley VOTE buffet dinner and fundraiser for October 13. The party will run from 5 p.m. to 8 p.m. and take place at Leyner's Northridge home. Cost is \$35 per person or \$60 for couples. Come have a cool drink, delicious food and chat informally with Valley VOTE members and political and business leaders in a beautiful setting. More details to come.

Participatory Democracy Redux

Polly Ward reports that the 912 Commission is about to finish its work and will be filing its final report in the next few weeks. Those who wish to contribute can still contact the Commission by e-mail at [www. NCRCLA.org](http://www.NCRCLA.org).

Come Up and See Us Sometime

We haven't moved but we have a new address. Actually, Valley VOTE's old Internet address remains the same, but now www.valleyvote.org is open and ready for visitors but updating of information is continuing. Can't remember who our featured speaker was in February 2006? Curious about what Wendy Greuel had to say about affordable housing last October? Experiencing sleepless night because you forgot all the LAUSD stats Julie Korenstein presented when she dropped by? Worry no longer. All our meeting reports are archived and appear along with Press Releases and notices of upcoming events.

Valley VOTE Mission Statement

Valley VOTE, a diverse coalition of San Fernando Valley residents, business people, educators, community activists, and organizations, is committed to exploring and fostering the implementation of programs that empower the people of the San Fernando Valley and the City of Los Angeles, to improve local governance, education and public participation on policy matters.

Please forward this email to interested individuals and organizations. If you would like to be removed from our distribution list please send an Email to javittisr@cs.com. We apologize if you receive more than one notice for this meeting.

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