

From Progression to Oppression: A
look at the injustices associated
with progressing Los Angeles'
transportation system

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Executive Summary

This research was done to address the problems of discrimination in transportation planning and development with a focus on the I-710 freeway extension project in Los Angeles. The paper analyzes how communities and government entities have dealt with and reacted to growing transportation needs. Using the northeast Los Angeles community of El Sereno as a case study and interviews of various stakeholders, the paper identifies the main concerns of El Sereno, what infrastructure is in place to address these concerns, and the barriers the community faces in their efforts to have their voices heard in decision making and planning that affects their community. What my research found was a strong disconnect between political leaders and El Sereno residents, resulting in widespread feelings of animosity towards the current governmental system. The paper concludes with recommendations of how El Sereno can utilize existing infrastructure and community assets to create a campaign in opposition of the freeway extension and utilize the campaign as a foundation for a lasting environmental justice organization.

“In many urban cities, the streets are our playground. We play football, baseball, ride our bikes and many other things in the street. On December 18th, 1994, my friends and I were walking to the corner store. We have to cross a six-lane street to get there. That day a truck ran a red light and struck me as I was crossing the street. My leg and collar bone were broken. The inside of my mouth was busted and my chin was cut. I had massive abrasions throughout my body. My mother says angels were guarding me and thanks the spirits for letting me live. Since my accident, five other children have been involved in auto-pedestrian accidents. Three of them died. Children have lost their right to their urban playground. The increased traffic in the inner city has become a death trap for children like me.”¹

Librado Almanza, Age 10

Introduction

In an era of unrestrained mobility and unparalleled development of highways and super freeways that serve primarily to fuel our obsession for rapid growth and advancement, rarely do we stop to consider the toll these rapid thoroughfares may actually be inflicting. For some, however, the toll is too great to overlook. In an effort to expand and facilitate the growth of Los Angeles and sustain the nation’s international trade capacity, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) have teamed up to execute plans to extend a main freeway, the I-710. Extending this freeway will theoretically facilitate transportation and commerce for the region, but for the community of El Sereno, the effects include severe health risks, safety concerns, lost homes and displaced lives.

How can one measure the benefits to the costs of a proposal with such significant implications as the expansion of the I-710? Who makes these decisions? Politicians and city planners play a key role

¹ Bullard, Robert D. and Glen Johnson. Just Transportation: Dismantling Class Barriers to Mobility. New Society Publishers, 1997, 111

in this process. Tantalized by the prospect of economic growth, politicians and city planners will support and even justify these sorts of developments by considering the benefits only to certain sectors of society while neglecting or even offsetting the costs to other communities. This discrepancy between those who reap the benefits and those who bear the costs serves only to further obviate some of societies most deeply cut stratifications, economic and racial. As quoted in Bullard and Johnson's Just Transportation, "poor people and people of color are subsidizing our addiction to the automobile."² In other words, the underserved and underrepresented have yet again fallen targets to the insatiable desires of economic expansion. My interest in this issue stemmed from recognizing this discrepancy and then delving into some of the surrounding questions such as why, in a time when cutting carbon dioxide emissions is on the top of the global agenda, was our government advocating the spending of billions of dollars on a project that will hinder development towards a more green and sustainable nation. As I searched deeper into the debate over the expansion of I-710, what I found was not only an untold history of government discrimination and racism, but that this debate hit closer to home than I ever imagined. My childhood home, the home in which my parents still live, sits directly along highway 101, one of Northern California's major North-South freeways.

I never before had contemplated the risks my family took, by living in that location, for the sake of those who used the freeway. Furthermore, after discovering how little consideration government associations were giving those who would soon lose their homes to the extension of the I-710 freeway, I grew concerned about what precedent this would set if other regional governments chose to widen or extend other freeways, particularly, the 101 freeway. Would my parents lose their home? Motivated by these questions and blatant injustices I chose to focus my research on the struggles of the small and underrepresented community in Los Angeles, El Sereno, as they faced the colossal, lucrative movement to extend the I-710 freeway.

² Bullard, Robert D. and Glen Johnson, 23

Although the El Sereno community will bear the brunt of the adversities associated with the I-710 extension, they have little use for the freeway and will therefore experience minimal benefits from its construction. Despite their role as key stakeholders, El Sereno residents have historically been neglected during decision making regarding the freeway and have constantly been overshadowed by their more active, more homogeneously Caucasian, and more affluent neighbors of Pasadena and South Pasadena. Despite El Sereno's limited resources, I believe the community has the potential and fundamental right to become active participants in the discussions of not only the I-710 freeway but any environmental concerns of future developments. This paper analyzes, through a case study of the community and numerous interviews, the ability and potential El Sereno has to develop a successful campaign against the I-710 extension, as well as, a lasting environmental justice organization. I use the case of El Sereno as an example of how a low-income, minority community can self-determine the future of their own neighborhoods and end the discriminatory practices by our nation's governments.

This study first presents a literature review of the explanations and background of transportation growth and industrialization to create the foundation for the I-710 expansion debate. Next, the specifics of the extension movement, the town of El Sereno and their junction will be presented. Finally, recommendations for the actions El Sereno can take to make their voice heard in the debate against the expansion of the I-710, and maintain this voice for future decision making in their community, will be proposed.

Goods Movement

As mature economies change, so must the infrastructure required to support those economies. For Los Angeles this means sustaining their ports, the backbone of the nation's goods movement.

“Goods movement” is a term denoted to goods or produce transported by ship, plane, train or truck.³ Supplying the United States with forty percent of imported goods⁴ and ranking as the fifth busiest port in the world⁵, it is no wonder Los Angeles and Long Beach treat their ports with such special attention. Not only do these ports serve as an international symbol of trade, these ports represent a huge portion of the entire United State’s economy. Los Angeles County’s economy alone ranks as the eighteenth largest economy in the world.⁶ In addition to creating a trading gateway to the rest of the world, port activity is estimated to be responsible for generating 900,000 jobs in California alone.⁷ Unfortunately, this job creation and economic prosperity from trade accessibility are not distributed evenly to those who bear the costs associated with port activity.

As goods are transported back and forth from water to land to the rest of the country, idling ships and heavy truck traffic flood southern California with twenty percent of the regions total diesel particulate pollution, making the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports the largest single source of pollution in Los Angeles,⁸ and while industries and businesses eagerly look towards the flourishing ports as a sign of prosperity, local communities look out their windows only to see a menacing polluting giant. Without appropriate mitigation measures, these communities suffer from negative health and quality of life issues directly caused by port activity with little to no economic benefits. One study led by Laura Perez from the Center for Research in Environmental Epidemiology found nine percent of all childhood asthma cases in Long Beach can be attributed to truck traffic from the ports and twenty-one percent of

³ Orange County Transportation Authority. Goods Movement. Orange County, 2010.

⁴ Southern California Association of Governments. *Multi-County Goods Movement Action Plan*. Rep. Los Angeles: Wilbur Smith Associates, Inc., 2008. Print.

⁵ Orange County Transportation Authority

⁶ Pitkin, Bill. *Geographic Divides in Los Angeles County: Demography, Income and Housing*. Los Angeles: United Way. 2008.

⁷ Los Angeles, Port of Los. Welcome from the Executive Director. Los Angeles, 2010.

⁸ Hricko, Andrea. "Global Trade Comes Home: Community Impacts of Goods Movement." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 116.2 (2008): 78-81. Print.

bronchitis episodes can be attributed to emissions from ships.⁹ Communities near the ports have suffered from these additional health costs for decades unfortunately, they are not the only ones affected by increasing port activity. The major arteries that transport trucks carrying goods to and from the ports have created what are called “freeway corridors.” Communities living adjacent to these corridors suffer the same consequences as those living near the ports.

Corridor residents are subjected to the constant pollution from heavy-duty diesel trucks running through their neighborhoods twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. Diesel trucks are the largest source of diesel particulate pollution in California.¹⁰ Everyday more than 40,000 trucks commute through the freeway corridors of Los Angeles,¹¹ and for the 1.5 million residents who live within three hundred meters of major freeway corridors this pollution translates into significant decreased lung function in children between the ages of ten and eighteen, lower birth weights and higher rates of premature pregnancies.¹² Studies by the California Air Resource Board “indicate that living close to high traffic and the associated emissions may lead to adverse health effects beyond those associated with regional air pollution in urban areas.”¹³ In addition to causing chronic health problems, pollution from truck traffic has been shown to increase death rates. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) “estimates that in a moderate sized city, particle pollution causes 25-50 increased deaths for each .5 mg/m³ above the national standard. The studies conducted in the LA basin show that concentrations of black carbon (one of the most hazardous components of the fine particles) downwind from highways with heavy truck traffic can be 12-13 mg/m³ times greater than concentrations found in urban air

⁹ Perez, Laura. "Global Goods Movement and the Local Burden of Childhood Asthma in Southern California." *American Journal of Public Health* 99.3 (2009). Print.

¹⁰ California Air Resource Board. "California: Diesel Trucks, Air Pollution and Public Health." Los Angeles: 2008.

¹¹ Southern California Association of Governments

¹² Hricko, Andrea. "Global Trade Comes Home: Community Impacts of Goods Movement." *Environmental Health Perspectives* 116.2 (2008): 78-81. Print.

¹³ Martinez, Adrian. "Are LA's Transportation Planners Living in a Fairy Tale Land." Weblog post. *Switchboard from NRDC*. 4 Feb. 2009. Web.

upwind of the highways."¹⁴ In many areas diesel pollution has been linked to an additional 300 to 500 premature deaths per year.¹⁵ What this all translates to for communities living near these freeway corridors is, their lives and the lives of their children are in jeopardy. Furthermore, studies reveal associated medical costs from truck pollution amounts to forty billion dollars a year for residents of the state of California.¹⁶ Recent awareness of these detrimental effects of diesel pollution on health and quality of life has heightened concerns of residents within freeway corridors and sparked a number of studies involving these communities. In addition to exposing the health and environmental risks and costs associated with expanded roadways, these studies have also unveiled interesting links between low income and minority communities and higher pollution levels.¹⁷

Freeway pollution is a crucial issue lower income communities must face, but unfortunately it is only one of the many concerns for which these communities must contend. Faced with concerns regarding steady access to food, housing and education, high crime, and job loss, the concerns associated with industrial development have simply just not been a priority. As trade volumes rise freeway infrastructure is deteriorating and roads are becoming more congested, increasing the need to expand and renovate the ports and their connecting roadways. Corridor communities are now increasingly threatened by the growth of the goods movement for the benefit of consumers and businesses outside their local region.

Despite an increasing awareness of the negative effects the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports have on Southern California, planning agencies understand without some expansion ports and corridors will lose efficiency, severely limiting the growth of the economy and the United State's ability to

¹⁴ Martinez, Adrian.

¹⁵ Martinez, Adrian.

¹⁶ California Air Resource Board.

¹⁷ "Low-Income, Minority Communities Disproportionately Exposed To Toxic Air Pollutants, Study Finds." *Medical News Today: Health News*. Web. 15 Dec. 2009. <<http://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/148257.php>>.

compete in the global market. In order to address these concerns, special attention has been given to researching and planning for the future of the goods movement.

In 2004 increasing concerns of maintaining the growing goods movement prompted the Schwarzenegger administrator to organize discussions of the future of the goods movement. Collaborations led to the creation of the Goods Movement Cabinet Work Group, co-chaired by Sunne Wright McPeak of the Business and Transportation Agency and Allen Lloyd of the California Environmental Protection Agency. This group is designed to address the following four major components of goods movement growth: “(1) the goods movement industry and its growth potential; (2) the four “port-to-border” transportation corridors that constitute the State’s goods movement backbone and the associated inventory of infrastructure projects that are being planned or that are underway; (3) the environmental and community impacts—as well as a preliminary description of mitigation approaches and issues; and (4) key aspects of public safety and security issues.”¹⁸ What California hopes to achieve through this process is a strategy to increase the capacity and improve efficiency of the transportation system in such a way as to “generate jobs, increase mobility and relieve traffic congestion, improve air quality and improve public health, enhance public and port safety, and improve California’s quality of life.”¹⁹ Regional governments have started constructing plans within their own jurisdictions to aid in the national advancement of the goods movement.

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) is the largest metropolitan planning organization in the United States. SCAG is composed of representatives from six counties, including Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura, and 189 cities from the Southern California region. SCAG works to develop infrastructure that will foster growth while improving the quality of life

¹⁸ Business Transportation and Housing Agency; California Environmental Protection Agency. "Goods Movement Action Plan." 2007.

¹⁹ Business Transportation and Housing Agency; California Environmental Protection Agency.

for residents in Southern California.²⁰ SCAG oversees the second most populated region in the United States and anticipates the population will reach twenty-one million by the year 2035. Coupled with this population growth the organization is making preparations for increased international trade leading to higher port activity. Six years after the turn of the century the number of containers passing through the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports rose sixty percent and that number is expected to triple by the year 2030.²¹ Increases port activity will directly impact how busy transportation corridors are. The sensitivity of the Southern California environment, natural expansion barriers including mountains and ocean, and rapid growth has put pressure on the region to quickly develop a plan for the future.

In alliance with the efforts of the state government, SCAG has developed a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) aimed at advancing the region's economy and fostering growing populations through "sustainable growth" practices. The term "sustainable growth" is abundant throughout a multitude of literature; however, rarely is it specifically defined. "Sustainable growth" can have vastly different connotations dependent upon the context in which it is used. For the purpose of this paper the term "sustainable growth" will connote two themes as described by economist Herman E. Daly: regeneration and assimilative capacities. According to Daly's definition growth is sustainable if resources are consumed at an equal or slower rate than they are naturally regenerated and if the rate of emissions and waste does not exceed the natural assimilative capacities of the ecosystems in which they are disposed into.²² Rephrased according to Daly's definition, the goal of SCAG's RTP is to foster growing populations while maintaining the supply of Earth's natural resources and abstaining from degrading any natural ecosystems. The projects identified in SCAG's RTP run over a span of 25 years and propose changes to address issues of mobility, accessibility, reliability, productivity, safety, sustainability,

²⁰ Southern California Association of Governments. 2008 Regional Transportation Plan Executive Summary. Los Angeles: Southern California Association of Governments, 2008.

²¹ SCAG

²² Daly, Herman E. "Operational Principles for Sustainable Development." Earth Ethics (1991).

preservation, cost-effectiveness, environmental and environmental justice.²³ Although this plan provides a framework for the areas of the region that need focused investment, SCAG also requested the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) develop a more detailed action plan to carry out over the next twenty-five years.

Metro in conjunction with Orange County Transportation Authority (OCTA), Riverside County Transportation Commission (RCTC), San Bernardino Associated Governments (SANBAG), San Diego Association of Governments (SANDAG), Ventura County Transportation Commission (VCTC), SCAG, and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) developed the Multi-County Goods Movement Action Plan (MCGMAP) and Technical Advisory Committee (MCGMAP TAC) to collaboratively design a future that addresses the needs of individuals and the region as a whole.

The limited jurisdiction these regional and state governments and organizations have over the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, as well as their limited ability to control the private sector has forced these agencies to focus on changes that can be made only to goods movement infrastructure. With a direction of which sector of the goods movement to focus on, the committee drafted four core mandates:

- (1) Environment: Avoid, reduce, and mitigate environmental, community and health impacts
- (2) Mobility: promote the safe and efficient movement of all transportation modes and reduce congestion
- (3) Economy: ensure the economic well-being of the region and state
- (4) Funding: secure the regions fair share of public and private funds for investment in the freight transportation system²⁴

²³ SCAG

²⁴ Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Multi-County Goods Movement Action Plan Executive Summary. Los Angeles: Wilbur Smith Associates, 2008.

With these mandates as the driving force of decision making, the MGMAP TAC began the first step of planning.

One of the most important components of the MGMAP thus far has involved uniting various stakeholders and hosting public workshops and meetings to reveal the most significant public concerns. In addition to these meetings a number of surveys have been circulated throughout communities to obtain various perspectives on what the MGMAP should encompass. A careful analysis of these opinions identified the major concerns of stakeholders and developed the following demands from them:

- (1) A reduction of current goods movement impacts before new infrastructure or development takes place
- (2) A Dedication of new private/public funding sources to reduce health and environmental impacts of goods movement in the region
- (3) The use of alternative fuels and technologies to reduce impacts
- (4) A comprehensive analysis of whether it is necessary to meet unlimited goods demand
- (5) A Limit on trade growth and diversion to other ports as well as investing in clean industries²⁵

These demands guided the development of short, mid and long term action sets specific to each county, as well as for the entire region.

The first action set addresses environmental mitigation. Through this action set the MCGMAP outlines ways to expedite mitigation efforts on existing goods movement infrastructure. Potential ways to achieve this goal include accelerating funding and implementation of air quality control plans,

²⁵LA Metro, pg. 15

enforcing stricter engine and emission standards for trucks, and encouraging the use of new and improved technologies.²⁶

The second action set aims to improve mobility throughout the region by reducing congestion. The MCGMAP identifies road and highway improvements as well as increasing rail capacity as ways to improve mobility for mixed flow traffic and increase efficiency for the transportation of goods.²⁷

Action set three targets operational efficiency at the ports and intermodal facilities. The MCGMAP TAC plans to utilize new technologies to increase the flow of trucks in and out of the ports and to allow for easier access during off peak hours, reducing idling time due to congestion. Strategies to improve highway operations include implementing technologies to maintain traffic flow and speed near truck weigh stations and increase the use of Open Road Tolling, a system allowing trucks and cars who frequent toll roads to avoid stopping and instead utilize an automatic payment system.²⁸

The final action set attempts to develop a method to equitably fund projects with private and public investments. This action set describes ways in which to receive the maximum amount of federal funds available for regional transportation plans and outlines the costs and benefits of partnering with the private sector.²⁹

Through these action sets the MCGMAP takes on the challenge of advancing the quality of life for Southern California residents while accommodating for population growth and an increasing trade sector. The plan identifies major infrastructural projects that must be addressed. The vast number of areas demanding attention, however, is too expensive for the MCGMAP budget, requiring a plan to prioritize certain projects and leave others for single organizations, committees, or agencies to develop on their own. The 710 south expansions represents one infrastructural project which is receiving attention from transportation agencies as part of the MCGMAP; unfortunately, the northern end of the

²⁶ LA Metro, pg. 16

²⁷ LA Metro, pg. 19

²⁸ LA Metro, pg. 20

²⁹ LA Metro, pg. 21

710 require more funds than the Action Plan can offer. The importance of the 710 north in facilitating the movement of goods has made this section of the freeway a focus for transportation agencies, despite funding limitations.

I-710 history

The I-710 freeway (710) serves as the gateway from the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports inland for nearly all goods traveling via truck. The freeway runs directly from the ports north to its terminus at the border of Los Angeles and Alhambra. The 710 became what it is today nearly 30 years ago and has had little to no reconstruction despite the growing number of cars and trucks congesting this major inland artery. Not only is traffic increasing on this freeway due to population growth, but the 710's connection to the ports makes it one of the most frequented freeways by truck drivers. The average number of trucks that travel through the 710 corridor is ten to thirty percent of the total number of vehicles traveling on the freeway, and of these trucks ninety-four percent are related to the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports.³⁰ The combination of passenger vehicles and heavy-duty truck traffic is one of the reasons this freeway averages five accidents per day. This accident rate has made the 710 notorious as one of the most dangerous freeways in Southern California. Additionally, heavy truck traffic has made the I-710 freeway corridor one of the most polluted in the region. What's more, is the corridor runs primarily through low income and minority neighborhoods.³¹

Regional and state transportation planners have recognized the 710's importance as the primary route moving trucks from ports inland, but are more recently realizing the magnitude of the costs associated with congestion and hazards on the freeway. Delays from heavy congestion or freeway accidents are delaying shipments which cost sellers, a cost which is ultimately passed on to consumers.

³⁰ Gunwoo, Lee. Environmental Impacts of a Major Freight Corridor: A Study of teh I-710 in California. Los Angeles, 2009. pg. 3

³¹ Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc. et. al. Purpose and Needs Statement. Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 2001.

These delays are increasing as the city grows and as port traffic increases. The thirty-year old design of the I-710 is struggling to accommodate these new demands of the goods movements.

The I-710 has endured an exponential rise in car and truck traffic with relatively no structural improvements, leading to a number of unforeseen hazards and astronomical costs. People have for years complained about continuous and recurrent traffic congestion. Furthermore, chronic traffic accidents cause bouts of congestion that are unpredictable and unavoidable. These design deficiencies frustrate drivers who then maneuver onto adjacent streets creating freeway like conditions along neighborhood streets. Spillover to surrounding neighborhoods creates a myriad of problems for corridor residents. In addition to poor air quality and dangerous road conditions, these neighborhoods must find ways to deal with constant noise and unpleasant visual surroundings.³² These problems affect both those who use the freeway and those who do not. Unable to quietly ignore these issues any longer, Southern California's transportation planners have finally begun considering ways to improve the freeway.

The I-710 South

The eighteen mile stretch of the I-710, which begins at the ports and terminates just north of the 10 freeway, is designated in the MCGMAP as a key artery requiring attention (See Figure 1). The MCGMAP has undergone a number of projects in an attempt to increase the freeway's capacity, improve safety, and move goods more efficiently. Efforts to improve the freeway have focused on creating safer and more efficient interchanges and refinishing the surface of the freeway.³³ Other proposals include expanding the width of the freeway to accommodate truck only or truck restricted lanes. Recent more innovative ideas include the implementation of truck only lanes where trucks travel

³² Parsons Brinckerhoff Quade & Douglas, Inc. et. al. Pg. 3

³³ Southern California Association of Governments, Gateway Cities, MTA, Caltrans. "The I-710 Corridor Improvement Program Newsletter." The I-710 Corridor Study. 2005. pg. 3

connected to cable lines supplying them with electric power and thus cutting out truck emissions completely. This system has

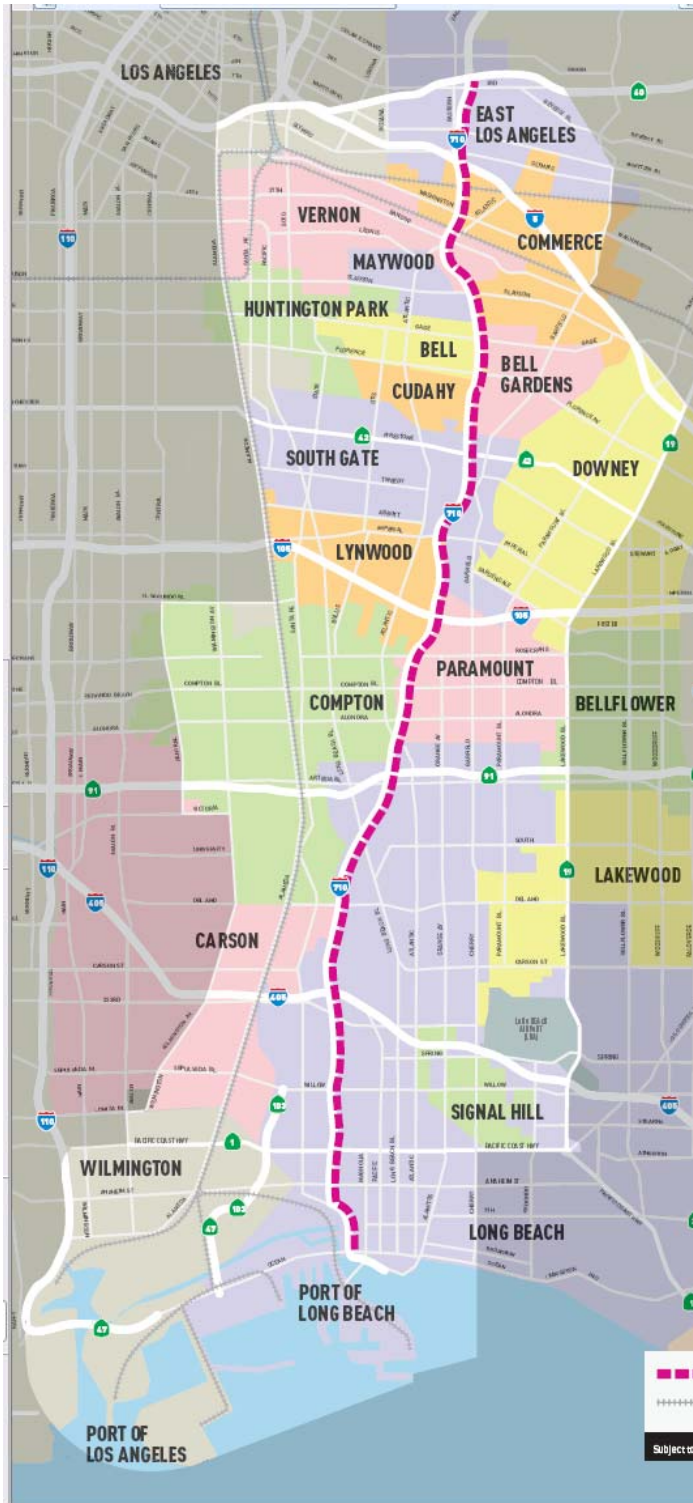


Figure 1: Metro, I-710 Corridor Project

never been used for diesel trucks, but buses and cable cars have successfully utilized electric cables in a similar fashion.³⁴ Careful considerations have gone into creating technically feasible plans for the 710 and numerous studies have analyzed how traffic, safety, and environmental conditions could change with the implementation of these plans. Before moving forward with any plans, government agencies must decide how to close major funding gaps.

According to the MCGMAP, Los Angeles County will require at least \$23 billion to complete the entire list of proposed projects.³⁵ Designs for the 710 freeway alone are expected to total more than \$88 million.³⁶ One of the biggest funding sources for plans outlined in the MCGMAP comes from the Highway Safety, Traffic Reduction, Air Quality, and Port Security Bond Act of 2006 (Proposition 1B). This proposition passed in the November 2006 election allocates \$20 billion to statewide transportation investments. This bond money designates \$3.1 billion to fund goods movement related infrastructure, emission reduction plans, and homeland security.³⁷ From the \$3.1 billion, \$1.65 billion was approved for trade corridor improvements specific to Southern California. In addition to these state funds, Metro has agreed to offer \$100 million for projects within Los Angeles related to the goods movement.³⁸ Even with these funds, Southern California lacks the money to complete all the retrofitting desired for the 710 freeway. The most viable option to close this gap is through partnerships with the private sector as well as the implementation of user fees. In fact, the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports have already begun implementing user fees such as the \$35 dollar per 20 foot equivalent storage unit (TEU) Clean Truck Fee to help pay for the retrofitting of old drayage trucks. This fee is charged to cargo owners for every loaded container entering or leaving the ports. Similarly, a \$15 dollar per loaded TEU fee is collected to

³⁴ Authority, Metropolitan Transportation. I-710 Corridor Project. 2010. January 2010
<http://www.metro.net/projects/i710_corridor/>.pg. 2

³⁵ LA Metro. pg 57

³⁶ SCAG. pg. 9

³⁷ LA Metro. pg 57

³⁸ LA Metro. pg. 57

fund highway and rail improvement projects within the vicinity of the ports.³⁹ Another type of user fee stakeholders are discussing is “mitigation banking.” This would allow developers to advance their projects regardless of its impact on environmental ecosystems if the developers mitigate their effects by “banking,” or providing funds for environmental protection in other areas.⁴⁰ For larger projects, such as the revamping of the 710, it will be necessary to persuade private investors to be the primary funders. While some proposals are on hold until funding becomes available, others are being prioritized and are in advanced planning stages. Although, these freeway improvements are meant to alleviate problems associated with overcapacity and enhance the quality of life for Southern Californians, many corridor residents are feeling threatened as expansion efforts thrust the freeways deeper into their communities.

Environmental Justice in the I-710 Corridor

The need to expand and the desire for healthier and safer communities have created tensions between corridor residents and freeway developers. The city’s aggressive initial desires to keep its’ port industry running smoothly, left little room for negotiations with corridor residents, forcing these communities to unite in order for their concerns be heard.

In 2001 when the plan to widen the 710 was introduced, Metro and Caltrans’ avidity to enhance the efficiency of the goods movement prompted them to fast track the project, allowing construction to begin without consulting communities who would face adverse affects from the expansion. Upon hearing details of the plan which included adding four lanes to each side of the freeway and destroying 600 homes to make room for them, communities along the corridor immediately began expressing their opposition through demonstrations, town hall meetings, and other events aimed at uniting corridor

³⁹ LA Metro. pg. 58

⁴⁰ LA Metro. pg. 58

residents.⁴¹ The unified voice of corridor communities persuaded transportation authorities to address these concerns in an unprecedented manner.

The Natural Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is a national act requiring projects implemented by government entities to create an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess the impacts the proposed project would have on the environment and surrounding communities. In addition to completing an EIS, Caltrans and Metro are required by the state specific California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) to create an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).⁴² The EIR is similar to the EIS; however, the EIR report addresses additional concerns specific to California. No criteria require an EIS or EIR to address environmental justice concerns or identify any disproportionate adverse effects on low-income or minority communities, but the Federal Executive Order 12898 imposes this requirement. Caltrans and Metro in adherence to the executive order decided to dedicate a portion of the EIS and EIR to identifying and addressing environmental justice concerns.⁴³ Resultant from community pressure and the regulation imposed by the executive order, Caltrans and Metro, for the first time, enlisted a number of community participation opportunities in the development of the EIS and EIR. Community participation consists of invitations to advisory and public policy meetings, holding community workshops, and dedicating services to answering questions and concerns regarding the 710 project.

Coupled with general community outreach programs, Metro and Caltrans have set up a tiered system of committees to represent the needs and concerns of affected communities. Tier 1 committees are composed of residents from neighborhoods who are most directly affected by the 710 and the expansion efforts. Tier 2 committees represent a wider range of constituents including local communities, academic affiliates, and businesses. Tier 2 committees also consist of the chairs of Tier 1

⁴¹ Justice, East Yard communities for Environmental. 710 Expansion Project. 2009. January 2010 <<http://eycej.org/710>>.

⁴² LA Metro

⁴³ Authority, Metropolitan Transportation. Environmental Justice. Environmental Impact Report. Los Angeles: Metro, 2009.

committees and a delegate from each remaining city in the corridor. Tier committees are responsible for developing criteria for construction on the 710 and recommendations to fulfill those criteria.⁴⁴ Creating a tiered system increases participation by inviting individuals to discuss transportation issues and needs in a local environment. Small discussion groups can more easily facilitate perfect participation, allowing every voice to be heard. Increased participation also leads to greater unity among corridor communities. The power of corridor residents resides in their ability to maintain unity, because their strength in numbers minimizes the political clout of transportation agencies. Not all communities are fortunate enough to have neighbors who readily and easily relate to them. At the northern end of the freeway, a decades long controversy over an extension of the 710 has left one community struggling to save their homes and lifestyle.

The I-710 Extension Project

Beginning at the time of original construction, the 710 was meant to connect to the 210 freeway in Pasadena. However, community opposition from Pasadena left the 710 stopping just short of the intended interchange. In line with the reconstruction efforts in the south, transportation officials are now more than ever striving to finish this “missing link” in order to ease traffic congestion and expedite the movement of goods.⁴⁵

The California Department of Transportation has been one of the major proponents for the extension project. By extending the freeway, Caltrans hopes to alleviate congestion both on the freeway and on surrounding streets. The extended 710 freeway would connect high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, commonly referred to as carpool lanes, on four major freeways, the 710, 210, 10, and 110, making travel easier and more efficient for those who choose to carpool. Additionally, by reducing congestion,

⁴⁴ Committee, I-710 Tier 2 Community Advisory. Major Opportunity/Strategy Recommendations and Conditions. Los Angeles: Tier 2 Community Advisory Committee, 2004.pp. 7

⁴⁵ Missing Link Study

Caltrans and other proponents, expect air quality will greatly improve.⁴⁶ With these visions in mind and widespread support from state, regional and local governments, Caltrans has attempted to create a plan that relieves the concerns of Pasadena and South Pasadena residents in hopes that they will ease up on their opposition and allow the freeway to run through.

One of the first attempts to extend the 710 was in 1964 via the “Meridian Route.” This proposal was meant to be a 6.2 mile surface route through the cities of Alhambra, Los Angeles, Pasadena and South Pasadena to an interchange at the 210 freeway. The route was specifically designed to avoid any historical homes within these communities. Organized efforts from Pasadena and South Pasadena, forced Caltrans to create an environmental impact statement (EIS) before they were permitted to continue with plans for the extension. After preparation of the EIS, however, Pasadena and South Pasadena residents were still unconvinced the extension would bring the promised benefits to their cities.⁴⁷ Various lawsuits from the two cities against Caltrans were carried out following the Meridian proposal in an attempt to stop any extension from getting constructed. These delays ended in an absolute objection to a surface route by the two cities, and silenced discussions of the extension for a few years. Recently, in conjunction with state and regional transportation plans, Caltrans has introduced yet another approach for the 710 extension.

Current proposition

After years of struggling to agree on a route for the extension that both community residents and government agencies would accept, Senator Gilbert Cedillo of the 22nd California senate district developed a bill, SB 1350, in 2008 that advanced construction of the extension in a completely new direction. The bill prohibited any surface route extension and allowed for construction to continue only in the form of a tunnel.⁴⁸ The design of a tunnel would extend the 710 in a way that preserved more

⁴⁶ Association, California Transportation. District 7 Update. Los Angeles: Caltrans, 2002. pg. 81

⁴⁷ Caltrans, Pg. 78

⁴⁸ Cedillo, Senator. Bill Number: SB 1350. Los Angeles, 2008.

homes, schools and businesses along the corridor and improved mitigation of noise and pollution.⁴⁹ The tunnel alternative has sparked interest around the globe as it would be the largest tunnel project in the history of the United States and would likely use the largest tunneling drill owned by the Spanish.⁵⁰ The new tunnel proposal would move forward in a “route neutral manner,” meaning that officials are required to explore all possible alternatives to the tunnel.⁵¹ This neutrality has expanded the possible 710 route to five different zones, spreading between the 2 freeway on the west and the 605 freeway on the East. The five zones fan out from the terminus of the 710 in Alhambra and as a result made many communities, who previously thought they had no stake in the expansion, concerned about the projects impact (See Figure 2).

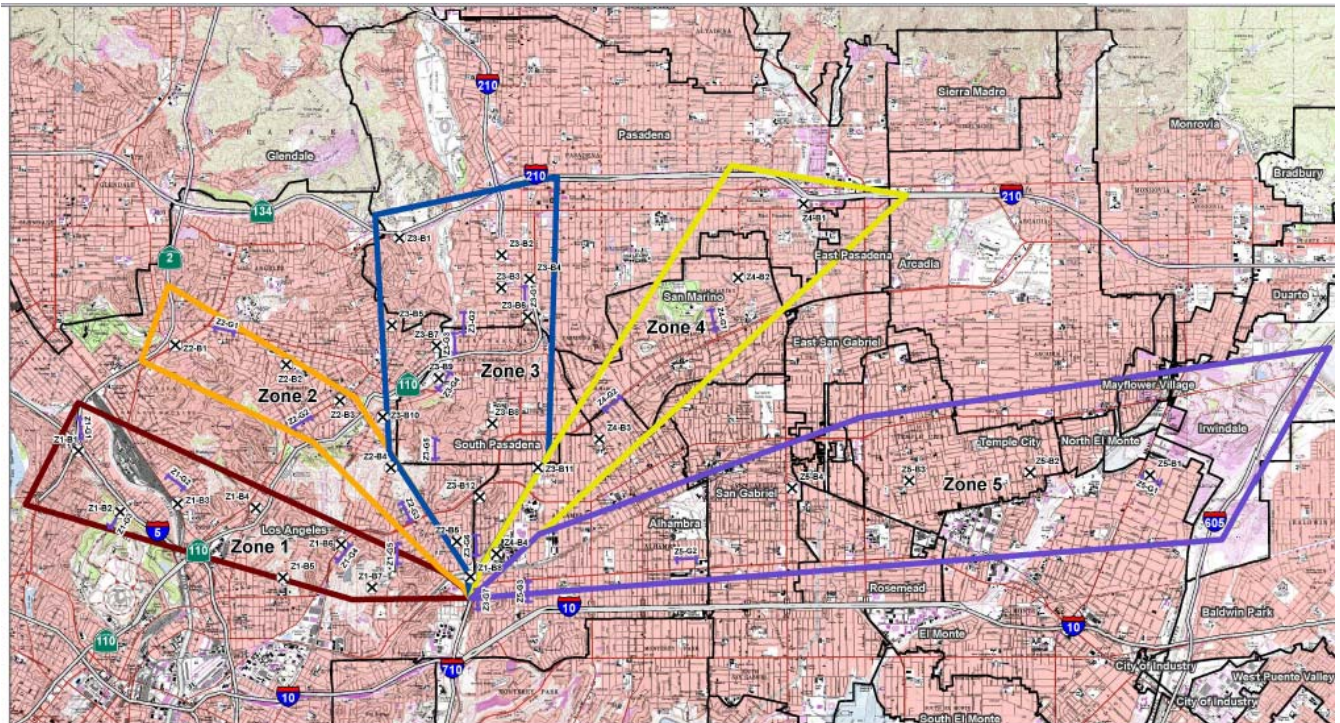


Figure 2: Caltrans, I-710 Technical Feasibility Study Information

⁴⁹ Wolfe, Christy. Cedillo's 710 Bill Heads to Governor, Resolves 50-Year Dispute and Preserves Homes. 22 September 2009. 2009 <[⁵⁰ LA Metro. pg. 4](http://dist22.casen.govoffice.com/index.asp?Type=B_PR&SEC={0A2790CD-E2A0-4AD1-ADCC-79E9FBBF6544}&DE={2D4DB5E5-7C5C-4F5B-8EB6-56FE92B82AFC}>>.</p>
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⁵¹ Merl, Jean. "Caltrans Renews Study of 710 Freeway Tunnel." Los Angeles Times 19 January 2009. Pg. 2

Regardless of the claimed neutrality, a careful analysis of project expenses and usability depicts some zones as far more favorable for construction than others. Zone 5, the furthest to the east runs almost directly parallel to the 10 freeway in an east-west direction, essentially defeating the purpose of extending the freeway north.⁵² Zone 1, similarly to Zone 5, extends in an east-west direction to the 2 freeway on the west. What seems to be the most probable tunnel route is the originally planned extension from Alhambra, directly north to the 210 in Pasadena. This is the most direct tunneling route, making it the shortest and therefore the least expensive to construct, an essential consideration with such a massive project. A major consideration in the recent activity involving the I-710 extension is the recent passage of county-wide Measure R in the November 2008 election.

Measure R

Measure R, as proposed by the Metropolitan Transit Authority, was developed in response to the lack of funding available for county-wide transportation projects. The measure, passed in November 2008, implemented a half cent sales tax increase. Revenue from this measure is expected to amount to nearly \$8 billion over the next thirty years, providing just over a third of the total \$22 billion estimated to completely fund the proposed transportation projects. The majority of the project money will be directed towards mass transit projects; however, twenty percent of the total funds are earmarked for highway projects and programs. Other areas receiving a significant portion of funds are rail and rapid transit construction, operational improvements, including enhancing the bus systems and increasing services for senior citizens and the disabled; and local transportation improvements, such as creating safer bus stops and increasing bike programs. As set protections against unnecessary or exploitive measures, funds cannot transfer from transit to highway projects for ten years and must have at least two thirds approval from a panel of judges.⁵³

⁵² Meryl, Jean. Pg. 2

⁵³ Metropolitan Transportation Authority. Measure R Workshop. Los Angeles: Metro, 2009.

Coupled with the improvements Measure R outlined, in order to get passed, Metro was forced to lay out a number of promises to the public that Measure R funds would fulfill. Promises ranged from explicit commitments, such as the construction of sound walls and grade separations, to more broad based long term goals, including reducing dependency on foreign oil through a focus on public transit and enhanced geographic equity. A number of promises also outlined ways to strengthen the relationship between governing agencies and the general public in regards to transportation decision making. To regulate this relationship the Measure R proposal promises to conduct annual audits, give constant and up to date reports, maintain transparency, and to set up an advisory board to ensure funds are spent on what voter's have decided. In all possible cases the measure aims to reinvest revenues into the local economy by creating jobs and increasing environmental benefits.⁵⁴

Unfortunately, it will be nearly impossible for measure R to produce enough funds to actualize all the projects outlined in the proposal. Similar to the regional transportation plans of SCAG and the MCGMAP, transportation planners anticipate managing the gap largely through public-private partnerships (PPPs). Although enlisting private entities to meet funding needs will accelerate the completion of necessary projects, private investors demand their investments return profits. Los Angeles County will then be forced to leverage real estate and share future revenue streams to meet the demands of private investors. Additionally, investors will demand assurance that a means to control risks will be implemented. Obligations to the private sector put pressures on government agencies to establish alternate funding sources that do not require extended debt repayments to external agencies. Alternate revenue sources and strategies include increasing government debt limitations, selling debt and bonds on Measure R funds, and accelerating construction time lines.⁵⁵

The passage of Measure R has important implications for the future of the Los Angeles transportation system. Currently, the public transit system of Los Angeles is only responsible for three

⁵⁴ Metro. Measure R Workshop.

⁵⁵ Measure R Workshop

percent of all commuter trips.⁵⁶ In an effort to increase this percentage and encourage greater public transit use, the majority of Measure R funds are designated to transit development, but some highway projects are still receiving significant amounts of funding from Measure R. \$780 million of Measure R funds are earmarked for the 710 extension which advocates point out, is in direct contention of the efforts to increase public transportation use as the 710 extension will only increase the infrastructure which supports Los Angeles' car centric lifestyle.⁵⁷ The money allocated from Measure R is a driving force in bringing the long awaited I-710 extension closer to reality.

Despite the 780 million from Measure R there is still a significant funding gap for the 710 extension. Construction of the tunnel is expected to exceed three billion dollars with operational expenses totaling approximately another twenty-five million.⁵⁸ These costs would make the 710 tunnel more expensive per mile than most other urban freeways and more than the entire Los Angeles subway system.⁵⁹ The option both Metro and Caltrans are pursuing to bridge this funding gap is to create a partnership with private investors. In order to cover private costs, an expected toll ranging anywhere between four and eight dollars per trip will be charged for usage of the tunnel.⁶⁰ Although to some a tunnel seems out of sight and therefore out of mind, exuberant costs and a lack of information about tunneling is still making many communities skeptical about the benefits of an underground freeway. Instead of alleviating concerns and suppressing community opposition, Caltrans has instead left many frustrated and confused.

Community Concerns

One of the greatest risk for residents affected by the 710 extension is health. Even with the proposition for a tunnel, which forces cars and trucks underground, emissions from these vehicles must

⁵⁶ Bullard, et. al. Pg 53

⁵⁷ Arnold, Margaret. *"The 710: A Community Says "No."* The Arroyo Seco Journal, 15. (2009).

⁵⁸ Southern California Association of Governments. Tunnel Financial Feasibility Assesment. Los Angeles: 2008.

⁵⁹ Knapp, Clarice. Road to Ruin. Los Angeles: United to Save South Pasadena. 2004. Pg. 10

⁶⁰ SCAG. Tunnel financial feasibility assessment.

still be expelled from the tunnel somewhere along the route. Residents are worried, whether emissions are exhausted through the portals (entry and exits of the tunnel) or through chimney like vents along the route, the emissions will severely lower the quality of air in their neighborhoods. Studies have found that fine particulate matter (PM) in diesel exhaust is not only a vascular threat, but can actually pass through natural body defenses and penetrate the lungs. This discovery prompted the state of California to add PM to the list of toxic air contaminants and the EPA to classify diesel exhaust as a known carcinogen. Recent studies have shown that seventy percent of cancer risks in the region can be attributed to PM from diesel trucks.⁶¹ These findings have made residents unwilling to support any proposal that would potentially increase risks to their health. In addition to these health concerns, residents must also consider their property and homes which are also in jeopardy.

Despite Caltrans' claims tunneling will save homes, schools and businesses significant surface construction is required to create the tunnel's portals, and this construction will inevitably take homes and businesses. Residents anxiously await the final tunnel route and the sentencing of who will lose their homes and to what degree. Unfortunately, a final route is not yet been identified and therefore answers cannot be given to inquiring residents, leaving many worried and frustrated. Residents who now reside in Caltrans owned homes, live on edge with the fear of knowing how easily Caltrans could remove them from their homes to make way for construction. Oppositely, land not used for construction will eventually sell on the open market, as Caltrans will no longer need it, granting tenants the opportunity to become homeowners, if they can afford the selling price. Those who are already homeowners worry how or if the foundation of their homes will suffer from subsurface digging and how this project might affect their property values.

The 710 freeway largely serves goods movement related industries. Even those who commute rarely use the 710 because of its congestion and safety risks. These reasons explain why residents in the

⁶¹ California Air Resource Board.

path of the freeway feel they are going to bear a disproportionate amount of the costs associated with the extension yet receive little to no benefits. Communities threatened by large infrastructure projects understand “transportation is a social investment affecting the social, economic and environmental quality of life in urban communities.”⁶² Transportation investments should serve to benefit the community, as they will bear the majority of the social costs. The working class community of El Sereno sits at the northern end of the 710 and is therefore subject to the detrimental effects of the construction and operation of the tunnel portal. Entry and exit points for the freeway are where home and business demolition will occur and truck traffic will increase the most. El Sereno residents understand even those who own cars will not utilize the tunnel enough to counter the costs they will pay with their health and lifestyles. Statistics support this fact, stating that “the 20 percent of the population that earned the highest income accounts for 32 percent of travel; the middle 20 percent accounts for 19 percent of all travel; and the lowest 20 percent accounts for only 9 percent of all travel” in Los Angeles.⁶³ Residents feel those who will benefit most from the tunnel should bear most the costs.

This discrepancy between those who bear the costs and those who reap the benefits is leaving many feeling victim to environmental injustices. Environmental justice is the “fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”⁶⁴ Within this context “fair treatment means that no group of people, including racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic groups, should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, municipal, and commercial operations or the execution of federal, state, local, and tribal programs and policies.”⁶⁵ Pasadena, South Pasadena, and neighboring

⁶² Bullard, et al., 26

⁶³ Bullard, et al., 57

⁶⁴ Bullard, Robert D. and Glen S. Johnson. "Environmental Justice: Grassroots Activism and its Impact on Public Policy Decision Making." *Journal of Social Issues* 56.3 (2000).

⁶⁵ Bullard, et. al.

communities within Los Angeles are unconvinced of the benefits Caltrans and other agencies are promising they will receive. These concerns coupled with Caltrans' apparent neglect of those communities have resulted in not only heated opposition, but legal action from effected cities and communities.

Preliminary Power Analysis

From the moment efforts began to construct the I-710 freeway from the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports to the 210 freeway, Pasadena and South Pasadena residents have rigorously organized themselves in opposition. Over the decades freeway proponents have poured money into silencing this opposition and continuing construction. Pasadena and South Pasadena, however, refuse to be easily silenced. Their incessant opposition and aggressive campaigns have inspired a number of other cities and communities to join them and placed Pasadena and South Pasadena residents at the forefront of a rapidly growing movement.

To more fully understand the two sides of this debate I will present a preliminary power analysis to identify key stakeholders and decision makers, their motivations, where power originates from and how these stakeholders relate to one another (See appendix, Fig. 3).

Caltrans, Metro, and SCAG are the most influential government entities dictating transportation decisions relating to the 710 extension. They are granted official decision making power by city, state and federal governments. Transportation agencies are allowed special privileges in regards to land acquisition and permitted to make most transportation decisions independently of any executive leader. Individuals who hold official power in transportation decision making are those who form the board of directors for these agencies. Two of the most important players in the 710 debate are Ara Najarian, the Chair of the Metro board of directors and mayor of Glendale, and Jose Huizar, Los Angeles City Council Member for east Los Angeles and Metro board member. Board members make final transportation decisions based on a majority vote. While extreme power is granted to these members as a group,

individual board members can become powerless without support from the rest of the board. Currently, Caltrans, Metro and SCAG as government entities are in support of the 710 extension while Najarian and Huizar are advocating more for a comparable alternative. Government departments and agencies are granted the means to carry out their decisions; however, funding from taxation obliges them to fulfill the needs and wants of taxpayers. Taxpayers, are thus indirectly, the most important decision makers.

Those who hold unofficial power are taxpaying citizens. Although, taxes are largely uniform, different groups of taxpayers hold different amounts of power. Unable to meet the demand of individuals, government entities respond to those whose voices are the loudest. Proponents for the extension include the American Truckers Association, producers who ship products via truck, and international trading partners. The main source of power for these organizations lies in their widespread support and monetary resources. Able to fund massive campaigns and monetarily support board members and politicians, these agencies are a driving force influencing transportation decision making.

Other unofficial powers include the Tenants Association, non-profit organizations and public entities including the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC), and various community groups. These entities exert power by organizing enough opposition to pressure board members to vote for proposals communities deem beneficial. Without the same monetary resources as some of the aforementioned larger organizations and businesses, community groups and associations need stronger numbers to maintain the same influencing power.

El Sereno the Forgotten Community

South Pasadena's aggressive opposition tactics have overshadowed their southern neighbor, El Sereno, which sits at the terminus of the current 710 freeway. Unlike Pasadena and South Pasadena, El Sereno is not known to have pursued many organizing efforts against the freeway construction. While a direct route threatens South Pasadena and Pasadena communities, nearly every proposed route would run through El Sereno, making it one of the largest stakeholders involved in the 710 freeway gap

closure. The community of El Sereno and their response to the 710 freeway extension proposal offers a case study of how low-income, minority communities can establish infrastructure to contest developments that promise to be detrimental to the welfare of residents. Through careful investigation including interviews with various stakeholders, certain tools were discovered as necessary and available to develop infrastructure within the community to allow them to unite and stand against any movement that challenges their community's well being.

Community profile

Northeast Los Angeles has a historical background which differs from the rest of Los Angeles. Originally, an unpopulated and distant settlement, Northeast Los Angeles developed into a new home for many Mexicans who were forced eastward by the anti-Mexican sentiment of the U.S. settlers following the Mexican-American war in 1846. This migration by the Mexican population established what is today one of the largest concentrations of Mexicans outside of Mexico.⁶⁶ El Sereno is just one of many communities throughout Los Angeles that is home to a majority Hispanic population.⁶⁷

El Sereno's 40,000 residents are nestled in a 4.7 square mile section of northeast Los Angeles.⁶⁸ Although, they are part of the City of Los Angeles and have similar demographics to their surrounding neighbors, El Sereno has very few associations with the City and is in itself a unique and thriving community. El Serrano's location at the northeast border of Los Angeles makes their closest neighbor the predominately white and affluent city of South Pasadena. This proximity to South Pasadena accentuates the vast incongruence in economics and demographics between these two very distinct communities, one of color and one not.

⁶⁶ Benitez, Tomas. East L.A.: Past and Present. 2004. 2010 <<http://www.pbs.org/americanfamily/eastla.html>>.

⁶⁷ Commerce, El Sereno Chamber of. Location and Demographics. 2009. 2010 <<http://elserenochamber.org/gpage.html>>.

⁶⁸ El Sereno Chamber of Commerce

83% of El Sereno's 40,000 residents identify themselves as Hispanic with 67.5% speaking Spanish as their primary language. El Sereno is a young community with a median age of 32.3 and 16.7% of the population between the ages of five and fourteen. A working class community, El Sereno averages an annual income of \$37,480 and 49% of residents are tenants.⁶⁹ Two major agencies represent the people of El Sereno within the greater Los Angeles: the Neighborhood Council and the district councilmember.

The fourteenth district encompasses the communities of Boyle Heights, Eagle Rock, El Sereno, Downtown Los Angeles, Garvanza, Glassell Park, Hermon, Rose Hills, Highland Park and Mount Washington. Jose Huizar, the councilmember who presides over the fourteenth district was elected to office in 1995 after serving on the Los Angeles Unified School District Board of Education. Huizar prides himself on implementing sustainable planning practices throughout the district and his efforts to revitalize major commercial corridors. In addition to his role in the City Council, Huizar sits on the Metro board, and thus has a vested interest in the fate of the 710 tunnel.⁷⁰

Locally, El Sereno is represented by the Neighborhood Council, an institution developed to vocalize the community's interests and concerns to the city at large. The Neighborhood Council system was established in 2001 in an effort to empower communities and allow individuals to have a greater influence in decision making. Communities are responsible for developing their own neighborhood councils, and therefore will only exist where residents have decided there is a need. Neighborhood Councils must get certified by the Board of Neighborhood Commissioners of Los Angeles to be recognized, but are then encouraged to become independent and guide the community as independently as possible from city government.⁷¹ Neighborhood Councils are granted a \$50,000 budget by the City which the Councils are free to spend as they deem necessary. Additional funding is available

⁶⁹ El Sereno Chamber of Commerce

⁷⁰ The City of Los Angeles. Jose Huizar. 2010. 2010 http://cd14.lacity.org/YOUR_TEAM/District_Profile/index.htm.

⁷¹ City of Los Angeles. Department of Neighborhood Empowerment Los Angeles. 2010. 2010.

with approval from the board.⁷² Currently, El Sereno's Neighborhood Council is headed by Hugo Garcia. Mr. Garcia is a lifelong resident of El Sereno and has a history of Chicano activism since high school. Mr. Garcia co-founded the El Sereno Organizing Committee, an organization established to advocate and take action for the betterment of the community, and has worked in opposition of the 710 extension.⁷³ Apart from these governmental agencies, El Sereno also has an established Chamber of Commerce. The El Sereno Chamber of Commerce consists of 150 participating businesses. The Chamber hosts community events to strengthen economic activity and promote neighborhood unity.⁷⁴

Although El Sereno has more at stake than their more vocal neighbors, Pasadena and South Pasadena, attempts to mimic their successful methods of opposition have failed. The impending threat of the freeway extension necessitates immediate action from the El Sereno community.

El Sereno represents one of the remaining communities in Northeast Los Angeles where the culture of a Hispanic working class still remains strong. Communities like El Sereno are under constant threat from a myriad of issues including gentrification, failing education systems, struggling businesses, discrimination and crime. Although many communities similar to El Sereno have struggled to establish and maintain an environmental justice organization, El Sereno's recent involvement with the I-710 freeway provides them the opportunity to serve as an example of a community that does make a difference. Unlike many other communities in the region, El Sereno is directly impacted by the proposed extension of the freeway, yet despite the successes of neighboring South Pasadena and Pasadena, El Sereno has had little success thus far in maintaining strong opposition. While a lack of resources seems like the obvious culprit to their misfortunes, previous campaigns against Caltrans have demonstrated that El Sereno residents do have the resources and assets necessary to form their own campaign, one which is distinct to their community.

⁷² City of Los Angeles

⁷³ Garcia, Hugo. Neighborhood Council Member Felisia Castaneda. 23 March 2010.

⁷⁴ El Sereno Chamber of Commerce

El Sereno History of organizing

El Sereno is one of the last thriving and artistic communities in Los Angeles that still maintains its working class mentality. This working class, while sustaining a strong sense of pride, has countless limitations, some out of their control and some within their control, which hinder their ability to maintain and progress the well-being of their community. Despite these limitations, El Sereno has demonstrated a set of intangible assets that have allowed their community to organize in a way even their rivals, northern neighbors Pasadena and South Pasadena, have been unable to achieve. Even so, El Sereno has struggled to stand up to the injustices brought about by the significantly more powerful Caltrans. This has not stopped the community from putting forth efforts, some which have resulted in success, and others not.

When proposals to complete the 710 extension through to the 210 in Pasadena first resurfaced in the early 1990s an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was required by Caltrans before they could proceed with planning. After the EIS was introduced a Route 710 Mitigation and Environmental Advisory Committee was established to identify specific mitigation measures required for El Sereno, Pasadena, and South Pasadena. Caltrans, refused to accept a representative of El Sereno who requested to serve on the panel.⁷⁵ As a result, plans for an above grade freeway running through El Sereno found it's way into the final Caltrans' proposal. When residents of El Sereno discovered what Caltrans was offering South Pasadena and Pasadena, El Sereno was quick to react. The proposal for the 710 extension through South Pasadena called for the freeway to be 80% below grade, and in Pasadena the extension was planned for 100% below grade.⁷⁶ This meant the road running through South Pasadena and Pasadena would be largely depressed, or below the surrounding ground level, making it less obtrusive and more aesthetically pleasing. Furthermore, a construction method known as *cut and cover*, where trenches are

⁷⁵ Bullard, et. al., 172

⁷⁶ Bullard, et. al.

dug, allowing the freeway to run far below grade, then covered and replaced with parks or other public space, was going to be used near schools in Pasadena; while near El Sereno's Sierra Vista Middle School, all freeway construction was planned at a significantly lower cost at or above grade.⁷⁷ This discovery was immensely discerning for residents as their middle school already suffered from underfunding and a lack of facilities that South Pasadena and Pasadena schools had an abundance of. The two neighboring cities enjoyed state of the art school gyms and, even simply, properly sealed classroom windows to maintain optimal temperature and seal out air pollutants inside classroom buildings, for their children. The youth of El Sereno, however, were forced outside during inclement weather for physical education for lack of a sufficient gym, and did not enjoy the simple benefit of properly sealed windows to protect them from outside air pollutants.⁷⁸ El Sereno, parents were infuriated their children were not granted the same treatment as their Caucasian, more affluent neighbors. In addition to the tactless approach Caltrans was taking towards El Sereno's schools, little consideration was taken as to how an above grade freeway might further isolate the community.

El Sereno's main thoroughfare, Huntington Drive, is a six lane road which cuts directly through the center of the community. This road already serves to hinder the ease and safety of pedestrian traffic within the community. The proposed section of the 710 through El Sereno would create additional barriers to pedestrian mobility and safety within the community. The freeway would further divide El Sereno more than its neighboring communities. New Community divisions created by the freeway extension would be unsurpassable except by car. Residents would literally be cut off from cultural institutions they frequented, simply because they could not reach certain destinations within the town, further isolating the community from one another and forcing residents, not only their daily routines, but their entire lives.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Bullard, et. al., 163

⁷⁸ Garcia, Hugo.

⁷⁹ Bullard, et. al., 168

In addition to destroying the solidarity of the community, El Sereno would be subject to even more displacement through loss of homes and properties. Of all the houses which would be destroyed in all three communities, El Sereno would suffer 47% of housing demolitions to make way for the freeway.⁸⁰ To make matters worse, the majority of these houses would be subsidized units for low income residents. Unlike displaced residents in neighboring cities, El Sereno tenants would not have the luxury of moving to affordable housing near their previous place of residence. Instead they would have to move to a completely new community or city.⁸¹ In addition to concerns over what would happen to affordable housing within the community, El Sereno officials were concerned about the historical homes within their neighborhood. Protections were put in place for a number of Pasadena and South Pasadena homes under the request of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. However, the small district in El Sereno identified by the trust as having historical homes in need of appropriate mitigation, were not offered the same protections by Caltrans.⁸² Discrepancies between how the freeway would affect South Pasadena and Pasadena in comparison to El Sereno left El Sereno residents feeling harshly discriminated against. While all the three communities had nearly identical resources at stake, El Sereno was not given anywhere close to the same mitigation considerations as Pasadena and South Pasadena.

What might explain this disparity in treatment by Caltrans? Ethnicity and economic status seemed to be the only differences between El Sereno and their neighbors, which would make this a clear case of environmental racism. Environmental racism can be explained as “an environmental policy, practice, or directive that differentially affects or disadvantages (whether intended or unintended) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color.”⁸³ The discrimination by Caltrans is a direct violation of the 14th Amendment of the United States which prohibits discrimination by any government body, and of Title VI of the post Civil War Acts of 1964 which “broadly prohibits the use of federal funds

⁸⁰Bullard, et. al., 164

⁸¹Bullard, et. al., 172

⁸²Bullard, et. al., 168

⁸³Bullard, et. al., 111

by recipients to discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin.”⁸⁴ The recognition of these violations led four individuals, including Hugo Garcia and Pete Navarro, to seek help from the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People’s (NAACP) Legal Defense and Education Fund to help build a case against Caltrans for environmental racism. The NAACP Legal Defense Fund worked with Mother’s of East Los Angeles, the El Sereno Neighborhood Action Committee, the El Sereno Organizing Committee, and the Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund (MALDEF) to file a lawsuit in September of 1995 against Caltrans for mitigation efforts that discriminated against El Sereno.⁸⁵ Residents wanted to make their case widely known to the public. With media connections from the NAACP’s Legal Defense Fund El Sereno’s fight against Caltrans made a presence in both the English and Spanish mainstream media. To spread the word about the court case within the community Mr. Garcia and others worked to educate the residents about the details of the lawsuit. Garcia and crew held community meetings, in which there was overwhelming participation and support. With the community’s support, plaintiffs were able to grab the attention of local officials, thus escalating public presence of their case.⁸⁶ The final decision ruled in favor of the plaintiffs and mitigation tactics were changed in El Sereno to match those in South Pasadena and Pasadena. Although El Sereno’s lawsuit was a major victory for the community, El Sereno has struggled to maintain an upper hand against Caltrans. El Sereno has proven they are capable their resources to win a lawsuit against stronghold, Caltrans. Can they do it again if the circumstance arises where their community is again at risk? Yes. The battle for Elephant Hill is the most recent success story of El Sereno.

Elephant Hill

Elephant Hill is the name given to an open hillside in El Sereno. The hillside provides a retreat where residents can go to enjoy a small piece of nature in a community with little open space. In the

⁸⁴Bullard, et. al., 157

⁸⁵ Bullard, et. al.

⁸⁶ Garcia, Hugo.

1980s, this hillside was under threat of development from Greenhill Investment Co., a real estate company wanting to use the land as a development space for luxury homes.⁸⁷ Upon hearing of this plan the El Sereno homeowners association began to express concerns regarding environmental safety, gentrification, and the loss of one of the only accessible open spaces in Los Angeles. In 1993, residents were disappointed to hear, not only the city's approval of this development, but also of the environmental impact report (EIR). Fortunately for El Sereno, however, a slump in the real estate market resulted in Greenhill Investment Co. postponing the development and ultimately selling the land rights to Monterey Hills Investors in 2003.⁸⁸ Immediately, a door-to-door campaign, led by local activists Hugo Garcia and Elva Yanez, was started to gather support in opposition of the development. After a more in depth look into the potential plans of Monterey Hills Investors, residents discovered the investment company had broadened the boundaries of the proposed development, arranging to build more than double the number of units originally planned. These revisions were made without an additional environmental review, convincing Garcia and Yanez to bring legal attention to the case.⁸⁹ In 2006 a coalition was formed helping residents gain political leverage and take legislative action against the developers. Only after ten public hearings did the City Council rule to require a supplemental environmental review prior to any development by Monterey Hill Investors.⁹⁰

Despite El Sereno's ongoing opposition, Monterey Hills Investors proceeded to argue for their rights to the original and additional land. In 2009 the company sued the city of Los Angeles for causing unnecessary damages and costing them millions of dollars.⁹¹ The investment company won the case against the city, but this did not stop El Sereno. With support from Councilmember Huizar and legal assistance from the Natural Resource Defense Council (NRDC), El Sereno residents appealed the court

⁸⁷ Sahgun, Louis. "El Sereno Saves the Heavens." Los Angeles Times 10 November 2009. Pg. 3

⁸⁸ Yanez, Elva. Engaging Communities. San Diego: Active Living Research Conference, 2010.

⁸⁹ Sahgun, Louis. Pg. 2

⁹⁰ Yanez, Elva

⁹¹ Zahniser, David. "Developer Wins Suit Against L.A. over El Sereno Housing Tract Project." Los Angeles Times 8 January 2009.

decision,⁹² and in November of 2009 Los Angeles finally settled the case with the developers by agreeing to purchase the 24 acre property and an additional five adjacent acres for \$9 million.⁹³ The newly purchased land will soon develop into a park with hiking trails, a panoramic viewing point and picnic areas.⁹⁴ This most immediate need for action coupled with the previous efforts made by El Sereno to campaign for their community's rights, prompted me to question how the community could establish a lasting confidence and structure which would allow them to defend their community in the future. To better understand the sentiments of El Sereno's residents I spoke directly with members of the community.

El Sereno: Their Voices Heard

The diversity in El Sereno fosters an array of opinions and concerns which I sought to capture through multiple interviews. I conducted eight separate interviews with residents and local political figures. Interviewees were chosen from stakeholders who had a history of involvement relating to the I-710 extension. Interview questions were designed to understand what stakeholders believe are the major issues facing El Sereno and what barriers exist, preventing successful community organizing. Interviewees were asked to describe El Sereno's strengths and weaknesses with regards to the community's organizational capacity and how these strengths and weaknesses have helped or hindered efforts against the 710 extension. Finally, interview subjects were asked about best approaches El Sereno could take to secure a larger role in decision making.

All interviews were conducted in person, if possible, or via phone. In person interviews were conducted either at the interviewees' home or at a local café. Four of the eight interviews were recorded with a handheld voice recorder and later transcribed onto a computer. The other four were

⁹² Yanez, Elva.

⁹³ Wave Staff. "City Council Settles With Elephant Hill Developer." [Los Angeles Wave](#) 5 November 2009.

⁹⁴ Sahgun, Louis.

recorded via note taking directly onto a computer during the interview. The following section describes interview subjects and the selection process by which they were chosen.

Interviews were meant to gather a wide range of opinions from stakeholders in El Sereno regarding the community. Two interviews, Marie Salas and Tom Williams, are El Sereno residents with a history of activism around the 710 freeway and are known throughout the community for their activism. Roberto Flores and John Smith^{95*} are active participants in the Eastside Café, a community space developed by residents of El Sereno to promote the self empowerment of the community. Interviewee, Smith, provided an outsider view of the community. He is not a resident but has only been involved with the Eastside Café for about one year. Pete Navarro and Hugo Garcia both were involved with the legal case against Caltrans involving environmental racism, and both have experiences with local government. The two also helped lead the El Sereno Action Committee. Elda Vizcarra, is the Planning and Transportation Deputy of Councilmember Huizar. He provides insight into the community of El Sereno from a political leader's perspective.

After conducting all interviews, similarities and differences among the various thoughts and opinions were carefully analyzed. Similarities from the interviews were then used to develop my recommendations for community development. The following section describes the findings from my interviews (See appendix, Fig. 4).

Interview Findings

Without contentions, El Sereno, like many eastside communities, struggles daily with a myriad of issues. One single largest concern cannot be agreed upon. Although differences in opinion can be dividing, some issues are recognized by most as concerns demanding significant attention. The only matter mentioned among all interviewees was housing. Housing in El Sereno is a chronic issue affecting nearly everyone within the community. A lack of housing throughout the city has made it difficult for

⁹⁵ Pseudonym

renters to become homeowners and even more difficult for people to find housing. According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development, if a household spends no more than 30% of their annual income on housing it is deemed “affordable.”⁹⁶ In Los Angeles, due to the housing shortage, 12 million renters and homeowners are paying more than 50% of their annual income for housing costs.⁹⁷ These exorbitant costs make it difficult for low-income residents to afford other basic needs. Within El Sereno, Caltrans has the potential to help alleviate scarcity problems by renting or selling homes purchased years ago at affordable rates.

Caltrans’ eagerness to purchase homes and land along the 710 corridor to have in the event of freeway expansions, makes Caltrans the largest landlord in El Sereno. As a government body, many feel Caltrans is obligated to rent and sell these properties at affordable rates to alleviate scarcity within the housing market and feel offense by how Caltrans is handling their homeownership. Nearly every block throughout the corridor has at least five empty homes.⁹⁸ For unknown reasons Caltrans is neither renting nor selling these properties which could provide a much needed home for low-income residents. Apart from the blatant disregard for the Los Angeles housing blight, Caltrans’ abandoned homes are causing nuisances for neighbors. Many properties, particularly those that are grouped together, attract criminal and delinquent behavior such as prostitution and drug deals, and are inviting to a myriad of drunks and homeless.⁹⁹ Properties which neighbors are able to protect from nefarious persons and activities, still face the challenge of keeping out the host of pests which find their way in. Neighbors must often fight off rat, cockroach, and raccoon infestations that cross over onto their properties.¹⁰⁰ Mismanagement by Caltrans also carries over to homes in which tenants reside.

⁹⁶ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Affordable Housing. 10 May 2010. 2010 <<http://www.hud.gov/offices/cpd/affordablehousing/>>.

⁹⁷ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

⁹⁸ Salas, Marie. El Sereno Resident, Caltrans Tenant Felisia Castaneda. 25 March 2010.

⁹⁹ Smith, Joe. Eastside Cafe Participant Felisia Castaneda. 24 March 2010.

¹⁰⁰ Salas, Marie.

Caltrans tenants, attracted to the homes for their affordable rates, are struggling to survive in deteriorating homes. Although Caltrans is a landlord to hundreds of residents, their role as a government transportation agency exempts them from the normal health and safety regulations imposed on conventional landlords. This absence of oversight allows Caltrans to neglect the needs of residents without liability. Tenants throughout the corridor were surprised to discover faulty plumbing, cracked windows, poorly constructed cabinets, termites, and rats, just months after beginning their lease with Caltrans. Homes that had appeared in good condition at the time of signing the lease were literally falling apart. Further infuriating residents are the lengths of time it takes Caltrans to make even the most simple and necessary repairs to their homes. The level of disrespect and abuse Caltrans put tenants through has dubbed them by residents as the largest slumlord in Los Angeles.¹⁰¹ This negligence from Caltrans has jeopardized their credibility as a government body and has lead residents and tenants to lose faith in the political structure as a whole.

The second issue that was nearly universally mentioned as a key issue facing the community was a feelings of disconnect between elected leaders and members of the community. Although the city is divided in a way that is supposed to grant more representation to individuals, local politicians are often criticized for catering only to the needs of their constituents who can secure them reelection. El Sereno cannot provide the same financial assets as their more affluent neighboring communities; but, the population of El Sereno does makes a necessary ally for any politician looking to raise enough votes for election.¹⁰² While politicians work to maintain a pleasant façade, El Sereno residents are growing more frustrated with a series of broken promises and mistreatments. Any agreements by political leaders with Caltrans is seen as a partnership with an organization many residents feel is the biggest threat to their community. Residents have seen these agreements in the form of public support for the 710 extension and the neglect by politicians to aid Caltrans tenants. While Pasadena and South Pasadena are granted

¹⁰¹ Salas, Marie

¹⁰² Tom Williams

the luxury of meeting with their elected leaders to discuss issues and concerns, residents of El Sereno are struggling to make their voices heard. When residents are able to reach politicians it is rare these encounters are taken seriously or amount to any real change. With one government body subjecting half of the community to slumlord conditions and elected officials turning their backs on this mistreatment, the government has proven more of a burden than benefit for El Sereno. Coupled with these issues, health and traffic were also mentioned at least in part by almost all the interviewees as major areas of concern.

Most of the residents interviewed made reference to a number of organizations most active in advocating for the rights of the residents. Some of the institutions mentioned were; the Eastside Café, Semillas del Pueblo, the El Sereno Neighborhood Action Committee, the El Sereno Organizing Committee, and the Tenants Association. I will use the following section to briefly describe each institution and their relationship with the community as described by the interviewees.

The Eastside Café “is a cultural and educational space founded by El Sereno residents for the evolvement of sustainable self-reliance through education, cultural awareness, health and the arts.”¹⁰³ The Café is founded on principles of self-governance and self-determination. Founders of the Café hope it will provide a place for the community to learn, develop networks, and reinforce and support activities that are conducive to the advancement of the community’s self reliance. The Café is a vibrant center for the surrounding community. Fandangos, large musical events, are often held at the Café as a way to unite people and promote the cultural vibrancy of the community. Every year the café hosts a celebration for Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), a Mexican holiday to remember and honor those who have passed away. In addition to these annual events, the Café is a space for English learning classes, women’s self defense classes, and is open to use by any member of the community. The

¹⁰³ Williams, Tom. [El Sereno Resident](#) Felisia Castaneda. 18 March 2010.

Eastside Café supports a community garden that serves as space for people to meet and learn about healthy living. The Café is entirely run by the community and receives no funds other than donations.

Semillas del Pueblo is a charter school developed specifically for the education of immigrant children of Los Angeles who might otherwise have a disadvantage at a mainstream school. The purpose of the school is to promote community engagement and a global perspective. The school uses the native Mesoamerican language of Nahuatl to help create cultural awareness and pride among the youth.¹⁰⁴ The school plays an important role within the community, as it serves as a cultural center and a haven for the development of the community's youth. In 2006 the school was under attack by people who feared the school was a communist institution trying to create a Zapatista movement in Los Angeles. These fears sparked anti-immigration and racist sentiment, leading to attacks on the school, including bomb threats. El Sereno, enraged by this blatant racism organized a group of community members to serve as security around the school. These security members became known as the "harmony keepers." Across the street Xocolat café was opened to help promote a cultural and community center within the vicinity of the school. The café also supplies food for the school.

The El Sereno Organizing Committee and the El Sereno Action Committee are two community organizations developed to provide the community with the support it needs to create change within the community. The organizations also work to challenge developments with adverse effects on the community. The El Sereno Organizing Committee is affiliated more with the community north of Huntington Drive and the El Sereno Action Committee affiliates itself more with the area south of Huntington Drive.

The Tenants Association is an organization of Caltrans tenants that hold regular meetings and provide a means of support to tenants who are experiencing difficulties with Caltrans. The association

¹⁰⁴ Semillas Community Schools. Mission and Vision. 2010. 2010
<http://www.dignidad.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=2&Itemid=4>.

has provided a basis for organization around the 710 as many members are worried about how construction of the extension will affect their homes and homeownership.

These institutions were mentioned with various opinions on the degree of their effectiveness to unite and organize the people. However, almost uniformly mentioned were examples of times when the community organized quickly and with force without any formal institution at all. The ability the community has developed to network and unite in times of need demonstrates an underlying foundation that cannot be qualified as an official institution. The strong network the community has developed over the years was mentioned by five of my interviewed subjects as being a major contributor to successes in the past. In addition to this important grass roots infrastructure, these examples of organizing make it apparent that there are numerous leaders within the community, capable of activating the people. Although this infrastructure forms a necessary base for community empowerment, they are weakened by identifiable faults within El Sereno.

At least once in every interview the divided nature of El Sereno was brought up as an inhibitor to organizing. The physical divide of Huntington Drive has partitioned the community into separate districts. The large road makes crossing between the two sides of El Sereno unsafe and inconvenient. As a result residents tend to frequent stores, churches, and other institutions on the side of Huntington Drive where they live. People in El Sereno are therefore less likely to familiarize themselves with others across Huntington Drive. Physical divisions have furthered the differences among community members by making it easier for residents to align themselves with their immediate neighbors rather than the community as a whole. Over time these alignments have developed their own attitudes and opinions about the most pressing issues and the best strategies to address them. Through their large number of registered voters, El Sereno has a fair amount of political leverage. However, disunity among the residents sends a powerful signal to political figures that the community can not pose a legitimate threat, weakening their influence. Without someone or something to bridge the boundaries of these

alliances, the community hinders its ability to create the broad based coalition it needs. These factions also impede the dispersion of information throughout El Sereno.

A lack of information was a constant point of discussion among all interview subjects. While my interview subjects were all aware of the magnitude of discrimination from Caltrans and the environmental injustices of the proposed 710 tunnel, they all reiterated that others were often unaware of how serious the issue was or completely oblivious to the discrimination faced by the community. The tunnel proposal is relatively recent and many people believe a tunnel will completely mitigate the effects they were worried about with the surface route extension. Coupled with this lack of information an abundance of misinformation from outside communities and Caltrans themselves is confusing many EL Sereno residents. Educating the people about the truth of El Sereno's plight was identified by nearly all the interviewees as necessary to advance organized opposition.

A significant amount of time was allotted during interviews to discuss what the best strategies were to achieve self-determination. Throughout the interviews two different concepts stood out as influential forces driving the directions El Sereno was taking in organizing efforts. The first is the more conventional idea of building governmental structures from the bottom up. This, approach involves inspiring the community, through education, to vocalize both what they support and oppose. Once the community is united in their efforts, pressure can be placed on local leaders and elected officers to allocate resources in a way which benefits the community most. Local government would be forced to relay the demands of the community to the next tier of government. In this fashion, legislation would change and develop that allowed for the community to take a larger role in the decision making process and thus promote a more sovereign community. To achieve this "good old fashion organizing"¹⁰⁵ door-to-door consultations, community meetings, and organized petitions and protests need to take place. Organizing and empowerment of the community should occur with the goal of improving living

¹⁰⁵ Navarro, Pete. Attorney, Community Activist Felisia Castaneda. 24 March 2010.

conditions for Caltrans tenants, diverting development from supplementing the automobile to supplementing transit, and establishing a system in which El Sereno can take part in decision making rather than be forced to fight it. The alternate agenda aspires to similar goals; however, it has a more revolutionary approach with focus on a comprehensive, long-term goal.

The second approach to self-determination involves a more deep rooted shift in the attitudes and actions of the people. This approach leaves out political figures completely and relies on the strengths and abilities of the community to lead El Sereno to a prosperous future. While some believe working with governments to create positive changes backed by legislative decisions is the best way to achieve their goal, this alternate idea excludes the government from dictating what the people do. If the community can unite and successfully determine what they need to do for the benefit of El Sereno and then carry out these actions, the governments will be forced to work around the agenda of the people. This will generate a new system where people are not constricted by bureaucratic regulations, but governments play a secondary role to the natural leadership within the community. In this strategy, the people must resist the development of a harmful freeway extension through their community and in the process develop a stronger community network that will help empower them to stop relying on the current government system for anything. El Sereno, has everything necessary to direct themselves towards a healthy and successful future; however, the people must learn to collectively use these assets to achieve their goals when they feel the time is right. Through popular education and community discussions about what people want from the community, a new form of government will take hold where El Sereno residents are the sole determiner of what happens in the community.

El Sereno has effectively utilized some of the most important elements of community organizing. Natural leaders who recognize tangible threats to the community are aware of what strategies best communicate these threats to the rest of the community. Creating an environment where residents can recognize their neighbors are experiencing similar injustices is a tool leaders have

successfully used to inspire activism and form a base for organizing. However, El Sereno has not identified issues that can unite the community in its entirety. The 710 extension has the potential to be this unifying agent if leaders can continue to use their skills in a positive manner to inspire residents.

Future Organizing in El Sereno and Recommendations

By developing the infrastructure already in place within the community and efficiently utilizing its unique assets, El Sereno residents have the potential to make demands from Caltrans and set a precedent of community resistance to all policies, projects, and people that do not directly benefit the community. However, nothing will strengthen El Sereno more than unifying themselves completely. If residents are unable to bridge the social and physical barriers that divide them, their efforts may result in detrimental inefficiencies.

For years the community has felt underrepresented and discriminated against by those outside the community. Efforts by Pasadena and South Pasadena to rally El Sereno against the freeway have proved ineffective and in some cases caused feelings of confusion and indignation. These feelings are resultant from the large contrasts between the communities. Although, these communities may all want to oppose a freeway running through their homes, cultural and societal differences motivate them in unique ways. The first step in empowering El Sereno is to rid them of these feelings of subordination and belittlement by outside forces.

Allowing the community to openly discuss among themselves the recent events involving the 710 will provide an opportunity for them to discover what they want and don't want. Identifying what El Sereno residents want without the influence of Pasadena, South Pasadena, or other outside sources will help distinguish the community from the rest of Los Angeles and the surrounding area, allowing them to recognize they are, in fact, a unique and separate community with unique needs. Setting up a space where these dialogues can be held is an important step in establishing a sense of place for the community. Although there are a few organizations, mainly the Eastside Café, that have a space where

such meetings can take place, these organizations have already built a foundation based on specific ideologies and established a system of governance. A more neutral space that relates to the entire community should serve as the meeting place for future organizing. The chosen establishment should be a symbol of culture and tolerance and provide an environment conducive to learning and uniting residents. Two of the most appropriate institutions are the Semillas del Pueblo School and the community garden.

Schools, aside from their historical role as a community meeting place, are a learning environment. They naturally instill a sense of trust in the community because it is where parents send their children and where the youth can develop relationships, find mentors, and make friends. Semillas, in addition to a school, is also a cultural center. The stress Semillas places on cultural values and youth empowerment makes it an institution that the largely Hispanic population of El Sereno can relate to. In addition to exemplifying the intrinsic values of the community, Semillas has already demonstrated itself as an agent of unity within the community. In 2006, when the school was under attack from hostile reactionaries, El Sereno residents immediately joined forces to protect the school and the children. The strength Semillas has to pull the community together would make it an ideal place to commence organizing efforts.

The community garden has a different history than the Semillas school; however, it represents similar values and also has potential to serve as a powerful unifying agent. The purpose of the garden is to serve as a community space and to promote and educate people on healthy lifestyles. For many, a place that makes healthy, fresh food available is a fortuitous benefit for the community. Gardens themselves are often thought of as a place of peace and tranquility and by focusing a community group around the garden people would learn to appreciate the environment as a resource in addition to a luxury. The garden would provide a physical resource that residents can all appreciate and therefore learn to share. Additionally, utilizing the garden in this way would strengthen the community connection

to the garden and thus pressure Caltrans to sell or donate the space to the community. Any attempts by Caltrans to destroy the garden would be taken as a direct attack on community sovereignty. Choosing an appropriate meeting place is important because it will contribute to the atmosphere of the meeting and thus help dictate the success of the gathering.

Before discussions of wants and needs commence it is important to inform the community of exactly what current issues are affecting them. A general meeting must be held to educate El Sereno about the discrimination they have faced and what the future will hold for the community with and without the 710 extension. The meeting should consist of a panel of El Sereno residents who have a deep understanding of the various issues facing the community and involving the 710. Keeping the panel to local residents would insure that information explains the issues specific to El Sereno and is presented in a way that is relatable to the community. Panelists should include someone to speak about tenant's issues and the housing shortage, another to speak about the lawsuit filed against Caltrans and the implications it has on the future, and someone else to address health. The meeting should consist of presentations by the panel followed by a question and answer session. At the end everyone should leave with a fact sheet containing key points. The first meeting should strictly be informational, allowing people to think, in their own time, about what this information means and how or if they want to address the issues presented. The next challenge will be finding a way to get people to the meeting.

Outreach will be an important and difficult factor in the development of a successful campaign against Caltrans and the creation of an environmental organization. While outreach will progressively get easier as networks grow and strengthen, a system must develop that enhances the efficiency of information dispersion. Previous experience has proven that simple door-to-door invitations are both manageable and successful. For the first meeting the session should be advertised as "just information," to lessen any pressures or fears people may have about attending a gathering with a strict agenda. An effective way to advertise this meeting throughout the community is to recruit help from those who are

already active. Marie Salas was able to get over three hundred Caltrans tenants from the 710 corridor to come to her house through a simple invitation to discuss the conditions which they were subjected to by Caltrans. Through her activism as a Caltrans tenant she has been able to create numerous connections among corridor residents. People have come to trust her as a reliable source of information and advice. There are others who have demonstrated an ability to gather a number of people in just a few days time. Working with these individuals in a cohesive fashion will almost guarantee a large turnout for the informational meeting. Once this initial crowd is gathered an announcement should be made explaining when the next meeting will be and what to expect at it. A calendar listing the dates and times of meetings and community events should be attached to the take home fact sheet.

To ensure this meeting attracts people from both sides of Huntington Drive as well as from any factions that have emerged in El Sereno, committees should form from each area. These neighborhood committees would work in a similar fashion to the Tier 1 and 2 committees established by Metro and Caltrans for south 710 corridor residents. They would have the responsibility for delivering information to their neighbors. In addition to dispersing information, these representatives should serve as a voice, expressing the most important issues facing that region of El Sereno. These committees should form on a volunteer basis. Those who feel they need specific representation for their neighbors would step forward to do so. By spreading these responsibilities to multiple people, residents would have a closer, more recognizable face to express their concerns too. Additionally, localizing this representation to streets or blocks would build stronger relationships and increase involvement. Once the stage is set for a community discussion about the 710 extension and environmental justice, residents interested in creating a campaign will continue planning.

It is important to remember that residents have long been subjected to discriminatory tactics by transportation planners who do not have El Sereno's interests at heart. For a campaign to be successful ideas and logistics must be determined solely by residents of El Sereno. The most valuable thing that can

be offered from the outside is information accessible to the entire community, something that has been withheld from them numerous times before. Once this information is dispersed, El Sereno will immediately increase the opportunity and potential it has to organize in such a way to produce similar results as their neighbors in Pasadena and South Pasadena. What I will suggest in the following paragraphs is a description of key elements that an environmental justice organization in El Sereno might consist of.

People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources (PODER) is an environmental justice organization started in Austin, Texas in response to discriminatory planning strategies implemented throughout the city of Austin. Similar to El Sereno, east Austin is comprised of a largely Hispanic population who contends with freeways and major roadways running through their communities.¹⁰⁶ El Sereno could benefit from similar strategies PODER is utilizing in their Transportation and Community Empowerment Campaign. PODER aims “to increase the participation of communities of color in corporate and government decision making related to toxic pollution, economic development and their impact on our neighborhoods”¹⁰⁷ through community education and empowerment. One of the main tools PODER uses to achieve these goals is community workshops. These workshops are held in different neighborhoods to help the community identify what their transportation needs are. PODER utilizes a video to convey the impact transportation has on the community and follows the viewing with an open discussion of what the community needs and how to attain these needs.¹⁰⁸ In El Sereno these small workshops could be a useful tool to induce productive discussions from residents.

A representative from the neighborhood committees could lead workshops after attending a community wide workshop demonstrating how they should run. The purpose of working in small neighborhood groups is to promote complete participation. At the same time having a representative

¹⁰⁶ Bullard, et. al., 110

¹⁰⁷ Resources, People Organized in Defense of Earth and Her. Mission. 2010. 2010 <<http://www.poder-texas.org/mission.html>>.

¹⁰⁸ Bullard, et. al., 111

committee from each neighborhood ensures that there is widespread communication. Workshops could occur as frequently as the community deemed necessary and could focus on a specific campaign or serve as an update to what is happening within the community. El Sereno should also decide on periodic times to hold community wide meetings, similar to the first informational meeting I previously described. This meeting would likely occur at least once per year to ensure all the neighborhood committees were operating at a similar level. In addition to fostering the participation of every individual, these workshop levels would provide a range of ways in which to participate. Arranging for the large annual meetings and workshops may take more time and effort than the weekly or monthly neighborhood workshops but would occur less frequently. In this way, people can volunteer for a leadership role that best suits their time and ability. Residents, of course, would also have the opportunity to be an attendee only, if they choose not to or cannot partake in any planning processes. Workshops will encourage an open dialogue among residents and will simultaneously function as a social gathering, strengthening community networks and fostering a sense of unity.

Another component of PODER that El Sereno could benefit from instigating is their focus on youth empowerment. Aside from the fact that El Sereno has a large youth population, the decades long debate over the 710 extension suggest it may be beneficial to prepare the youth for future contentions of a similar nature. Additionally, including the youth in the development of this new system will ensure it remains intact for years to come. Furthermore, youth are unique stakeholders in transportation issues because “youth are most vulnerable to poor transportation injustices, in access and safety.”¹⁰⁹ Youth are most dependent on public transit and are most susceptible to the hazards of pedestrian and bike activity due to their inability to drive. In a community like El Sereno, where the lack of after school and youth activities is an issue, involving them in the development of a decision making system could be a powerful tool to enable and educate the youth. Youth empowerment programs could consist of two

¹⁰⁹ Bullard, et. al., 111

types: educational and recreational. Educational programs would include workshops similar to those held for the general community; however, these workshops would have a more dynamic atmosphere and be directed towards youth culture. Recreational activities would serve to develop relationships among El Sereno's youth and strengthen community networks. Recreational activities could be free concerts, open-mic nights, or inter-mural sport activities.

The Eastside Café is a hub for local artists and the café is currently in the process of developing a concert series with a specific goal of encouraging communication and networking among residents as well as promoting awareness of the 710 extension. With thorough advertisement of these events, this series will be influential in reinforcing the web of relationships that unites the community.

Although the development of this organizational system will be largely volunteer based, monetary resources will undoubtedly still be necessary. Historically, obtaining monetary support for campaigns in El Sereno has been difficult. Developing a unified organizational system with support of the entire community will make both monetary and non-monetary resources more abundant. Additional funding could come from a variety of sources. The most immediate source of funds for community projects and programs is the Neighborhood Council. The council is granted up to \$50,000 dollars per fiscal year to allocate as it deems necessary. As the council, in essence, works for the community, residents of El Sereno, through this system of tiered democracy, will decide how to allocate the funds granted to the Neighborhood Council. Additional funds could be secured through grants and partnerships with non-profit organizations. Edel Vizcarra the Planning and Transportation Deputy to Councilmember Huizar noted in my interview that the council member's resources are available to assist in grant writing as well as expediting the permit process for various construction projects. Although these resources from the city council have nearly always been available, most people were unaware of their availability or how to acquire them. Vizcarra recommends contacting the El Sereno field staff, the city hall office, or him directly to learn more about these opportunities. The city council, however,

should serve as a secondary resource to the Neighborhood Council and thirdly to the direct resources and funds from community members.

Conclusion

Rapidly changing populations and growing consumer demands have resulted in a call to state and local governments by the federal government to create proposals to accommodate these changes. Southern California, in response to this request, has taken on the challenge of increasing port and corridor capacity, improving efficiency, and sustaining the environment and well-being of surrounding communities. Transportation agencies have played a major role in this planning. Various projects have been proposed to increase capacity on freeways and facilitate traffic. One project getting attention from both state and city transportation agencies is the I-710 freeway. This freeway is one of the largest arteries connecting the Los Angeles and Long Beach ports inland, and thus is a key component of the goods movement infrastructure. Expansion project along the entire corridor have resulted in widespread community concerns. In response to these concerns transportation planners have developed ways to include communities in the planning process. However, one community is faced with continuous neglect and oppression.

El Sereno's position at the terminus of the 710, makes them a key stakeholder in the proposed tunnel extension which would connect the freeway to an interchange at the 210 freeway in Pasadena. Pasadena and South Pasadena have rallied, for decades, in opposition of this extension for fear it will have severe adverse effects on the community. Unable to come up with the same resources as Pasadena and South Pasadena, El Sereno has struggled to have their demands answered by Caltrans in the same way as their neighbors have. This discrepancy is a blatant racist injustice by transportation planners yet has not been addressed.

After analyzing information gathered from various residents in El Sereno, it is clear these injustices are taking a major toll on the quality of life of residents. Currently, the community has no

strong voice against the construction of the 710 extension. However, previous successful organizing campaigns are proof that the community has the potential to stand up to Caltrans and self-determine the future of their community. By tapping into the intangible assets the community holds, such a strong community network and natural born leaders, El Sereno can create a forceful campaign against the freeway and utilize this campaign to form the basis of a lasting environmental justice organization. Such an organization would set an example for other communities facing oppression from transportation planners and would also set an important precedent allowing communities to become more sovereign within a large metropolitan area.

Appendix

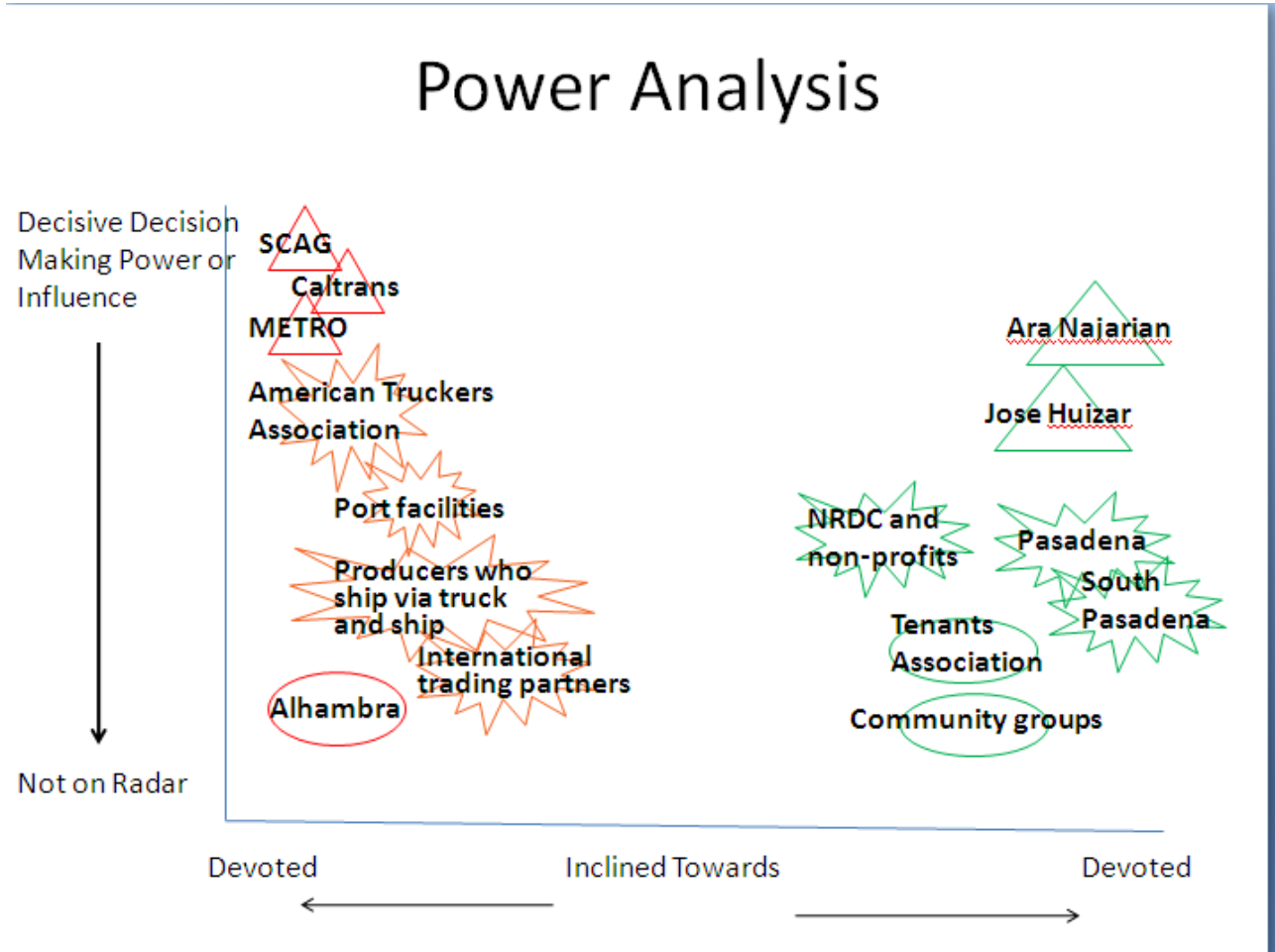


Figure 3

	Edel Vizcarra	Pete Navarro	Hugo Garcia	Roberto Flores	Joe Smith	Marie Salas	Tom Williams
Problems/Issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Huizar sits on metro board</u> • traffic • lack of open space for public use • community divided • No economic structure • housing • <u>unwalkable neighborhood</u> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • environment • racism • land use • recreation • Traffic • Money • Gentrification • No economic structure • lack of afterschool programs • Political disconnect • gang activity • Vandalism • abandoned vehicles • illegal dumping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing • discrimination • racism • transportation • health • unemployment • “urban island” • migration to other communities • Slumlord 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • privatization of everything • exploitation • food sovereignty • housing • jobs • Political disconnect • Money • health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slumlord • Political disconnect 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrimination • Slumlord • Displacement • health • housing • community unity • traffic • noise • Money • Political Disconnect • jobs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Money • PPPs • Displacement • Health • Jobs • low graduation rate • Political disconnect

Figure 4