2019

Exploring Transit-Based Environmental Injustices in San Gabriel Valley and Greater Los Angeles

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Recommended Citation

https://scholarship.claremont.edu/pomona_theses/198
Exploring Transit-Based Environmental Injustices in San Gabriel Valley and Greater Los Angeles

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In partial fulfillment of a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Environmental Analysis, 2018-2019 academic year at Pomona College, Claremont, California

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Abstract

This thesis attempts to disentangle the multilayered interactions between Greater Los Angeles’s history, its built environment, and its inequitable treatment of different peoples, focusing on how transportation in surrounding suburban communities like San Gabriel Valley has developed in relation to the inner city of Los Angeles. Greater Los Angeles contains a long, winding trajectory of transit-based environmental injustices, from the indigenous societies being overtaken by the Spanish missions, to the railroads and streetcars boosting the farmlands and urban growth of Los Angeles, leading into the decline of transit and rise of automobile-oriented suburbia. Within the San Gabriel Valley, the suburban community of El Monte has a varied history in its racialized spatiality and transportation development, rising from a former agricultural hub and to its more recent growth as a vibrant working-class suburb full of minorities. Based on a case study of El Monte’s past and present built environment, this thesis looks at the present situation of El Monte’s downtown district, including a walkthrough of its ongoing downtown revitalization project centered on transit-oriented development around the newly renovated regional bus station. This thesis finds the city of El Monte and Greater Los Angeles’s transit agencies have approached the renewed economic and public interest in transit in disconnected ways, leading to mixed results for its working-class minority populace, but also finds avenues in which the government and the public can cooperatively create more equitable transit-based communities for the future.

Key words: transportation, environmental justice, environmental history
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Professor Guillermo Douglass-Jaimes and Professor Char Miller for their in-depth wisdom, helpful feedback, and unending patience overseeing my thesis. Both of you have been highly influential in my work as an Environmental Analysis major and as a Pomona College student, and for that I am forever grateful. I am also thankful to the librarians and resources of the Claremont Colleges Honnold-Mudd Library and LA Metro’s Dorothy Peyton Gray Transportation Library and Archive. Without their online and physical information, I could not have written this thesis.

I would also like to thank everyone involved in the Environmental Analysis Program at Pomona College and the Claremont Colleges, its faculty, workers, and students, for supporting this thesis and inspiring me with their passions and interests throughout my time in college. In particular, I want to thank Professor Susan Phillips for her Urban Environments class, much of which helped inform me on my thesis writing topic, Professor Lance Neckar, whose classes I have taken and guidance throughout my time in college has helped me discover my passion for studying the built environment, and Professor Marc Los Huertos, whose summer research lab my freshman year introduced me to the pressing need for equitable environmental work.

Thank you to Ma, Ba, my brother Alex, my extended family, my friends, and everyone that has supported my academic and personal growth at Pomona College. Without this community to keep me accountable and raise me up, I would not be where I am today.
Introduction

For many outsiders and (even) many locals, “Los Angeles” and “public transportation” are words that do not mix, like water and oil. Looking down on a map or satellite imagery of Southern California’s spread-out matrix of roads and freeways, one can easily attribute the entirety of Greater Los Angeles’s famed suburban sprawl and outward growth to the region’s love affair with automobiles and driving. For statistical purposes, the U.S. Census Bureau’s defines the Los Angeles-Long Beach Combined Statistical Area as five counties in Southern California—Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside—covering over 30,000 square miles and containing over 18 million residents. However, the vast majority of the population reside within a smaller, continuously built-up area known as Greater Los Angeles (Figure 1). The freeways in this vast and disparate region are some of America’s (and the world’s) most congested roads. In many ways, the traffic-clogged freeway of Southern California seems to symbolize a stark opposition to the public transportation systems of most other American metropolitan areas like New York City or Chicago.

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Figure 1. The five counties of that make up the built-up area of Greater Los Angeles contains vast amounts of sparsely uninhabited deserts and mountains in the east and north. The entire five-county area is called the “Los Angeles-Long Beach Combined Statistical Area” by the U.S. Census Bureau. The continuously built-up area of Greater Los Angeles is roughly contained within the dashed lines.²

²“Los Angeles-Long Beach, CA Combined Statistical Area.”
However, anyone who says Greater Los Angeles residents rely solely on the car without any means of transit would be sorely mistaken. The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, commonly known as LA Metro, runs the largest transit agency by ridership in the United States outside of the New York metropolitan area. According to LA Metro’s own research department, its service area covered over 9.6 million residents in Greater Los Angeles and provided 285 million bus rides and 113 million train rides in the year 2017 alone. In addition, many other regional and municipal transit agencies run within Los Angeles County, such as Foothill Transit in San Gabriel Valley and Pomona Valley, as well as transit agencies outside Los Angeles County that LA Metro connects with, like the Metrolink trains that serve the five counties of Greater Los Angeles.

Many of these public transportation options did not exist just thirty years prior, when LA Metro’s predecessor, the Southern California Rapid Transit District (RTD), controlled the vast majority of Greater Los Angeles’s vastly underfunded transit system. In 1980, Los Angeles County voters approved Proposition A, a county tax increase which would fund the region’s first light rail and subway systems built in the subsequent decade. For the first three years, the proposition subsidized the reduction in RTD bus fares from 85 cents to 50 cents, leading to a ballooning of bus ridership from 354 million in 1982 to nearly 500 million by 1985, the peak year for bus ridership.

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3 “About Metro.”
4 “Metro Research”; “Interactive Estimated Ridership Stats.”
5 “Fast Facts.”
Without increased bus service to complement this massive influx of bus riders, most of them lower-income people of color, transit overcrowding occurred in more populated bus corridors like South Central Los Angeles. Rather than increase bus services, RTD chose to not continue its subsidy after 1985, instead shifting its bus subsidy into its ongoing rail projects. This effectively reallocated public money away from lower-income bus riders, many of them relying on bus as their sole form of transportation, toward wealthier driving constituents that voted for the proposition to fund the choice of riding commuter rail. In 1994, a coalition of everyday bus riders, community activists, urban academics, and progressive politicians known as the Bus Riders Union sued RTD’s successor agency LA Metro, coining the term transit racism to describe the agency’s neglect of lower-income riders of color as a violation of their civil rights.

Transit agencies around Southern California faced tightening budgets that limited its ability to serve all its constituents with different transportation needs and wants. Because a huge proportion of the population lived in the suburbs, the public agencies decided to fund expensive new projects stretching miles out into Los Angeles’s vast sprawl, with little consideration for building and improving upon existing services from the past. In a sense, this appears to be a clear-cut issue of geographic and modal disparity, with the issue of want for rail in wealthier suburbs versus the need for buses in poorer inner cities. That is how the Bus Riders Union framed their civil rights lawsuit against LA Metro, and much of existing environmental justice literature focuses on the racialized geospatial dynamic between poorer urban communities and wealthier

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8 Grengs, “Community-Based Planning as a Source of Political Change: The Transit Equity Movement of Los Angeles’ Bus Riders Union.”
suburban communities. However, what I would find in my research was that in suburban areas, there also exists a group of transit-dependent riders who have been historically overlooked due to the association of wealth and car ownership with the suburbs.

In fact, as I delved into the suburbs around the City of Los Angeles, I found a hidden history long before the first automobile or freeway had arrived in the region. Beneath the trains and streetcars that laid the foundations for Greater Los Angeles’s growth patterns, I found the underlying origins of Greater Los Angeles’s rail-induced development came from the colonization of its fertile valleys fit for agriculture, which once employed thousands of indigenous and immigrant farmworkers. With this in mind, the following questions drive my thesis: how has the racialized and classist history of transportation-based urban planning of the built environment in Greater Los Angeles perpetuated transit-based inequities? How have transportation infrastructure projects created unequal suburban landscapes and transit-based inequities, thereby affecting life opportunities and outcomes for disparate communities within them? How has the long history of planned urban development in Greater Los Angeles contributed to cycles of erasure and displacement for the different peoples living here, leading to environmental injustice? In the San Gabriel Valley suburb of El Monte, I attempt to use the geospatial and temporal evolution of the city’s transportation networks throughout its history as a case study to connect specific transportation-related developments with aspects of other urban environmental and social injustices around Greater Los Angeles. Based on background research and on-the-ground findings around El Monte’s city center, I attempt to map out potential shortfalls and limitations of ongoing transit-based
urban redevelopments and its interaction with existing suburban environments. From this, I explore how transportation problems can create avenues for collaboration across governmental levels and communities.

The first chapter of my thesis will provide background academic literature, contextualizing the environmental justice issues surrounding urban planning in the lens of transportation, overlaid on interactions between transportation, urban developments, and community responses in the history of Greater Los Angeles and Southern California. In particular I focus on how urban bus riders versus suburban bus riders received different services and treatment due to the different political recourses afforded to them. From there, I will lay out the long history of human developments tied to transportation in Greater Los Angeles, from the pre-colonial era all the way to the Bus Riders Union lawsuit with LA Metro. The second chapter will dive into El Monte, a large suburban community in Greater Los Angeles area and its tied histories of transportation development with larger societal conflicts and injustices, ending on the recent transit-oriented redevelopment in and around El Monte’s historic Downtown Main Street district. The third chapter will analyze existing conflicts and missed opportunities in El Monte’s current redevelopment and the community’s possible paths forward, connecting it back to Greater Los Angeles’s issues around history, transit planning, and environmental justice issues, and the potentials for creating more equitable transit redevelopment in the future.
Chapter I: The Narrative and History of Transportation

Environmental Justice: Literature on Transit Planning in Greater Los Angeles

Racial and socioeconomic inequity in the realm of urban planning has been well-documented for decades, from the 20th century Home Ownership Loan Company maps redlining major metropolitan areas based on their neighborhoods’ race and class makeup,9 to environmental activism movements against polluting freeways and industries from entering vulnerable communities.10 Most environmental activism up until the 1980s, such as the mid-century opposition against the destruction of neighborhoods for freeways, had been framed as extensions of other pressing issues of the time, such as civil rights, discrimination, and housing inequity against marginalized communities based upon disproportionate environmental hazards.

On the other hand, the framing of environmental justice as a unique movement for academic scholarship is a more recent phenomenon. In Laura Pulido’s landmark piece, *Rethinking Environmental Racism: White Privilege and Urban Development in Southern California*, Pulido described environmental justice as a more recent term, an “inclusive” and “more politicized conception” for the need to create an economic and social movement in fighting existing environmental racism.11 In the paper, she takes apart the arguments against the existence of environmental racism in the City of Los Angeles away from purposeful intent of individual companies to relocate in poorer communities.

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10 Avila, “L.A.’s Invisible Freeway Revolt”; Gottlieb, “Cars and Freeway in the City.”
with high concentrations of black and Latinx populations. Ofentimes, she noted, influential politicians and scholars would argue instead that a highly polluting industrial plant chose a site based on market conditions, or that communities themselves chose to live near polluting sites based on their lower living costs. Pulido points out that intent is not relevant when it comes to the impacts they have on communities, since environmentally hazardous actions disproportionately affect lower-income black and Latinx communities, regardless of the intent of those who pursue these actions. By shifting the focus away from equating inability to prove malicious intent as proof environmental racism did not exist, Pulido emphasized the lack of privilege in communities that face combined issues of unhealthy human-made environments with lower socioeconomic, racial, and political ability to fight against disproportionate environmentally injustice to wreck their physical surroundings and neighborhoods. This becomes important in the development of Los Angeles throughout its history, since a long history of racist and classist policies like redlining (as in the maps of “desirability” for the Home Owners Loan Corporation) cemented the city and its surrounding communities’ normalization of racist and classist individual actions like racially-motivated housing covenants and homeowners’ associations. Inversely, Pulido makes the claim that by not choosing to build in more wealthy and/or white, communities, individual owners of environmentally hazardous sites inadvertently contribute to America’s underlying existence of white privilege. Pulido’s point is poignant in that it emphasizes an individual person does not need to intend a racist,

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13 Pulido.
classist, or any other damaging act to personally benefit from their associations to the demographic groups or categories society places them under.

However, the identity of one person as defined by their surrounding society is neither monolithic nor cut in stone; a person’s interactions with the built environments they inhabit shapes the way they view themselves in relation to their physical surroundings and surrounding society. Edward Soja explores how the term spatial justice entails working to combat systemic inequities with communities united by a common geospatial location, or in the case of Bus Riders’ Union, a common mode of transport. One interesting thing to note is the different ways bus ridership and service were affected in the suburbs versus the inner city in the late 20th century. These two communities responded in different ways to push back against RTD’s bus service cuts, leading to the formation of a grassroots coalition (Bus Riders Union) and the creation of a separate transit agency (Foothill Transit) for urban and suburban riders, respectively.

In more middle-class suburban places like San Gabriel Valley and Pomona Valley east of Los Angeles, RTD proposed cancelling suburban bus routes in anticipation of new light rail lines into the region, even though the new rail lines had little overlap with most of the existing bus lines. Bolstered by support from the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, which managed all countywide transportation funding, and Los Angeles County Supervisor Pete Schabarum, municipal governments in these two valleys organized a new public agency called Foothill Transit to protect existing its bus riders. To the ire of RTD’s union workers, Foothill Transit contracted service out to private bus companies that paid much lower wages for its workers. The unions sued Foothill Transit, hoping the courts would
reintegrate it into RTD, but to no avail.\textsuperscript{14} Despite the agency’s controversial start, Foothill Transit managed to provide cheaper bus fares for residents in San Gabriel and Pomona Valleys compared to RTD, while running at a cheaper cost per-mile.\textsuperscript{15} Foothill Transit’s ability to provide cheaper transit for its suburban riders came partly at the expense of RTD’s existing unionized bus drivers, showing how transit-based spatial justice is not as black and white as it may seem.

Unlike its eastern neighbors in San Gabriel Valley, residents in South Central, Koreatown, and other working-class Los Angeles neighborhoods like them had neither the political influence nor financial ability to create a separate bus agency as RTD ran its budgets deep into the red. By the time the first light rail train on the Blue Line between Downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach opened for business in 1990, RTD was already over $7 billion in debt before it had finished constructing the Red Line subway.\textsuperscript{16} In 1993, RTD was combined with the Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, creating the modern-day Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (commonly known as LA Metro or simply Metro). This new “multi-modal super agency” subsumed the formerly separate public transportation services provided by RTD and the at-large transportation funding provided by the Transportation Commission; LA Metro would control everything related to countywide transportation, from running existing transit services and continuing Proposition A’s rail projects to maintaining the county’s entire freeway network. LA Metro was responsible for not just

\textsuperscript{14} Quintana, “Foothill Transit Trial Begins.”
\textsuperscript{15} Rutten and Muir, “NEWS ANALYSIS.”
\textsuperscript{16} Grengs, “Community-Based Planning as a Source of Political Change: The Transit Equity Movement of Los Angeles’ Bus Riders Union.”
the county’s transit riders but also millions of its driving commuters that expected new rail lines, reduced its already tenuous commitment to transit-dependent riders further. LA Metro pushed ahead in its multi-billion-dollar rail ambitions, opening the first phase of the Red Line subway in 1993. Meanwhile, LA Metro’s commission voted to reduce bus service and to remove the monthly and weekly transit passes, a popular cost-saving choice for its bus riders.17

The proposal to remove the monthly bus pass was the last straw for the Bus Riders Union. In 1993, they began the process of bringing a lawsuit against LA Metro to court. According to the group, LA Metro was shifting transit funds away from lower-income bus riders and communities of color dependent on bus transit to build out its new light rail and subway projects, which mostly benefitting higher-income communities with higher white populations that could afford to drive. By focusing on exorbitant rail projects in more wealthy white regions of the county, LA Metro discriminated against low-income riders and historically marginalized neighborhoods by ignoring their disproportionate needs for transit services in Los Angeles County, even if the agency did not have any explicit intention of hurting these groups. The Bus Riders Union called this transit racism, and they argued this constituted a violation of Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, since any public agency with federal funding could not discriminate on the basis of race, color, or national origin.18

The Bus Riders’ Union proved the agency was committing transit racism by showing impact the outsized focus of time and resources LA Metro spent on suburban

17 Grengs.
18 Soja, “Seeking Spatial Justice in Los Angeles.”
rail projects compared to their underserved, overworked urban buses, even when LA Metro argued their lack of intent to harm transit-dependent communities absolved them of responsibility to affected riders. While over 95 percent of its bus riders were black and/or Latinx in 1990, initial ride counts for the new rail lines had a much higher white ridership. LA Metro committed transit-based environmental injustice because their need-blind approach to building out its rail transit system did not consider existing systemic inequities in their transit system. Minorities in poor transit-dependent communities were overcrowding in buses, while white people in car-centric affluent communities got clean, underused trains. In the 1996 landmark settlement with BRU, LA Metro committed $2 billion to replacing its old diesel buses, increasing the size of its bus fleet, and other bus improvements to increase reliability and reduce overcrowding. The Bus Riders Union’s success showed that transit agencies can create more equitable transit for more people by collaborating with community activists, rather than fighting with them in expensive adversarial litigation. Transparency in the process of planning transit projects can benefits all parties involved, and equitable transit can affect the life opportunities by allowing individuals to access services they may not receive within walking distance of their homes.

Edward Soja’s emphasis on the importance of bus transit access for poorer residents of Greater Los Angeles is exemplified by Eun Jin Shin, who found in her case study of San Gabriel Valley that the region’s transit disparity in access to opportunities like jobs, recreation, and government services is higher than the surface-level

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19 Lee, “Economic Justice For Los Angeles Bus Riders!”
20 Lee.
geographic disparity.\textsuperscript{21} Shin’s study found the built environment of San Gabriel Valley and other suburban areas like it in Greater Los Angeles exacerbates inequity in transportation accessibility, since most services are available by driving but neither within walking distance of residents nor easily reached by existing modes of public transit. Families that can afford a car or live in an area that is close in proximity to most services, generally denser (and usually more expensive) areas of the suburbs, can take the convenience of driving for granted. However, the lack of bikeable or walkable accessibility in services, though provided, means those without a car or far away from sparse transit services cannot get to opportunities that determine one’s quality of life beyond jobs and employment opportunities.

The academic literature cited above reflect that underneath the surface of Greater Los Angeles’s supposedly auto-oriented sprawl and suburbia lies multiple issues of race and class. However, much of this disparity had begun developing before the freeways or even the car became dominant. The urban-suburban narrative that has engrained itself in the American mindset is complicated on the grounds of Greater Los Angeles, where long histories of de facto and de jure inequities outside of the immediate city have shaped the way the entire region has grown throughout different periods of settlement. For us to understand how centuries of changing transportation has impacted the entire region’s development and its peoples in different ways, we must understand Greater Los Angeles’s unique history of transportation far before the first automobile rolled onto its streets.

\textsuperscript{21} Shin, “Disparities in Access to Opportunities across Neighborhoods Types.”
Mountain, Valley, and Sea: Early Los Angeles

For thousands of years before Spanish ranchers, missionaires, and conquistadors existed, distinct indigenous groups lived along the semi-arid section of the Pacific coast we know today as Southern California. The largest groups were Tongva or K’izh people in present-day Los Angeles Basin stretching into Orange County, San Gabriel Valley, and San Bernardino Valley, Cahuilla further west inland towards the desert, and Chumash along the coastal ranges of the Santa Monica Mountains and up into the Central Coast. Trails left behind by the Tongva, Cahuilla, and Chumash show a sophisticated network of trade and cultural interaction between settlements along the coast and as far inland as Arizona.²²

Along the coast of Alta (Upper) California (present-day US State of California, north of Baja or Lower California), the Spanish Empire established a total of 21 missions, religious outposts that doubled as military markers of New Spain’s forced domain over indigenous peoples and the land on which they inhabited. Two of the missions, Mission San Gabriel Arcángel and Mission San Fernando Rey de España provided the namesake for San Gabriel Valley and San Fernando Valley, respectively, serving as a base on which Catholic missionaries proselytized Christianity as a way to coerce indigenous folks into Spanish domination. Though religious in nature, missions often were established alongside military presidios, showing the tight relationship between religious preachers and expansionism in Spanish colonial expeditions.²³

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²² “Native American Indians - Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.”
²³ Cheng, “A Brief History (and Geography) of the San Gabriel Valley”; “San Gabriel Arcángel.”
According to popular belief, a famous road known as El Camino Real, or “The Royal Highway” ran hundreds of miles from San Francisco and Monterey down into the San Fernando and San Gabriel Missions, then further down into San Diego and beyond, linking Alta California (from which the American state of California derives its name) with Baja California and the rest of New Spain. However, the legend of El Camino Real’s historic trail is a myth created much later in the 20th century by automobile tourists and boosters.\textsuperscript{24} The Spanish term “the royal road” implies a single defined route, however, historically any colonial highway under direct jurisdiction of the Spanish crown was referred to as a camino real.\textsuperscript{25} The exact path of the trails connecting all missions also were based off of indigenous trails and changed over time as travelers found shortcuts and made adjustments to changing land conditions.\textsuperscript{26} Nevertheless, the El Camino Real—and all the other caminos real—became important physical links for Spanish (and after 1833, Mexican) forts, pueblos, and religious missions to assert their military domination over indigenous populations.\textsuperscript{27} Despite this network of trails, most civilian long-distance travel and shipping prior to the 19th century still happened over water along the coast of Alta and Baja California.\textsuperscript{28} From a historic standpoint, ships were much more reliable and quicker than traveling on land, since large shipments of people and goods could be guided by consistent ocean currents or surface winds with little to no obstruction on the open seas, whereas travelling by

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{24} Masters, “How El Camino Real, California’s ‘Royal Road,’ Was Invented.”
\textsuperscript{25} Masters.
\textsuperscript{26} Masters.
\textsuperscript{27} Masters; Banham, “The Transportation Palimpsest,” 57.
\textsuperscript{28} Masters, “How El Camino Real, California’s ‘Royal Road,’ Was Invented.”
\end{flushright}
road required a caravan moving at a much slower pace along various topographies, elevations, and environments. Travel on land was “painfully slow”: a journey between Mission San Fernando and Santa Monica took two full days, and a full wagon from Riverside to Pueblo de los Ángeles could take up to a week.29

Without a natural enclosed harbor for ships, the settlements around Mission San Gabriel consisted mostly of rural farms inhabited by colonized Tongva, who were forcibly baptized by the missionaries, housed around the central town church, and made to farm the fields. As a testament to how many indigenous people served and died at the mission, the California Missions Foundation estimates 6,000 indigenous people are buried on the site of Mission San Gabriel. The fertility of San Gabriel Valley basin brought down from the mountains by the Rio Hondo’s sedimentation, coupled with the Tongva peoples’ collective labor made San Gabriel known as the most agriculturally productive mission in California, and became Alta California’s leading producer of wine grapes.30

A few miles west of Mission San Gabriel Arcángel lies a narrow piece of land between the Rio Hondo and Rio San Gabriel (San Gabriel River), an area now known as Whittier Narrows in the present-day city of South El Monte. Spanish colonizers named the area based what they saw: the name El Monte is an archaic Spanish term meaning “The Woods”, not the more contemporary Spanish term for “The Mountain”. The convergence of sedimentation and silt washed down from the mountains by the two rivers allowed a fertile, forested area to flourish in El Monte. With dense woods and

29 Banham, “The Transportation Palimpsest,” 58.
30 “San Gabriel Arcángel.”
shrubbery situated between two rivers, the area around El Monte became known as an “island” of trees\textsuperscript{31}, a stark contrast from the prairie-like scrubs and sage environment native to Southern California basins at the time.\textsuperscript{32}

Other small farms and rural activity developed around Mission San Gabriel and its namesake community, abundant in crop thanks to San Gabriel Valley’s fertile soil. Throughout the 19\textsuperscript{th} century, Southern California’s missionaries and settlers forced all remaining Tongva, Chumash, Cahuilla and other native peoples into a subsistence agricultural lifestyle. Meanwhile, the land claims in this rustic valley changed hands multiple times. New Spain declared independence in 1821, and the newly-established Mexico secularized the missions in 1833 and converted their land holdings into civilian-run ranchos.\textsuperscript{33} In 1847, the Battle of Rio San Gabriel a few miles south of the mission decisively pushed Mexican troops out of Alta California during the Mexican-American War. After Mexico’s surrender, the United States annexed Alta California with the help of American settlers and admitted it as its 31\textsuperscript{st} state, the present-day state of California. A few miles away, the growing market town of Pueblo de los Ángeles was incorporated as a city in 1850. During the Civil War, the Union maintained control of Southern California, preventing Confederate-aligned rebel militias from growing to armed conflict. This included El Monte, which was locally known as a Confederate-sympathizing town and home to the anti-Mexican, anti-black, and anti-indigenous Monte Boys militia.\textsuperscript{34}

\textsuperscript{31} Weller, “El Monte’s Wild Past.”
\textsuperscript{32} Schiffman, “The Los Angeles Prairie.”
\textsuperscript{33} Cheng, “A Brief History (and Geography) of the San Gabriel Valley”; “San Gabriel Arcángel.”
\textsuperscript{34} South El Monte Arts Posse, “Who Were the Monte Boys?”
Despite the influx of white Americans into the newly-created state of California, the majority of Southern Californians in the 19th century were still Californios, the Hispanic and indigenous descendants of Alta Californians prior to American annexation.35 The vast majority of journeys into Southern California up until the 1870s were treacherous and laborious, taking weeks riding a wagon through harsh desert terrain from the east or south, or weeks riding a ship through the vast Pacific from the west. However, the lives of those around Los Angeles would change drastically, its quaint basins and valleys growing into agricultural powerhouses and boomtowns with the advent of a new mode of transportation: the railroad.

Dawn of the Rail Era: From Rustic Countryside to Streetcar Metropolis

The dawn of the rail era would change the trajectory of Southern California. In 1869, America’s first transcontinental railroad opened between San Francisco, then California’s economic and political center, with existing rail lines in the Great Plains that stretched to the East Coast. Soon after, the construction of the Southern Pacific Railroad and the Santa Fe Railroad into Southern California connected the relatively isolated region with the rest of the country, bringing in huge numbers of white non-Hispanic settlers. Many farming communities became agricultural powerhouses with the arrival of the train; in 1873, Southern Pacific opened a rail depot in El Monte, bringing San Gabriel Valley’s bountiful harvest of fruits and walnuts to the rest of the

35 South El Monte Arts Posse.
nation. Many of these fields were filled with economic migrants from Mexico, Japan, China, and other Pacific Rim nations.\textsuperscript{36}

More people moved in to Southern California as it became an agricultural powerhouse and tourist destination. Out of the pueblo arose the City of Los Angeles, as more neighborhoods around the original town square transitioned from ranchos to homes and businesses. Competing horse-drawn rail carriages popped up left and right to accommodate the growing populace. The first of these equestrian transit systems, the Spring and Sixth street line, opened in 1874 and served blocks within the traditional core of Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{37} By the 1880s multiple entrepreneurs had used the invention of electric trams to build into further districts like Watts and Culver City, then onward to Long Beach, Santa Monica, and Pasadena by the 1890s. The end of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century saw all electric streetcar lines operating inside the city consolidated by Ben Huntington, nephew of rail baron and Southern Pacific developer Collis P. Huntington, functioning as the Los Angeles Railway. These streetcars were nicknamed Yellow Cars for its yellow paint. Right after the electrification of the city streetcars, Ben Huntington then started building the Pacific Electric interurban lines, conversely nicknamed as the Red Cars, as a form of regional commuter rail system.\textsuperscript{38}

Southern California’s urban growth in the early 20\textsuperscript{th} century was described by contemporaries as spread-out like a “string of pearls,” held together by the lines of Huntington’s crimson interurban streetcars.\textsuperscript{39} This imagery of the Pacific Electric

\begin{footnotes}
\item[36] Brightwell, “California Fool’s Gold — Exploring El Monte, the End of the Santa Fe Trail (or at Least Some Trails)”; Cheng, “A Brief History (and Geography) of the San Gabriel Valley.”
\item[37] Axelrod, ““Keep the “L” Out of Los Angeles,”” 12.
\item[38] Steele, “The Red Car of Empire,” 711; Axelrod, ““Keep the “L” Out of Los Angeles.””
\item[39] Steele, “The Red Car of Empire,” 711.
\end{footnotes}
interurban system conveys how closely tied the streetcar was to the region’s sprawled pattern of population boom. Though the streetcars converged in Los Angeles, multiple population centers grew clustered along dozens of miles of the Red Cars heading east to San Gabriel Valley, south to Long Beach, west to Santa Monica, and north into San Fernando Valley. Boosters and land speculators in emerging municipalities within Los Angeles County like Long Beach, Pasadena, San Gabriel, and El Monte, all disconnected communities in their own right in the 1910s, benefited economically from the streetcar system running through their towns. After they bought out the ranchos distributed back when Mexico disestablished the mission systems’ land ownership, the businessmen would resell the land around newly opened streetcar stops at a significant profit. Pacific Electric and other rail lines running east linked up the easternmost farming towns in Los Angeles County, like Pomona and Claremont, with more agricultural fields further inland into present day San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. The interurban streetcars extended all the way to the rail hub of San Bernardino, the center of the Inland Empire’s agriculture, and would help establish the larger conurbation that we know today as Greater Los Angeles. Much of this growth would not have been possible had the connections between these valley basin towns not been established with a reliable system of transport—and in the early 20th century that system was the streetcars of the Los Angeles Railway and the Pacific Electric Railway, coupled with the interstate railways of Southern Pacific and Santa Fe railroads.

It is hard to overstate how expansive and enormous the streetcar system in Los Angeles was. By 1923, over one thousand miles of tracks had been laid from downtown Los Angeles in all directions across the Los Angeles Basin and into San Gabriel Valley,
where the streetcars promoted growth along the lines linking up with Pomona Valley and what would become called the Inland Empire.\textsuperscript{40} With the combined lengths of the Los Angeles Railway and the Pacific Electric, the linked conurbations of Los Angeles, San Bernardino, Riverside, and Orange Counties had established perhaps the largest combined system of electric streetcars in the history of the world.\textsuperscript{41} Up to 2,700 streetcars a day bustled throughout Southern California at its height in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{42} The streetcar and rail systems provided not just a means of transportation for 72 million passengers a year, but also provided tracks for freight between the farms, the industries, and the cities, as well as delivering mail throughout Southern California.\textsuperscript{43}

A major reason why the streetcar became so integral to Southern California’s growth was its monopolization of much-needed transportation between the farms, the towns, and the rest of the United States with its connection to interstate commerce on the intercontinental railways controlled by rail giants like Southern Pacific and Santa Fe. The multiple uses of the streetcar lines, from transporting people between towns to delivering goods like produce and mail, made it a much more reliable option than the slow trek of riding a horse or driving a vehicle on backcountry road, many of which were still unpaved. For example, El Monte’s convergence of the Pacific Electric streetcars with a Southern Pacific train depot made it a local transportation hub for San Gabriel Valley agriculture.\textsuperscript{44} Another major reason why the streetcars became so

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\textsuperscript{40} Banham, “The Transportation Palimpsest.”
\textsuperscript{41} Steele, “The Red Car of Empire,” 711.
\textsuperscript{42} Barrett, “Los Angeles Transportation Transit History – South L.A.”
\textsuperscript{43} Steele, “The Red Car of Empire”; Banham, “The Transportation Palimpsest.”
\textsuperscript{44} Brightwell, “Silver Line Stroll from Union Station to El Monte”; Brightwell, “California Fool’s Gold — Exploring El Monte, the End of the Santa Fe Trail (or at Least Some Trails).”
successful is due to the fact that it was a private company that owned the right-of-way for much of the interurban rail between towns. The ability to lay down tracks in open rural expanses across Southern California meant Pacific Electric streetcars could travel as fast as 60 miles an hour outside of between towns, unimpeded by traffic from cars or other competing trains.\(45\) The other option was to traverse unreliable dirt roads across large expanses of the countryside. For travelers who could afford a streetcar ride, the choice was obvious. Pacific Electric’s interurban lines connected the vast rural and less developed areas of the region with commercial activity in towns and cities. The streetcar also allowed land speculation around its stops to create wealth for developers and boosters of boomtowns.

However, once the streetcars reached into older built-up areas, they often had a hard time mixing with other town traffic. In the case of Los Angeles, the inner city neighborhoods had grown prior to the advent of the streetcar, requiring them to navigate the streets filled with slower pedestrian, horse, and later on car traffic (Figure 2). In addition to foot and car traffic, Pacific Electric interurban streetcars travelling within the city of Los Angeles had to share limited track space with the exclusively inner-city Los Angeles Railway streetcars. However, just as Los Angeles’s world-famous traffic problems were already developing a century ago, planners and community organizers alike were already looking towards other established cities in the East for solutions. One of the solutions proposed was to create an elevated path heading south and an underground path heading north from the Los Angeles rail depot to the

\[45\] Steele, “The Red Car of Empire.”
closest exclusive rail rights-of-way for streetcars and trains entering in and out of the downtown core. 46

Figure 2. Traffic in Los Angeles is not a new phenomenon: in this 1938 photograph on the corner of 9th and Hill Streets, a policeman stops multiple streetcars and a long line of cars to allow pedestrians to cross the street in Downtown Los Angeles (View Looking down Hill Street From the Corner of 9th and Hill). 47

In the same way that the business elite worked in tandem with the political elite to build up Los Angeles’s dispersed character, similarly powerful groups of boosters and business leaders opposed any densification of Los Angeles into a more traditional city like New York, with its highly connected urban core surrounded by neighborhoods

47 View Looking down Hill Street from the Corner of 9th and Hill.
of decreasing density levels. Instead, they wanted to preserve the “quasi-rural amenities” that much of Greater Los Angeles still had at the time, while continuing to promote Greater Los Angeles’s rapid growth. Through this, they shaped the conversation of public transit in the early to mid-twentieth century around burgeoning concerns of traffic in Greater Los Angeles. As seen by the depictions of Los Angeles as early as the 1920s, the international city emerging appeared more “a city of bungalows and private automobiles, and not as a modern skyscraper city” like those of Chicago or New York City. A city’s development patterns is woven together with the ability of its people to travel around it, and Los Angeles planners’ insistence against fast public transportation in the form of Chicago’s L Train or New York’s subway would create urban conditions favorable to the private automobile decades before the federal government would break ground for the first interstate freeway, and decades before the last streetcar ran would run through Los Angeles.

Without the support of the city’s political or business elite, Pacific Electric decided to create the region’s first underground transit. In 1924, construction began underground on the first phase of the Hollywood Subway, a bypass for longer-distance streetcars travelling between Downtown Los Angeles and the city neighborhoods of Westside and Hollywood. In two years, the subway opened along with the new Subway Terminal Building, a large underground complex with multiple train platforms more akin to a traditional subway station than a streetcar stop. However, the city

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48 Axelrod, “‘Keep the ‘L’ Out of Los Angeles,’” 7.
49 Axelrod, 6.
50 Axelrod, 11.
immediately objected to any expansion of the new subway system and its implications for a more vertical city. The Los Angeles City Planning Commission, created in 1910, became one of the first citywide planning departments in the nation with its 52-member consortium of public laypeople and one professional planner. By 1925, the public forum was replaced with a five-member nominated selection of planners, partly borne out of Los Angeles elites’ fears of rapid upward growth like those seen in older American cities. One of the new board’s first jobs was to halt the expansion of Pacific Electric’s subway ambitions, stalling the company’s plans for further underground construction with a lengthy process of governmental reviews not required of most other transportation-related construction projects in that era. Its planners imagined a new type of city, one where far-flung, low-lying communities could be separated by race and class through strict enforcement of height, density, and zoning restrictions. As a common meeting point connecting commuters from many neighborhoods of differing backgrounds, the streetcar did not fit into this vision of a segregated urbanscape.

Ironically, the regional streetcars’ promotion of low-density countryside across Southern California landscape and its popularity as a means of transport now threatened the survival of the streetcar.

The inability for Pacific Electric to build bridges over or tunnels under existing roads, or for the company to convince burgeoning communities to build around the streetcar rights-of-way, meant the streetcar slowed down to rising automobile traffic and resulting collisions with cars. Service on the tram deteriorated and its speed, at one

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51 Axelrod, “‘Keep the “L” Out of Los Angeles.’”
point almost matching the speed limits for urban freeways today, began grinding to a halt. Even their extensive private rights-of-way could not save their streetcars from disruption, for the proliferation of traffic and intersections around towns inevitably slowed the streetcar to a crawl and delayed their scheduling. All the while, the promise of door-to-door travel enticed many more Southern Californians to travel by car, abandoning the streetcars en masse. The Pacific Electric streetcar’s woes coincided with the national trend of accommodating transportation infrastructure for private vehicle ownership at the expense of public transportation, even as many lower-income and non-white residents around Greater Los Angeles and the rest of the country continued to rely on rail and bus transit.\(^{52}\)

The rise of the interstate freeway system throughout the post-war years marked the death knell in a long line of setbacks for the ailing streetcar. In Southern California, the freeways secured what the private streetcar companies never did: exclusive lines separate from other forms of traffic, large sums of government subsidies, and widespread political support to build over existing neighborhoods. On the grade-separated freeway, the fastest-moving automobile travelling across the region would remain separate from the local traffic traversing the streets around the freeways, and ramps would connect the separated vehicular traffic of the highway with local arterial roads. Though this concept is easily recognizable by the millions of Americans travelling daily on the country’s vast interstate freeway network, in the first decade after World War II the only large-scale example in the world of a high-speed roads with

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\(^{52}\) Gutfreund, *Twentieth-Century Sprawl*. 
limited local access was Germany’s Autobahn network.\textsuperscript{53} Another way in which roads got the advantage was the millions spent by the city and county governments around Los Angeles, aided by state and national discretionary road funds and deep pools of gas tax funding. Los Angeles was not alone in the nationwide scramble for federal highway dollars. Owen Gutfreund’s \textit{Twentieth-Century Sprawl} lays the case for the coalescence of federal, state, and local interests around the country that prioritized building rural, interurban highways while ignoring working urban infrastructure already in place.\textsuperscript{54} The federal government was fronting almost all the initial construction of roadways: in the 1921 Federal-Aid Highway Act, the government was effectively subsidizing the entirety of road maintenance costs inflicted by automobiles by waiving tolls, federal gas taxes, and any other user charges. From the year 1921 to 1932, all levels of American government spent $21 billion on roads, yet they only collected $5 billion from owners of the vehicles that used them, creating massive public debts.\textsuperscript{55} Roadbuilding lobbyists ensured that embedded in federal highway acts were requirements that a disproportionate amount of federal funding go towards creating new regional highways and paving interurban rural roads. With the government improving interurban roads, interurban streetcars lost its former advantage as a much faster option than formerly unpaved dirt roads. At the same time, the neglect of transportation infrastructure in urban centers meant streetcars still had to grapple with congestion upon entering towns.

\textsuperscript{53} Commission, Esse, and Eisner, \textit{Freeways for the Region}.
\textsuperscript{54} Gutfreund, \textit{Twentieth-Century Sprawl}.
\textsuperscript{55} Gutfreund, 29.
The massive financial incentives and convenience driving on newly-paved roads by the governments convinced many Americans to switch over to automobiles. Cars were made all the more convincing by major automobile companies like Ford, whose founder Henry Ford made explicit efforts to build affordable cars “for the great multitude”, like the Model T that was marketed to the middle class folks. Pacific Electric, unable to compete with cars, cut service and maintenance costs to balance their budgets, making the system even less reliable for remaining passengers who relied on the system. Unlike the municipal roads and highways, cities and counties felt uncomfortable providing any of their funding for city or interurban streetcars to make up for their deficits. Because the rail industry grew out of private companies, the government did not see their transportation infrastructure or the services they provided as public utilities that should have access to the public purse.

The rapid expansion of Pacific Electric and Los Angeles Railway streetcars originated from the profits that could be made selling property around transit stops. Once lands closest to the streetcar stations were speculated, sold off, and built up by the 20th century, the streetcars were unable to make up operating costs of the streetcars themselves from only collecting passenger fares. This started a cycle of budget cuts that led to worse service, in turn driving away passengers and decreasing profits even further. Land speculators like the Huntington family got rich off the rail and the streetcar, but left the Pacific Electric and Los Angeles Railway to spiral down a decades-long decline throughout the twentieth century. What was once the world’s largest

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56 Ford and Crowther, *My Life and Work.*
interurban tram system was dying a slow death in one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the United States.

During the streetcar’s initial decline, local officials could have stepped in at any point to buy out the companies and improve them with public money, which is exactly how many transit agencies started on the East Coast. With infrastructure and rights-of-way already in place, the main costs would have been for renovating lines with elevated rail or rapid transit separate from car and foot traffic, and could have built onto existing streetcar-based communities. Instead, political leaders of the City of Los Angeles and the counties of Greater Los Angeles bought into a futuristic concept of highways and car-filled suburbia.

To take advantage of the massive funds and political expediency for roadbuilding, the Los Angeles County Planning Commission had grand plans in store. In their 1943 publication *Freeways for the Region*, the Commission provided the initial layout for what would ultimately become Los Angeles County’s freeway system, proposing an interlocking web of highways separated from local street traffic. A decade prior at the World’s Fair, General Motors had bedazzled the nation with its *Futurama* exhibit, showcasing to the globe a futuristic city full of high-speed car corridors. However, the actual implementation of high-speed, grade-separated roads was still new to the public, so the Commission’s report advertised extensively the benefits of separating freeway traffic from local street-level movements. The Commission recommended replacing streetcar services in Greater Los Angeles with “rights-of-way sufficient to accommodate also rail transit lines located within the wide center strips
and also completely separated from automobile traffic.”  

They even proposed bus depots and dedicated stops for long-distance buses along freeways, not unlike the bus rapid transit system that would develop decades later (Figure 3).  

However, this inclusion of bus and rail in the discussion of planning future freeways may have been inserted into the text to allay concerns from existing transit riders rather than out of serious consideration of its implementation, for the Commission devotes the vast majority of the report surmising how freeways would lead to more efficient movement of motorized private vehicles than Southern California’s existing street patterns.

The Commission admits as much when its report declares in bold:  

“acquisition must be made upon a 

liberal basis, in order that subsequent development will not be thwarted.”

In other words, planners in the agency sought not to accommodate the existing need for increased capacity, but to prepare for future development. At the

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57 Commission, Esse, and Eisner, Freeways for the Region.
58 Commission, Esse, and Eisner, 17.
59 Commission, Esse, and Eisner, 17.
time, government agencies did not have an obligation to share their plans to the public for comment and review, and the report makes little effort to mention the technical details of aligning routes of these new freeways through neighborhoods or what local voices it would consult to acquire their rights-of-way. If anything, the Commission knew strong pushback would come from communities that would be razed by the freeways and felt the need to quash community opposition. Rather than seeking ways for integrating road planning with residents that would be affected by their proposals, the planning agency requests “legislation simplifying the acquisition of land needed for freeways”.\textsuperscript{60} This suggests that the Commission wanted to circumvent the outcry from neighborhoods that would be torn up freeway alignments through massive eminent domain.

Communities fought back against freeways as best they could. One of the most famous examples of the “freeway revolt” is in San Francisco, where in the 1960s a coalition of community activists, businesses, and city leaders successfully stopped seven out of ten planned freeways from being constructed around the city, including most of the freeways that would have gone straight through its inner-city neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{61} This phenomenon was not limited to the West Coast: in New York City, local urban activist Jane Jacobs led a David-versus-Goliath grassroots movement that convinced local and state officials to not approve the Cross-Manhattan Expressway, which would have decimated multiple working-class Lower Manhattan neighborhoods.

\textsuperscript{60} Commission, Esse, and Eisner, 21.

\textsuperscript{61} Mohl, “The Interstates and the Cities: Highways, Housing, and the Freeway Revolt.”
However, less talked about in the planning community is that Jacobs was originally inspired to take on Moses only after he and his planning associates leveled whole communities. Before Jacobs’ involvement in the freeway revolts, Moses was the mastermind behind the Cross Bronx Expressway, consistently one of the most congested freeways in New York since its completion in 1972. Despite organized resistance from the Bronx’s network of activists, construction started in 1948 and slowly diced through impoverished neighborhoods of color for three agonizing decades. Moses actively crushed New York’s subway lines and bus routes throughout the city by building inner-city bridges and roadways only accessible by cars. The constant stop-and-go pollution that has choked the Cross Bronx Expressway ever since solidified the physical division and environmental marginalization of the borough’s predominantly black population that has long outlived Moses’s time in New York City government.

Like in the Bronx, most other revolts around the country against the undemocratic process of acquiring land for highway building only delayed the inevitable arrival of bulldozers, especially if the communities involved had little political or financial leaders to lobby on their behalf. Eric Avila notes that the few success stories of freeway revolts in Los Angeles, like those in predominantly affluent white communities like Beverly Hills, overshadows the reality that most freeway revolts in the larger region did not succeed. Geographically, urban areas surrounding Downtown Los Angeles with high numbers of minorities like Boyle Heights and West Adams were prime real estate to the Los Angeles County Planning Commission for

62 Caro, *The Power Broker*.
63 Tyrnauer, *Citizen Jane: Battle for the City*.
64 Avila, “L.A.’s Invisible Freeway Revolt.”
connecting suburban freeways to the city center. Local commissioners and federal bureaucrats rammed multiple freeways through these inner-city neighborhoods with great economic, social, or environmental damage to their community lives because they did not have the political connections or racialized social power of most neighborhoods who successfully fought off freeways from their backyards. Who gets the write history versus who gets overwritten depends on who has the privilege and power to receive representation in the dominant culture of America. In the case of freeway revolts, the successful forces of political leaders and influential communities across San Francisco and Lower Manhattan against more freeways overshadow the losses inflicted by the building of freeways in societally and politically disadvantaged urban areas like the Bronx and East Los Angeles despite hard-fought battles from the community.

Even amidst the planned destruction of countless communities beneath behemoth highways, there was a glimmer of hope that public mass transit would be retained in Greater Los Angeles. In 1951, the California State Legislature passed a bill to create the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Agency (MTA). However, the bill restricted the MTA to study the feasibility of a monorail between San Fernando Valley, Downtown Los Angeles, and Long Beach.\(^65\) Despite this, in 1951 Los Angeles Times reported the planners in the MTA created a highly ambitious goal of three years to complete the 44 miles of track elevated over a mountain pass and dozens of existing neighborhoods.\(^66\) MTA engineers estimated the monorail’s complete grade-separation over the street level allowed an average a speed of 38 miles an hour throughout its

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\(^{65}\) “Here Are Details On Monorail Plan”; Barrett, “Los Angeles Transportation Transit History – South L.A.”

\(^{66}\) “Here Are Details On Monorail Plan.”
hour-long journey compared to the average 9 miles an hour on the streetcar.\textsuperscript{67} An easy build-up of the monorail was envisioned in the same way that Los Angeles was happily going all in for the freeway.

With this mindset, it was no wonder that when the California state legislature created the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority, it was not to save the existing rail system from irrelevance but to fund a futuristic pilot project akin to a freeway system. In 1954, the state legislature finally passed another bill to give MTA extra powers, allowing it to envision countywide transit beyond a single line. Even after the state amended the MTA’s goals to incorporate the takeover of the Pacific Electric lines, the MTA had very limited powers as a transit agency. It was unable to raise funds through local taxation, obtain lands via eminent domain, or receive capital funding from state or federal resources.\textsuperscript{68} Originally the monorail was intended to be completely elevated, with sections above Wilshire Boulevard on the Westside and Valley Boulevard in San Gabriel Valley, but the agency received major pushback from these communities.\textsuperscript{69} In hopes of drumming up broad public support, MTA scaled back the multiple proposed lines into the single Backbone Route, a mix of subway from Beverly Hills and the Westside down Wilshire Boulevard to Downtown Los Angeles, then rising up east of Downtown onto the newly-built Interstate-10 rail right-of-way in San Gabriel Valley, ending at El Monte. Despite the lack of authority to follow through with this plan, the MTA held a premature groundbreaking ceremony in Downtown Los Angeles with California Governor Edmund G. Brown, even though it was never made clear

\textsuperscript{67} “Here Are Details On Monorail Plan.”
\textsuperscript{68} Barrett, “Los Angeles Transportation Transit History – South LA.”
\textsuperscript{69} Barrett.
what ground they were exactly breaking. Without eminent domain, to build the
Wilshire Boulevard subway the MTA needed the approval of wealthy Westside
businesses and Beverly Hills inhabitants, who did not want to connect their car-
dominant communities with less well-off transit riders.\textsuperscript{70} The confusion heightened
when multiple private monorail companies like Alweg and Goodell planned a separate
monorail system for the MTA in exchange for 40 years of the monorail’s fare revenue,
even when it did not meet the MTA’s intention of creating a Wilshire route.\textsuperscript{71} The MTA,
formerly studying a monorail but now advocating for the controversial Backbone
Route, was now competing for the public’s attention with the Alweg monorail, a
proposed public-private endeavor with a completely different route.

The MTA’s indecisiveness in deciding between conflicting plans for monorail,
subway, and ground-level rail and its inability to build out any public transportation
confused the public and made it easy for the agency to overlook the dying streetcar
system. Rather than provide any meaningful action plan to combine freeways with
public transportation, the idea for elevated rails across the county sat in planning rooms
for years as streetcars continued running at a loss without government intervention.
Because the Pacific Electric Railroad and Los Angeles Railway continued as private
companies, they resorted to cutting lines travelling the furthest away that required the
highest maintenance costs, and then replacing these lines with cheaper motor coach
buses. National City Lines, funded by General Motors, took advantage of the Los
Angeles Railway’s decline right after World War II by buying out the Huntington

\textsuperscript{70} Axelrod, ““Keep the “L” Out of Los Angeles.””
\textsuperscript{71} Barrett, “Los Angeles Transportation Transit History – South L.A.”
estate’s share of the company and replacing all streetcars with motorized bus service.\textsuperscript{72} By 1953, Metropolitan Coach Lines had also acquired Pacific Electric’s entire passenger fleet, with the MCL owner’s explicit intention of replacing all remaining streetcars with motor coach buses.\textsuperscript{73} In 1955, MCL closed the Subway Terminal and Pacific Electric’s last line to Glendale, replacing streetcar service with buses.\textsuperscript{74} Only after 1957, when the state legislature gave the MTA powers to own and operate any regional transit system were they able to finally acquire MCL and Los Angeles Railway to create a publicly-owned streetcar agency. By then, the streetcar was well beyond saving; the motor coach had become a much more cost-effective option since it ran on the same federally and locally subsidized roads and highways as private cars. The last Pacific Electric line between Watts and Long Beach closed in 1961,\textsuperscript{75} followed by the last Los Angeles Railway streetcar in 1963,\textsuperscript{76} marking the end of the world’s once-largest combined urban and interurban streetcar system.

State officials would fold MTA the next year, glad to rid itself of a scandal-ridden agency and combining most of Greater Los Angeles’s remaining bus systems into the Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD or RTD). From the monorail pipe dreams that led to the creation of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority to the Los Angeles County Planning Commission’s promise of futuristic busways, much of the transit proposals throughout the mid-20\textsuperscript{th} century involved creating grandiose projects

\textsuperscript{72} Axelrod, “‘Keep the ‘L’ Out of Los Angeles’”; Barrett, “Los Angeles Transportation Transit History – South L.A.”

\textsuperscript{73} Bail, “Metro to the Rescue; Red to Green.”

\textsuperscript{74} “Streetcar Tunnel Will Cease Service Sunday.”

\textsuperscript{75} Bail, “Metro to the Rescue; Red to Green.”

\textsuperscript{76} “Streetcars Go for Last Ride”; Barrett, “Los Angeles Transportation Transit History – South L.A.”
rather than maintaining and improving upon the network of urban trams, regional railways, or exclusive rights-of-way already in place. Meanwhile, the automobile lobby increased their influence by pushing for freeway construction and replacing streetcars with motor coaches. The discussion of features like dedicated busways or transit rail alongside freeways appears more as a means of getting approval from authorities with vested interests in public transit, rather than a concerted effort to benefit transit riders, in order to justify the expansion of planning beyond existing boundaries of Los Angeles’ expanding urban fringes.

The planning agencies anticipated huge population growth throughout the Los Angeles Basin and beyond. However, rather than plan for improvements in existing neighborhoods around the central core of Los Angeles, where most people continued to live at the time, they saw more value in facilitating mass suburbanization by spreading out the populace through freeways. The development of future of Los Angeles would expand outward, even if it meant ramming bulldozers and swinging wrecking balls through established neighborhoods in the process. Hypothetical busways and monorails of yesteryear appear to only have been used as another justification for freeways taking up large rights-of-way, and urban planners explained this undemocratic land grab as the price of progress. With Greater Los Angeles transit reduced to the few motor coach lines where streetcars had once run, suburban communities found promise in motorized traffic and highway building instead.

77 Gutfreund, Twentieth-Century Sprawl.
In burgeoning communities like El Monte, where this growth had resulted in increased traffic, the freeways appeared to hit two birds with one stone: a solution to existing traffic woes, and the beginning of more incoming prosperity (Figures 4 and 5). Coupled with federal homebuilding subsidization, the freeway building of the Cold War era exacerbated white flight and capital away from the city to its surrounding communities, creating the massive sprawling suburbs integral to modern America’s urban form. Most of the funding would come from the state and federal governments, and for most suburbs that were yet to be built out, the choice to build freeways was an easy one.

The correlation between population growth, freeway construction, and its ensuing property development is hard to overstate. Los Angeles County was experiencing massive growth throughout the mid-twentieth century: from 1920 to 1950, the county grew from less than 1 million residents to over 4 million, and by the end of the century it would double to over 8 million residents.78 Across the San Gabriel Valley, former orange and walnut groves gave way to continuous plots of single floor homes and seemingly endless miles of road pavement. The 1950 Census registered around 8,000 residents in El Monte, when the city still had an agricultural sector, and before Interstates 10 and 605 were built through the city in 1956 and 1971, respectively.79 By the 1990 census, El Monte had grown twelve-fold to over 106,000 residents, with virtually all its land built up as suburban developments.80 However, the sprawled out nature of suburbia and the physical limits of open land meant growth could not be sustained.

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78 “Census of Population and Housing.”
79 “Census of Population and Housing.”
80 “Population and Housing Unit Counts: California.”
forever. El Monte’s population growth has slowed considerably since the 1990s, with a population of 113,000 in the 2010 Census and an estimated population of 116,000 in 2017.  

At the regional scale, the Greater Los Angeles area has seen various waves of growth tied to its transportation developments, whether it was the freeway, the streetcar, the railroad, or the colonial and indigenous trails. What did this mean for suburban communities at the local scale? In the next chapter, I describe in-depth the microcosm of El Monte, today one of the largest and oldest suburbs in San Gabriel Valley, as emblematic of Greater Los Angeles’s historic transit-oriented growth and environmental injustices.

Figure 4 (left): The opening of the San Bernardino Freeway extension into El Monte was supported by politically powerful figures across multiple levels of government (Lapp 1956).  

Figure 5 (right): The Mayor of El Monte, Governor of California, and two state Highway Commissioners at the freeway extension’s ribbon-cutting ceremony (Lapp 1956).

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81 “El Monte City, California.”
82 Lapp, Freeway Ribbon Cutting (San Bernardino Freeway El Monte Extension), 1956.
83 Lapp.
Chapter II: El Monte as a Microcosm of Greater Los Angeles’s Transit-Based Environmental Injustices

Island Between Two Rivers: El Monte in the 19th and 20th Centuries

From the long-established history behind transportation in Greater Los Angeles, I attempt to explore the temporally-layered built environment in a suburban community like El Monte. El Monte’s development in the 19th and 20th century closely followed its importance as a local hub for transportation. This chapter looks at the underlying racialized and classist nuances that came with various stages of its development in relation to an evolving transportation system.

As previously noted, El Monte and surrounding communities had developed a strong agricultural industry with the advent of the transcontinental and regional railways. In the late 1800s, Japanese, Chinese, Mexican, Filipino, and other immigrants worked the fields in San Gabriel Valley.84 In particular, many first-generation Japanese families started farming by leasing land from white landowners or were able to buy lands outright if they were natural-born citizens. Eventually, some Japanese farms grew large and profitable enough that these families started to employ Mexican laborers to help pick berries and other crops. Over time, Japanese came to dominate the agricultural industry in San Gabriel Valley by undercutting competitors, though often this meant cutting down on labor prices. This muddles the complex racial history during the segregation era, since Japanese were often able to rise economically as farm managers and leaseholders in the white-dominated culture of Southern California. Yet

84 Cheng, “A Brief History (and Geography) of the San Gabriel Valley.”
this success often came at the expense of Mexican Americans, most of whom continued as field workers under Japanese American farming families.

Being neither white nor black meant Mexicans and Japanese living in the San Gabriel Valley and throughout Southern California could not assimilate fully into America’s exclusive version of an idealized Caucasian race, nor could they conform to the country’s black-white racial structure in the early 20th century. El Monte pushed Japanese and Mexican primary school students into the Lexington Grammar School, segregated from white primary students, yet the local high school accepted both white and non-white students.85 On the other hand, there were also documented cases of Japanese parents successfully transferring their children away from “remedial” non-white schools to better-funded white schools.86 At public spaces like theatres or swimming pools, Japanese and Mexicans were segregated from white residents, who got the best times and sections.87

After the Japanese Empire’s attack on Pearl Harbor and President Roosevelt’s signing of Executive Order 9066, the military forced Japanese Americans in San Gabriel Valley and across Greater Los Angeles to the grounds of Santa Anita Racecourse, and then further to the Pomona Fairgrounds when the racecourse inevitably overcrowded.88 These large recreational grounds turned into “assembly centers,” where military officials processed thousands of American citizens and residents as if they were possible foreign agents. From there, the military bussed Japanese Americans to

85 South El Monte Arts Posse, “A Community Erased.”
86 South El Monte Arts Posse.
87 South El Monte Arts Posse.
88 South El Monte Arts Posse.
shoddily built concentration camps, them in isolated places like Owens Valley, California and northwest Wyoming, for the duration of World War II. This heartless injustice wiped out the entire Japanese American presence in San Gabriel Valley and across the West Coast. Having lost their lands, homes, and businesses, most of the more than 100,000 Japanese Americans that once populated El Monte and countless other West Coast towns would never return after the war ended. With Japanese Americans vacated from the farms of El Monte and other Southern California rural communities, white landowners moved quickly to take over their former farmlands, supported by political leaders as the federal government built up rural road networks and through the GI Bill and Federal Housing Administration subsidized post-war housing developments.89

In the 1950s, the replacement of all streetcar lines with buses coincided with the arrival of the San Bernardino Freeway (Interstate 10) in El Monte. According to long-time El Monte High School principal Jack Barton, Gay’s Lion Farm was the “Disneyland of the 1920s and 1930s”.90 Long before Walt Disney opened his world-renowned amusement park in post-war Orange County, in Charles and Muriel Gay relocated their circus to a heavily-forested piece of land El Monte. They brought with them their expertise in training show lions, which became popular for Hollywood executives a few miles away to rent out. The most famous lions raised by the Gays were Jackie and Leo, which were filmed for the original “roaring lion” motif shown in every MGM film introduction. Another famous lion, Numa, appeared in multiple films in the 1920s, most

89 South El Monte Arts Posse; Ling, “History of Asians in the San Gabriel Valley.”
90 Weller, “El Monte’s Wild Past.”
notably Charlie Chaplin’s *The Circus*. The Gay’s Lion Farm linked its business closely to the growing film and entertainment industry in Southern California, but also its racist undertones of what was “civilization” versus what was “wild”. Gay’s Lion Farm and the surrounding woods of El Monte became set locations for (in)famous films such as the pro-Confederacy *The Birth of a Nation* in 1915, and the 1935 rendition of *Tarzan* which used the Rio Hondo’s woody environment for its “tropical” appearance. In other cases the racism was more overt. On the front page of September 27, 1928, *Los Angeles Times* reported that three lions had run amok in the compound. “Joe Hoffman, guide and lecturer at the farm, took up the trail of N****r and dropped him with a bullet through the brain,” the article declares triumphantly. Tourists and celebrities around the world came to town to admire the lush scenery of El Monte’s heavily forested terrain, the grounds of caged lions reimagined as a “semi-tropical playground” that created a racialized dichotomy between the caging civilized (white) people with the caged wild animals.

The Gays were unable to re-open the park after World War II, despite their pre-war success, and the site was abandoned. The construction of the San Bernardino Freeway through El Monte a few years later paved over the vacant lot of Gay’s Lion Farm, literally burying a piece of El Monte’s racist past underneath asphalt and concrete. Only a small, forgettable memorial lot surrounded the busy intersections of Valley Boulevard, Peck Road and the San Bernardino Freeway remains to memorialize

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91 Weller.
92 Weller; Medina, “Tarzan on the Rio Hondo! When Hollywood Invaded the Whittier Narrows.”
93 “MADDENED LIONS BATTLED.”
94 Weller, “El Monte’s Wild Past.”
the parks’ former entrance. However, remnants of this problematic past would remain in the center of El Monte’s civic life: since 1950 the original lion statue that sat at the gates of Gay’s Lion Farm has greeted students entering El Monte High, Home of the Lions.

With the Gay’s Lion Farm gone and agriculture disappearing from El Monte, the city shifted its economy to meet the needs of suburbanites, from providing regional shopping and entertainment to selling cars. Aside from Gay’s Lion Farm, El Monte became known for the American Legion Stadium, a boxing-ring-turned-dance-hall that saw the rise of live rock ‘n’ roll shows in the region. The American Legion Stadium’s success in El Monte in the 1950s was directly tied to the growth of the automobile around Greater Los Angeles as well as its segregated built environment. Art Laboe, a local disc jockey who put on weekend events at the Stadium, recalled “white kids from Beverly Hills, black kids from Compton, and local Chicano kids used to come out to [their] shows every weekend.” In the Stadium’s height in the 1950s and 1960s, young people across the region would come to the hall for a diverse selection of bands (in terms of genre and demographically) and mingled across racial and ethnic lines, even if they themselves drove in from highly segregated neighborhoods.

This unifying character of music and dance failed to leave the American Legion Stadium. Outside of the dance hall, mid-century El Monte and San Gabriel Valley continued perpetuating America’s segregationist society, with home loans and racial

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95 Weller.
96 Weller.
97 Garcia, “El Monte’s American Legion Stadium.”
covenants restricting home ownership to white or light-skinned non-white families and homeowners unwilling to live next to or rent out to darker-skinned families. The inability for many Mexican and Japanese families to raise their families in El Monte resulted in a colonia-esque community forming south of the city limits, perpetuating the north-south chasm between haves and have-nots across the rest of San Gabriel Valley that exists to this day. For decades, residents of unincorporated South El Monte asked El Monte to annex them so that the city would provide services for their neighborhoods. The municipal government’s response was that “that area was only fit for chickens”, even as El Monte willingly expanded the city boundaries into other areas. In response, the community tried an interesting tactic: it successfully rezoned itself as an industrial area, giving it at least recognition of its existence in Los Angeles County. This rezoning had massive environmental justice implications for the community, as blocks of homes and businesses would be built adjacent to industrial warehouses and plants. After gaining at least recognition as an industrial zone, South El Monte was finally able to incorporate itself in 1958 as a majority-minority city encompassing Mexican, Japanese, black, and other minority residents.

However, the working-class minority character of South El Monte meant that it was never able to attract the same type of economic activity as El Monte could. Unlike South El Monte, the San Bernardino Freeway opening in El Monte in 1956 and nearby

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98 Garcia; Juravich, “City of Achievement”; Ling, “History of Asians in the San Gabriel Valley.”
100 Juravich, “City of Achievement.”
101 Juravich.
102 Juravich.
San Gabriel River Freeway (Interstate 605) opening in stages in the 1960s and 1970s introduced the city to a variety of new commerce, from El Monte creating white-collar office jobs at its Flair Business Park to the city becoming San Gabriel Valley’s largest hub for buying cars. People would travel for miles around to the city’s many dealerships lined up conveniently near freeway exits along Interstate 10 and Interstate 605. To emphasize how important and popular the car industry became to El Monte, one can look at the Longo Toyota that opened in 1967 with just five employees. Within one year of opening, Longo had become the #1 volume Toyota dealership in the nation, and today it calls itself the single largest auto dealership in the world with over 2,000 cars sold monthly.103

With the economy, lifestyle, and urban form based around sprawl and cars, it is no wonder that El Monte and much of San Gabriel Valley had little transit to speak of after the last Red Car made its final stops in the 1950s. Before the 1970s, El Monte and most of San Gabriel Valley had very few bus lines compared to the city of Los Angeles; at that point the valley’s population density was relatively low and many of its relatively wealthier inhabitants could afford a car. The MTA’s overpromising of grand monorail and subway plans with no substance had left a sour taste across Greater Los Angeles, and its successor agency felt a need to reinvent transit in the region. During this era of freeway dominance, Southern California Rapid Transit District (RTD) began

103 “Longo History”; “The World’s Largest Car Dealer in Southern California Is Amazing.” By 1972, Longo had moved to a much larger five-acre lot, growing from five original employees to over 100. Today, Longo Toyota takes up over 50 acres and has a contains a Starbucks branch, a Verizon store, and two car rental offices all within its dealership. For decades it has billed itself the world’s largest single car dealership, and it seems plausible: since 2001, the dealership consistently sells over 2,000 cars a month, which is more than the average American dealership might sell in a year.
multiple efforts to re-introduce transit to the region. One such attempt was the El Monte Busway and Transit Center (bus station) that opened in the 1970s. In the next chapter, I will explore how the El Monte Busway, borne out of a pilot project or compromise from the MTA’s Backbone Route rail plans, foreshadowed RTD’s focus on rail projects at the expense of bus infrastructure, and San Gabriel Valley’s resulting decision to secede its bus services from LA Metro. I will then look at the current situation of recently-rebuilt El Monte Transit Center and the combined level of government’s efforts and shortcomings in creating transit-oriented development around the bus station hub and around next-door Downtown El Monte and its separate Metrolink train station.
Chapter III: El Monte’s Transit-Oriented Revitalization

After the end of streetcars in the mid-20th century, El Monte’s transit consisted solely of a few local bus lines connecting San Gabriel Valley with the City of Los Angeles. As the suburbs grew out far beyond San Gabriel Valley, so too did its traffic. Planners and politicians in Los Angeles County had not seriously consider the possibility of transit in mitigating deteriorating traffic conditions throughout Los Angeles until the 1970s, perhaps hoping the modernist promise of superhighways and satellite cities would save the community from the woes of peak-hour traffic jams. So what changed the minds of the transportation planners, state legislators, and city officials to choose El Monte and San Gabriel Valley as one of the nation’s first bus rapid transit experiments?

The way in which the government portrayed the El Monte Busway and Transit Center project throughout its planning, construction, and opening gives some hints as to why it came to fruition, after many years of the government hemorrhaging transit funds. The busway ran on what was essentially the former, MTA’s ill-fated Backbone Route. The initial environmental impact report lists “fringe parking facilities” as a core facet of the El Monte bus terminus104. Promotional pamphlets and press releases from the SCRTD out the busway’s much-improved travel times over cars on Interstate 10’s other four lanes of traffic, and highlight the large park-n-ride facility able to house hundreds of cars.105 In addition, the El Monte-Los Angeles Busway demonstration

104 State Department of Public Works, Division of Highways and Southern California Rapid Transit District, “Environmental Statement.”
105 “From Dream to Reality”; Metro Digital Resources Librarian, “40 Years Ago This Week.”
objectives listed by RTD show analyzing the interaction between automobiles and bus rapid transit in a shared corridor and testing the feasibility of park-n-ride commuting via bus as reasons for implementing the project, but not increasing the accessibility of the urban landscape for existing bus riders. In the groundbreaking ceremony of January 21, 1972, California’s Secretary of Business and Transportation Frank J. Walton outlines clearly the state government’s intentions where he declared:

This project is the first attempt to wean the driver away from his automobile and at the same time provide him with the mobility that only rubber-tired transit can make available.

The public agencies responsible for designing and constructing the Busway and Transit Center intended it as a method of alleviating traffic for existing drivers commuting on the freeway, not so much as a means for improving bus access to those dependent on existing bus routes around San Gabriel Valley.

The Southern California Rapid Transit District broke ground and started construction on the Los Angeles-El Monte Busway and the El Monte Transit Center in 1972. The entire infrastructure project opened in multiple phases, starting with the Busway in 1973. The El Monte Transit Center, a central terminus for RTD buses, opened to the public in the following months, followed by two intermediate stations at California State University, Los Angeles and the Los Angeles County-University of Southern California Medical Center on the busway itself. Later, in 1976, California

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106 “From Dream to Reality.”
107 Metro Digital Resources Librarian, “40 Years Ago This Week.”
108 Metro Digital Resources Librarian.
Department of Transportation and SCRTD converted the busway to double as a carpool lane for vehicles with three or more passengers, creating one of the nation’s first high-occupancy vehicle lanes. By the completion of all projects and initial improvements in 1980, multiple federal, regional, and local agencies had spent $61 million on the busway and transit center, a much lower price tag than if the government had increased the number of lanes on the freeway.¹⁰⁹

Figure 6. As of fall 2018, the El Monte Busway’s alignment has remained unchanged since the one-mile extension of the separate right-of-way roadway between the LAC /USC Medical Center station and Union Station in 1989 (Turnbull 2002).¹¹⁰

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¹¹⁰ Turnbull, “Effects of Changing HOV Lane Occupancy Requirements: El Monte Busway Case Study.”
The El Monte Busway, a dedicated dual carriageway stretching eleven miles from the El Monte west towards Downtown Los Angeles, would encourage suburban commuters from the east to park in El Monte and avoid the traffic conditions of the 10 freeway and further into the city center (Figure 6). Its similarities to the Pacific Electric line, which brought commuters outside Los Angeles in, and the Backbone Route, which RTD’s predecessor MTA had planned to do with trains, effectively made it as such. To shuttle buses efficiently in and out of the El Monte terminus, the busway’s eastern end utilizes the former Pacific Electric right-of-way leading underneath the freeway as a direct exit ramp leading into the station’s bus bays, without having to encounter street traffic level or stop at an exit ramp. That said, no physical improvements were made to the existing routes that local buses travelled on other than realigning them to the new bus terminus. Although the bus terminus provided a central drop-off for local and express bus routes, existing non-express suburban routes did not see improvements since they did not travel on the Busway itself. This did little to alleviate traffic conditions for people traveling in El Monte and around San Gabriel Valley, since the Busway’s route along the center of the freeway prohibited it from making intermediate stops before the busway became its own separate right-of-way before the stop at California State University, Los Angeles. The bus station was marketed and built as an alternative to rush hour traffic jams for middle-class suburbanites in eastern San Gabriel Valley, those who travelled into the central business district or Westside in Los Angeles for work and could commute via car.

Despite these limitations, initial results from the Busway’s first years proved promising. The project cost millions of dollars under the original budget for the
proposed expansion of the 10 Freeway, yet it carried greater capacity than the original plan of adding more lanes to an already-congested freeway.\textsuperscript{111} By 1980, the total number of average daily travelers on the Busway exceeded 10,000 passengers, with an even split between bus riders and carpoolers. By the start of the 21\textsuperscript{st} century, this two-lane busway was carrying an average of 40,000 weekday passengers with a combination of carpools and 80 peak-hour buses, all the while maintaining over twice the speed of the adjacent ten lanes of freeway during rush hour.\textsuperscript{112} In turn, thousands of commuters came through the Transit Center on a daily basis, establishing it as one of the most important transit hubs in the region. Anywhere from 20,000 to 30,000 bus riders use the Transit Center on a given day, and LA Metro calls it the busiest bus station west of Chicago.\textsuperscript{113} Two bus rapid transit lines travel on the El Monte Busway: LA Metro’s Silver Line between San Pedro south of Downtown Los Angeles and El Monte, and Foothill Transit’s Silver Streak between Downtown Los Angeles and El Monte Transit Center have a combined average weekday ridership of around 20,000.\textsuperscript{114} Relative to other bus rapid transit systems, even within Los Angeles, the El Monte Busway is not the busiest. LA Metro’s Orange Line runs on a bus-exclusive route through San Fernando Valley north of Los Angeles, with an estimated ridership of around 30,000 to 50,000 on a given weekday.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{111} Southern California Rapid Transit District., “El Monte-Los Angeles Busway System.”
\textsuperscript{112} Turnbull, “Effects of Changing HOV Lane Occupancy Requirements: El Monte Busway Case Study.”
\textsuperscript{113} Metro Digital Resources Librarian, “40 Years Ago This Week”; Hobbs, “El Monte Station”; Brightwell, “Silver Line Stroll from Union Station to El Monte.”
\textsuperscript{114} “Metro Research.”
\textsuperscript{115} Sisson, “The Valley’s Wildly Successful Orange Line Can’t Get Any Respect.”
In the late 2000s, LA Metro began deconstructing the aging El Monte Transit Center as it was reaching its passenger capacity. In 2012, the new bus terminus opened to the public. One limitation of the new Transit Center was that planning of the bus station in some areas conflicted with the city’s plans for the surrounding neighborhoods. Intersections between the station and the surrounding amenities, such as connections to El Monte’s nearby pedestrian-friendly Valley Mall or the Rio Hondo Bike Path behind the station, appear disconnected from the planning process (Figure 7). The hundreds of parking spaces in front of the station set the station back from the street, away from Santa Anita Avenue and the western edge of El Monte city center. The station also has no direct path for pedestrians or bikers to access the Rio Hondo Bike Path, instead asking riders to exit at the entrance facing Santa Anita Avenue and loop around the side of the station to a hidden entrance. Residents of the trailer park and homes on the other side of the Rio Hondo Bike Path are physically impeded from walking straight into the bus center by the Rio Hondo running west of the transit center (Figure 7). Without building appropriate accommodations around the station for surrounding pedestrians and bikers to access the transit center, the bus station serves most of its passenger volume as a park-n-ride for drivers or a transfer point between express and local bus routes. Though its planners originally imagined the station to be used in this fashion, that LA Metro planned and built this station with makes its failure to mind the station’s walking and biking connections rather odd, considering it claims to coordinate transit-oriented development with communities like El Monte. In

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116 Scauzillo, “Metro Studies.”
addition, the feasibility study to consider combining El Monte’s bus station and Metrolink did not happen until 2017, five years after the redesigned bus station had already reopened.\textsuperscript{118} The station was designed from the start with less connectivity to the rest of El Monte than its central location would suggest.

El Monte is currently undergoing a major renovation project in its downtown area. A major part of the El Monte’s Gateway Transit project, and its larger Downtown Revitalization Project, is the focus on transit-oriented development. This phrase means any form of urban development that prioritizes the needs of transit riders, often in an area that has traditionally underserved or underutilized transit. Transit-oriented development tends to combine mid-density neighborhoods with mixed-use and many pedestrian connections. However, in any successful transit-oriented development plan, the urban plan of the site involves connection with a variety of transit options, whether they be accessible bike lanes or converging development around bus corridors.

\textsuperscript{118} Scauzillo, “Metro Studies”; “Los Angeles Metro Station Location Feasibility Study: El Monte Metrolink Station - Feasibility Study Executive Summary.”
Figure 7. Only the station & the Exchange at Gateway affordable apartments (Parcel 1 Residential) are built, with a mixed-use building (Parcel 4 Retail/Residential) under construction as of November 2018 (both outlined in blue).¹¹⁹

El Monte’s Downtown Main Street Transit-Oriented District Specific Plan and Master Plan was done by a local firm named RRM Design for the City of El Monte with funding from LA Metro. The plan thoroughly outlines meticulous urban design details like curb cutoffs and multi-storey setbacks, and building vehicular access, but is light on specifics for larger transit-oriented urban planning in and around Downtown El Monte. Interestingly, the transit-oriented plan insists in its transit section that “parking should be expanded and not reduced”\textsuperscript{120} around the Bus Station. In addition, the specific plan devotes two pages specifically for parking minimum requirements, the same number of pages it does for the entire plan’s transit network, half of which are general summaries of existing transit options around El Monte. The whole purpose of transit-oriented district is to increase transit and reduce car usage, so why is the city so focused increasing parking, thereby increasing the number of cars?

Meanwhile, the transit section of the transit-oriented district plan has mixed success. The specific plan lists four minute improvements in the Downtown area (Figure 7). Transit-oriented development requires effective change at the micro- and macro-level; for the specific plan to detail small improvements in the everyday usability of existing transit is important. Without the larger-scale study of how effective existing transit running through Downtown might be, one cannot increase the accessibility of transit for those who will most likely use it or need it the most. For example, how will the Union Pacific tracks running along the northern edge of the transit-oriented district or the proposed Metrolink station relocation between the Rio Hondo and the Transit

\textsuperscript{120}“Downtown Main Street Transit-Oriented District: Specific Plan & Master Plan.”
Center accommodate and interplay with increased transit and road traffic through the area? How do existing transit options align (or conflict) with plans outside of El Monte’s Downtown area, in neighboring cities and regions? (Figure 7 and 8). Transforming transit to better connect and align with local and regional transit need is central to encouraging ridership. Focusing exclusively on improvements in the Downtown area is important at the human scale, but with no consideration of transit’s interaction with the surrounding city or region, transit-oriented development will not function as properly as it should.
Figure 8. Figure 3-1 from “Downtown Main Street Transit-Oriented District: Specific Plan & Master Plan” (2017)

Figure 9. Figure 3-7 from “Downtown Main Street Transit-Oriented District: Specific Plan & Master Plan” (2017)
Walkthrough of El Monte Downtown Main Street Revitalization

To see the ongoing changes around Downtown El Monte as it develops and follows through with its Transit-Oriented District plans, I made a site visit of central El Monte on Tuesday, 13 November 2018 to observe the existing built environment’s interactions with its users. I mainly observed the traffic patterns of the bus station and the surrounding El Monte community, but also paid attention to details of accessibility and usability of existing transit options. Specifically, I walked around the central areas between the El Monte Metrolink train station and the bus Transit Center, such as the Downtown area, the Valley Mall, and the Rio Hondo Bike Path, covering most of the Downtown Main Street Transit-Oriented District (Figures 7 & 8).

I started my day at 08:42 AM getting on the westbound Metrolink train in Claremont. Like most suburban communities that developed around Los Angeles before the post-war era, the impetus for initial growth in the college town of Claremont was the construction of railroad and interurban streetcars. Having passed through Inland Empire’s many bedroom communities, many commuters before Claremont had already taken up a seat when I got on. However, the carriage was not overly crowded as I could easily find a spot next to someone. The San Bernardino Line train, originating in the namesake city of San Bernardino and crossing the Inland Empire, Pomona Valley, and San Gabriel Valley into Los Angeles Union Station is consistently Metrolink’s most popular route. According to Metrolink’s latest fact sheet for the first quarter of the 2018-2019 fiscal year, 9,509 riders rode on the San Bernardino Line on an average weekday. Coming from San Bernardino and travelling through the Inland Empire westward towards Los Angeles Union Station, many of the seats were already taken up by
commuters by the time I got on. The ride took around half an hour, crossing through Pomona Valley and the eastern end of San Gabriel Valley.

On 09:12 AM, I got off at the El Monte train station with a handful of other people onto a small island platform (Figure 10). El Monte is one of Metrolink’s busiest stops outside of Union Station, with around a thousand passengers using the train station on an average weekday. However, this pales in comparison to the tens of thousands of daily users of the bus station less than a mile away. The station property itself is owned by the City of El Monte since Metrolink is merely a service provider. Metrolink’s commuter rail service throughout Los Angeles does not own most of the railroad, rights-of-way, or property that it relies on to serve its passengers. Instead, Metrolink gets permission to run its trains on tracks owned and maintained by BNSF

Figure 10 (left). The single-island platform of El Monte Metrolink station (Lai 2018).
Figure 11 (right). The bus terminus of the El Monte Transit trolley system, next to the train station (Lai 2018)

121 Lai, El Monte Downtown Walkthrough.
122 “Los Angeles Metro Station Location Feasibility Study: El Monte Metrolink Station - Feasibility Study Executive Summary.”
and Union Pacific, the modern equivalents of the 19th and 20th century Santa Fe and Southern Pacific railway companies that helped create the region.

When I walked off the station platform, I was immediately greeted by the Commuter Shuttles that the City of El Monte operates. These buses link the Metrolink train station with Flair Park Business District, the office park west of central El Monte, and run in a loop to El Monte’s municipal government offices during peak commuting hours. The shuttles and the trolleys are designed for Metrolink commuters in mind: from the trolley station terminus and commuter shuttles starting and stopping at the train station, to the timing around Metrolink train stops, and the running hours coinciding with work hours of the week. The shuttles are timed so that they leave the Metrolink station right after a train arrives during the morning from 5:00 AM to 9:00 AM, when people are going to work, during the lunch hours around noon, and from 3:00 PM to 6:00 PM in the evening hours when commuters head home. Further out into the street is the Trolley Station, the terminus for El Monte Transit’s five circular trolley routes around the city (Figure 11). El Monte’s municipal buses operate once every 50 minutes, meaning that it might be faster to just walk if you miss a bus. The circular, meandering routes centered on the around the trolley station also make the bus inefficient if one’s destination does not start or end next to the Metrolink. El Monte as a city also has no obligation to extend or coordinate services with close-by cities like South El Monte. The orientation of the routes also does not have appear to have a close

123 “El Monte Commuter Shuttles.”
124 “Trolleys.”
connection to LA Metro’s more regional bus routes, even though I often saw signs for the trolley stops next to regular Metro bus stops.

![Figure 12](left). The trolley and Metrolink station entrance at the corner of Valley Blvd and Center Way (Lai 2018)

![Figure 13](right). Metro Bus #76 stops on Valley Boulevard a block away from El Monte’s Metrolink station, but there’s no signage linking the station with this bus stop (Lai 2018).

Moving further out towards Valley Boulevard, the arterial east-west thoroughfare crossing central El Monte, I noticed the connection to the LA Metro 76 bus that runs on Valley Boulevard. Though the 76 Bus is technically connected with Metrolink, the stop is a block away (Figure 12 and 13). Meanwhile, the Metrolink and trolley stations are recessed a block from Valley Boulevard in Center Way (Figure 12), making the connection not apparent when I got off the train.

I headed a few blocks south into The Valley Mall. The outdoor pedestrian-oriented mall is currently the center of the ongoing revitalization project by the City of El Monte and is being renamed Main Street to emphasize the centrality of this pedestrian-oriented mall within the larger the city. The Valley Mall was where Valley Boulevard ran through Downtown El Monte, but the city diverted traffic a block north to the present alignment on a six-lane boulevard, coinciding with the opening of the
Interstate 10 Freeway just south of Downtown El Monte in the 1950s. This transition away from the town center, with a mix of slow pedestrian and street traffic, to wide boulevards prioritizing fast movement of cars is emblematic of the transition that many older suburbs in Los Angeles made in the shift from streetcars to automobiles. Most of the city population grew away from the walkable center next to the train out to strip malls and shopping centers along the city’s boulevards. As a result of this traffic diversion, the Valley Mall has a quiet atmosphere and struggles for foot traffic with a mix of small mom-and-pop storefronts, some regional stores, and empty storefronts for lease (Figures 14 and 15).

Heading south from the Valley Mall on a side street, I walked to Ramona Boulevard, which demarcates the southern edge of Downtown El Monte. Ramona Boulevard ends at the entrance of the Transit Center, aligned parallel to the El Monte Busway, which heads west straight off the Interstate.

Figure 14. The typical street layout of Valley Mall in Downtown El Monte (Lai 2018).

Figure 15. A small playground built atop former parking spaces provides shade and recreation on the Valley Mall (Lai 2018).

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125 Kimitch, “El Monte Breaks Ground on Long-Awaited Housing, Retail Development.”
10 freeway. The freeway diverts southwest away from running through El Monte city center. This curious parallel belies the transportation history of El Monte: the Busway and the Interstate 10 freeway run atop of what was Ramona Boulevard and its adjacent Pacific Electric streetcar line. The continued impact of Ramona Boulevard’s streetcar line can be seen in the developments of El Monte and neighboring Baldwin Park. A long strip of condos and parking lots lines the edge of Ramona Boulevard east of central El Monte all the way into Baldwin Park, filling up the disused the streetcar’s former right-of-way. In the cities of Rosemead and Monterey Park just west of El Monte, a few disconnected streets that parallel the edge of the San Bernardino Freeway are still named “Ramona”, a small sign of the freeway’s past.

Back in El Monte, the designers of LA Metro’s new bus terminus in El Monte meant for the Transit Center to be a central hub for local, regional, and interstate buses. Initial plans for the layout of the Transit Center include allocations for Greyhound buses travelling around California and out of state, LA Metro’s Silver Line bus to San Pedro, and Foothill Transit’s complementary Silver Streak bus between Downtown Los Angeles and Montclair in San Bernardino County, and the City of El Monte’s circular trolley bus and commuter shuttle routes. Yet the most recent schedules for El Monte’s city-run shuttles show that they do not enter the bus terminus, but stop opposite the entrance next to the intersection of Santa Anita Avenue and Ramona Boulevard, and their pamphlets cite timeliness as a reason for not entering into the bus complex.126 This is because the El Monte Transit Center’s bus stops are built a few hundred feet behind a

126 “El Monte Commuter Shuttles”, “Green Route.”
parking lot entrance. The design of this long driveway-esque entrance at the end of Ramona Boulevard seems to be meant for the convenience of drivers, who can easily pick up people at the passenger drop-off and turn back out of the station (Figure 18), or senter the paid commuter parking lots on either side of the entrance (Figure 19). On the other hand, the convenience given to drivers causes the entire bus station to be set back from the street front and separate from the rest of the city center across Santa Anita Avenue. The pedestrian pathway from the entrance into the station itself to the driveway entrance at the intersection of Santa Anita and Ramona requires walking
across the edge of either parking lot. An interesting aspect of the rebuilding of the El Monte Transit Center is the inclusion of a bike “hub”, meant as a one-stop repair shop and secure location for LA Metro commuters to park and fix their bikes. However, there are no separate bike lanes on Santa Anita Avenue or Ramona Boulevard. Instead, on the right-most lane of Ramona Boulevard are bike arrows painted on the ground with a bike sign every few hundred feet, indicating a shared lane (Figure 16). Considering how fast most traffic was moving on the six-lane Ramona Boulevard, it seemed more likely that bikers would prefer the sidewalk for safety reasons, despite it not being built for biking. This is exactly what happened, as I ran into multiple bikers on the sidewalks walking around Santa Anita Avenue. I did not see a single biker riding down the shared lane on Ramona Boulevard; in fact, there are no existing separated bike lanes in El Monte’s Downtown area, except one small sliver on Tyler Avenue heading south. This made me curious about other ways bikers can connect to the station, like the Rio Hondo Bike Path that passes underneath the Busway.

I managed to find the sign leading me to the bike path at the side of the station, next to the bike hub and a strange “Sidewalk Closed” sign (Figure 20). This signage for the bike path seemed like an afterthought, since a biker would bike through an alleyway meant for a parking garage (Figure 21) to find the entrance for the Rio Hondo Bike Path in a parking lot hidden behind the station (Figures 22 and 23). During my site visit right after the morning rush hour, the bike racks were mostly full, indicating high demand for more biking infrastructure (Figure 17). No matter how much bike infrastructure is placed within the station, the lack of bike connections outside the Transit Center would inhibit more people from accessing the station by biking.
Figures 20 and 21 (left and right). The signage at the corner of the bus station entrance leads into the back alley for a multi-storey parking structure and a hidden gate entering the Rio Hondo Bike Path (Lai 2018).

Figure 22 (left). Entrance to the Rio Hondo Bike Path in the foreground, with the Rio Hondo and Busway in green in the midground, and Metrolink rail bridge in tan in the background. (Lai 2018)

Figure 23 (right). Facing north, the Rio Hondo Bike Path runs along the Rio Hondo on the left, and a portion of the Metrolink San Bernardino Line runs above the bikeway after crossing the Rio Hondo. (Lai 2018)
Another issue I experienced is the everyday reliability of bus versus rail services. On multiple occasions passing through El Monte Transit Center, I have seen either the Silver Line or Silver Streak have issues with timeliness or breaking down, causing delays. On the 13 November site visit, I witnessed the Los Angeles-bound Silver Streak bus have its wheel cover pop off, and the bus driver had to get everyone on board off the bus. (Luckily, I was heading back on the Montclair-bound Silver Streak.) LA Metro buses serve a much larger populace across a much larger geographic region of the county, yet it receives much less funding and research to this day, even after the BRU agreement to incorporate more bus riders’ input into LA Metro’s planning processes.\textsuperscript{127}

Another worrisome implication of El Monte Downtown’s revitalization effort is who gets selected to have a voice. The City of El Monte’s report lists multiple town hall sessions and civic outreach meetings with the public, and affordable housing is mentioned as one of the concerns brought up regarding the Downtown Main Street Transit-Oriented District.\textsuperscript{128} To the city’s credit, the first Gateway apartments built were the Exchange at Gateway, a 132-unit affordable housing complex for low-income families (Figure 26). However, all units were leased by the time the Exchange opened in 2015, and it’s likely that many low-income families on waiting list of over 1,000 will never get a chance to live there.\textsuperscript{129} Despite this enormous demand, the rest of Gateway developments are being built as market-rate by developers (Figure 27), with no plans to

\textsuperscript{127} Ben-Akiva and Morikawa, “Comparing Ridership Attraction of Rail and Bus”; Grengs, “Community-Based Planning as a Source of Political Change: The Transit Equity Movement of Los Angeles’ Bus Riders Union.”
\textsuperscript{128} “Downtown Main Street Transit-Oriented District: Specific Plan & Master Plan.”
\textsuperscript{129} Kimitch, “Long-Awaited El Monte Affordable Housing Project Offers 132 Units”; Kimitch, “El Monte Breaks Ground on Long-Awaited Housing, Retail Development.”
build more affordable housing at the moment. In the report, there is neither any mention of how or whether the city will reach out to the homeless population that once lived in Pioneer Park, the former park north of the Transit Center on which the Gateway mixed-used developments are being built. With El Monte’s home prices rapidly going up (I saw new condos on Valley Boulevard asking for over $400,000), the city will need to consider how its lower-income residents will get by living in the area.

Next to the Gateway project construction site exists a section of the former Pioneer Park known as the Santa Fe Trail Historical Park. The City of El Monte’s seal has claimed it is the “End of the Santa Fe Trail” since the early 1900s, based on an extension of the original Santa Fe Trail, and the park appeared to be a historic rendition of El Monte from the 19th century. When I tried to enter, the gates were locked and the park looked in a state of disrepair as construction crews were building next door (Figures 24-25). Though it’s hard to say when it was last opened, multiple local blogs that tried to visit the site years ago suggest that the Santa Fe Trail Historical Park has been closed off from the public long before the Gateway Project closed down Pioneer Park. The closure of Pioneer Park (Figure 26), which had baseball fields and open spaces, and Santa Fe Trail Historical Park is a blow to a park-deprived city with less than one acre of park space per 1,000 residents.

131 “Downtown Main Street Transit-Oriented District: Specific Plan & Master Plan.”
132 Fullam, “Recognition as the End of the Santa Fe Trail Still Eludes El Monte.”
133 Fullam.
134 Fragos, “Urban Approach to Suburban Living.”
Figure 24 (left). *The shuttered, locked entrance to the Santa Fe Trail Historical Park* (Lai 2018).

Figure 25 (right). *The remaking of a 19th-century style ranch in the park has been removed* (Lai 2018).

Figure 26 (left). *Street leading to Exchange at Gateway affordable housing, with Transit Center parking on the left and Gateway construction on the right* (Lai 2018).

Figure 27 (right). *Market-rate Gateway apartments under construction* (Lai 2018).

Figure 26. The closed baseball fields in Pioneer Park could not be seen from the Rio Hondo Bike Path.
The City of El Monte’s plans to reinvigorate civic life into its Downtown area, based around the remodeled El Monte Transit Center, has many potentials but also many issues like Greater Los Angeles’s 21st century pivot away from freeway-induced suburban development to transit-induced mixed-use development. Attempts to revitalize El Monte’s struggling town center with the bus station is driving up demand for developers to create more expensive market-rate housing (Figure 26), while the small supply of units more affordable to its population are not keeping up with demand. Despite lengthy community reviews and some community input, the developments are being built piece-by-piece, making important overarching details like pedestrian connectivity or transit network flows harder to integrate. These things will affect how user-friendly the streetscape of Downtown El Monte will become as it becomes more populated and attracts more visitors.

El Monte’s current downtown revitalization is part of the city’s larger “Billion Dollar Investment Initiative”, in which the city is trying to attract regional and international corporations along its transit corridors.135 With this in mind, I question who what type of future the City of El Monte is building towards. Considering the median income of the city is $39,000 and a quarter of its population is under the federal poverty line,136 I hope the city will make sure its current residents can afford to live there once all these new multi-million dollar businesses arrive by building more affordable housing projects like the Exchange at Gateway, as well as allowing more lower-income businesses to coexist and thrive alongside these new developments.

135 “The El Monte Billion Dollar Investment Initiative.”
136 “El Monte City, California.”
Future of Greater Los Angeles Transit

Much of LA Metro’s efforts since its inception in the 1990s has continued to go to develop new rail lines, even after the Bus Riders Union settlement. This has resulted in its continuous underfunding of bus riders, which still make up over 70 percent of its total ridership.\(^{137}\) Multiple tax propositions and measures in the late 20\(^{th}\) and early 21\(^{st}\) century have built upon the first funds from Proposition A in 1980 for RTD’s initial rail lines. For example, Measure M in 2016 funded the estimated $1.5 billion needed to complete the light rail extension from Azusa to Claremont at the eastern edge of Los Angeles County by 2027, and potentially into San Bernardino County if it funds the extension into the city of Montclair.\(^{138}\) Meanwhile, plans to build much cheaper bus rapid transit for the highly-developed Vermont Avenue through South Los Angeles and the east-west corridors in San Gabriel Valley have either stalled or have yet to leave the proposal stages.\(^{139}\) Other existing bus rapid transit lines like Metro’s Orange Line and Silver Line arose out of compromise between light rail and local bus service, with reliability issues and lower than anticipated ridership due to their disconnect with the existing built-up regions on which they were built. As a testament to how little attention LA Metro has paid to its bus lines, the ongoing NextGen Bus Study, expected to be finished in 2019, is the first major study and re-alignment of countywide bus system since Metro took over from RTD nearly three decades ago.\(^{140}\)

\(^{137}\) “Metro Ridership.”

\(^{138}\) City News Service, “$1.5B Metro Gold Line Extension Project Breaks Ground.”

\(^{139}\) Linton, “Metro Planning Vermont Avenue Bus Rapid Transit.”

\(^{140}\) “NextGen Bus Study Overview.”
An interesting, complicated development is Foothill Transit, which has been a public-private partnership since its conception. Though three-fourths of its funds come from local taxes in San Gabriel Valley and Pomona Valley, the everyday service it provides to these municipalities is outsourced to two for-profit transportation companies, Transdev and Keolis.\footnote{“Fast Facts.”} This tactic to divide workers into separate private contractors has been accused by LA Metro’s union workers of de-unionizing the workforce of the former RTD lines\footnote{Rutten and Muir, “NEWS ANALYSIS.”}, since the Los Angeles County Commissioner that supported Foothill Transit’s secession admitted himself he was against the RTD and later LA Metro unions.\footnote{Quintana, “Foothill Transit Trial Begins.”} Unlike LA Metro, Foothill Transit funds solely bus lines and has no plans to create rail, light or heavy, in a region that is highly built-up with existing suburban road networks. Perhaps because of these two reasons, Foothill Transit can provide cheaper fares to its suburban cities compared to RTD and LA Metro.\footnote{Rutten and Muir, “NEWS ANALYSIS.”} Foothill Transit currently has made ten percent of its bus fleet run on electricity and aims to become one of the first fully-electrified bus systems in the country, piloting the nation’s first double-decker electric buses on the Silver Streak line through El Monte.\footnote{“Electric Double Decker Bus.”} Time will tell if LA Metro, Metrolink, and other regional transit operators will follow suit in removing tailpipe emissions from their vehicles, eliminating the air pollution impact the buses and trains have on the homes and businesses along their routes.
Returning to a more equitable transit planning will need professionals and officials willing to listen to the lived experiences of laypeople and consider nuances that are not immediately apparent in a standardized planning process. Doing this will take time implementing transparent avenues of communication between public agencies, city governments, local groups, and individual riders. The unique nature of San Gabriel Valley, with its present-day majority-minority population of Latinx and Asian Americans, should also be taken into consideration when studying this diverse region. Future studies can incorporate interviewing individuals or community groups around transit hubs like El Monte, combining the needs of their livelihoods with the needs for better transit.

146 Cheng, “A Brief History (and Geography) of the San Gabriel Valley.”
Chapter IV: Conclusion

The modern struggle for equitable transit in different areas of Greater Los Angeles belies the complicated nature in which this region has been built upon over ensuing years of conflicting transportation developments. Most of the public transportation that would be built in the late-20th to 21st centuries saw the green light only after decades of successive tax propositions that heavily relied on the votes from wealthier car-centric communities. However, less known to the residents that benefited from this new transit is that much of these massive transportation projects lay atop existing pathways from historic streetcars and railroads. In fact, Greater Los Angeles at one point had one of the most integrated transit systems of any metropolitan area in the world. A near consistent urbanity stretching dozens of miles from the Pacific Ocean inland, the Greater Los Angeles region today hides in plain sight a long history of transit stretching back centuries. Southern California’s earlier transit systems, from the indigenous trails before Spanish colonization to the railroads in the 19th century, were crucial in developing the core foundations and much of the urban layout that continues to exist and impact the millions of residents in the Greater Los Angeles Area. Therefore, we must look at the multifaceted layers of inequitable planning with the important role travel has played in how Greater Los Angeles came into existence.

Much of the background literature that I read focused their attentions on acts of discrimination and disparity placed on certain geographic spaces or the modes of transport, such as the fight for improved buses by the Bus Riders Union. In addition, I found that environmental injustice extends beyond immediately visible environmental
hazards such as environmental degradation into less apparent forms of discrimination that are ingrained into the fabric of our built environments, which is the underlying planning process behind our collective communities’ existences. The built environment is normally defined by the planning of physical environments that have been and are being built for human use, covering technical fields like civic engineering and urban design. However, urban planners and local agencies too infrequently reflect on the role their profession has played in perpetuating or challenging existing society’s expectations for what can or cannot be built, where it is built, and for whom that planning shall build for. With El Monte, San Gabriel Valley, and Greater Los Angeles, I focus on the importance transportation has had on influencing the decision-making processes of city building by individuals with power throughout history, and its corresponding relationship to build around (or in some cases, over) existing built environments over subsequent time periods. Rather than finding that transportation planning throughout history is a zero-sum game for different players, I found that different groups navigated societal frameworks and built environments by negotiating existing human-built structures of society placed upon geographic environments, at times working with, against, or separate from each other.

What I found on the grounds of El Monte Downtown is that much of the current refocusing on transit-oriented development needs to be improved upon. Individual projects like El Monte’s Downtown Main Street Transit-Oriented District need to contextualize itself within the larger metropolitan area, rather than create piecemeal renovations and disaggregated improvements in arbitrary boundaries isolated from the rest of the city or region. Greater Los Angeles’s long tradition of transit needs to be
accounted for when building for the future. Larger field of urban planning needs to better incorporate all aspects of civic life in interdisciplinary fields, combining access to public services like transit with other services like healthcare, schools, recreation, and so forth. City governments and transit agencies should be given credit for being open to starting this process. As seen in the Bus Riders Union settlement with LA Metro, approaching transit planning through civic participation allows the community to take ownership of their needs and gives transit agencies legitimacy and insight that can better integrate their plans in solving local disparities. With hope, the NextGen Bus Study, El Monte’s Downtown Main Street projects around its bus station, and other ongoing proposals to revitalize the urban fabric will create a more just transit system and built environment in Greater Los Angeles for future generations.
Glossary

**Built environment** – any space or surroundings humans have altered for specific human activities, such as a residential community for habitation

**Environmental injustice** – the unequal and unfair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens upon which the environmental justice movement tries to combat

**Environmental justice (EJ)** – a social movement that emerged as a concept in the late 20th century, envisioning the equal and fair distribution of environmental benefits and burdens upon different groups and communities of society

**Environmental racism** – a term explaining the unjust nature of inequitable and disproportionate environmental harm placed upon communities of color in a racialized lens

**Foothill Transit (FT)** – a bus transit agency created in 1988 out of former RTD/Metro bus lines serving 22 cities in San Gabriel Valley and Pomona Valley

**Inland Empire** – a geographic region east of Pomona Valley and Los Angeles County roughly contiguous with San Bernardino Valley that was historically known for agriculture up until mid- to late-20th century, a highly-developed metropolitan area centered on the cities of San Bernardino and Riverside on the western edges of San Bernardino and Riverside Counties, respectively

**Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro or Metro)** – created in 1993 merging countywide transit powers of RTD with countywide transportation funding of Los Angeles County Transportation Commission, creating a “super-agency” responsible for all countywide transportation

**Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA)** – created in 1951 to do a study on monorail system, later expanded powers to operate transit and bought out regional bus and streetcar lines, oversaw closures of the last Pacific Electric and Los Angeles Railway services

**Pomona Valley** – a mostly suburban region at the eastern edge of Los Angeles County, east of San Gabriel Valley and west of San Bernardino County and the Inland Empire, roughly encompassing the cities of San Dimas, La Verne, Pomona, and Claremont

**San Gabriel Valley** – named after Mission San Gabriel, today a highly-developed, mostly suburban region east of the City of Los Angeles and west of Pomona Valley
*Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD or RTD)* – superseded the LAMTA in 1964, served bus lines throughout Greater Los Angeles and built light-rail and heavy rail subway in the 1980s to 1990s

*Tongva or K’izh* – a cultural group of indigenous Americans residing in Southern California across much of the present-day Los Angeles metropolitan area (Los Angeles Basin, San Gabriel Valley, Pomona Valley, Inland Empire), sometimes referred to as *Gabrieleños* due to Spanish colonization of their homeland by Mission San Gabriel

*Transit* – the transportation of people from one place to another, often referring to mass public transportation

*Transit racism* – providing transit services in a racially inequitable manner, the main argument of Bus Riders Union in its civil rights lawsuit against LA Metro
Appendix I: Select Photos of El Monte Bus Transit Center
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