

A Transportation Revolution in the City of Angels: Existing, New and Combining the Two



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Los Angeles is at a fascinating point in time. Innovative transportation technologies are impacting our region in an unprecedented way. And while no one really knows exactly where it is all going, we do have some ideas of what's in store for us. But first, we have to look at what's happening.

Through strategic urban planning and the comprehensive expansion of its transit system, Los Angeles is catching up—and in some cases surpassing—many other cities with existing legacy transit/rail systems. At the same time, Los Angeles has become a center of transportation innovation, through new technology developments and experimentation with quality-of-life-improvement methods. For example, an increasing number of area companies are focused on autonomous vehicles, smart cities, and other technological advancements. Other companies are examining innovations in our urban landscape, whether through developing complete streets, bike sharing, or improving the walkability of neighborhoods. The New Cities Foundation, a non-profit based in Montreal, brought the LA CoMotion Conference and Festival to Los Angeles last fall because it sees LA as the next center of innovation in urban mobility. So, what does it all mean? How will Los Angeles combine existing and new transportation elements?

It's already happening. LA Metro is examining a microtransit program while in development of a vast expansion of LA's rail network. The Los Angeles Department of Transportation has been exploring the role of transportation technology innovations and examining partnerships with a variety of companies. Those are only two of many examples.

There is also potential tension between existing transportation and new technology. Many fear that transportation network companies and the development of autonomous vehicle technology present a threat to transit. At the same time, there has been a decrease in transit ridership in Los Angeles County that is causing concern. So how do we combine the existing and the new in a beneficial way?

There may be a number of answers. The public sector, which currently manages most transit, and the private sector, which is driving new transportation technologies, should work together in closer ways if we want to achieve optimal results. Already, there are signs of this from a number of partnerships between the private sector and public agencies. So, what's a city to do?

We should think critically about how we want existing transportation and new technologies to merge, as well as the potential consequences. On one hand, some traditional transportation options may become less prominent with a wider variety of transportation options driven by technology. On the other hand, technological innovation is not an end in itself—we need to think about ways to make it work for us and the greater good of Los Angeles.

Los Angeles is experiencing an unprecedented period of transportation growth and technological innovation. Only through constructive cooperation between the public and private sectors can we successfully incorporate existing transportation and new technologies.

-Blair Schlecter