



April 16, 2007 Meeting Report

by
David DeVoss



Michael Collins
LA Inc.

Destination: San Fernando Valley

Sunshine. Palm trees. Mountain trails. Beaches. With all these assets you might think promoting LA tourism is an easy job. Not so, says **Michael Collins**, executive vice-president of **LA Inc.**, the organization responsible for attracting conventions and visitors to the city.

"There was a time four or five years ago when we couldn't give the Convention Center away," he says. "We told convention organizers just come to LA and you can have floor space worth \$250,000, but they still said no."

No longer. Last year, LA Inc's aggressive marketing helped lure 25 million visitors who collectively spent \$13 billion. This money, paid directly from visitor's pockets, results in 260,000 hospitality-related local jobs.

Far from being a forgotten part of the city, the San Fernando Valley is the second most visited destination in Los Angeles, second only to Hollywood, says Collins, a Vietnam vet and father of six who lives in nearby Glendale. "The Valley has the highest level of repeat visitors who stay an average of 4.2 days, or 42% longer than the city average." The Valley's high numbers are driven by the fact that many travelers come to visit friends and relatives. "Most people who stay in the Valley are on vacation," Collins says. Indeed, the Valley boasts the largest vacation factor of all the nine regions into which the city is divided. Also surprising is the fact that the Valley is tied with downtown LA as a destination for people attending conventions and trade shows. This is because people attending trade shows often stay with relatives in the Valley and commute to the convention center (hopefully on the orange and red lines).

The Valley has 13 full service hotels and their occupancy rate grew 6.7% last year. On average Valley hotels and motels are 78% full. Next to downtown LA, the Valley has the second highest room rates, which average \$116 per night. These figures should be kept in perspective, however, since Beverly Hills and Santa Monica are separate cities and don't contribute to all the statistical categories. The Valley contributes 17% of the city's hotel tax receipts yet has 25% of LA's hotel rooms. Why the imbalance? Because many Valley hotel rooms are found in small motels with modest room rates.

Much of LA Inc's recent success is attributed to the "See My LA" advertising campaign in which celebrities promote the city.

Television commercials worth \$800,000 are airing in cities like San Diego and San Francisco, which contribute substantially to Valley visitor totals.

Want to learn more about the Valley's tourism potential? Then visit the **Valley Hospitality Expo** at the Warner Center Marriott on Tuesday, May 22 from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. The event combines a tabletop trade show with interactive presentations by the Valley Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Economic Alliance of the San Fernando Valley.



Richard Katz
MTA Board Member

Silver Buses not Silver Bullets

MTA board member Richard Katz, an LA Times-certified "friend of Antonio" who won acclaim for his leadership role in the Valley's 2002 campaign for cityhood, rounded out a fact-filled evening, giving Valley VOTE members an insider's assessment of the city's traffic situation.

"When it comes to traffic people want a silver bullet, but there isn't one," says Katz. "I used to think \$3 (a gallon) gas would be a habit changer, but is up to \$3.25 with barely a ripple (in commuting behavior)."

There are significant advances, however. Katz notes that ridership on the Orange Line is way ahead of schedule and the 101/405 interchange improvement is the only design/build project the legislature approved last year. Sacramento did try to eliminate money set aside for carpool lanes on the San Diego freeway, but the Governor, Mayor and Assembly Speaker successfully argued for its retention so that soon a carpool lane will run from the 118 freeway all the way to the LAX exit at Century Blvd.

"The key is to have these lanes connect to something," says Katz. "That's why we're working on completing that system by extending the Expo Line from downtown to Santa Monica and making Olympic and Pico Boulevards one way streets."

Does LA's transit future lie underground or on the surface? In the near term, buses probably are the solution. "The red buses that run down Ventura Blvd. are successful - and not just with the transit dependent - at getting people from A to B fast. I give the Mayor a lot of credit for being focused on short term solutions like filling pot holes and (creating) left turn lanes."

Car pooling and ride sharing, traditional solutions that people support for everybody but themselves, remain on the table. But completing the 710 freeway and eliminating bottlenecks like where the 110 narrows to two lanes at the 134 also need immediate action.

Could greater urban density lead to less traffic congestion? Katz believes so, if the increased density comes in the form of urban infill next to train stations and other transit hubs. Says Katz: "There are three times as many jobs on the Westside as there are housing units. That's why the 405 is so crowded."

Katz says Los Angeles residents need to change their transit habits before real progress can be realized. "It's nice that many celebrities now are putting biodiesel in their Hummers," he smiles. "But the environment would improve faster if they would take the train to the academy awards."

Mixed Signals from LAVA

"I expressed relief last year that LAX expansion was proclaimed dead at the Settlement Agreement Press Conference," says Denny Schneider, Valley VOTE's eye on Los Angeles World Airports. "Alas, it may not as dead as we hoped."

The Specific Plan Amendment Committee meetings continue, says Schneider, but next month "a Notice of Preparation," the official notification of an Environmental Impact Review, for a new series of master plan changes will include a plan that imposes community impacts worse than the Master Plan discarded by the Settlement Agreement.

LAVA has given way on many issues but it continues to push for project elements that include a new, independent Airport Complex a couple of miles west of the original LAX, a new ring road access, and a north runway complex expansion that increases LAX capacity.

LAVA claims they want to mitigate environmental impacts and there's no expansion because there is a gate cap until 2020, notes Schneider. But it's like building a new freeway off ramp ending in your community and putting a chain link fence across it with a sign, "not an exit." Their continued excuse for runway movement closer to communities as well as runway lengthening is "safety." Several public meetings and a trip to Washington failed to convince anyone. At the end of this month six more "studies" will be released in an attempt to convince our elected officials that a problem exists.

One has to wonder what these yet to be seen studies could say that justifies spending billions of dollars when less expensive, alternative improvements like better FAA tower staffing and improving aircraft status light systems on the runways exist.

Mixing It Up

Mixed-use housing is pretty much what the name implies: commercial usage on the ground floor and residential units or hotel rooms above.

The concept has long been used on the East Coast and in other countries," says Valley VOTE treasurer Vic Viereck. "Now mixed-use units are proliferating in Los Angeles and the Valley.

The new zeal for mixed-use housing is traffic driven. By having stores and residential units in the same complex, there should be less traffic from people driving to and from stores and their employment. Mixed-use developments are being built along Hollywood Blvd. and above the subway terminal at Wilshire Blvd. and Vermont Avenue. A Valley Glen development by Chris Allen of Dasher-Lawless is planned for the North side of Victory Boulevard, between Ethel and Fulton. That development, which replaces an old apartment complex, will have shops, restaurants, and an upscale market on the first floor topped by 109 market rate condominiums.

In North Hollywood, along Lankershim Boulevard a mixed use building is nearing completion. Next to the NoHo Commons many apartments, including loft units, have been and are being built. Shopping, subway and bus transportation, and entertainment will all be within a short walk.

"My hope is the Los Angeles City Council will support such developments, as long as they do not significantly replace single family neighborhoods," says Viereck. "More ways need to be utilized to develop housing and offset the City Council's tendency to destroy affordable housing through draconian restrictions and redistribution of owners assets."

What's Universal Up To?

Polly Ward, who monitors Neighborhood Councils for Valley VOTE, presented a schematic of the mega project Universal hopes to develop adjacent to its existing studio and backlot. According to Ward, it will be a complete village. Just how big will this village be? Universal offers to meet with 20 people from Valley VOTE. Ward will ask the developers to address our entire membership.

Valley VOTE Mission Statement

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

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