



April 21, 2008 Meeting Report
by
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Is Los Angeles A Black Hole? Mike Antonovich Thinks So



County Supervisor Mike Antonovich

Physicists believe a black hole is a region of space in which the gravitational field is so powerful that nothing, not even light, can escape after having fallen in. **LA County Supervisor Mike Antonovich** has the same opinion of the City of Los Angeles, at least when it comes to money. "The city of LA is the black hole," he insists. "You see the dollars go in and they disappear. You have to ask yourself does LA have a revenue problem or a cost problem."

Elected to represent the County's Fifth Supervisorial District in 1980 (county supervisors have no term limits), Antonovich wonders why a city with a \$7 billion budget can't provide efficient mass transit. One reason may be that it doesn't have a \$22 billion budget like the County. But Antonovich suspects the real reason is that downtown business interests, and the politicians they control, don't listen to the neighborhoods.

"Many years ago, Valley voters were asked if they wanted a subway or a monorail to run along the 101 to downtown," Antonovich remembers. "The monorail came out No. 1; the subway finished last. But Dick Riordan got the city to vote against it and the (*Los Angeles Times*) never referred to the vote of the people in its reporting. City Hall and the Times brushed you aside and now you don't have mass transit to anywhere. The reason is that transit dollars are spent by the Metro Transit Authority (which is dominated by Antonio Villaraigosa.) That's why instead of using the right of ways we already have to complete the Gold and Expo lines, the mayor wants to spend \$5 billion to build the subway to the sea."

LA's habit of caving to developers and discarding agreed upon development plans is reflected in its handling of county airports. "In the 1960s, LA wanted to have airports serving the entire region so LAWA acquired Ontario and Palmdale," Antonovich says. "Eventually, LAWA put more parking at

Ontario, but it dragged it's feet in promoting Palmdale. The 405 doesn't expand like a pair of pantyhose," he smiles. "It makes no sense for people from Ventura and Kern counties to go all the way to LAX when they could go to Palmdale or Ontario." To insure that at least Los Angeles can use Palmdale, Antonovich says that three weeks ago the county began providing bus service from Van Nuys to the Palmdale airport.

Instant Runoff Voting: Worth the Cost?

Elections cost money and often aren't decided on the first ballot. If nobody receives a majority, a second election must be held at great public cost with little public enthusiasm. **The New America Foundation's Gautam Dutta** thinks he has a better idea: Instant Runoff Voting.

Under the IRV system, voters rank their favorite candidates in their order of preference on an electronic ballot. If no candidate has a majority of first choice rankings, the instant runoff begins at no additional cost. The candidate with the least support is eliminated. Voters who ranked their candidates now have their vote counted for their second choice and all ballots are recounted. The candidate with the majority of votes wins.

The machinery to conduct IRV elections costs \$30 million. A typical May runoff election costs \$8 million. Are long-term savings worth the upfront cost? Someday you may be asked to decide.

Happy Trails

In 1968, LA introduced a comprehensive trails program designed to ring the entire San Fernando Valley with a recreational trail suitable for hiking and horseback riding. In 1990, then governor George Deukmejian approved the idea making LA's *Rim of the Valley Trail* one of 26 state-recognized regional trails. State approval meant that Sacramento could fund up to 84% of the trail's construction. Sounds like a happy ending, but it's not. "Today, the Rim of the Valley is a concept not a plan because the city hasn't done any planning," explains **Mary Benson, CEO of the National Heritage Foundation's Los Angeles Trails Project**. "In 40 years the city of Los Angeles never has gotten around to asking for funding."

The benefits of a trail encircling the Valley are obvious, says Benson. "It could help promote equine tourism, attract tourists to Valley B&Bs and provide the focus for hospitality-oriented dude ranches. Europeans flock to states like Montana and Wyoming for the dude ranch experience and we can cater to that market in the spring when Montana and Wyoming are still too cold.

"We're missing an opportunity here," says Benson. "Trails increase the value of property. The value of a house can jump 10% if it's closer to a trail. Glendale is developing a citywide trails plan, but LA's general plan does not recognize recreational trails." LA is quick to ask what bicyclists want but it ignores hikers and everybody else, she reports. Benson says that people who want to save the Valley from developers like those behind Las Lomas need to contact their city council representative and demand that a "recreational trails element" be included the city general plan's "mobility element." Act before it's too late and the Valley's last vestiges of open space are graded and covered with houses.

Be Careful What You Ask For

"Time and again elected officials have passed legislation that has victimized the very people they plead to for votes," says **Valley VOTE treasurer Vic Viereck**. "Part of the 1986 Federal Tax Reform Act was enacted to prevent investors from escaping income tax by taking advantage of real estate tax shelters. Although certain parts of that Act, such as reduction of income tax rates, were

very beneficial, the increase (from 19 years to 27 1/2 years) in the depreciable life of residential income property, and disallowing operating losses on such property for taxpayers with income above stated levels, has created a persistent shortage of affordable apartments. The better (28% maximum) part of the 1986 Federal Tax Reform Act is long gone.”

As the recently ended housing boom was gaining steam, affordable housing advocates were pushing for easing of restrictions on lower income people so they too could buy homes. Those homebuyers, and many others, are now paying the price.

The City of Los Angeles is worse. Considering the combined effect of the foregoing federal tax laws and the Los Angeles Rent Stabilization Ordinance, it's like a double whammy against the supply of rental housing, particularly affordable housing. After the Ordinance started in 1978, subsequent amendments have made it even more intolerable. Less and less Mom and Pop middle class investors are able or are motivated to invest in apartments. While investors can find other investments for their hard earned money, people need a roof over their heads. Now that the city officials have gotten what they asked for (but did not want), the other consequence is dumped on us, the taxpayers. Besides having to fund the \$100 million Affordable (not to the taxpayers) Housing Trust Fund, expenditures from that “Trust” fund incrementally undermine the property tax base.

A Beautiful Day In The Neighborhood?

Neighborhood Councils in the Valley opting to utilize the city clerk to conduct their elections this year selected Saturday, June 28th as the date for same,” says **George Truesdell** . “Not only does this place an entity trained in conducting elections in charge of this important function, but it also allows for economies of scale when advertising each community's election,” he says. “The process to be conducted by the city clerk's office includes mailing election materials to every address within each community's geographic boundaries and advertising the events on more than one occasion. It is presumed that this extra effort and attention to the process will increase participation among all stakeholders. Individual councils will still conduct candidate forums and do their own outreach, but this will all be enhanced by the new procedures. Only time will tell if this effort increases awareness and interest in the respective neighborhood council areas.”

The second concern for neighborhood councils is the reworking of SB 1818 by our City Council, and the apparent givebacks to developers. The original state bill did not offer the increase in reduced parking enhancements as that provided by the L.A. City Council, and it appears that developers want to construct new housing in areas not necessarily conducive to this increased density. This action has galvanized neighborhoods in opposition to many of the plans submitted by developers. Incumbent in the developer's plans are increases in height as well as reductions in setback. Right now, sides are being drawn on these issues impacting Ventura Boulevard from Studio City to Woodland Hills, and it looks to be an ugly fight. SB 1818 does not take into account the other density and traffic problems described by **Polly Ward** in the Universal City fiasco, that is another matter altogether.

Airport Report

Denny Schneider reports that Burbank (Bob Hope) Airport is preparing a Part 161 Study for the FAA requesting a ban on night time flights. Critical to VNY neighbors is that they are pushing to have all nighttime private jets use VNY instead of Bob Hope. Also, a request for proposal has been released for a facilitator for a new VNY-Community Noise Roundtable. It will give local residents and businesses a new voice and insight into the operation of VNY.

“Some of us are beginning to question the sincerity of LAWA in its effort to modernize instead of expand capacity at LAX,” says Schneider. “ It was reported, today, that LAWA intends to add more gates onto the back of Tom Bradley International Terminal LAWA. The new midfield terminal is again delayed. To date only the capacity-expanding project of moving the South runways has been completed since the Settlement Agreement two years ago. No other projects have been approved for construction.”

A shortage of fully experienced controllers still looms at LAX, as there is a large number retiring. Also, in the name of safety, the air traffic controllers have asked that the rate of flights taking off or landing at LAX be decreased, not increased, and as recently mandated by the FAA.

The North side Safety Committee (NORSAC) was created as a result of the City Council desire to settle the question about whether a safety issues exists. NORSAC met a week ago to discuss a new substitute approach for the original approved NASA study that failed to materialize. NASA will perform the simulations and a selection of college professors will assess the data for conclusions.

There are many things that can be done in the name of safety that does not include moving runways. Last month the Mayor worked a deal with the FAA to allow a new PILOT PROGRAM installation of runway status lights within a year. These new traffic signals at runway/taxiway intersections show red when it is unsafe to cross. Unfortunately only some of the critical intersections are covered by the partial installation. Runway status lights have been shown to be effective, but they remain classified “experimental” by an FAA that has been reviewing them since 1991! For more information go to www.RegionalSolution.org or call Denny Schneider 310 641-4199

The Mayor Is Coming!

Mark May 12 on your calendars since that's the day LA Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa will be the featured speaker of Valley VOTE. Galpin Ford's meeting room is sure to be packed, so please arrive early with a brief question and open mind. Galpin Ford will provide refreshments for the meeting and requests that visitors park on the West side of Orion Street where there is plentiful, free parking.

The next Valley VOTE meeting will be on **Monday, May 12, 2008**. Our featured speaker will be **Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa**.

Valley VOTE Mission Statement

Valley VOTE, a diverse coalition of San Fernando Valley 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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