

**SUSTAINABLE PORTLAND? A CRITIQUE, AND THE LOS ANGELES  
COUNTERPOINT**

By

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the Portland experience as America's most widely regarded example of urban sustainability. It suggests that appearances are deceptive. It compares some characteristics of development in Portland with similar trends in Los Angeles, not known as an exemplar of sustainability. The data suggest that Portland and Los Angeles are much more alike than different. In fact, from some points of view, Portland is less sustainable. It sprawls more (with densities about one-half of Los Angeles), its housing is less affordable, it consumes more land for urban development, it has more roads, and its minimal reliance on transit is similar.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Portland, Oregon, has the reputation of being the American leader in smart growth and sustainable development, the Mecca for U.S. planners, both academic and professional. To provide what at first sight appears to be a striking contrast with Portland, we refer to trends in Los Angeles, with its notoriety for sprawl, congestion, gangs, and dirty air. Yet when you make the comparison, the surprising finding for most people is that Portland and Los Angeles are much more alike than different: “two peas in a pod.” The main point of difference, and a key point in the sprawl debate, is that Portland’s densities are lower than Los Angeles, not marginally but almost 50 percent lower, and however successful the growth management controls and the interventions of Portland Metro, it will never catch up. The market-driven force of escalating house prices may help it to narrow the gap in the next couple of decades, but not by much. All this is not so surprising to those who think about it. The U.S. metropolitan experience pervades this land; it is a shared experience from which there is no escape. The preferences for single-family homes and SUVs are strong and embedded, and only the discipline and rigor of much, much higher prices will force people to change their minds.

In Section II, we offer some brief observations on the “Smart Growth” concept. In Section III, we discuss the equally elusive concept of “Urban

Sustainability.” In Section IV we present a few descriptive statistics on population and employment that compare Portland with Los Angeles. In Section V we select several issues that have cropped up in the sprawl debate with particular reference to Portland, using Los Angeles as a counterpoint. Finally, Section VI offers some overall conclusions.

## **II. SMART GROWTH**

The literature on “smart growth” is becoming too large to be reviewed here. Hence, the discussion will be limited to some brief observations and a personal assessment of what smart growth means.

Smart growth appears to imply an updated mix of growth management techniques: top-down designation of desirable future development patterns (Staley, 2001, calls these “end-state visions”); urban growth boundaries; concurrency agreements (to ensure that infrastructure provision keeps pace with development); densification strategies to make cities more compact, such as an emphasis on infill projects; measures to restrain automobile use and promote transit and non-motorized travel modes; and citizen participation (see Holcombe and Staley, 2001; Cox and Utt, 2001; Shaw and Utt, 2000; and Burchell *et al.*, 2000 for more extended discussions).

The last of these characteristics (citizen participation) is very important. Probably, this is the force most responsible for the spread of smart growth ideas throughout the country, facilitated by e-mail, listservs and other information

technologies. From one perspective, this might seem desirable as a democratization of top-down planning. However, the rational ignorance model of political behavior highlights a darker side: “citizen participation” often becomes a cloak for activist interest groups while most people sit on the sidelines, taking little notice. The exception is when NIMBY opposition objects to more compact development, usually on traffic generation grounds. In such cases, a struggle can develop between neighborhood NIMBYism and metropolitan-wide smart growth protagonists, with the outcome uncertain. These conflicts have occasionally emerged in Portland, but the vast majority of both residents and public officials appear supportive of smart growth ideas.

Another critical dimension of smart growth is its cooption of the developer community. It has encouraged developers to adopt more pro-environment stances. These may include a willingness to compromise on the scale of a project or an agreement to pay mitigation fees for environmental disruption or additional traffic. In some cases, it can be profitable for the developer because higher-density projects may yield significantly higher profits per unit. The “if you can’t beat them, join them” philosophy can be a powerful inducement to cooperate.

Portland Metro’s actions embody many elements of the smart growth strategy. On the other hand, although a few Southern California cities, especially in Ventura County, have passed smart growth ballot initiatives, most jurisdictions are relatively

favorable to development. However, citizen participation (i.e. interest group) efforts have slowed down major projects such as the Playa Vista project in Marina Del Rey near the ocean and the Ahmanson Ranch project in the outer reaches of the San Fernando Valley to a snailpace, if not a standstill.

### **III. URBAN SUSTAINABILITY**

“Sustainable” has become the indispensable adjective in almost every planning discussion. But sustainability has so many different meanings for different observers. When one of the authors (Richardson) taught natural resource economics a generation ago, the emphasis was on the resource price that achieved the optimal rate of exploitation, but prevented the over-exploitation of fishery pools, oil reserves, etc. Now the emphasis is on minimizing resource use, almost regardless of its cost.

In the urban context, “sustainable urbanization” has received considerable attention, but in most cases it reduces to an emphasis on reduced automobile dependence. But in the United States this goal has been difficult to achieve. Transit and non-motorized modes have not increased their miniscule shares of total trips.

Obviously, intergenerational concerns have become tantamount, i.e. preserving the treasures of the earth and its scarce resources for future generations. But how do we trade off immediate known risks for highly uncertain future risks? An example is the diesel fuel subsidies in Europe that induce consumers to buy diesel rather than gasoline powered vehicles in order to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions with their

claimed global warming impacts. Yet we now know that the PM associated with diesel fuel is among the most dangerous carcinogen of all (claiming 14,000 lives per year in California, according to The California Air Resources Board).

Similarly, how do we take into account the impact of future changes in technology? An illuminating example is that of peat in eighteenth century Ireland and Scotland. If people at that time had been influenced by sustainability rhetoric, they would have conserved their peat for future generations at the expense of their comfort (warmth and cooking fuel). For what? A few decades later, peat was considered useless, except perhaps for smoking herrings, having being totally displaced by coal made cheap by new mining technologies. Later, of course, coal was similarly displaced by oil and natural gas. We believe that the oil depletion problem is a false issue. Oil will be displaced by fuel cells and other new technologies long before the oil reserves run out.

Another aspect of urban sustainability about which we have written is the “ecological footprint” concept (Gordon and Richardson, 1999). This extends the land use per capita measure both spatially (worldwide) and functionally (to cover all items of consumption). The concept’s main proponents (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996) argue that all countries (except for Canada and Australia) are “overpopulated in ecological terms,” with the United States the worst offender with a “personal planetoid” of 5.1 hectares per capita; even the widely acknowledged exemplar of

Vancouver, Canada, has an ecological footprint of 4.27 hectares per capita. They conclude that the world is “already ecologically full” and “sustainable growth on this scale using present technology would require five to ten additional planets” (Wackernagel and Rees, 1996, p. 211). There is no space here to deal with the limitations of the ecological footprint concept in detail. Let us merely list some of its severely limited assumptions: no substitution of other factors of production for land; minimal rates of technological change; the wrong-headed belief that urban residents consume far more natural resources than rural residents; gains from trade are negligible (perhaps even undesirable); price signals do not work; and small countries with large populations are a scourge on the earth.

One other point about urban sustainability: the late David Drakakis-Smith, a well-known researcher on urban issues in developing countries, argued that the fact that the very large developing country megacities continued to thrive was strong evidence of their sustainability (Drakakis-Smith, 1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1997). Of course, these cities have their problems (e.g. poverty, environmental degradation, congestion), but they have coped with significant rates of population growth quite well.

Focusing on the scope of this paper, the question to ask is whether Portland is more sustainable than other American cities. We answer this question by a



comparison with Los Angeles, a metropolitan region considered much less sustainable by many casual observers.

#### **IV. PORTLAND AND LOS ANGELES COMPARED**

In this part of the paper, we look at aggregate population and employment data in the two metropolitan regions. The Los Angeles CMSA consists of five counties: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino and Ventura. The Portland-Salem CMSA consists of eight counties: Multnomah, Clackamas, Washington, Clark (in Washington State), Columbia, Yamhill, Marion and Polk. Much of the Portland discussion refers to the first four counties only, the “major” counties.

The most critical difference between the two metropolitan regions is size, both in terms of population and spatial extent. The Los Angeles CMSA has a 2000 population of 16.374 million, a 12.7 percent increase since 1990; the core county (Los Angeles) has 9.519 million (a 7.4 percent increase since 1990; and the City of Los Angeles has 3.695 million, an increase of 6.0 percent since 1990). The Portland CMSA had 2.27 million in 2000. The most rapid population change since 1990 occurred in Clark and Washington counties, 45 and 43 percent respectively. Growth was concentrated in the Portland-Vancouver PMSA, with a 27 percent increase in the last decade, reaching 1.92 million in 2000.

In terms of size, the 1990 urbanized area in Los Angeles (at 2,231 square miles) was 4.77 times larger than that of the Portland-Salem urbanized area (468

square miles). In Los Angeles, you can drive east past Moreno Valley for 75 miles before you reach open country, drive north 45 miles beyond Ventura, drive south 65 miles until the barrier of the U.S. Marine Base of Camp Pendleton, or drive west 15 miles to the ocean. Portland is quite large, given its population, but many of the counties in the CMSA have a substantial rural character.

According to the data in Figure 1 in the 1980s, the population growth rate in the Los Angeles CMSA was almost double that in the Portland-Salem CMSA. In the 1990s, the situation was almost exactly reversed, despite the fact that in the latter decade the Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) was beginning to bite. This reflects a moderate slowing down of immigration into Los Angeles and a renewed vigor of Portland's economy. Figure 2 looks at employment growth rates in the Los Angeles CMSA and Portland CMSA. There is nothing surprising here; they march together with Portland growing somewhat faster in the 1990s.<sup>1</sup> This implies that the growth management regime has not negatively impacted Portland's economy, but we do not understand what other forces were at work. Separating out the "no policy" trends is always a problem. The bottom line is that the trends in Portland and Los Angeles are very similar. The market rules, and the presence or absence of growth management makes little difference.

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<sup>1</sup> In an earlier paper (Richardson and Gordon, 2001), we presented much more disaggregated data, distinguishing between the "core" and "non-core" areas and by sector. The trends were similar in both regions, especially the strong evidence for decentralization. Portland's growth management regime has done little to affect these trends.

## **V. SPRAWL-RELATED ISSUES**

### **a. Densities**

The comparison that many observers (even planners) find hard to believe is that Portland, despite its decades of density-promoting planning, is so low-density compared to Los Angeles. The 2000 urbanized area information has not yet been released, but the 1990 data show 3,021 persons per square mile in Portland and 5,801 persons per square mile in Los Angeles. Much is made of the high densities in the NE 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue Census tract in Portland, yet its 2000 density (22,683 persons per square mile) is only 24 percent of Los Angeles' densest Census tract (Vermont/Normandie/3<sup>rd</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> at 94,450 persons per square mile). The NE 23<sup>rd</sup> Avenue area is closer to Interstate 205 than MAX, and much of its commerce depends on cars rather than transit riders and pedestrians. Finally, if you compare either the one percent or the 10 percent densest areas in Los Angeles with those in Portland, Los Angeles is three times more dense.

### **b. Regional Governance**

Planners from the rest of the country and from abroad have misunderstand the Portland situation by assuming that Portland Metro is a fully-fledged metropolitan authority and that here we have a rare, perhaps unique, example in the United States of a regional governance system. Hence, planning works in Portland because it is regional planning. This is not the case. Certainly, Portland Metro is a little different

from COGs and MPOs in other parts of the country. It has a Board of 7 elected officials, rather than the traditional appointee system. It has a few operational functions, such as the Zoo and the Conventional Center, and it has considerable indirect influence on transportation. It adopted a 2040 Metro Plan, brave indeed for those of us who hesitate to look a month ahead. But its powers of authority, at least in practice are quite weak, not much stronger than the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) in Los Angeles, an agency that is adept in instituting research studies, gathering data (often aimlessly), and circulating reports, while the rest of the world goes on in blissful ignorance. Portland Metro works (within the framework of its own goals), not because of top-down regional powers, but rather because, for the most part, the individual jurisdictions within Portland Metro (and many of the residents within these jurisdictions) share in its aims and beliefs; the key is voluntary cooperation not governance (Abbott, 1997; see also Fischel, 1997).

The Los Angeles CMSA has almost 200 individual jurisdictions (it is difficult to keep count). They vary widely in their attitude to growth. Some promote it; others have growth management controls in place. Some are primarily industrial or commercial (the city names of Industry and Commerce tell the story), others are bedroom communities. This is the classical Tieboutian world, and if you believe in a

market for cities this is your dream. However, if regional governance is your panacea, Los Angeles is not for you.<sup>2</sup>

### **c. Transportation Infrastructure**

Portland has a highly developed transit system, whereas Los Angeles is auto-dominated with a monstrous freeway system. Right? Think again. With respect to roads, Portland has 2.8 times more road length per capita than Los Angeles (10.6 meters per capita compared with 3.8 meters per capita; Newman and Kenworthy, 1999). The strange story here is that Newman and Kenworthy ignore their own data. They state: “Los Angeles has the most extensive freeway system the world has ever seen, yet the city has huge traffic problems” (Newman and Kenworthy, 1999, p. 54). This is false, whether measured in lane-freeway miles per capita or per unit area; for example, Los Angeles has 3.93 freeway miles per million population compared to Portland’s 6.03. The Texas Transportation Institute has again ranked Los Angeles as the most congested metropolitan region in the United States (TTI, 2001). To the extent that this may be true, this is because of Los Angeles’s *limited* freeway capacity. If you count major arterials, the Los Angeles highway system has considerable redundancy, with many of these arterials paralleling the freeways. This

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<sup>2</sup> The University of Southern California Studies Center (SC2 in local parlance) has recently published a study titled “When Sprawl Hits the Wall” (SC2, 2001). It turns out that the report has little to say about sprawl, other than a comment that the region is running out of land. Of course, in terms of the CMSA this is not true. The Coachella Valley with its 200-year aquifer could easily accommodate another million people. In fact, the report is primarily a plea for regional governance. The word “sprawl” is simply a hook to attract attention. Interestingly, the authors of this paper (with 20 or so sprawl-related papers, we have lost count) are not even mentioned in the bibliography. Next door neighbors, same university, a world apart!

explains why average commuting times in Los Angeles are only in the mid-range of large U.S. metropolitan areas. We claim that measures of congestion should relate to system-wide measures (such as average travel time) not to bottlenecks on individual routes. VMT per capita has increased much faster in Portland than in Los Angeles (25.2 percent compared with 0.2 percent, 1990-97), while the TTI road congestion index (a measure that we believe is deficient, because its coverage of arterial roads is limited) rose by 53 percent in Portland between 1982 and 1999 and only by 22 percent in Los Angeles (although the index remained 27 percent higher in Los Angeles in the latter year). However, Portland benefits from much shorter commute times than Los Angeles (18.5 minutes for privately operated vehicles compared with 24.1 minutes; other trip times are much closer, 1995 NPTS data). However, the TTI travel time index for Portland rose by 19 percent between 1992 and 1999, compared with a 1 percent increase for Los Angeles.

As for transit, both Los Angeles and Portland have boardings above the national average, and are very closely ranked. In 1980, boardings per capita were 38.74 in Portland (Rank 16) and 41.80 in Los Angeles (Rank 15), compared to a national average in the one-million-plus metropolitan areas of 37.20. By 1998, the ranks were reversed: 41.90 in Portland (Rank 11) and 37.09 in Los Angeles (Rank 12), compared to the national average of 32.36. These numbers imply an 8.2 percent increase in Portland and an 11.3 percent decline in Los Angeles. Transit's share is

less than two percent of trips in both regions. The marginal improvement in Portland reflects an aggressive light rail expansion program. The decline in Los Angeles is partly because of fare increases, but mainly the result of cannibalizing bus services to pay for rail.

The light-rail evidence for both Portland and Los Angeles is very similar. The MAX route expands from downtown to Gresham in the East and, more recently, to Hillsborough in the West; a 5-mile spur to the airport is about to open; a cross-river extension to Vancouver in Clark County, Washington, is currently stalled. In Los Angeles, the Blue Line from Long Beach to Los Angeles is operative, while its extension to Pasadena is in the early stages of construction (under a new transit authority rather than the regional agency, the MTA, Metropolitan Transit Authority). The Green Line runs from Norwalk in the East to Redondo Beach in the west, stopping two miles short of the airport! There is also a heavy rail line (a subway, the Metro) from downtown to North Hollywood (a dog-leg line turning west to Western Avenue before it turns north). Both these “systems” are much less than comprehensive rail systems and do not provide region-wide coverage like those of Tokyo, Seoul, Paris, London and some other major cities.

In both Portland and Los Angeles, rail captured most of their riders from the buses, not surprisingly given that parallel express bus services were closed down. Also, new trips were generated, but the modal shift from cars was minimal in both

cases. In both metropolitan regions, the design made it difficult to add to capacity via new cars, a problem already visible in Los Angeles' Blue Line that has more or less reached its capacity ridership. Even close to capacity, the capital and operating costs per trip on the Blue Line are huge relative to the fare.<sup>3</sup> The capacities of both systems are minimal compared with adding another freeway lane. In Portland, in particular, highway congestion has deteriorated as MAX service has increased.

Although we use Los Angeles as the reference norm, some comparisons with the demon sprawl city of Atlanta merit attention (Antonelli, 2000, p. 150). Although Atlanta is even more sprawling than Portland with 65 percent of the latter's density, its core public transit ridership per capita is about 90 percent higher, and its highway construction has been 45 percent lower since 1982. The increase in road congestion has been comparable in the two metropolitan regions.

#### **d. Land Consumption**

We would expect that Portland's growth management regime would have reduced land absorption in the Portland metropolitan region. Yet not only was more urban land absorbed in Portland than in Los Angeles percentage-wise in each five-year period between 1982 and 1997, but the gap widened in the later years: in 1982-87 urban developed land increased by 10.1 percent in Portland, 7.3 percent in Los Angeles; in 1987-92 the numbers were 12.8 percent and 11.9 percent; finally, in

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<sup>3</sup> For a relatively early but detailed comparison see Richmond (1998). An interesting finding of his analysis is that the cost per ride on MAX is similar to that on buses, whereas in Los Angeles the cost per ride on both the Blue and the Red



1992-1997 Portland's urban land consumption increased by 19.4 percent compared with 6.5 percent in Los Angeles.<sup>4</sup> As for the whole period (1982-97), Portland's density fell by 11.3 percent, while that of Los Angeles increased by 2.8 percent (Fulton, Pendall *et al.*, 2001).

### **e. Housing Affordability**

As a measure of changes in housing affordability, we can refer to the National Association of Homebuilders' Housing Opportunity Index. This index refers to the percentage of houses recently sold that could be afforded by a household with the area's median income. In 1991, Los Angeles had an index of 13.6, the second worst (San Francisco was the worst) among the largest 80 metropolitan areas, while Portland had an index of 68.3 (much better than the national metropolitan average of 56.9). By the year 2000, the index in Los Angeles had increased to 34.8, while in Portland it had fallen to 27.6. Thus, Los Angeles is now more affordable for home purchasers than Portland. Even more striking, in terms of the changes since 1991, Los Angeles ranks #1 in terms of improvement among the top 80 metropolitan areas (+156 percent), whereas Portland ranks #80 (-60 percent; Cox and Utt, 2001).

The deterioration in Portland's housing affordability situation is closely linked to the increasingly choking effect of the Urban Growth Boundary in the 1990s. However, note that Knaap (2000, p. 221) takes a different view arguing that "these

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Lines is many times higher than on the buses.

<sup>4</sup> Advance data from the National Resources Inventory kindly provided by Henry Bogusch.

price effects reflect the supply-constraint rhetoric more than any supply-constraint reality.” But, in our view, alternative explanations do not fit the evidence, not population growth (in metropolitan areas that grew faster [e.g. Las Vegas, Phoenix] the housing opportunity index rose), not income growth (below the average in Portland compared with other large metropolitan areas), not economic growth (as demonstrated by the data elsewhere in this paper), not its Western location (housing affordability improved on average in Western cities in the 1990s, with a few exceptions [San Francisco, San Jose, Denver and Tacoma]). An attempt by Nelson (2000) to defend Portland’s housing affordability by arguing that in sprawling Atlanta, the percentage of income spent on homeownership is the same as in Portland fails because his analysis period (1985-95) does not match the UGB-tightening period (the 1990s) and his data applies to all homeowners not recent purchasers. So, if the UGB and the growth management regime are not to blame, we are left with the explanation of desperation: the willingness to pay argument (i.e. Portland is such a wonderful place to live with such a high quality of life that people are willing, even happy, to pay through the nose to live there).

#### **f. Urban Growth Boundaries**

Although other cities and States have adopted urban growth boundaries, none has received more attention than that of Portland. Much has been written about Portland’s urban growth boundary. Here we will confine ourselves to a few brief

observations. First, setting the boundary lines was a political decision, not a technical decision. When the initial boundary lines were drawn in 1979, there was substantial vacant land within the boundary. The UGB did not become a binding constraint until the 1990s. So, reactions in the 1990s might be quite different from those in the 1980s. Second, as pointed out by Knaap (2000), unless the law is changed, the boundary has to be expanded periodically (as it was in 1998) to accommodate 20 years of growth, so the collar will never get too tight. On the other hand, the possibility of expansion and where expansion might take place sets up the opportunities for land speculation just beyond the boundary. This explains why, although land prices drop off dramatically beyond the boundary, they are not as low as might be expected if the land had zero development potential. Third, a UGB is a very crude tool, subjecting environmentally sensitive and useful open space land within the boundary to development pressure while unproductive land beyond the boundary is closed off for development.

There are no urban growth boundaries in the Los Angeles metropolitan region. There is little vacant land in close-in areas of Los Angeles County so that development projects there have been restricted to a few small-scale infill projects. Elsewhere, in the region however large-scale development companies such as the Newhall Land Company (that operates in the Santa Clarita/Valencia area in Northern Los Angeles County), the Irvine Company (in suburban Orange County), and

developers in the Coachella Valley (i.e. the Palm Springs region) hold large tracts of land that they periodically draw upon for development, a process that dampens house price increases in these areas. One might interpret what is happening as market forces managing the development process much more efficiently than a rigid UGB.

### **g. Transit-Oriented Development**

The key idea behind TODs is that transit ridership can be increased by supportive land policies around stations and terminals (usually rail, but can be applied to buses). It involves: high-density residential development near stations; some commercial/office and mixed-use development; and incorporates pedestrian design elements to encourage walking to the station.

Survey evidence indicates that TOD residents are 5 times more likely to commute by transit, but 43 percent of TOD residents were commuters before. This implies that locational choice is endogenous. Self-selection bias means that transit users choose to live near transit stations, so the impact on auto commuters is unclear. The barriers to TOD implementation are high: existing land uses and structures near stations (except on greenfield sites); problems in large-scale land assembly; unclear whether private land market can sustain TODs; and the economic and fiscal impacts may be less than reassuring to municipalities.

Development will occur near rail stations, only under certain conditions (Boarnet and Compin, 1999): where market demand is strong, land is available and

cheap, and there are reinforcing land use policies. Moreover, there is a conflict between the high-density corridors needed to sustain light rail and the need for undeveloped sites to facilitate reuse. This, again, gives the greenfield sites more potential.

In Los Angeles, there are two types of transit stations: light rail stations on the Blue and Green Lines (from Los Angeles to Long Beach and Norwalk to Redondo Beach respectively) and subway stations on the Red Line (from downtown Los Angeles to North Hollywood). On the Blue and Green Lines the typical surrounding land use is free parking lots. Areas around the Red Line stations are heavily developed, so the issue is the potential for redevelopment.

We will consider one example here; the Vermont-Sunset Metro Station.<sup>5</sup> This station is located close to the intersections of Vermont Avenue and Sunset Boulevard about 3 miles west of Downtown Los Angeles. The key characteristic of the location is that it is a hospital zone with three major hospitals (Kaiser Permanente, the Children's Hospital of Los Angeles and the Queen of Angels/Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital) located nearby (within a quarter mile). At first sight, this would seem propitious for promoting transit, yet less than 15 percent of the hospital-based trips are by transit. The explanation is the dispersed character of residences throughout the metropolitan region and their lack of access to transit. So, few

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<sup>5</sup> We are grateful to the M.Pl. Transportation Specialization class of 2000 for data and insights.

employees use transit to get to work, and patients have even less incentive to relocate to be near transit. It would be feasible for many employees, outpatients and visitors to drive to the nearest light rail station, park free and then go to one of the hospitals via transit, but (with transfers and walking at the destination station) the door-to-door travel time would be much longer than via automobile. Because of the hospitals, there is little residential population in the immediate area (about 2,000), most of them low-income and poorly educated with a majority of them Latino; at least a quarter of them are transit-dependent, but their overall numbers are negligible in the context of transit demand. The number of jobs is significantly higher (about 12,750, most of them related to the hospitals). The area also contains a small, but historically important, park (Barnsdall Park, based around a famous Frank Lloyd Wright house [Hollyhock House] and art galleries opened later) and the Scientology headquarters, but neither have much impact on transit demand. There are no vacant parcels, so a TOD would depend on redevelopment, such as retail outlets near the station or in association with a reconfiguration of hospital space. However, if the prospects for a TOD are limited in this high-density employment zone, as they surely are, the Sunset-Vermont location is illustrative of the severe problems involved in TOD-promotion in an already built-out zone.

The test of TODs in Portland is Orenco Station, a national prizewinner in many community awards, an area known for its many trees. The development is 190

acres in size, with a planned development of 450 single family homes and townhouses and 1,400 apartments. Densities (at 9.7 units per acre) will exceed the original planning objective of 7 per square mile. The station (opened in 1998) is located in Hillsboro, about 15 miles west of downtown Portland. Train service is very frequent, and the hours of service are long. The central development (Starbucks, an Indian restaurant, a steakhouse, and a few commercial businesses) is located a five-minute walk north of the transit station (with its 150-space transit carpool lot; there are very few offstreet parking spaces). A prime reason explaining why most residences are quite far (up to one mile) from the transit station is the need for proximity to the arterial (Cornell Road) to maximize the demand for retail sales for the development's businesses (a large retail complex is under construction 0.8 miles from Orenco Station center). Most of the residences are close to the shops. House prices are above Portland's median (with small lofts starting at \$129,000 and live-and-work townhomes starting at \$370,000), and the housing in the central area is very attractive (reminiscent of New York's brownstones with retro street lights and hanging flower baskets). None of the developments would appeal to households wanting a sizeable yard, although (with that exception) there is a variety of housing types from which to choose.

The key question is: how many of the residents ride MAX? If they work in downtown Portland and if they live in one of the homes closest to the station, MAX

is very convenient. If they live on one of the feeder bus routes, taking the train is less convenient but feasible. One advantage is that transit is already in place rather than an unfulfilled promise. Yet most homes in Orenco Station have double garages (at least), and the freeway (Highway 26) is only 2.2 miles away. Intel and some other employers are within walking distance. A survey of the travel behavior of Orenco station residents has yet to be undertaken. Without it, an assessment of whether Orenco Station works as a TOD remains speculative.

#### **h. Racial Heterogeneity and Multiculturalism**

During the past decade, both regions have become more diverse, but the differences remain immense. Portland is more white than the national average, while Los Angeles is at the other extreme. The white population share in the Portland PMSA is 90 percent (the U.S. average is 75.1 percent). In Los Angeles, the white population share ranges from 49 percent in Los Angeles County to 70 percent in Ventura County. In fact, the white population share in Los Angeles-Long Beach PMSA fell by 18.6 percent in the 1990s (an absolute loss of a half-million), while the Portland PMSA experienced a 15 percent increase, a gain of 200,000. Latinos are the next prominent demographic group in both regions. In the Portland PMSA, the Latino population almost doubled (a 189 percent increase) in the 1990s. In Southern California, one in every three persons is Latino (ranging from 31 – 45 percent in the five counties), as opposed to Portland where the range is from 2.5



percent in Columbia County to 17 percent in Marion County (a magnet for migrant farm laborers). Of course, the Latino population in the Portland is very small, only 3.4 percent of that in Los Angeles.

The African-American population is spread thinly in the Portland eight-county area. Multnomah County, the largest county, has the highest share with 5.7 percent, Clark and Washington Counties have 1.7 and 1.1 percent respectively, while the other counties have less than one per cent. In Southern California, the African-American population in the PMSA remained stable between 1990 and 2000 (growing only from 947,000 to 950,000). Interestingly, from John Logan's database at the Lewis Mumford Center in SUNY-Albany, there was a 19,000 population increase in the suburbs; the suburbanization of minority populations remains an interesting research area. In the CMSA, both Los Angeles and San Bernadino have an African-American population in excess of 9 percent of the total, followed by 6 percent in Riverside County; in Ventura and Orange the African-American share was less than two percent.

Why is this racial discussion relevant to growth management? First, the white middle class is much more supportive of growth management controls, hence the strong support in Portland. Second, immigration from Central America and Asia to Los Angeles has played a crucial role in increasing densities, especially in the core region. Market forces perform better in creating compactness than growth

management regimes. Another point is the benefits from multiculturalism, the food, the music, the culture, etc. To give an economic number, 29.6 percent of California firms are minority owned, compared to 6.4 percent of Oregon firms. If diversity is a virtue, Los Angeles stands tall.

## **VI. CONCLUSIONS**

This is a preliminary review of Portland, with some reference to Los Angeles. Suburbanization and decentralization are similar in both cases. Despite all the policy interventions, the central city is doing little better in Portland than in Los Angeles. The potential for transit is problematic in both regions. Who would have believed twenty years ago or even ten years ago that housing in Portland would now be less affordable than in Los Angeles? Regional governance in Portland is less than it appears on first sight. TODs remain a pipedream in both cities, as they are almost anywhere in the United States. The key finding is that these metropolitan regions are much more similar than different, except for the density variations. This finding is not surprising. Growth management controls have a minimal impact. The forces of metropolitan growth and change and the responses of individual households are universal in the United States. So, to discover that Portland is quite like Los Angeles is not unexpected.

The rationale for the focus on Portland is justified by its reputation as a paradigm for urban sustainability efforts in the United States. This paper suggests

that these efforts are more window-dressing than an accurate representation of reality. We have supported this position by drawing some parallels with Los Angeles, widely regarded as the epitome of unsustainability. Yet the differences between the two metropolitan regions (except for densities, size, and racial mix) are miniscule. The bottom line: If Portland is sustainable, so is Los Angeles. If Los Angeles is unsustainable, so is Portland.

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