

Theater, a historic landmark in the square, is capitalizing on the square's improvements as well as its proximity to transit. Its monthly programs, which include live as well as film performances, attract a regional audience and enjoy renewed patronage. Its restoration and reconstruction, scheduled for 1996, reflects favorably on the square's recent improvements.

Davis Square is also host to new commercial office space. Since 1988, two substantial office buildings totaling approximately 170,000 sq ft have been completed and are at 100 percent occupancy. Building tenants include a major regional community health care provider, a medium-sized architectural firm, and headquarters for a local bank. Also, the square hosts a number of start-up businesses.

Taken together, these activities add vitality to the square, both during and after traditional business hours. Undoubtedly, the transit improvements have contributed significantly to the square's overall health. The transit station has made it possible for people to reach the square without bringing cars into the densely settled area. Rent control was abolished recently in the neighboring communities of Cambridge, Boston, and Brookline, and the affordable housing available in Somerville, combined with access to its good public transit, has made it an attractive place for people to live. Other factors that increased the square's attractiveness include changes in living preferences and increased private transportation costs, which bolster support for public transit use.

The *Red Line Extension, Land Use Study*, prepared in 1988 by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council, analyzed the changes in land use and commercial and residential development 5 years after the completion of the extension. The report states, "Davis Square appears to have passed the turning point on its way to recovery. Businesses in the square, old and new alike, are generally thriving and public confidence is high. The Red Line clearly . . . helped to stimulate this revitalization, but it was clearly accomplished only by a cooperative effort of the municipality, local merchants, and the residents of Davis Square." [1] Specifically, the report states that businesses near the station show increased sales and office and retail uses rose by 10 percent.

CONCLUSIONS

Davis Square has been revitalized and is a thriving downtown area, not just because of the transit investment and improved access, but because of the energy and commitment of the city, businesses, the MBTA, and residents. Working together, the transit station served as a catalyst for a range of cooperative

programs that have breathed new life into the district and made the city of Somerville more livable. The tremendous community effort to preserve the neighborhood's character paid off: Davis Square is remarkable in its coherence and urban texture. As the residents had hoped, the area still has the narrow streets, the small scale and the densely built fabric that made it unique and that now contribute to its success.

SOURCE

Metropolitan Area Planning Council, *Red Line Extension, Land Use Study* (1988).

ENDNOTE

1. Metropolitan Area Planning Council, *Red Line Extension, Land Use Study* (1988) p.32.

Case Study 5-2
Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative: Rebuilding Disinvested Neighborhood "Main Streets" from the Bus Stop Up

LANI is a vision that touches everyone who encounters it. It is like a palette of paints allowing each neighborhood to design its colors, textures, and uses. Government is there to provide the paint, but only the community can compose the picture.

—Deputy Mayor Rae James

My dream for LANI is that it becomes a national model for revitalizing and sustaining neighborhoods through community empowerment.

—Richard J. Riordan, Mayor of Los Angeles

SUMMARY

The Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative (LANI), sponsored by Mayor Richard Riordan, is undertaking a 30-month demonstration project that seeks to provide an economic stimulus to eight transit-dependent neighborhoods through community planned transportation improvements, housing, and commercial rehabilitation, and development. Incorporated in 1994, LANI has established community organizations in each neighborhood and provided technical support, training, and funding for demonstration projects around transit facilities.

In December 1994, local organizations completed work plans, describing programs and projects to be

implemented. In 1995, they hired design consultants and began construction of the initial demonstration projects. Projects vary greatly from neighborhood to neighborhood, but all share a common focus on bus stops as centers of community life. In addition, LANI has encouraged other ongoing efforts in neighborhoods and has served as a catalyst for community participation and action. At the end of the 2-year demonstration period, local organizations will have the capacity to become permanent vehicles for community revitalization.

PLANNING PROCESS

LANI has its roots in the Los Angeles riots of April 1992, when it was evident that rioters, in the words of the original LANI proposal, “had no feeling of ownership or caring about what happened to their neighborhoods. Residents felt disconnected, and in many cases they were.”

In addition to a lack of connection between people and their neighborhoods, the neighborhood main streets—even in stable, middle-class neighborhoods—looked abandoned. Transit service was inadequate for low-income areas in which more than 20 percent of households in auto-dependent Los Angeles have no car. Moreover, transit stops are virtually invisible. They are situated on narrow sidewalks with few amenities, just inches away from speeding traffic. The stops are, as one resident put it, “humiliating places to wait.”

Rather than simply take a city initiated “triage” approach to neighborhood renewal, the Mayor’s Office of the City of Los Angeles developed the concept for LANI, whereby with a minimum of financial support coupled with dedicated technical assistance, neighborhoods would be empowered to address their own economic opportunities. Moreover, it was important not merely to plan communities, but actually to implement projects that establish linkages between other programs in communities and build in the self-reliance necessary to continue these efforts.

After encouragement from the United States Secretary of Transportation, the Mayor’s Office prepared a proposal in January of 1994, which identified the overall scope of LANI and the eight neighborhoods to be included. City council members were solicited to nominate neighborhoods in their districts, and city staff and planning consultants evaluated projects to identify those with the greatest chance for success. Each of the project sites selected was situated along a significant bus or rail corridor (four adjacent to Metrorail light rail stations) with a substantial transit-dependent population and, while several of the area main streets were underused, there was a

demand for new affordable housing and neighborhood retail. Moreover, the projects all had existing community organizations and some level of planning work already in place; these were considered to be the main ingredients for short-term success. The city council representative for the district had to endorse LANI, identify the appropriate community groups, and provide continued leadership and cooperation with that local group.

Within 6 months of its conception, LANI became a reality. A board of directors with diverse backgrounds in real estate development, transportation, urban planning, finance, labor law, communications, and community organization was established and an executive director hired. Funding commitments were obtained from the FTA and local public and private sources. Eight “Recognized Community Organizations” (RCOs) were set up, composed of community members representing businesses, commercial property owners, residents, and institutions.

In another 6 months, each of the eight RCOs had completed a project work plan that defined specific physical improvements, such as transit and pedestrian amenities, to be implemented in 1995. They also developed longer-term programs to revitalize the neighborhood main streets, create jobs, and assist youth. The work plans identified goals and prioritized needs determined by community meetings, outreach, and previous planning work. Organization and decision-making structures were developed and the scope of work for designers of the initial projects outlined.

Throughout 1995, efforts focused on implementation: hiring consultants, developing specific plans, reviewing plans and proposals with city agencies for approval, bidding, and beginning construction. Meanwhile, RCOs pursued other nonconstruction activities, like holding special events and installing banners that gave tangible evidence of the LANI project.

STRATEGY

The LANI strategy has several important, interconnecting components:

Community Participation and Ownership. LANI is based on the substantial involvement of local residents, businesses, and property owners. The RCOs have substantial independence and are responsible for implementation of their own projects and programs, with financial support and guidance from the LANI board. Methods of participation have varied by project, but include diverse representation on the RCO Board, community workshops, and outreach to existing institutions and organizations.

Leveraging Public and Private Resources. LANI seeks to leverage its own limited resources with other local, state, and federal programs, both public and private. This strategy is critical in concentrating rather than diffusing scarce financial resources. LANI has been successful in obtaining in-kind donations as well. For example, bus shelters and information kiosks for all the neighborhoods were provided by Gannett Outdoor. This private company donated \$250,000 and agreed to maintain the shelters and kiosks for 3 years.

One advantage of pursuing eight projects concurrently is that LANI is able to help streamline approval processes through various city agencies. For instance, the Los Angeles city council contributed to the LANI program by waiving more than \$150,000 in permit fees.

Short-Term Catalytic Projects. Critical to the success of LANI is that it did not merely plan for long-term



Figure 5-7 and 5-8. Case Study 5-2. As part of the Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative (LANI), residents work together making transit stops centers for community (before—Figure 5-7). This bus stop in North Hollywood was transformed and integrated into an “art park,” which will be the site for a cafe, art displays, and community events (after—Figure 5-8). (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

visions, but produced concrete results during the first year of the program. Each community has determined for itself which of the best first projects will lead to other projects and programs in the future. Projects such as the installation of new bus stops and information kiosks help make the commercial streets more attractive and build a sense of cooperation within the neighborhoods. These are the short-term efforts underway in the eight neighborhoods:

- Tree plantings using volunteers from a conservation organization, with refreshments provided by local businesses.
- New historic light fixtures, installed on a trial basis.
- A training program for youth in gardening and landscape maintenance, operated by a local senior center.
- Installation of banners with a special banner-raising ceremony.
- A jazz festival to celebrate the importance of jazz in the African American community.
- Development of an “art park” next to a bus stop, with trees, sculpture displays, and a community mural.
- A community garden on a vacant lot run by at-risk youth, an important first step to creating a farmer’s market where the community can buy produce and at-risk youth can earn employment.

Building Long-Term Local Capacity. LANI’s strategy is to produce self-reliant programs that have the capacity—in terms of organization, finance, leadership and technical skills—to carry on the work in the future. It is anticipated that future programs will be sustained through special neighborhoods improvement districts, which can finance streetscape improvements, public space management activities, and business development efforts. Community development corporations can also help sustain programs by supporting affordable housing. It is hoped that local business associations will be developed as well.

FUNDING

The core of the funding for the Los Angeles LANI comes from the FTA Livable Communities program, which provides \$250,000 in support to each neighborhood through the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA). Contributions from the FTA/MTA have totaled \$2.3 million. MTA also provides free office space overhead for LANI.

Meanwhile, the city of Los Angeles has contributed \$800,000. This includes the \$115,000 that the city council approved for the program start-up and administra-

tive expenses. Since the initial contribution, the majority of the city's money has gone directly to the eight neighborhoods where LANI operates. (The county of Los Angeles helped fund LANI as well, \$200,000 was approved by the state ballot for county transit stores and 138 transit shelters.)

Local neighborhoods have also been successful in obtaining donations, such as meeting refreshments, flyer printings, and meeting spaces. Local businesses have donated trees and private companies have donated legal, accounting, and design services. Of course, much of the implementation of projects relies on community volunteers.

For example, Leimert Park, one LANI neighborhood, has leveraged more than \$1 million in local government money to fund various aspects of its demonstration project; \$600,000 was contributed by the City Department of Parks and Recreation to upgrade the local park; \$285,000 was donated by the Community Redevelopment Authority to pay for needed street work, including adding decorative paving and bump outs; and \$400,000 was granted by the local city council office for re-stripping and improving lighting in parking lots and adding landscaping. In addition, a mixed-use retail/office development project has been attracted to the area and has purchased land.

As noted above, each neighborhood group is preparing a plan for sustaining the program. LANI will also continue to seek federal, state, and local support for implementation of demonstration projects.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

LANI implemented a process to overcome obstacles before they arose. In May 1995, LANI arranged a 2-day forum during which each of the eight design engineers presented their plans to a panel composed of representatives from the City Department of Transportation, MTA, and the Departments of Public Works, Safety, Streets and Lighting, and others. This streamlined the planning process because each neighborhood did not have to seek separate approvals from each agency. During the two days of deliberation, concessions were made and compromises reached. For example, the NOHO (North Hollywood) community agreed to the widening of Magnolia Street as a trade-off for streetscaping and amenities.

The bureaucratic hurdles involved in leveraging funding tied to other city initiatives have been difficult to overcome, however. Currently, LANI has a second round of FTA funding and an ISTEA grant is still pending.

Local obstacles exist in each of the project areas as well. For example, the Highland Park site is within the overlay of a historic district that prohibited the

use of angle parking. Also, some design engineers have developed plans that are simply not feasible to build. People within the organizations themselves have been working hard, however, to overcome these obstacles as well as to gain consensus among divergent groups so that they can move forward with implementation.

IMPACT AND ASSESSMENT

So far, a number of project areas have been successful in attracting additional funding for improvements. These design and planning efforts have also served to boost efforts to organize merchants into local merchants associations. In Leimert Park, community development block grant funds will be used to hire a consultant to develop a nonprofit organization to manage and administer the new merchant's association and to coordinate other efforts aimed at attracting further funding.

In addition, many communities have gone a step further in their design process and have created plans for the next stage of development, so that when funds are identified, communities have plans ready for implementation.

CONCLUSIONS

Although still in its early stages, LANI has combined many key ingredients: community involvement, a focus on creating places along corridors that are unappealing to pedestrians, and short-term, visible projects, all focused on transit. In the next year, the true test will be weighing the impact of the first phase of plans and seeing how neighborhoods take the next step toward making their communities more livable and transit-friendly.

Case Study 5-3 Chicago, IL: The Green Line Using Transit Stations to Spur Reinvestment in Distressed Inner City Neighborhoods

We started with a pie in the sky notion and now there is a \$300 million investment . . .

—Doug Farr, Project Architect

The Green Line took neighborhoods and businesses, inner city and suburban residents, and city government and transit operators and made them realize that they had something in common.

—Jackie Leavy, Executive Director,
Neighborhood Capital Budget Group