

“Southwest Museum Area Economic Development Strategy: Final Report and Recommended Land Use Alternatives”

prepared by Economics Research Associates for the City of Los Angeles, Department of Planning. April 1999.

Attached are some pages from the 1999 Report of Economics Research Associates (the sub-consultant that analyzed the future economic performance of the Southwest Museum in the Levin & Associates Report).

In this study, prepared when Economics Research Associates was not under the supervision of Autry National Center management, this same firm projected renovation of the Southwest Museum could generate between 125,000 to 140,000 visitors per year to the Southwest Museum. In contrast, under Autry supervision, just four years later, Economic Research Associates slashed its projected annual attendance estimate from 140,000 down to a mere 46,000. In 1999, Economic Research Associates reported that Southwest Museum attendance usually ranged between 75,000 and 90,000 per year. It is hardly a surprise that the Coalition’s expert, Thomas Martin of ConsultEcon, found the 46,000 per year attendance estimate in the Levin Report to be ridiculously conservative!

SEE THE 1999 REPORT FOR YOURSELF.

Table III-1

**MARKETS AVAILABLE
IN THE SOUTHWEST MUSEUM AREA**

1999 Estimates

		<i>¼ Mi. Radius Ring</i>	<i>½ Mi. Radius Ring</i>	<i>Highland Park and Adjacent Study Area</i>
1.	Resident Population	2,000	5,000±	24,000±
2.	Employees			
	• In commercial floor space	380	600±	3,440±
	• In offices-at-home	200	400+	1,200±
3.	Southwest Museum Visitors	75,000-90,000/year		
4.	Recreational Facilities Use Purpose Visitors (from region)	10,000-20,000/year		

2010 Estimates

1.	Resident Population	2,400±	5,700±	28,000±
2.	Employees			
	• In commercial floor space	450±	700±	4,750±
	• In offices-at-home	300+	700+	2,800±
3.	Southwest Museum Visitors ¹	125,000-140,000/year		
4.	Recreational Facilities Use Purpose Visitors (from origin) ¹	30,000-40,000/year		

¹ Presumes Blue Line Light Rail system is in operation.
Source: Economics Research Associates.

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Atry's sub-consultant on economic
analysis in the Brenda Levin Report.

**SOUTHWEST MUSEUM AREA
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY
ECONOMIC FOCUS GROUPS
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

A summary of the recurring economic development issues suggested by all of the participants in the two economic focus groups for the Southwest Museum Area Economic Development Strategy is outlined hereafter. Roughly 25 individuals from the community participated in each of the focus groups and were joined by members of the City Planning Department, Economics Research Associates (ERA), and Dr. Goetz Wolff. Appropriately, both meetings occurred at the Southwest Museum itself, which gives significant character and landmark locational identity to the area. The first meeting, on November 13, occurred from 4:00 to 6:00 P.M. Participants requested that a later time be scheduled for the second meeting in order to provide greater ease and convenience for attendance. Accordingly, the December 2 economic focus group occurred between 7:30 and 9:30 P.M.

A variety of concerns and needs were expressed by all participants. Common ground was uniquely found in agreement that the Southwest Museum area, including the half-mile radius ring around the proposed Blue Line Station site, represents an incredible collection of historical, cultural, recreational, and community assets which have regional-serving capacity, but are presently not that well known in the 1990s in the Los Angeles region.

Similarly, there is a need to reacquaint the entire Highland Park residential community with the richness of resources, what is happening at the present time for community and economic improvement, and how the existing resources may effectively attract additional economic opportunity for the Southwest Museum area.

Considerable consensus has also been established regarding the need to continue initiatives and to form new economic linkages in the present time, rather than to wait upon the Blue Line Light Rail transportation service. Economic focus group participants and

representatives of a number of associations have consistently indicated that incremental progress now is as important as the eventual arrival of light rail transit service.

Any summary of the two highly successful economic focus groups must select the "vital few" elements which consistently arose in the conversations. Accordingly, the several items described below have been seen by ERA and its economic resource experts as the principal findings.

1. **Sense of Loss of Community Assets**

Community residents and businesses have described their concern regarding the loss of the Packard Grill (a restaurant), and have also described the loss of effective communications because of the departure of a local newspaper in the recent past. The historic nature of the Highland Park area which is focused upon the Southwest Museum district also means that public infrastructure and community appearance have aged substantially and need revitalization, adding to the sense of loss.

2. **There are Many Active Groups but No Coordinated "Town Council"**

Members of associations include the co-optation of many similar person members is evident in Highland Park. Some entities have been in transition, and new entities, such as the Community Development Corporation, are in formative stages. It is necessary to again collect together a viable community leadership which is broadly based and representative in order to rebuild both a sense of community and to target selected initiatives which can draw upon available community resources and not be heavily reliant upon the contingency of external funding.

3. **Need to Regenerate Business Community Consensus and Advocacy Activities**

At the present time, the Highland Park Chamber of Commerce acknowledges that the Southwest Museum area merchants are not members of the Chamber and do not seem to have their own organization. It will not be appropriate to

wait for the Blue Line Station to deliver new clients and customers to the retailers and services group along Figuerora. Regeneration of a merchant association should begin immediately. It is possible that both the Chamber and the CDC, which is still being born, could help in the formation of an association.

4. **Concern About the Quality of Retailing**

Community residents commented about the disappointing quality of the appearance of a number of buildings, and the lack of some services including dinner house restaurants. Reference was made to the need for Lucky Market to upgrade the store interior, as well as improve the exterior appearance. It was acknowledged that many residents in the hills above the Arroyo shop elsewhere and do not patronize stores and services on Figuerora in the Southwest Museum district area. This will need to be strongly addressed in any revitalization strategy.

5. **The City of Los Angeles is Partially Responsible for the Confusion Regarding Many Types of Meetings for Specialized Issues**

There is a need to consolidate and coordinate community information about the multiple planning efforts and revitalization activities which will be ongoing in the next two to three years. Participants receive fragments of information regarding unique programs rather than a comprehensive view of all of the efforts of the City. Examples of the multiple efforts underway include the revision of the Northeast Community Plan, the transit-oriented districts planning of which this effort is a part, the targeted neighborhoods initiative, and the cycles of MTA transit planning. Other programs and efforts which involve job training, youth diversion, recreational facilities and cultural facilities improvements and programming are also topics which need to be coordinated in the larger community awareness effort.

6. **The Southwest Museum Will Stay in Place**

The Board and the management desire to strengthen the attracting capacity of the Museum and are enthusiastic about the potentials which will arise from the opening of Blue Line Light Rail transit service. The Southwest Museum has identified the rehabilitation and retrofitting of the Casa de Adobe structure for reuse as a restaurant near the Light Rail Station as an appropriate initiative. FEMA funds will be in place to help create the appropriately strengthened shell structure which could then accommodate such a venture.

Presently, the Southwest Museum has an annual visitation ranging from 75,000 to 90,000 of which more than half are normally school children coming in student groups on scheduled tours each year. This level of visitation is modest (and represents an opportunity) to utilize existing available additional capacity.

7. **Doubling of Cultural Facilities Visitation in the Community**

A doubling from 75,000 to 150,000 annual visitors to the Southwest Museum, the Casa de Adobe, Sycamore Park, a refurbished and repositioned Ramona Hall, and other visitor-attracting and community-serving assets could generate significant economic benefit for the Southwest Museum area. It is unlikely that such a doubling of visitation, if occurring throughout the calendar cycle of the year, would cause any significant congestion or pressure on existing available facilities. Presently, a tribal market which occurs once a year is the largest event in the Southwest Museum area.

8. **Define Three Phases of Economic Betterment**

The result of conversations during the economic focus groups has defined three sets or phases of initiatives for economic revitalization.

- A. There are initiatives which can be formed and carried out now which will have near-term benefits and assist in repositioning of the

community's self knowledge of the richness of assets and opportunities.

- B. There are initiatives which may be undertaken which will ready the community for the Blue Line's eventual arrival. These include the MTA pedestrian linkage improvements which may happen over the next two years or more.
- C. There are economic development initiatives which will arise as a result of the initiation of Blue Line Light Rail service.

Thus, overall we may see the economic development strategy as initiatives now and for the next two years, mid-term initiatives which ready the community for the arrival of the Blue Line service, perhaps over the next two- to four-years; and longer-term initiatives which will coincide with the beginning of light rail service, perhaps after the year 2002. The economic development strategy should speak to these phases and to a clustering of initiatives which are doable in the near term, can collect both community and external resources for the mid-term, and can take advantage of unique business volume potentials once the Blue Line Transit Service has commenced.

9. Improve the Los Angeles Region's Knowledge of the Southwest Museum Area

Highland Park, and the Southwest Museum area, await rediscovery. Land use change is not necessary; residential density increases are not necessary; community reeducation about the assets and opportunities is essential; a coordinated outreach program about the historic, cultural, commercial, and recreational opportunities in the Southwest Museum area is similarly essential. In other words, the most critical, early-term, economic development strategy initiatives are likely to be of an informational and marketing character. Much is already underway including a limited range of public improvements, traffic

Autry was suppose to market the SW Museum. Long-recognized need for the area!

safety improvements, seismic safety improvements to key historic buildings, and the networking of cultural assets into both interpreted as well as self-guided visits and experiences.

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An emerging economic development strategy for the Southwest Museum area will largely be a combination of community reeducation and the creation of coordinated series of partnerships to bring existing resources together and to capture already available resources from the City, from MTA, and from other entities. The Southwest Museum area is the most unique of all of the Blue Line Light Rail Station site areas in the sense that it is very likely to be a visitor attractor, rather than a sender of commuters only. This will require a sustained, community-led, and community-controlled vision of both the community residents' experiences, with the remarkable assets, as well as the quality of experience and return patronage which can be gained by the networked assets.

8. ROLE OF TRANSIT SERVICES AND OPERATIONAL POLICIES IN SUPPORTING LOCAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

At this point, the primary battle ahead which must be won, is to make certain that the Southwest Museum station platform is built and that the service opens at the time that the Blue Line service opens. This means that community leadership must coalesce to fight off any possible move to economize by cutting out the station from early service opening.

The most recent events concerning the reviving of the Pasadena Blue Line Light Rail system are outlined on Table 7. What had previously been an almost expired project in mid-1998, has come alive again, but will be based solely upon effective leadership and political will.

In the meantime, the sum result of the LACMTA Northeast Bus Service Realignment Plan has been to retain the principal services which move along Marmion Way and Figueora Street. Two additional connector services have been committed. In addition, the City Council office has pursued the initiation of a DASH bus system service in and around Highland Park.

The main chance for the Southwest Museum Area Economic Development Strategy lies in the initiation of regional Light Rail service, however. With the service will come the ability to identify and position the collection of cultural and recreational facilities as a destination, a position which has been lost over the past 20 years as multiple commercial entertainment districts and other farther distant cultural and recreational attractions have arisen. Delivery of light rail transit service will open unique day-trip opportunities for millions of people in the Southern California region.

In order to enhance this potential oncoming opportunity, the consultant recommends the "half pass" concept. The idea is that the patron will pay the fare to get to the Southwest Museum station platform. The LACMTA, which is likely to be the operator of the line when it is built, would enter into a validation arrangement with the destination (such as the Southwest Museum) for the return portion of the trip either toward the Pasadena end of line,

or toward Union Station. Grant funds to cover such costs could be found from the special projects category occasionally awarded by SCAQMD, from the several arts and cultural grant programs, and/or from corporate sponsors and from the City of Los Angeles DOT.

Transit programs which highlight cultural and festival destinations are used throughout the United States. Examples include train service to the Summer Ravinia Festival by METRA in the Chicago region, and the trains to Clifton, Virginia for the Clifton Festival. In the Southern California area, LACMTA operates express buses to the Hollywood Bowl. The "half pass" concept adds a funding challenge, but also seeks to boost transit ridership and destination facility patronage.

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An additional opportunity is evident in the possibility of combining cultural facility visitation at Southwest Museum with a number of the cultural facilities in downtown Los Angeles and in the center of Pasadena. The combined patronage of 10 to 15 separate destinations is a remarkable business opportunity for the LACMTA when real numbers begin to be defined.

The arrival of the Blue Line will also represent an opportunity for the mixing of patronage between residents who dwell on the hill slopes of Mount Washington and in the higher elevations of Highland Park with the residents of the Arroyo Seco Valley area. In order for the Southwest Museum station platform to maximize business, it will be necessary to create effective "kiss and ride" drop offs for both residential communities. The narrow alignment of Marmion Way makes Mount Washington resident drop off a design challenge. Similarly, the high volume and relatively high speed movements along Figueora Street make drop off a traffic hazard challenge. Without attention to detail regarding these issues in the immediate future, the reputation of the service and its safety will be diminished.

Previously, ERA has commented upon a possible target of developing additional patronage by visitors in the range of 50,000 per year for the Southwest Museum. ERA believes that at least 40 percent of this increased patronage could come via the Blue Line Light Rail service. We would expect that proportion to grow in a few years after initiation of service.