



The City Project



OLDTIMERS FOUNDATION
(Founded 1964)



Transit to Trails

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The City Project
Policy Brief

Transit to Trails takes inner city youth and their families and friends on fun mountain, beach, and Los Angeles River hiking and biking trips. The project enriches their education about water, land, wildlife, and cultural history, and the importance of physical activity and healthy eating for life-long health.

In April 2007, Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne joined Anahuak youngsters for a hike to celebrate National Junior Ranger Day in the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area.

Transit to Trails is a creative partnership between: Anahuak Youth Association, The City Project, Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority, the National Park Service, Old Timers Foundation, CORBA (Concerned Off Road Bicyclists Association) and others.

Although these children live only an hour from the mountains and beaches, many have never been there, because parents often work two or more jobs, and do not have access to cars or to information to plan trips. We are diversifying access to and support for mountains, beaches, and rivers -- and having fun doing it!

Transit to Trails lleva a los niños de la ciudad y sus familias y amigos a las montañas, las playas, y al Río Los Angeles a pie y en bicicleta, con el fin de enriquecer su educación sobre la naturaleza, historia cultural, actividad física, y la nutrición saludable.

En abril de 2007, Ministro del Interior Dirk Kempthorne viajó con los jóvenes de Anahuak para celebrar el Día Nacional de Guardabosques Jóvenes a la Zona de Recreación Nacional de las Montañas de Santa Monica.

Transit to Trails es un esfuerzo creativo entre varias personas y organizaciones: Anahuak, The City Project, y Mountains and Recreation Conservation Authority, the National Park Service, Old Timers Foundation, CORBA y otros.

Aunque estos niños viven sólo a una hora de las montañas y playas, muchos nunca han estado allí, porque los padres trabajan a menudo dos o más trabajos, y no tienen acceso a los automóviles o a la información para planear los viajes. Nosotros estamos diversificando el acceso y el apoyo para las montañas, playas, y ríos.



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Diversifying Access to and Support for Green Space

An expanded Transit to Trails program would serve all people, but would be particularly useful to the working poor with limited or no access to cars. Transit to Trails provides choices to people who have none. Transit to Trails would help reduce traffic congestion and parking problems, improve air quality, and reduce run-off of polluted water into rivers and the ocean. It would also help reduce dependency on the automobile and fossil fuels.

The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) calls for public transportation to improve access to parks throughout Southern California in the 2008 Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) Environmental Justice Report. There is almost no access to national parks and very limited access to state parks by transit across all income groups. There are virtually no parks where the population lives with the lowest 20% income. “A multi-agency effort must be undertaken in order to further address and remedy the issue of inequity of park access,” according to SCAG.² Transit to Trails is one remedy.

Diversifying access is important to build support for parks and green space in urban and rural areas. National park attendance has eroded for years. The number of annual visitors to Yosemite has dropped 20 percent since 1996.

Overnight park stays in particular have declined. California is a "majority-minority" state, but park attendance does not reflect the demographics of the state and has not expanded enough among seniors, foreign tourists, and non-Hispanic white families.³ The Angeles National Forest provides 78% of the public space in the Los Angeles region, and lies within an hour’s drive of most of Los Angeles, but few people of color go there. Recreation is the predominant use of the forests in Southern California.⁴ Yet only 1% of the visitors to the forest are black, and only 11% are Hispanic. Zero percent of the visitors to the wilderness areas of the Angeles National Forest are black.⁵ Transit to Trails will diversify park users and create the environmental stewards of tomorrow.

Angeles National Forest Visitors

Race/Ethnicity	% of Visitors
Non-Hispanic White	79%
Latino	11%
Asian/Pacific Islander	7%
Black	1%
Native American	1%



Secretary of Interior Dirk Kempthorne on Transit to Trails Hike (April 07)

Improving Health and Addressing Health Disparities

Physical inactivity contributes to obesity and chronic conditions, such as Type 2 diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and some cancers. It is associated with greatly increased costs for medical care and lost productivity, estimated to cost California approximately \$13 billion a year.⁶

The health consequences of the lack of access to parks are profound. The Los Angeles County Health Department found a higher prevalence of obesity – up to 37% – where the economic burden (crowded housing, poverty, unemployment, lower educational attainment, more dependents, and lower median income) was greater. Cities with less parks or wilderness area were more likely to have higher childhood obesity levels.⁷

Overweight and Unfit Children in California

Race/Ethnicity	Overweight	Unfit
Latino	34%	45%
African American	29%	46%
White	20%	34%
Asian	18%	36%

2. SCAG Regional Transportation Plan Environmental Justice Report (2008), available at www.cityprojectca.org/blog/archives/880.

3. Ben Arnoldy and Brad Knickerbocker, *National Park Attendance Keeps Dropping: Higher Gas Prices, Admission Fees, Summer Camps, Even Video Games Contribute To Decline*, Christian Science Monitor, May 27, 2007.

4. United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Draft Environmental Impact Statement for Revised Land Management Plans for the Angeles, Cleveland, Los Padres, and San Bernardino National Forests (May 2004) at 3-58 (“DEIS”), on file with The City Project.

5. Race/Ethnicity of Visitors to the Angeles National Forest (2000 Survey). Source: U.S. Forest Service (available at www.losangelesalmanac.com/topics/Parks/pa07.htm).

6. Robert Garcia, Zoe Rawson, Meagan Yellott, & Christina Zaldaña, *Economic Stimulus, Green Space and Equal Justice 12* (The City Project Policy Report 2009)(“*Economic Stimulus, Green Space and Equal Justice*”). Available at www.cityprojectca.org/blog/archives/1450.

7. Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, Office of Health Assessment and Epidemiology, *Preventing Childhood Obesity: the need to create healthy*

The county report ignores significant health disparities based on race and ethnicity. Latino and black children are disproportionately overweight and unfit compared to non-Hispanic white and Asian children.⁸

Reflecting Community Values

Transit to Trails promotes the diverse values at stake in access to parks and recreation. Parks, beaches, rivers, mountains, and other natural public places are places to have fun and bring people together. Having fun and social cohesion promote other values, including physical, psychological, and social health, including reducing obesity and diabetes; youth development, improved academic performance, and positive alternatives to drugs, gangs, crime, and violence; conservation values of open space, clean air, water, and land, habitat protection, and climate justice; economic vitality for all through local green jobs including youth conservation corps; culture, heritage, and art; spiritual values in protecting the earth and its people; and sustainable regional planning. Fundamental principles of equal justice and democracy underlie each of these other values.⁹

Few people of color visit national forests and other green spaces in Southern California, but that does not mean people of color do not value parks and green space. Quite to the contrary. Recent park and resource bonds provide two important lessons. One, people of color and low income people make a difference in passing bonds for parks, clean water, and clean air. Two, it is necessary to ensure that the benefits are distributed fairly by targeting low income communities of color for access to parks. Transit to Trails can help. Transit to Trails takes low income people of color to green spaces that they would not otherwise visit.

In 2002, California voters passed Proposition 40, at that time the largest resource bond in United States history, which provided \$2.6 billion for parks, clean water and clean air. Prop 40 passed with the support of 77% of Black voters, 74% of Latino voters, 60% of Asian voters, and 56% of non-Hispanic White voters. 75% of voters with an annual family income below \$20,000, and 61% with a high school diploma or less, supported Prop 40 – the highest among any income or education levels.¹⁰

In 2006, people of color made the difference in passing California's Proposition 84, a \$5.4 billion park and water bond. Latinos supported Prop 84 by 84% and gave Prop 84 an 800,000 vote margin, accounting for Prop 84's margin of victory. Only 45% of non-Hispanic whites favored Prop 84.¹¹

Economic Stimulus and Transit to Trails

Transit to Trails can help put the nation back to work. Transit to Trails can lead to part time and summer jobs for diverse students in youth conservation corps programs, and in the long term to careers as park rangers and in other conservation positions. By providing lessons on physical activity, healthy eating, and life-long health, Transit to Trails can reduce the medical costs of inactivity.



places. *A Cities and Communities Health Report*. October 2007.

8. California Center for Public Health Advocacy, *An Epidemic: Overweight and Unfit Children in California Assembly Districts* (Dec. 2002).

9. *Economic Stimulus, Green Space and Equal Justice* at 11-14.

10. *Id.* at 8.

11. *Id.* at 8.



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Transportation infrastructure investments should provide transit alternatives to cars and highways. More than 80% of gas taxes go to highways and bridges, less than 20% to transit.¹² More funds should go to transit, including Transit to Trails.



New Deal projects offer valuable lessons. New Deal projects included 8,000 - new parks, 40,000 new schools, and 2 billion new trees. The Civilian Conservation Corps expanded open space and created jobs. Part-time jobs kept high school and college students in school and out of regular markets. The difference New Deal programs made in people's lives and putting the nations back to work is incalculable.¹³ Transit to Trails can make a difference now.

Transit to Trails is a successful pilot project that should be institutionalized throughout Southern California and beyond. Other park agencies should join the Mountains Recreation Conservation Authority and the National Park Service in providing buses, rangers and programs for Transit to Trails. School districts should provide buses and drivers on weekends and holidays. Transportation agencies should fund and support Transit to Trails at the federal, state, regional and local level, including CalTrans, L.A. Metro and L.A. DOT.



Solutions to many social problems – unemployment, environmental degradation, no place to play, little hope for disadvantaged youth, obesity – must be tied to a vision for a new America that includes green infrastructure projects to improve the lives of all residents.

Transit to Trails offers hope and change to create healthy, livable communities for all.



12. Editorial, *A Pitch for Mass Transit*, N.Y. Times, Jan 4, 2009.

13. *Economic Stimulus, Green Space and Equal Justice* at 7-8.