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Authors

Ong, Paul M.
Haselhoff, Kim

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Roadblocks to Smart Growth

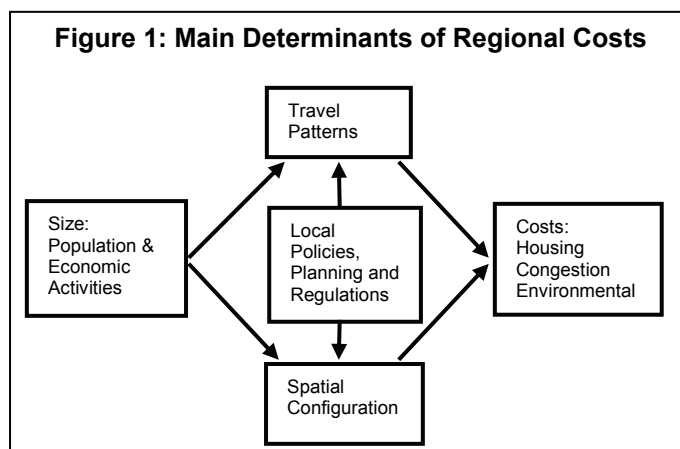
INTRODUCTION

Public opinion surveys play an important role in decision-making by providing information that complements data from standard sources such as the Decennial Census and Current Population Survey. This Fact Sheet presents findings from a recently completed survey of Southern California residents (those living in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura). Details of the survey can be found in the appendix. The information from the survey can inform elected officials about the public's concerns and priorities, and can also give the public insights into why it may be difficult to tackle many urban problems. In particular, the information can help us understand why it has been so difficult for this region to promote more compact and mixed land-use patterns that would lessen the problems of traffic congestion, pollution, and higher land use. The current geographic configuration is not the most efficient, and over the next two decades, the region will have to accommodate millions of more residents. Despite the potential of Smart Growth to alleviate some of the problems, collective progress is hampered by narrow individual self-interest. One key result from the survey is that there is considerable opposition to developing multi-unit apartments and large retailing centers by those living close to such a proposed development. Moreover, resistance to such developments is concentrated within some economic and demographic groups.

BACKGROUND

In recent years, there has been an increasing call for using Smart Growth strategies to address traffic congestion, high housing costs, and air pollution in this region. Unquestionably, these problems are generated by fundamental demographic and economic forces tied to the region's size (see Figure 1). Size matters because it requires more land to house residents and firms, generates more travel to connect people and places, and pushes land prices higher in response to greater demand. The problems have grown with the population, which increased from about 7.8 million in 1960 to 17.7 million

in 2005. The problems will worsen as the region adds another 3.5 million over the next 25 years (see Figure 2). Growth, however, is not inherently bad because it is the product of a vibrant economy that creates employment and business opportunities. But, it comes with associated costs. Size determines both travel patterns and the overall geographic configuration, but growth is not the sole cause of higher costs. Local policies, planning, and regulations influence how efficiently the region organizes the locations of its population and economic activities.



Accommodating growth has not been without difficulties. One problem most residents confront daily is traffic. The Texas Transportation Institute ranks the combined Los Angeles and Orange area as having the worst congestion among the very large metropolitan areas, as well as all metropolitan areas (Schrank and Lomax, 2004). In terms of hours wasted in delays per traveler, the Riverside and San Bernardino area ranks second out of 27 large metropolitan areas, and Ventura tied for seventh out of 30 medium metropolitan areas (see Figure 3,

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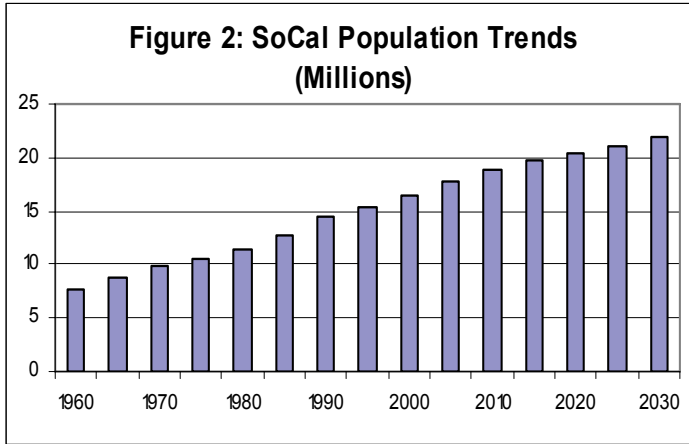
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Paul Ong is a professor in urban planning, social welfare, and Asian American studies at UCLA and Director of the Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

Kim Haselhoff is a post-doctoral fellow at the Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies.

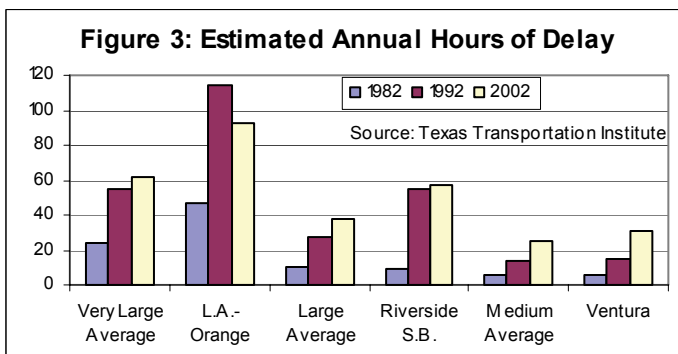
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which reports average hours of delay for the local region as well as the average for different classes of metro areas). Congestion, however, is only one part of three inter-related outcomes. There is also an “affordability crisis” because of high housing costs due to extremely high land prices (Ong et al., 2004; Glaeser and Gyourko, 2003), although the government has also played a role in constraining the housing supply (The Economist, 2005). Finally, although Southern California has made remarkable progress in cleaning the air, the region is still listed by the EPA as the worst in the nation, with much of the pollution coming from mobile sources



(Winer, 2005).

For a growing number of urban analysts, the triumvirate of woes is due in part to a geographically inefficient configuration that unduly contributes to sprawl and over reliance on the automobile. The alternative is to promote more compact development based on mixed land uses, an approach that comes under the term “Smart Growth,” but also includes alternatives such as New Urbanism and transit-oriented planning (Zasloff, 2003; The Planning Report, 2004). Smart Growth comprises a wide range of strategies, but two important elements are denser housing developments and allowing retailing close to residential areas. This type of urban design would reduce vehicle trips and provide more affordable housing. Of course, these two strategies by themselves are not a panacea for the region, but they can contribute

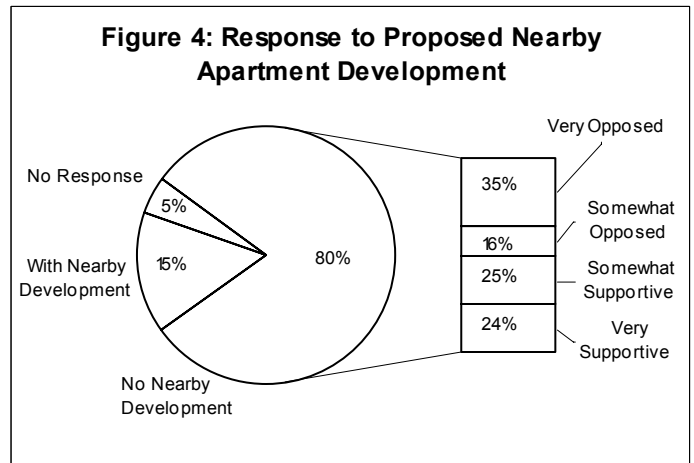


to alleviating some of the problems at the margin.

Implementing Smart Growth, however, runs up against neighborhood opposition, also known as “not in my backyard” resistance, or NIMBYism. Compact residential development must include some multi-family housing, but this type of development is seen as one of the least desirable and most difficult to approve, in part because of pressure from local residents (Lewis and Neiman, 2002). People are willing to encourage commercial development but not close by (The Field Institute, 2002; Mueller and Mueller, 2005). These reactions are understandable because large-scale development can generate potential disruptions caused by traffic, thus adversely affecting housing values. While this is individually rational, it makes it difficult to implement important elements of Smart Growth planning.

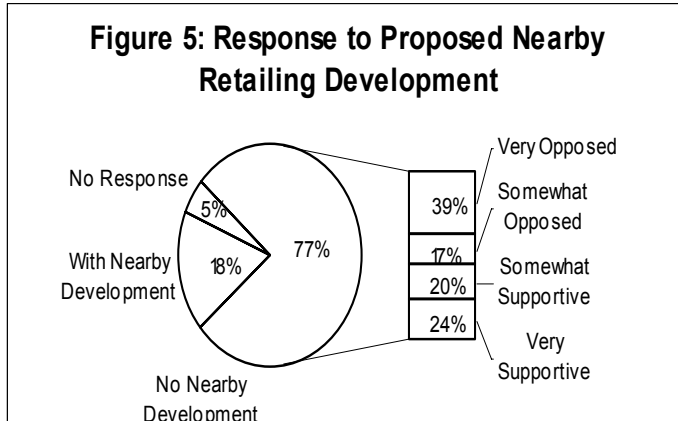
RESPONSES TO NEARBY DEVELOPMENTS

The 2005 Southern California Public Opinion Survey gauges the level of support and opposition to the two elements of Smart Growth through two questions. The first, is “How supportive would you be of development of a multi-unit apartment complex two blocks from your home?” Figure 4 summarizes the responses for those who do not already have such a development nearby. Among this group, a slight majority stated that they are opposed to such a proposed project. However, we cannot say with a high degree of certainty that this majority exists due to the inherent limitations of estimates based on a sample of the population. Statistically, there is about a two-in-three chance that the majority of the population holds this view. While Southern California residents are fairly evenly split on this question, those who are opposed are more likely to feel strongly about their position than those who are supportive. This difference in the strength of views is statistically signifi-



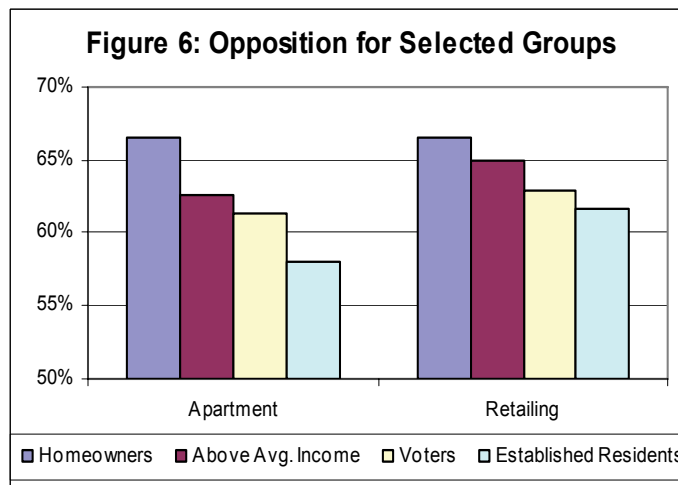
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The second question is, “How supportive would you be of development of a large commercial retail center two blocks from your home?” Figure 5 summarizes the responses for those who do not already have such a development nearby. Among this group, a statistically significant majority stated that they are opposed to such a proposed project. Moreover, those who are opposed are more likely to feel strongly about their position than



those who are supportive.

Finally, the survey data provide information on the locus of opposition. Figure 6 summarizes the proportion opposing the proposed nearby developments for four subgroups: homeowners, those in households with above average income (\$60,000 or more), voters, and established residents (residing in the current home for five or more years). These are the groups that have a greater stake in preserving the quality of their neighborhoods. A sizeable majority of each group opposes having a multi-unit apartment complex nearby, with homeowners showing the greatest resistance. Even larger majorities oppose having a large commercial retail center nearby, with homeowners showing the greatest resistance.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

The pattern of the responses helps explain why it is so difficult to implement Smart-Growth strategies when they require everyone to make some sacrifice. There are strong pockets of resistance to higher residential density and mixed land use. Although opposition may vary according to the type of neighborhood one lives in, and whether or not it is near more pedestrian-oriented development already, in general, opposition is concentrated within the groups with the greatest economic and political leverage. The result is that developments that are seen as undesirable tend to be pushed into neighborhoods at the other end of the economic and political spectrum. The end effect is a regional configuration that is less than efficient, and also less than equitable.

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APPENDIX: SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY, 2005

The 2005 Southern California Public Opinion Survey is supported by the UCLA Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies and is designed to gather the views and opinions of Southern California residents on critical public policy issues in this region. The survey was developed with input from campus and community organizations. UCLA units include the Center for Communications and Community, the Institute of Transportation Studies, the Center for Civil Society, and the Anderson School of Management. Three public agencies participated in the process: the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, and the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC). Several UCLA faculty provided valuable input: Professors Vickie Mays, Michael Stoll, Brian Taylor, Amy Zegart, Frank Gilliam, Helmut Anheier, Chris Thornberg, and Ed Leamer.

The 2005 Survey gathered basic demographic data and covered seven topical areas: 1) major issues facing the region, 2) the efficacy of local government, 3) transportation, 4) the state of the regional economy, 5) housing, 6) civic engagement, and 7) major disasters. When possible, questions were worded to parallel existing questions from other surveys. Half of the respondents were asked questions related to NIMBYism.

The Survey was conducted in English and Spanish during the months of January and February 2005 using random digit dialing, and the data were collected by The Social Science Research Center at California State University, Fullerton. There are 1544 completed surveys for the five counties: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura. The sample is divided proportionally by county household population. The characteristics of the sample by age, ethnicity, income and home ownership categories are consistent with the 2004 March Current Population Survey. There is a sampling error of +/- 2.6 percent at the 95 percent confidence level for the full sample, and +/- 3.7 percent for the subsample answering the questions related to housing and commercial development. (Sampling error may be larger for subpopulations).

The **Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies** was established to promote the study, understanding and solution of regional policy issues, with special reference to Southern California, including problems of the environment, urban design, housing, community and neighborhood dynamics, transportation and economic development. It is a focus of interdisciplinary activities, involving numerous faculty members and graduate students from many schools and departments at UCLA. It also fosters links with researchers at other California universities and research institutes on issues of relevance to regional policy. Founded in 1988 with a \$5 million endowment from Ralph and Goldy Lewis, it was directed until December 1994 by Professor Allen J. Scott, directed by Roger Waldinger from 1994 through 1998 and is currently directed by Paul Ong. The Center is supported by its endowment, other private donors and foundations and research grants from a variety of agencies. The director works with an executive committee, with guidance from an advisory board that includes members drawn from both the University and the wider community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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DISCLAIMER

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