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# L.A. Al Fresco: Converting Parking Spaces for Outdoor Dining During COVID-19



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## Issue

The L.A. Al Fresco temporary outdoor dining program transformed our streets and reimagined the public right-of-way as a place for people, not cars. The program allows for the conversion of parking spaces into outdoor dining areas, increasing a restaurant's floor space either on the sidewalk, at the curb or in their off-street parking lots. At the expense of lost parking meter revenue, the city of Los Angeles has rolled the dice on curbside/on-street dining in the hopes that businesses stay open and the increased floor space translates into greater sales for businesses and more tax revenue for the city.

A pleasant climate and vibrant culinary scene make Los Angeles an ideal location for outdoor dining. Since the pandemic, though, even more restaurants, bars, and cafes have taken advantage of the expanded outdoor dining space made available through L.A. Al Fresco. Given the city's intention to transform L.A. Al Fresco into a long-term program, this research aims to assess the success of the temporary program and offers valuable insights for the development of a permanent outdoor dining initiative.

## Methods

The researcher analyzed the benefits of L.A. Al Fresco using applicant data, parking meter revenue provided by the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, and

sales tax revenue for businesses in case study corridors located provided as aggregate data by the city's Office of Finance. Treatment corridors with L.A. Al Fresco dining included Larchmont Village, NoHo Arts District, San Pedro, Westwood Village and Venice/Abbot Kinney. Sales tax revenue from these corridors was then compared with the control corridors without L.A. Al Fresco in Hollywood and Studio City. The researcher obtained qualitative data through surveys and public comments from stakeholders, including business owners, neighborhood councils, business organizations, dining patrons and neighbors.

## Findings

- L.A. Al Fresco has proved to be successful, with 80% of business owners reporting that the program kept them open during the pandemic. The treatment corridors with L.A. Al Fresco generated an impressive increase of \$12 million in gross sales in 2022 compared to 2019, representing an average sales growth of 30% in these designated corridors.
- Control corridors without L.A. Al Fresco performed poorly by the same metrics. The Hollywood control corridor, along Hollywood Boulevard, experienced a significant decline in revenue in 2022 compared to 2019, while Studio City's corridor along Ventura Boulevard managed to maintain similar revenue levels in both years.



Figure 1. Curbside dining in the NoHo Arts District in 2020.

## Conclusions

- The L.A. Al Fresco program has been highly successful. Introduced in two phases, it facilitated outdoor dining on sidewalks, private off-street parking lots, and curbside/on-street parking spaces. The main objective was to support struggling businesses by simplifying approvals and temporarily relaxing zoning codes.
- The program provided a crucial lifeline to restaurants during the challenging times of the pandemic, while also generating economic benefits for the city. A reported 80% of businesses were able to remain open and corridors with L.A. Al Fresco experienced a remarkable increase in gross sales, highlighting its effectiveness in boosting revenue.
- The vibrant outdoor spaces created by the program have become integral to their communities, and the flexibility to repurpose parking spaces has been instrumental in its success. Transitioning the L.A. Al Fresco program into a permanent initiative will further enhance the economic and social well-being of the city, increasing sales, tax revenue, and community spaces throughout Los Angeles.
- The conversion of metered parking spaces into curbside dining areas resulted in an estimated annual revenue loss of \$211,000 in treatment corridors. This estimate assumes that the 66 parking meters that were temporarily suspended for curbside dining would have generated the same revenue in 2022 as they did in 2019.
- Outdoor dining in off-street parking lots emerged as the preferred option among business owners. They reported fewer program restrictions, increased safety from vehicular traffic, and the ability to accommodate more customers by converting their parking lots into dining areas.
- Interestingly, there were no perceived impacts on parking demand reported by either business owners or dining patrons. This challenges the necessity of parking requirements, as the conversion of parking spaces did not seem to have a negative effect on parking availability.



Rossmore, G. (2023). Dining or parking?: Managing the curb during COVID-19 and beyond (Master’s Capstone, UCLA). Retrieved from: <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1p53w0bx>

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