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Transit-Oriented Development Without Displacement: Strategies to Help Pacoima Businesses Thrive



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Issue

Bounded by mountains and freeways, the culturally rich, working-class Los Angeles neighborhood of Pacoima faces a legacy of environmental degradation and historical injustice. Power plants, landfills, toxic release sites, lead contamination, freeways, and a municipal airport create a powerful cocktail of airborne and ground soil pollution, causing substantial impacts to community public health. Through the state's Transformative Climate Communities Program (TCC), the Green Together Collaborative secured a \$23 million grant in 2018 to implement urban greening and streetscape improvement projects in Pacoima and neighboring Sun Valley. Meanwhile, LA Metro is also building an at-grade light rail transit line through the East San Fernando Valley and down Van Nuys Boulevard, Pacoima's major commercial corridor.

Considering the risks of displacement, gentrification, and cultural erasure that are associated with transit expansion, this research focuses on commercial anti-displacement strategies that can support the predominantly immigrant-owned small business community in the corridor. This research supports the efforts of Pacoima Beautiful, the only environmental justice organization in the neighborhood and a member of the Green Together Collaborative, in developing a Displacement Avoidance Plan to mitigate the potential impacts of the TCC investments and the East San Fernando Rail Line extension. This research answers

two questions: (1) What are the concerns, experiences, and priorities of Pacoima small businesses facing transit-related displacement pressures? (2) How can community groups respond to displacement pressures from rail transit expansion to ensure thriving community businesses?

Research Findings

- The extant scholarship on commercial anti-displacement is limited and does not evaluate the impacts of anti-displacement strategies.
- Key representatives from the business community help unite businesses. Identifying a few key business representatives to advocate for the community has proven useful for building community power in our case study communities.
- Case studies showed that business owners require technical assistance and funding support. Common forms of technical assistance included social media and Yelp.com training, grant application support, website development, and digital payment services. This need was echoed by Pacoima survey respondents, who expressed interest in similar support services.
- Advocates stressed that funding from LA Metro's Business Interruption Fund was insufficient to offset the impacts of construction and that the fund's eligibility requirements were too narrow.
- In one case study, community ownership of land helped stabilize businesses. An organization

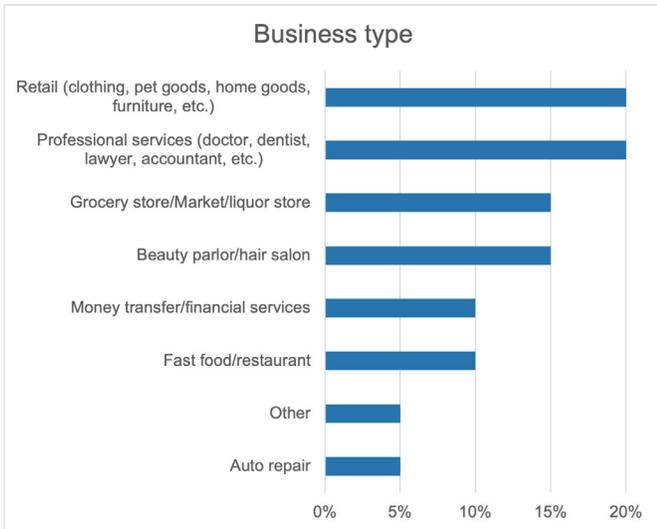


Figure 1. Survey respondents represented a diverse set of business types that make up the Pacoima small business landscape

interviewed as part of this study reported no cases of displacement of existing businesses across their community-controlled commercial properties.

- Pacoima has a diverse small business community. Survey respondents represented both English- and Spanish-speaking businesses, new and legacy businesses, and businesses providing a wide range of services and products (Figure 1).
- The Pacoima small business community is not formally organized. The majority of respondents were not part of a formal business association.
- Respondents are largely unaware of details regarding the light rail line, and they largely hold negative opinions about the project and its impact on their businesses.

Study Approach

The research team conducted a literature review of commercial anti-displacement strategies, case studies of transit-oriented communities, and a small business survey. For case studies, the team reviewed news reports and

interviewed community advocates from three communities — Boyle Heights, Crenshaw, and Little Tokyo — all of which had light rail investments, robust community responses, and household income and non-white population profiles similar to Pacoima. For surveys, the research team employed a multipronged outreach strategy — including flyers, phone calls, texts, partnership with community organizations, and social media outreach — to gather survey responses. The team surveyed 20 small businesses along Van Nuys Boulevard.

Recommendations

- Provide holistic support services to the small business community, with a focus on legal, marketing, and digital services, and facilitate the creation of an association of small businesses in Pacoima to develop people power and unite the small business community.
- Establish a cultural commercial district to recognize and uplift the importance of ethnic small businesses as assets to cultural wealth and community capital in Pacoima.
- Model commercial anti-displacement strategies after existing residential anti-displacement strategies that have demonstrated success, including rent control, right to counsel, and commercial community land trusts (CCLTs).
- Ensure equitable resource distribution for communities that will be impacted through extensive outreach and funding from LA Metro. LA Metro can expand eligibility requirements for the Business Interruption Fund to include all businesses along the affected corridor to allow more businesses to benefit from the program. Additionally, Metro can increase funding for commercial displacement avoidance strategies in proportion to the impact that its light rail projects will have on local businesses.



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