

Northern News

NORTHERN SECTION, CALIFORNIA CHAPTER, AMERICAN PLANNING ASSOCIATION

Cities Must Change to Survive

By Joel Kotkin

FEBRUARY 2002

The catastrophe that befell lower Manhattan, and the continuing concerns over security in Gotham, could foreshadow a broader reversal of fortune for America's first-tier cities. After nearly a decade of remarkable resurgence, New York and other major urban centers face a new era of uncertainty and intensified competition from smaller cities and towns.

It would be dense for business leaders in New York and other key cities to believe that the assault on the World Trade Center, and the heightened security around all high-profile locations, will not profoundly impact the future of major urban areas.

A city ... is more than a collection of steel and glass connected by fiber optic cables. It is a living, breathing organism ...

What is needed now is a new vision of urbanity that responds, and overcomes, our altered reality. The giddy period of urban resurgence — nurtured by mayors like Rudolph

Giuliani, plummeting crime rates and the stock boom of the late 1990s — has come to an end. A new organizing principle for cities needs to be developed, and fast. It should rely not on handouts and tax breaks to developers and companies, as has been the case in the past, but on an unleashing of the entrepreneurial instincts and assets of our urban population.

Unfortunately, to date, much of the brave rhetoric coming from Mayor Giuliani and Gov. George Pataki has been oriented more toward restoring the old order. Their proposals for a multi-billion dollar bailout — including plans to replace the twin towers with similarly gargantuan office complexes — are out of whack not only with post-Sept. 11 realities, but with patterns of business dispersal that have been emerging for decades.

Indeed, after Sept. 11, many firms are already signing long-term leases for new locations in the suburban hinterland. With the loss of 15% of downtown Manhattan's office space, according to a recent report from Reis.Com, it is inevitable that at least some of these firms will find homes outside New York City. And once employees acclimate to the relative ease of suburban locations, particularly given the long-term security concerns, they are unlikely to return to Manhattan without massive subsidies and tax breaks that the city can ill afford.

Let us remember that since the mid-1960s, most major cities have either lost population or stagnated, while mid-sized, horizontal cities — better adapted to the automobile and better able to offer a suburban-style quality of life — have grown rapidly. Indeed, even in the midst of the recent economic expansion, little in the way of high-rise office space was built anywhere in the U.S. With the possible exception of Charlotte, N.C., virtually no major American city added significantly to its skyline in the '90s.

New York is not the only city that has to rethink its development strategy. Even before the terror attacks, many of the great comeback cities of the late '90s, such as Boston, San Francisco and Seattle, had begun to suffer precipitous drops in occupancies and rents. With their own share of high-profile targets, these cities have all heightened their security as a response to terrorism.

Yet it would be inaccurate to blame the current crisis facing America's first-tier cities on Osama bin Laden. Over the past year or two, as the Nasdaq fell and the dot-coms imploded, the glow of inevitable prosperity had already started wearing thin. Lower Manhattan, the Garment District, and other

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DIRECTOR'S NOTE

It looks like we are off to a great start for the New Year.

CONGRATULATIONS to **Juan Borrelli, AICP**, and **Tim Woloshyn, AICP**, who are our newly elected Director Pro-Tem and Treasurer, respectively! Welcome to your new roles on the Board. We are glad you both are here.

Your Board Members held a retreat on January 12th to set new goals and develop a budget. We had a terrific turn out and a very worthwhile session.

While many of our goals are to maintain the same level of service our members have come to expect, we are also planning on putting together an annual **Nuts and Bolts Workshop for Planners**. Some of the areas that may be incorporated into the workshop may be effective staff report writing, public speaking skills, how to read and understand the implications of a grading plan, dealing with the press, etc. We are interested in areas that you believe would be helpful to planners that are in the early stages of their careers or areas in which not much training is currently available. Please let me know by email of any ideas you may have.

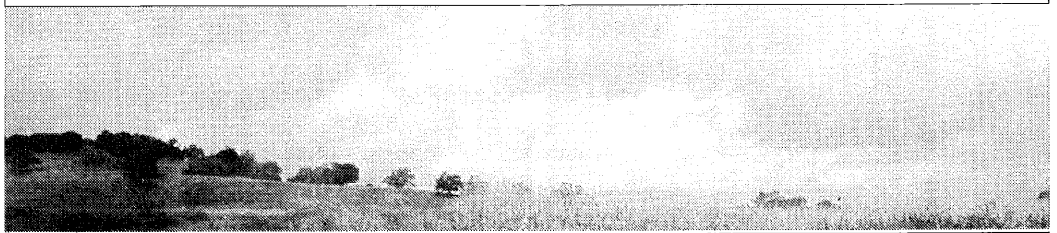
Each of our Directors have ambitious plans for their areas of expertise and I am looking forward to what we will all accomplish this year. We have a new RAC Coordinator for the Monterey Bay Area. **Michael Bethke, AICP**, from the Santa Cruz area will be replacing Ernie Franco, who was very active for many years. I hope all of you in the Monterey Bay Area will contact Michael and let him know the types of activities you would be interested in having.

We also discussed how we could more effectively involve students in our Section. We just filled two new positions. **Sung H. Kuon** is our new University Liaison, and **Anthony Drummond** is our first Student Representative (we hope to have several representatives from the various Bay Area schools). The Board is very excited to have these two talented individuals help us and we have provided funding to enable some good programs for students.

We are also planning to continue with our professional development program of events, hosted by **Rebecca Lave** every other month. These events have been well attended and have addressed a variety of topics. I hope to see many of you at our next event.

It is going to be a fabulous year!

—*Jeri Ram, AICP*



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The deadline for submitting materials for inclusion in the **Northern News** is the 16th day of the month prior to publication.

SECTION AWARDS NOMINATIONS 2001

This is the second and final announcement soliciting nominations for the Northern Section awards program. Nominations will be reviewed by a jury of Northern Section planners and judged against criteria of innovation, transferability, originality, quality and implementation. This is an opportunity for you and your elected and appointed officials to receive recognition for the excellent work done in our Section. And it is a chance to share your ideas and successes with your fellow planners.

To receive further information and application materials, please contact: Wayne Goldberg, AICP Northern Section Awards Coordinator
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Deadline for applications is April 12, 2002



Your Invitation to Present at CalAPA 2002, "Plan Diego"

Deadline Extended to March 1, 2002

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Sessions will be 75 minutes in length and we encourage use of innovative session formats in addition to the panel discussion, such as point/counterpoint, debates, audience involvement, case study/problem solving sessions, and charrettes.

What to submit: (1) Session or Workshop Title: A succinct and catchy title that accurately reflects the focus of your session. (2) Abstract: A maximum of 100 words that concisely describe your presentation and what attendees will learn (this will be published in the conference program). (3) Session or Mobile Workshop Summary and Relevance: An outline of the proposed and a brief discussion of the relevance of this topic, what the audience may learn through this session, and what new information will be available (maximum: one page). (4) Presenters' Identification: Provide the name, title, address, telephone, fax and e-mail address for the primary presenter, and identify additional presenters if known. (5) Presenter Expertise: A maximum of 100 words describing the relevance of the presenter's expertise to this topic.

Submit your proposal on-line or by mail, to be received or postmarked no later than midnight, March 1, 2002 to the following:
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If you have questions, please call the Conference Program Committee Chairs: Steve Silverman at (619)908-3524, or Kathy Garcia at (619)696-9303

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parts of New York were already hemorrhaging tenants before Sept. 11.

In a new, more austere environment, some entrepreneurs, who may have flocked to places like New York's Silicon Alley or West Los Angeles, are now tempted by locations in less glamorous locales. "When money was easy, and you didn't have to make profits, why not locate in Santa Monica?" suggests Houston-based real estate investor Andrew Segal. "When you have to look at the bottom line, other places begin to look more attractive."

Among the markets that Mr. Segal has seen business gravitate to are low-profile cities such as Tulsa, Kansas City and Hartford, which have been less affected by the recession than the bigger cities. These cities also have far lower rents and housing costs than the still-inflated markets of New York, San Francisco, Seattle or West Los Angeles, and arguably make far less inviting targets for terrorists. And new telecommunications technologies today could hasten this new hegira from the great cities.

So, what is the future of our great cities, and urban real estate? Under current conditions, the corporate functions most likely to stay in cities like New York will be those that require face-to-face contact—high-end deal making, collaborative creative processes and global connections. Clerical, administrative and other mid-level tasks can be as effectively done from the suburbs, or from less costly regions of the country.

The other critical element for cities will be to direct their efforts to appealing to those who, even with the increased fear factors, still will want to live or work in the urban core. These include those who have been flocking to places like New York over the past decade—creative people, the young, single, childless couples, lovers of the arts, and immigrants. The key to the next urban renaissance lies here: luring the often talented and highly motivated minority that craves the edginess and personal contact that only great agglomerations can provide. To do so, and to fend off challenges from second-tier cities, major

urban centers like New York must give priority to those issues that matter most to this demographic: cultural amenities, lower taxes, greater public safety, and clean streets.

In the process, New York will change, as all great cities always change. After the early '90s' riots and natural disasters in LA, the city was forced to abandon the long-time, heavily subsidized dream of turning downtown into "Manhattan West." The economy rebounded, but the corporate focus shifted to the West Side, the San Fernando Valley and other centers closer to where knowledge workers lived. Over time, downtown reinvented itself, largely as a thriving center for immigrant business.

Underutilized Areas

Similarly, New York will have to adapt to a geographic redefinition. The ultra concentration of lower Manhattan will likely never return, but market forces could see growth spread to other parts of Manhattan, and to well-located but now grossly underutilized areas like downtown Brooklyn and Harlem. Like Gotham a century ago, a renewed New York can now use more of its physical endowment.

Rebuilding New York on this new vision would be the best answer to the terrorists. A city, New York or any other, is more than a collection of steel and glass connected by fiber optic cables. It is a living, breathing organism whose various parts function together with reasonable efficiency. It also possesses a kind of soul, with a sense of itself, that leads its citizens to adapt to challenges both as individuals and as part of a greater urban enterprise. In the digital age, ultimately, the most important characteristics are those—sense of place, excitement, willpower and commitment—that have withstood barbaric assault from the days of antiquity, and can do so again.

Mr. Kotkin is a senior fellow at the Davenport Institute for Public Policy at Pepperdine University and at the Milken Institute. Used with permission of the author. This article first appeared in the Wall Street Journal, October 24, 2001.



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Rail-Volution Revisited

By Robert Piper

Last November's Rail-Volution conference in San Francisco extended the theme, "Building Livable Communities with Transit." Some 1,000 rail buffs, public officials, consultants, and hardware vendors celebrated the continuing expansion of rail transit, extolled recent successes, and discussed how to do better.

Whether it was "Sustainable Communities" or "Smart Growth", the common theme was more walking and less driving. Plenary sessions featured public officials lauding transit, including Congresswomen Nancy Pelosi and Ellen Tauscher, and Federal Transit Administrator Jennifer Dorn. Perhaps most notable was Phil Angelides, California State Treasurer, also a former developer. He wove a tapestry of connections among economics, social problems, the environment, and government policy, relationships which are familiar to planners everywhere.

NEW STARTS AND LAND USE

Federal Transit Administration (FTA) requirements for land use planning in applications for transit project New Starts were presented at the conference. Land use — at and near stations — is among the factors that the FTA now uses to rate proposals. Some 200 proposals are currently in the queue nationally, more proposals than what could be realistically funded. FTA seeks to avoid the mistakes of early rail systems whose stations were not integrated with supportive development. Many older systems remain surrounded by wastelands of pavement for parking. Good feeder bus service is rare. Parking lots fill early in the morning and then activity wanes through the day. Few seats are filled in the backhaul direction because nothing worth visiting lies within walking distance of the stop. In some cases, the public sees stations as a blight rather than a boon.

Here at home, BART waited 25 years to establish a station area planning group (now

five in number). Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) has blossomed at only a few suburban stations. Elsewhere it has yet to advance beyond the drawing board. Congress and the FTA seek assurance from New Starts applicants that TOD will occur in less than a quarter century. Persuasive showings of in-place plans (zoning, etc.) and development commitments are necessary to qualify for New Starts dollars.

RAIL VERSUS BUS CONTROVERSY

Everybody agrees that buses are the best solution at low developmental densities and along lightly traveled corridors. Conventional wisdom has it that investment in rail becomes justified when peak demand can fill seats of frequent train service. Historically, planners have assumed that passengers walk up to ten minutes to a train stop/station but only five minutes to a bus stop, reflecting customer preference for rail. Bus advocates contend that bus service would be just as attractive if it offered comparable amenities and quality. They suggest more luxurious vehicles, fewer stops, stations like those on rail lines, and various measures like traffic signal delay, pre-paid fares, and exclusive rights-of-way to speed travel. Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) is a term commonly associated with these concepts. The FTA funds BRT under the New Starts program. The jury is still out. Limited-stop bus operations have existed for decades. They are superior to the plodding, local services that give bus transit a bad name. Modern technology and HOV lanes widen their advantage. A number of systems exist in the U.S. (and elsewhere) and more are planned. Some systems, notably Ottawa and Pittsburgh, run part of the distance along exclusive rights-of-way (busways). In the Bay Area, AC Transit has proposed an express service along San Pablo Avenue, one of its heavily traveled routes. It could have traffic signal delays, low-floor buses, wait time display boards and pre-paid fares to shorten boarding times. *(continued on page 6)*

Rail-Volution ... (continued from page 5)

BRT MODEL

In notoriously congested Washington, DC, a new BRT line to the Dulles airport will run in the median of the 24-mile highway. It has no en route interchanges. Eight planned stations will be linked to nearby land developments by pedestrian bridges. Each will have space for four buses (each direction) and allow construction of Washington METRO commuter rail without disruption of service. Permitted station area densities will be increased when METRO comes. The BRT to Dulles will build up ridership in preparation for rail, which will be built when capital becomes available. Not a bad idea. (Hint, hint, Bay Area.)

MORE BRT QUESTIONS

The Rail-Volution conference raised issues and left many, necessarily, unresolved. Are all transit solutions equitable? At one session, an audience member distributed a newspaper clipping from Pittsburgh, Pa., where residents of a predominantly African-American suburb have sued the transit agency, alleging racial discrimination. A more expensive light rail line was built through a wealthier, majority-white suburb. The suit argues that the African-American suburb is served by buses which produce noise and diesel fumes, while the environmentally friendly light rail has brought the other community economic development.

And, what lesson can be drawn from the success of the Wilshire Avenue-Whittier corridor BRT? This bus service runs 26 miles between Santa Monica and a Metro station in Los Angeles. This is a limited stop (about one per mile) express service using compressed natural gas powered, low-floor buses that are sped along by traffic signal over-ride (about 10 seconds of green). The service has proven spectacularly successful: 45,000 passengers per day and climbing. Buses routinely carry standees between 2:00 and 9:00 p.m. But operating costs are high and headed upward. They could be lower with rail, which is less labor-intensive.

CARS ARE THE PROBLEM

Not surprisingly, one common complaint was the under-pricing of automobile use. Several conference speakers alluded to this problem with resignation. Politicians give transit a nod but it appears that their over-riding concern is to keep driving cheap. Rail-Volution conferences hope to continue educating planners, politicians and the public so that real transit solutions are recognized and new ones are developed in the future. Rail-Volution 2002 will take place in Washington, D.C., October 3-6.

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NORTHERN SECTION CALENDAR

February

6 SPUR Citizen's Guide to San Francisco General Plan event: www.spur.org

March

1 Deadline for State Conference—Cal APA 2002, San Diego proposals.

1 C P F Workshop, "How to Hire a Consultant," Southern California, p.3

4 AICP Exam registration fee and submission deadline.

7-8 Annual Institute on Planning and Zoning sponsored by the Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.
Visit <http://www.urban.uiuc.edu/ce>

15 C P F Workshop, "How to Hire a Consultant," Northern California, p.3

April

12 Deadline for APA Northern Section Awards Nominations.

13-17 National APA Conference, Chicago, Regency Hyatt.

May 11 AICP Test Date

FEBRUARY

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MARCH

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Northern News

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