

DAILY CLIPPINGS

OCTA News
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1. Meetings This Week Focus On Big Redevelopment Projects

By Doug Irving
Orange County Register

The City Council is scheduled to discuss several long-range redevelopment projects during a meeting on Tuesday night.

The agenda includes plans to rezone much of the downtown core, build new housing on vacant lots, refashion the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center and run a streetcar through the city. The meeting begins with a closed-door session at 5:30 p.m. and will be in the community room of police headquarters, 60 Civic Center Plaza.

The city has also scheduled a neighborhood meeting on Thursday to review one of those projects, the so-called Station District. It would use dozens of vacant lots that the city owns for new apartments and for-sale housing. That meeting begins at 6:30 p.m. in the parish hall of St. Joseph Church, 608 E. Civic Center Dr.

2. Council Meeting: Santa Ana

By Doug Irving
Orange County Register

The City Council is scheduled to discuss several long-term redevelopment projects during a meeting tonight. The agenda includes plans to rezone much of the downtown core, build new housing on vacant lots, refashion the Santa Ana Regional Transportation Center and run a streetcar through the city. The meeting begins with a closed-door session at 5:30 p.m. and will be in the community room of police headquarters, 60 Civic Center Plaza.

3. Major O.C. Layoffs Top 13,000 In '09

By Mary Ann Milbourn
Orange County Register

Orange County employers slashed 13,565 workers from their payrolls in major layoffs of 50 or more last year, a 34% increase over 2008.

The numbers, based on an analysis of government filings, company announcements and independent reporting, show the depths of the recession as employers moved aggressively to cope with an economy that ground to a virtual halt.

The analysis mostly reflects Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notifications (WARN) — notices that companies are required to file with the government if they lay off 50 or more. It does not include the thousands of smaller layoffs and the self-employed who also lost jobs which aren't reported.

Unlike 2008, when mortgage companies dominated the major layoff list, last year's big job losses cut across a variety of industries.

Top 10 2009 Orange County major layoffs			
Rank	Company	City	Layoffs
1	South Coast Medical Center*	Laguna Beach	580
2	U.S. Bank (Downey Savings & Loan)	Newport Beach	570
3	JPMorgan Chase & Co. (WaMu)	Irvine	514
4	Irvine Regional Hospital & Medical Center	Irvine	510
5	Veolia Transportation**	Irvine	500
6	Ceradyne Inc.	Costa Mesa/Irvine	486
7	Marriott Ownership Resorts	Santa Ana	400
8	Capital Group Companies	Irvine	392
9	Quiksilver Inc.	Huntington Beach	350
10	Assurant Specialty Property	Orange/Santa Ana/Tustin	325
	*Many rehired by Mission Hospital/**Many rehired under a new contract		

It was somewhat of an unusual year in that two major hospitals closed down, accounting for nearly 1,100 layoffs. Many of the 580 workers at South Coast Medical Center, however, were rehired by Mission Hospital Regional Medical Center, which bought the Laguna Beach facility for \$35.7 million.

Irvine Regional Hospital & Medical Center was closed for renovations in January after Hoag Memorial Hospital Presbyterian picked up the lease for the facility. Hoag has hired or plans to hire many of the 510 Irvine workers who got laid off during the renovations.

The mortgage meltdown continued to hit Orange County workers last year as U.S. Bank wound down the operations at Downey Savings & Loan, which it took over. JPMorgan Chase & Co. did the same with workers it inherited at Washington Mutual. The two banks accounted for 1,084 layoffs.

Veolia Transportation cut 500 drivers when its contract with the Orange County Transportation Authority ended June 30. A company spokeswoman said a lot of those jobs would be picked up by Veolia and MV Transportation which split the contract after July 1.

The remaining top 10 layoffs were straight job cuts without any plans for rehiring. See the Register's full 2009 major layoff list [HERE](#).

4. Even If Mph Sign Seems Out Of Place, Obey It

By David Rizzo
Orange County Register

Q. Why does the speed limit on Imperial Highway, between Yorba Linda Boulevard and Orangethorpe Avenue in Yorba Linda, start out at 55 and then suddenly drop to 35 after Kellogg Drive? Is this a speed trap, or is the 35-mph sign just inadvertently left over from the recent construction?

– Walter Schultz, Yorba Linda

Q. Why does the speed limit on Imperial Highway, between Yorba Linda Boulevard and Orangethorpe Avenue in Yorba Linda, start out at 55 and then suddenly drop to 35 after Kellogg Drive? Is this a speed trap, or is the 35-mph sign just inadvertently left over from the recent construction?

– Walter Schultz, Yorba Linda

A. The latter.

But you didn't speed through it anyway, did you?

"This sign was placed by our crews as part of a construction project," says Caltrans spokesman Alex Valdez Jr. "Our resident engineer for that project has reported that the sign was removed on Dec. 25."

Just for the record, wherever motorists see a reduced speed-limit sign placed alongside the road by any construction crew, motorists must adhere to that limit, even if no construction workers are on site.

The reason why those signs are left there is because there might be some debris or construction materials that could present a hazard, said Sgt. Austin Phillips of the Brea Police Department, the agency that patrols Yorba Linda.

"Even if the project is finished, if the sign is still up, motorists have to obey it until it gets taken down," Phillips says.

Q. Can you please tell me what is happening on Raymond Avenue just north of the Riverside Freeway? The westbound Raymond exit road is down to one lane so it makes it very difficult to turn right onto Raymond. The street has been torn up for months! What is going on?

– Debra Pearlman, Fullerton

A. As a Fullerton traffic commissioner, and with the kind help of some acquaintances, I can tell you what's happening on both the north and south sides of the Riverside Freeway at that junction. You might call it a tale of two cities. Answering for the north side of the freeway, where the street enters the city limits of Fullerton to become Raymond Avenue, is City Associate Engineer Jaswinder Ghanda.

"This is a joint project with Anaheim to do some ramp improvement work," Ghanda says. "Together, we are widening the left-turn pockets to improve access to the on-ramp, things like that. Both cities are paying for a portion of this project, but Anaheim is the lead agency for the construction."

Weighing in for Anaheim is one of its construction department representatives, Matt Card. On his side of the freeway, this project is referred to as the "East Street Project/91 Interchange."

"Since the job includes widening East Street, we have to remove some of the slope paving behind the columns and install new sidewalk in that location," Card says.

"There will be new turn signals installed as well. The whole project is supposed to finish up around the first part of April, barring any extra work."

To ask the good doctor a transportation question, contact him at droadmap@pacbell.net.

5. Rail Rush

Riverside Press-Enterprise

The state's legislative analyst last week offered more evidence that California's plans for a high-speed rail system is running off the tracks. Certainly the debt-laden state should not be pouring nearly \$10 billion in borrowed money into this project anytime soon. But the analyst's revelations about the bullet train's flawed business plan should prompt voters and state officials to rethink the whole proposal.

The legislative analyst told the Assembly Transportation Committee last week that the California High-Speed Rail Authority's business plan glossed over potentially costly risks -- and appeared to violate state law. Those conclusions hardly build public confidence in a plan that depends heavily on wishful thinking.

The rail authority's 2009 business plan proposes a \$42.6 billion high-speed line between Los Angeles and San Francisco. The plan projects that a ticket price of \$105 would bring 41 million passengers a year and \$2.87 billion in revenue by 2035. But the legislative analyst noted the plan gave no indication of how reliable those numbers were. And the figures in the report are suspect. The plan counts on 13.5 million riders in 2020, the first year of operation. Yet a Brookings Institution report last year on air travel put the number of passengers flying the Los Angeles-San Francisco corridor at 6.3 million for the 12 months ending in March 2009. So in a decade, a bullet train on that route would carry more than twice as many people a year as airlines do now?

Fewer riders than the plan projects could undermine financing for the rail line, however. The plan addresses that risk with one sentence, touting "policies that continue to draw people to reside in California and that encourage high-speed rail as an alternative mode of transportation." Whew! Everyone can relax.

The potential funding pitfalls are similarly downplayed. The project's funding counts on about \$3 billion a year in federal money for the next six years. But that funding stream does not yet exist. And the legislative analyst notes that California only receives \$3 billion a year from the federal government for the state's entire highway system, much less a new rail project.

The rail project also depends on \$10 billion to \$12 billion in private money. The analyst's report points out that the plan's strategy for attracting the private investment involves using public funds in ways that would violate Prop. 1A. That 2008 rail bond measure prohibits using public money to subsidize the train's operations.

Faster rail travel falls nowhere near the top of any list of pressing state needs. California faces years of annual budget deficits in the \$20 billion range, while the state's yearly debt payments could soon hit \$10 billion. So just exactly why is anyone proposing to spend billions more in public borrowing on a plan that skirts the law and blithely dismisses financial risks?

6. Our View: Back The Regional Park-And-Ride

Whittier Daily News (Opinion)

WHEN local cities eye developable land on a major thoroughfare, they usually think of the tax revenue from retail, big box and car dealerships. But the Great Recession has taken the shine off that pot of sales-tax revenue gold.

Cities, still hurting for cash, must shift the retail-only paradigm toward projects that keep people in their shopping districts, improve traffic flow and create new jobs.

It's a difficult transition for cities that are battered by an outdated sales-tax revenue model on one side of the equation, and a state government that annually robs them of other revenue sources such as low-income housing and redevelopment funds. West Covina is in such a predicament. Its City Council tonight will consider a Foothill Transit proposal for a regional park-and-ride facility that certainly does more for regional commuters than for West Covina's sagging bottom line.

But for many of the above reasons, and for the benefit of workers who need a convenient place to park while taking the express bus that runs from Glendora to downtown Los Angeles, it's a project that very much should be built.

Locating a five-story Foothill Transit park-and-ride structure on the east side of Vincent Avenue, adjacent to The Lakes shopping center, will add a total of 742 spaces as well as 2,000 square feet of first-floor retail space. Architectural treatments will make the parking garage look like office space and signage could point to future retail at The Lakes.

Foothill wants to build the structure using \$21 million in federal and state dollars that must be used soon or lost. There is no cost to the city of West Covina. The regional bus agency will add lanes for buses entering the eastbound 10 Freeway and improve other bus stops. While Foothill has done a good job planning and designing the proposed structure, we understand West Covina's concerns about traffic and safety.

Councilman Steve Herfert told our editorial board he's concerned about bus riders walking across Vincent to ride the Silver Streak, a double-coach bus offered by Foothill Transit, while most will board the Express Route 498 on the same side as the structure. Perhaps that stop can be moved, or, as Herfert suggests, a pedestrian bridge be built over Vincent Avenue. Herfert was also concerned with future changes to bus routes and stops that can snarl traffic on Vincent and West Covina Parkway. All are legitimate matters to work through on the local level using the Conditional Use Permit process.

But we also want to see local governments accommodate regional transportation agencies when they can, whether by adding bus stops, rail lines, rail stations or park-and-ride lots. It helps all our local cities to contribute to regional mobility solutions in a region where freeways and arteries are jammed with single-occupancy drivers.

In this instance, 92 percent of the riders of the express bus live in West Covina and have been parking willy-nilly in the Westfield mall across the street or at West Covina City Hall.

Finally, the project would create 88 construction jobs and 40 other spin-off jobs. And since Foothill has the money, it can start construction immediately.

We join the West Covina Chamber of Commerce and Foothill Transit in support of the park-and-ride. And we urge other cities to accommodate regional transit amenities as part of future downtown designs.