A POLICY OF DELUSION and MISDIRECTION

RETHINKING CALIFORNIA'S NEW PLANNING REGIME

CENTER FOR DEMOGRAPHICS & POLICY

RESEARCH BRIEF CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY



A POLICY OF DELUSION and MISDIRECTION RETHINKING CALIFORNIA'S NEW PLANNING REGIME

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"Demographics is destiny" has become a somewhat overused phrase, but that does not reduce the critical importance of population trends to virtually every aspect of economic, social and political life. Concern over demographic trends has been heightened in recent years by several international trends notably rapid aging, reduced fertility, and before large scale migration across borders. On the national level, shifts in attitude, generation and ethnicity have proven decisive in both the political realm and in the economic fortunes of regions and states.

The Center focuses on research and analysis of global, national and regional demographic trends and also looks into policies that might produce favorable demographic results over time. The Center involves Chapman students in demographic research under the supervision of the Center's senior staff. Students work with the Center's director and engage in research that will serve them well as they look to develop their careers in business, the social sciences and the arts. They also have access to our advisory board, which includes distinguished Chapman faculty and major demographic scholars from across the country and the world.

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A POLICY OF DELUSION AND MISDIRECTION

California's leaders speak much about housing affordability, but their policy agenda seems designed to prolong and worsen the crisis. As it has done for almost a generation, the state has placed ever increasing burdens on housing developers, and now seems determined to "solve" the crisis by adding more challenges to anyone seeking to expand housing.

The failure of this approach should be manifest. Governor Newsom has called for building 3.5 million new homes by 2025.ⁱ Yet housing construction continues to be muted, with the 2019 building permit number of 119,000 below the last two years and far below the 315,000 permits issued in 1986, when California had one-third fewer residents. At the current rate it would require more than 30 years to build 3.5 million houses.

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Clearly, the state's principal housing strategy, Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA), has not restored housing affordability. RHNA requires metropolitan planning agencies, counties and cities to zone sufficient land for housing production targets. But land and regulatory costs in the state are so high that builders can earn a competitive return on investment only on houses that are too expensive for nearly all middle-income households to afford. Only 7,800 of the new apartments built in Los Angeles between 2015 and 2017 — 11 percent--are affordable — with rents around \$1,842 a month. The vast majority, some 66,000, are "market-rate," with rents that exceed \$2,800 a month.ⁱⁱ Yet despite this, an estimated 100,000 units remain vacant, including in high-end new high rises in the downtown.ⁱⁱⁱ

One alternative is publicly subsidized housing, which would require significantly higher state and local spending to come close to meeting the demand for affordable units. At an estimated cost of roughly \$500,000 or more, per unit subsidies will not solve this problem, only policy changes can. The state's Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) estimates that housing subsidies are available to only one-quarter of eligible households, because of long waiting lists, a result of insufficient public funding. According to LAO, "The scale of these programs—even if greatly increased—could not meet the magnitude of new housing required to address affordability challenges for low income households in the state."iv

Yet arguably the most deluded policy is one that demands that housing be entirely "in-fill" and located close to larger job centers. These places have the highest land costs and often the most tortuous approval process. Rather than an effort to create more housing that is affordable, recent attempts to force density in virtually every major metropolitan area, as former LA county supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky noted, may about real estate speculation by Wall Street interests who seek "to monetize" properties, "eviscerating decades of planning," not to mention local preferences.^v

Given these conditions, Governor Newsom's "Marshall Plan for affordable housing" seems doomed to fail. It would require communities, in Southern California, for example, to build at three times the last decade's rate, adding as many housing units as exist now in Ventura and Orange counties combined. Given slow, or no, population growth, and a lack of higher-paying jobs, this seems a policy certain to fail without massive public housing projects.^{vi}

There's also the question of whether here would even be the necessary workforce available, particularly on the coasts. Indeed, a recent Chapman study revealed that based on income not one union construction worker in the state could afford a new median priced house in any coastal county.^{vii}

The Multi-polar metropolis

Many contemporary urban pundits and planners seek to recreate the traditional city, dominated by a central core. Yet dense urban cores have not been created in the United States since World War II. Instead the polycentric urban formepitomized by Southern California in particular-has been well established and documented.^{viii} In reality, all the major metropolitan areas of California are characterized by dispersion, rather than centralization of employment location. Even in San Francisco and Los Angeles, with by far the strongest central business districts (downtowns) in the state and a considerable number of suburban employment centers, approximately 70% of employment is dispersed outside these areas.

To restore affordability, the state has to stop directing housing policies that are at odds with its economic structure and employment geography. In the past, California policy permitted housing construction to take place in areas with lower land costs. The state's developers built, for the most part, the singlefamily construction preferred by most Americans, including Californians. These policies managed to meet demand by creating new communities in what was then considered the hinterland, such as Lakewood, Irvine, Valencia and Foster City.

Although the state has stopped growing significantly, virtually all the growth that does take place occurs in functional suburbs and exurbs. Between 2010 and 2016 (mid-year for ACS 2014-2018), 75% of the San Francisco metropolitan area's growth was in the suburbs. This was even more true in other metro areas. In Los Angeles, more than 85% of growth was suburban or exurban, and in the other four major metropolitan areas (Riverside-San Bernardino, San Diego, Sacramento and San Jose), suburban and exurban growth exceeded 97%.ix Suburban and exurban construction also has a greater payoff; each singlefamily home produces three jobs compared to a multi-unit development average of just one.

Looking at domestic migration it's clear that people are voting with their feet towards the suburbs and exurbs—exactly the opposite result sought by state planners. Despite this, the California government now seeks to revoke these preferences, in large part to create "greener" and denser neighborhoods, although California has the densest urbanization of any state in the nation.^x This flies against a pattern that continues in the rest of the country^{xi} trends.^{xiii} and throughout much of the world.^{xiiii}

SUBURB/EXURB & URBAN CORE GROWTH California Metropolitan Areas: 2010 to 2014/2018



Derived from American Community Survey & City Sector Model

BAY AREA CSA: DOMESTIC MIGRATION BY MSA 2010 to 2018



Derived from Census Bureau Population Estimates 2018

DOMESTIC MIGRATION: LOS ANGELES CSA 2010 to 2018



Derived from Census Bureau Population Estimates 2018





Derived from Census Bureau data

The VMT obsession

New state regulations targeting vehicle miles traveled (VMT), by forcing growth into areas that are "near transit," especially "transit priority areas," as defined by Senate Bill 743, will worsen the affordability crisis. As population densities increase, so does traffic congestion.^{xvi} This can be expected to substantially increase even in most transit priority areas, where residents use cars for commuting to a much greater degree than the available highquality transit.^{xv}

Perhaps the most palpably absurd part of the evolving state housing policy lies in the notion that new development should be tied to transit use, seen as a way of reducing greenhouse gases. Oddly the very mode that dominates the state planning model is in secular decline. The reality remains that a vast majority of Californians drive alone to work, two million more today than in 2010.^{xvi} Even before the coronavirus began to impact transit ridership around the country, Los Angeles' share of commuting by transit had dropped 15 percent since 1990, before the extensive Metro and Metrolink rail networks were opened. At the same time, the work at home/telecommuting share has more than doubled. Overall, commuting by driving alone increased by 770,000 daily in the greater Los Angeles Metropolitan area from 2008 to 2018, while transit commuting declined by 75,000. Indeed, the Los Angeles Metro system carried approximately 120 million fewer riders in 2019 than in 1985, despite subsequently opening a huge rail system, with six lines radiating from downtown.xvii

For nearly all Californians, getting to work by bus or rail would vastly increase travel times and reduce the number of jobs available, especially for low-income workers. The state's growing obsession with density and

EMPLOYMENT ACCESS: MAJOR MSA'S: 2017 30 Minute Job Access: Auto Times Transit



Derived from University of Minnesota

BAY AREA CSA JOB SHARE BY WORK LOCATION Downtown, city of SF & Balance: 2012 to 2016



Derived from CTPP 2012 to 2016 data (American Community Survey)

BAY AREA CSA TRANSIT SHARE BY WORK LOCATION Downtown, city of SF & Balance: 2012 to 2016



Derived from CTPP 2012 to 2016 data (American Community Survey)

reducing vehicle miles travelled (VMT) seeks to promote housing growth in precisely those areas that are most prohibitively expensive and which are stagnating in terms of population growth. The two areas where transit usage is greatest, urban Los Angeles and the Bay Area, are precisely those now experiencing rising outmigration as well as housing affordability challenges.^{xviii}

With the notable exception of downtown San Francisco, California's dispersed job locations relegate traditional mass transit to essentially to a very minor role.^{xix} Downtown San Francisco accounts for only 8% of the employment in the Bay Area,^{xx} with 92% outside. Transit commuting is strongly connected to jobs in downtown. Employment in California's metropolitan areas — even in the Bay Area — is simply too dispersed, and has been so for too long, to be effectively transformed by diktat, at least without strong negative consequences (see sidebar maps).

Making the Middle and Working Classes Pay for Climate Change

As has been all too often the case, working families are most hard-hit by the state's policies. Many policies that discourage car use and prioritize transit serve to severely limit job opportunities. In San Francisco, the part of the state best served by transit, the average commuter can reach eight times as many jobs by car as by transit but the gap is far larger elsewhere in the Bay Area , home to the bulk of both the region's jobs and population.

In Los Angeles, the average commuter can reach 33 times as many jobs by car as by transit. In San Jose, autos provide

AUTO 30 MINUTE COMMUTES TIMES TRANSIT San Francisco & Los Angeles Metropolitan Areas



Derived from American Community Survey

42 times as much access, and in San Diego and Sacramento cars provide more than 50 times as much access. In Riverside-San Bernardino— Southern California's fastest growing region — with its high-quality commuter rail service (Metrolink), the average worker can access nearly 100 times as many jobs in 30 minutes by car as by transit.^{xxi}

Ultimately these policies punish middle and, especially, working class Californians who are seeking work. In the Los Angeles metropolitan area, for example, barely one in 18 commuters living "near transit" considers transit to be good enough to use instead of cars. Alltransit.cnt.org indicates that 88.8% of workers live "near transit" in Los Angeles. Yet, only 5.0% of Los Angeles commuters use transit.xxii This speaks volumes as to the value of being "near transit." Barely one in 18 commuters living "near transit" considers transit to be good enough to use instead of cars."xxiii

This applies even in areas which have relatively strong transit links in areas with many poorer people. An example is East Los Angeles, where residents are 16 times as likely to commute by car as by transit, despite regular light rail service to nearby downtown Los Angeles. As distances from downtown get longer, cars become even more practical. For example, in San Francisco's Bay Point, with its own BART station and frequent service on the Pittsburg line, residents are 161 times as likely to commute by car as by transit. In Los Angeles, Willowbrook, (in south central Los Angeles) with a light rail station serving both the Green and Blue light rail lines with frequent service, residents are 156 times as likely to commute by car as by transit.xxiv Perhaps most maddening to the state's burdened commuters, under

this policy virtually any improvement in road infrastructure, including such things as synchronizing traffic signals, can be seen as "traffic inducing." The call for more density, the *summum bonum* of state policy, is likely, as at least two studies have shown, to do little to get people out of their cars given the spatial configuration of places like California.^{xxv}

Research by the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) finds that greater residential densities have little impact on reducing driving or on the environment.^{xxvi} A 2017 study showing 1.9 million units in "infill" locations rather than elsewhere would "save" 1.79 million metric tons of GHG per year, about one percent of state 2030 mandated GHG reductions. Fighting climate change by limiting the supply of housing to areas that are already expensive seems an inefficient, and profoundly regressive way to cut emissions.^{xxvii}

Needed: A New Policy Approach

The VMT or "vehicle miles traveled" approach reflects an obsession with densification that, notes PPIC, is, not surprisingly, highly unpopular with the public. This applies particularly to the state's remaining stable, middleclass urban neighborhoods.xxviii A recent study from UCLA and London School of Economics Professor Michael Storper characterizes densification as a "blunt instrument" more likely to destroy and reduce affordability, particularly in urban areas. It constitutes instead what he describes as "a mechanism of displacement." Along with Andrés Rodríguez-Pose (also of the London School of Economics), Storper posits that blanket upzoning, as densification

JOB ACCESS: TRANSIT v. WORK AT HOME 2010 to 2018



Source: American Community Survey

advocates propose, would not bring "substantial cost savings" to the lower two-thirds of the market (which includes much of the middle-class).^{xxix}

Some density advocates, like LA Mayor Eric Garcetti, insist that accommodating and promoting density is part of a process of our "growing up" and yet another way to show our commitment to leadership on climate change. Yet most Californians instinctively know this notion is nothing short of chimerical. Boosting density, notes a recent study, fails as a means to reduce GHG emissions, in part due to unexpected trade-offs in terms of emissions, notably from greater traffic congestion.^{xxx}

Our recent bout with coronavirus—and the likelihood of future pandemics—is not likely to increase the demand for dense living or for transit. A US map of the pandemic, at this editing, reveals that the vast majority of cases are occurring in the densest, most globalized regions such as Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston and most especially New York. It has been far less prevalent in the vast, albeit largely ignored, interior of the states as well the middle of country and particularly more rural areas, which health professionals suggest benefit from less crowding and close human contact.^{xxxi}

In contrast, the risk of pandemics are likely to accelerate the demand for dispersed living. Tele-commuting, already experiencing enormous growth, represents an alternative to the jostling, crowded and often dirty experience that comes with city life. In California as well as nationwide, work at home now exceeds transit usage, and its growth trajectory is much greater.^{xxxii}

California could be encouraging these developments, which have considerable potential to reduce GHGs. Several states and localities, from Oklahoma to Vermont, and Maine to Iowa, have adopted programs to promote this environmentally friendly policy,^{xxxiii} but, California, despite its self- appointed leadership in innovative green policies, has virtually no program to promote such work. Such an approach would allow people to turn their residences into offices, promote less commuting and save considerable energy without disrupting communities.^{xxxiv}

Even before the current coronavirus pandemic, the benefits of working remotely were apparent. A 2017 report by Jones Lang LaSalle cited this finding; "Studies show remote workers (who work outside the office some, but not all, of the time) on average are more productive, more innovative and more engaged. Companies who have remote work policies experience less turnover and are more attractive to employees and young workers in particular.^{xxxv}

A focus on dispersed work, and telecommuting, would allow families to afford decent homes without needing to make long, and environmentally damaging, commutes. Instead it would allow growth to shift towards the interior of the state.^{xxxvi}

One likely objection may be that this shift would promote "sprawl" in a state that is already "running out of room." Yet in reality that is nonsense. California's urban land covers only 5.3% percent of the state's expanse,^{xxxvii} and most agricultural losses have been made by land being retired as opposed to being supplanted by houses. For example, from 1950 to 2010, the total agricultural land area of the state declined by 18,900 square miles, far more than the urban land increase of 6,200 (Figure E-2).^{xxxviii}

The state has ample new land for development, but also enormous opportunities for development within our urban areas. Scott Crowe, chief investment strategist with Center Square Investment Management, estimates that 44% of current mall



AGRICULTURAL & URBAN LAND: CALIFORNIA 1950 to 2010

Derived from US Department of Agriculture data



Solving California's housing crisis will require solutions that address the causes of the problem, not exacerbate it.

... Failure to take decisive action is likely to lead to even greater losses in housing affordability and serve to further widen the state's already gaping inequality.



There is also considerable land already zoned for multi-family so that there is no need to break into existing and stable single-family neighborhoods. According to a McKinsey Global Institute study, redeveloping existing multi-family units could create between 580,000 to 990,000 new units of housing, IF governments and developers collaborated to create supportive policies and a plan to house temporarily displaced people.^{xli} Ultimately California must address its housing crisis in ways that improve, not worsen, the situation. Our approaches do not need to be regressive, attempting to recreate some imagined ideal past, but look at new innovations dispersed work, telecommuting, ridehailing and eventually autonomous vehicles. Tax policy changes, providing incentives for new housing and the conversion of retail space, certainly could help.

Solving California's housing crisis will require solutions that address the causes of the problem, not exacerbate it. These require, as noted above, restoration of the competitive market in urban land and other regulatory relief. Half a century of market distortion due to excess regulation cannot be solved overnight. Failure to take decisive action is likely to lead to even greater losses in housing affordability and serve to further widen the state's already gaping inequality.

SIDEBAR: HOW WE REALLY LIVE AND WORK

Maps are divided into four groups:

• Employment Density

- Population Density
- Employee to Population Ratio
- Distribution of Business Establishments by their Employee Size





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Employment and Population Densities:

Slides 12 through 16 show the geography of employment in Southern California. At the regional level, there are major concentrations in the West San Fernando Valley, along the Wilshire Corridor (from Downtown to Santa Monica); Downtown; smaller concentrations in Pasadena, Burbank, and Glendale; Culver City and El Segundo (around LAX), continuing to Torrance and Long Beach; and Irvine, Costa Mesa, and Santa Ana. Looking at these maps, it is clear that Southern California has multiple major employment centers (i.e., employment concentrations). The distributed nature of employment suggests that housing would have to be provided everywhere and at price ranges that are affordable for wages typical of particular sub regional geographies.

This pattern is confirmed more clearly with population density patterns. In almost all areas where there are major employment concentrations, LA's population is already concentrated. However, there are a few exceptions. For example, around LAX, there is less housing, for obvious reasons. In South LA, where employment is largely lacking, there is a large population concentration. This area is a longestablished center of African American communities, with a growing number of Latinos in the eastern section. If anything, this area needs an economic development plan first.

Employee to population density illustrates the challenging job/housing balance in Southern California. Despite large employment concentrations, there are more residents than jobs in most neighborhoods. The exceptions to this pattern include the southeastern section of downtown to Vernon, portions of Wilshire Blvd, LAX, Warner Center in







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the West San Fernando Valley, Pasadena, Burbank, Irvine, Costa Mesa, and along the I-5 Corridor in Norwalk. In all, it appears that wherever there are major employment centers, the number of jobs outnumbers local residents by a factor of 2 to 5. Assuming an average household size that slightly exceeds 2, the number of jobs to households approaches 1 to 2. In a few areas in the Southeastern section of downtown and Wilshire Blvd, the number of employees to residents is 5 to 10.

In the Bay Area, the geography of employment is different. The city of San Francisco has the largest employment concentration. Secondary but important concentrations also appear in Santa Clara, San Jose, and along the 101 corridor through Palo Alto. There is another concentration across the bridge in Oakland, extending northward to Berkeley. In its totality, with the exception of the city of San Francisco, employment geography in the Bay Area seems to be more heavily associated with key highways and major roads. Even with the city of San Francisco included, the major concentration of employment appears east of the 101.

Population concentration closely responds to this geography, with some exceptions. Concentrations appear throughout San Francisco, particularly within close proximity of the 280. Along the 101 and east of the 280, lower population concentrations extend to San Jose, with pockets of larger densities closer to that metropolitan area. Across the bay, larger population concentrations appear from San Leonardo to Oakland and Berkeley. The tighter geography of the Bay Area, which limits growth, has produced similar geographies of employment and housing, distinguishing it from Southern California, where the extensive nature of land has produced multiple employment centers and a wider population distribution.



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Nonetheless, Employee to Population Ratio maps produce a familiar result. As in Southern California, a few areas within the region display a much higher ratio of employment to residence (e.g., in the eastern section of San Francisco, particularly the Financial District), while the remainder has a much smaller ratio. In fact, Southern California and its vast geography





displays a much higher number of areas where employment far exceeds local resident populations. This may suggest that metro regions where employment is de-concentrated, lending itself to a polycentric form, can produce better planning opportunities for job/housing/ income balance. To some extent, this can be seen in the case of San Jose and Oakland and their employment/resident concentrations as well.

Geography of Businesses by Their Employment Size

The last set of slides illustrate the geographic distribution of business establishments by their employee size in Southern California and the Bay Area. A number of observations can be made from these maps:

1. Smaller firms (fewer than 5 employees) are more prevalent (look at the number of firms in the legend and compare to firms with larger number of employees in the succeeding slides) and geographically decentralized. Vast areas in the San Fernando Valley, downtown to Santa Monica, along the Santa Monica Bay to Torrance, and significant portions of Orange County and the western section of San Bernardino County house these smaller firms. The expansive geography of small firms does not help identify corridors or particular areas where housing supply needs to be concentrated. In the Bay Area, however, its corridor style of development, dictated by the 280, 101 and 880 freeways, creates a less diffused pattern of smaller firms.













- 2. As the employment size increases, the number of firms in that category become smaller and their geographic distribution becomes more concentrated. This can be seen in Southern California for business establishments with 5 to 9 employees. This is similarly true for the Bay Area. The emerging nature of the polycentric urban form becomes more evident in both areas as we examine the distribution of mid-size business establishments.
- For business establishments with 10-19 and 20-49 employees, major concentration patterns begin to emerge clearly in Southern California, with many in suburbanstyle settings such as Irvine. This pattern continues with larger business establishments.
- 4. The distinction between Southern California and the Bay Area is the nature of the urban form. Southern California is served by a web of freeways and an expansive built environment, whereas the Bay Area's development seems to follow two major corridors and then concentrates in San Francisco. Reflecting on all the maps, it is clear that a universal policy regarding the reshaping of the built environment may not be fruitful. What is needed is a better understanding of the polycentric nature of employment and the income levels each center generates and developing a more rational response by building housing that corresponds to this geography. Micro-geographies can only be managed if macrogeographies of the urban form are well understood.







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END NOTES

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- ^x ###ng article
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- xv https://www.bisnow.com/national/news/construction-development/how-californias-environmental-law-became-a-weapon-against-developers-82848; https://www. chapman.edu/communication/_files/ca-getting-in-its-own-way.pdf
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- xix <u>https://embarcaderoinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Californias-Soar-ing-Transit-Expenditures-are-Failing.pdf</u>
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Design Notes

California's Social Priorities and the graphics utilize the following:

To achieve visual harmony a modified version of the grid Jan Tschichold conceived for his book Typography was employed.

MINION PRO Chapman's serif family, is a digital typeface designed by Robert Slimbach in 1990 for Adobe Systems. The name comes from the traditional naming system for type sizes, in which minion is between nonpareil and brevier. It is inspired by late Renaissance-era type.

FUTURA is Chapman's sans serif family. Designed by Paul Renner and released in 1927. It was designed as a contribution on the New Frankfurt-project. It is based on geometric shapes, especially the circle, similar in spirit to the Bauhaus design style of the period.

All images were sourced fand purchased rom stock photo sites.

Book design by Eric Chimenti; professor at Chapman University.

Eric Chimenti's work has won a Gold Advertising Award, been selected for inclusion into *LogoLounge: Master Library, Volume 2 and LogoLounge Book 9*, and been featured on *visual.ly*, the world's largest community of infographics and data visualization. He has 19 years of experience in the communication design industry. To view a client list and see additional samples please visit www.behance.net/ericchimenti.

Professor Chimenti is also the founder and head of Chapman's Ideotion Lab. The Lab supports undergraduate and faculty research by providing creative visualization and presentation support from appropriately qualified Chapman University undergraduate students. Services include creative writing, video, photography, data visualization, and all aspects of design. Students specialize in the design and presentation of complex communication problems.

CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY IDEATION LAB



