

PICO BOULEVARD BEAUTIFICATION

405 Freeway to Patricia Avenue

Prepared for

Westside Neighborhood Council
and
Council District 5

by

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INTRODUCTION

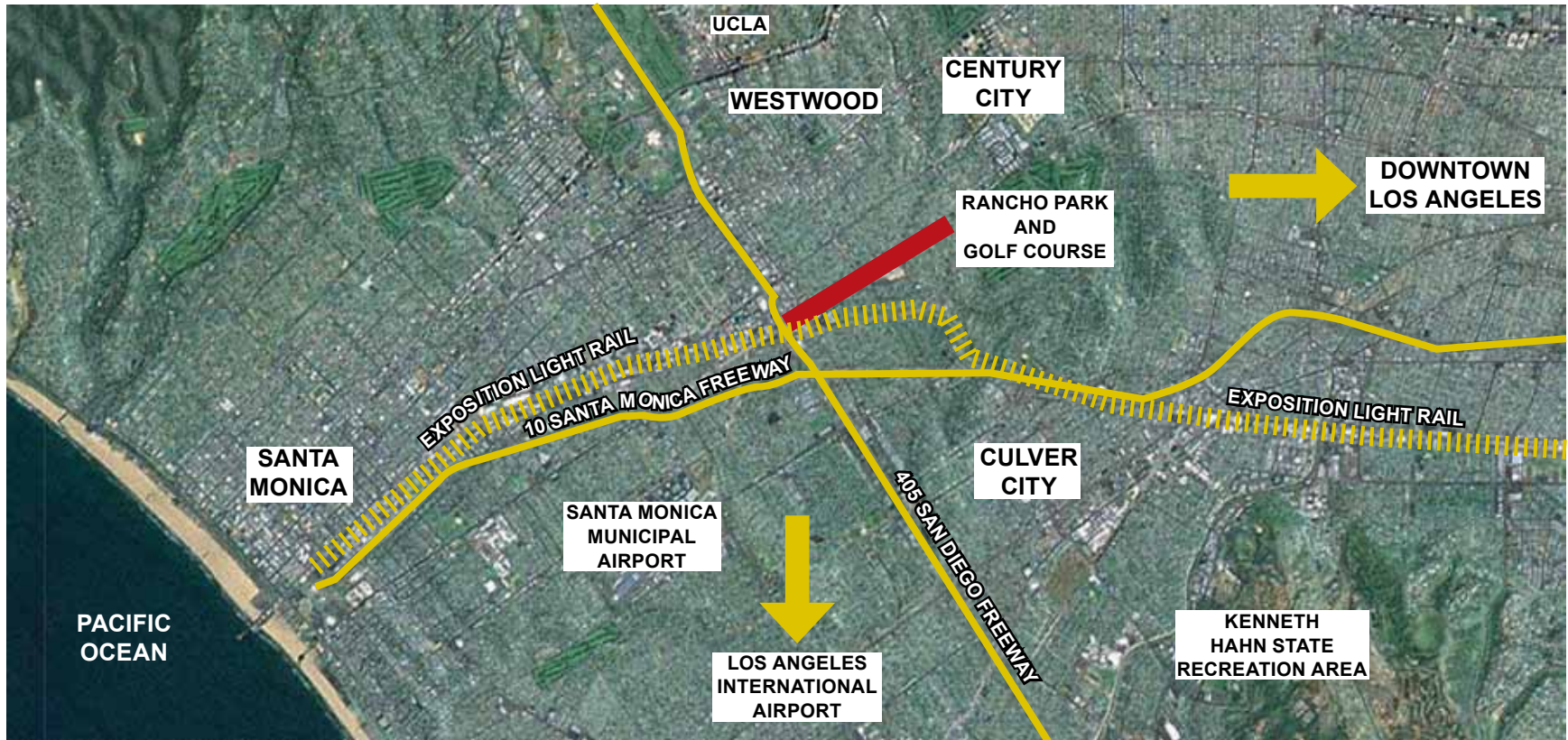
Project Area Maps

Vicinity Map

SCOPE OF WORK



Pico Boulevard - 405 Freeway to Patricia Avenue



Street Map

SCOPE OF WORK



Pico Boulevard - 405 Freeway to Patricia Avenue



Background

Between the 405 Freeway and Patricia Avenue, Pico Boulevard is a highly variable corridor, unified chiefly by its constant vehicular flow. Moving eastward from the Freeway, Pico goes through three distinct neighborhood types: industrial-commercial uses between the Freeway and Sepulveda Boulevard, followed by government-commercial uses and the fortress-like multi-story Westside Pavilion between Westwood and Overland, and ending at the mostly single-story ‘mom and pop’ neighborhood shops and restaurants at the east end.

Pico Boulevard has always been a major east-west corridor linking Los Angeles to Santa Monica and the Pacific. Old Los Angeles Railway rail tracks still exist under the street paving where they crossed Pico at Pontius Avenue and also at Pico and Sepulveda. Heavy vehicular traffic continues to move along this corridor. The new Metro Rail Exposition Corridor line is currently being constructed and may someday relieve the vehicle traffic on Pico.

The City of Los Angeles’ Department of Transportation has proposed the Olympic West – Pico East Initiative to restripe the existing roadways, replacing and installing peak period parking restriction to provide continuous peak period curb lanes on both sides of Olympic and Pico Boulevards between Centinela and Fairfax Avenues. This would be installed in junction with new left turn signals and signal timing modifications to favor westbound traffic on Olympic and eastbound traffic on Pico. By so doing, the effective travel route is widened during rush hours without taking private

property to widen the roadways. The community opposes the Initiative which they foresee to have a negative impact to business by reducing parking for store customers. The City has undertaken an environmental impact report, due to be completed in 2011.

The Metropolitan Transit Authority has identified a preferred route for Phase 2 of the Metro Rail Exposition Corridor line that will connect downtown to Santa Monica along the Exposition Boulevard right of way. Once constructed and in use, the Expo Line should relieve some traffic congestion and bring new opportunities to Pico Boulevard. An Exposition line Station is planned at Westwood Boulevard within walking distance of Pico, making Pico Boulevard’s shops and attractions “a walking destination.”

Pico Boulevard is listed on the City’s Bicycle Master Plan as a Class III bike route. However, at this time most bicyclists do not use Pico Boulevard because of its heavy automobile traffic and the absence of bike lanes. The hope is that both pedestrian and bicycle uses will increase with the completion of the Metro Rail Exposition Corridor line and with implementation of planned pedestrian enhancements, including a new plan created for Pico Boulevard west of the 405 Freeway as well as this one for Pico Boulevard east of the Freeway.

The newly revised West Los Angeles Community Plan identifies “a lack of defined neighborhood places, the need for improved design quality in commercial

places, a deficit of evening street life activities, and the need to preserve neighborhood-preserving ‘mom and pop’ uses on Pico Boulevard.” Community input includes complaints about the degraded quality of public sidewalks, lack of street trees, excessive car fumes, vehicle noise, lack of night lighting, and a generally threatening pedestrian environment.

In 2007, the Westside Neighborhood Council and Council District 5 hired landscape architects, Kathryn Cerra Associates, to work with them and the businesses and property owners on Pico to improve the pedestrian experience and enhance the visual appearance of Pico between the 405 Freeway east to Patricia Avenue. A series of public meetings with business and property owners was held between 2007 and 2010 to identify community preferences and priorities and to create these streetscape guidelines for pedestrian enhancements for Pico Boulevard, east of the 405 Freeway to Patricia.

Existing Conditions

The heavily Pico Boulevard is pocked with holes at the turning lanes onto side streets. The vehicular noise and dust created by mostly through-traffic is a constant irritation.

The existing street tree canopy is primarily *Ficus microphylla* 'nitida' that has been variously pruned and/or butchered into lollipop trees, bare columns, or permitted to grow heavy, thick, and dense. The small figs from the trees stain the sidewalks. On the south side of Pico, the shade of the ficus trees feels dark and blocks light from storefronts. Tree roots have lifted paving throughout the corridor, though in 2009 the City replaced some sidewalks on both sides of Pico between Patricia and Parnell, trimming tree roots and widening tree wells as they did so.

Replacement of lifted concrete and deteriorated concrete is incomplete and needs to be pursued throughout the Pico corridor to make sidewalks fully accessible and walkable. In many areas sidewalks are dirty and stained with discarded gum and tree droppings and other trash. Some shop owners maintain notably clean walks in front of their shops, but these are isolated efforts and not uniform.

Storefronts are likewise unevenly maintained. The overall impression is of a run-down district where some make an effort and others have given in and given up.

Graffiti is a continuing problem and is found on buildings, canopies, windows, sidewalks, benches,

tree trunks, street lights and street vaults. Some shop owners are vigilant about discouraging graffiti, reporting it to the Council office, but graffiti continues to appear.

No pedestrian level lighting is provided, and pedestrians rely on the inadequate light that spills over from roadway illumination and from shop windows. However, most store windows are dark at night. Consequently, in the evening, some areas of Pico are dark and uninviting.

Street furnishings consist of the City's coordinated street furniture program offerings and the City-vendor's brown plastic bus benches. The brown plastic benches seem to invite the graffiti-practitioner; they are the most tagged object on the Boulevard. Litter receptacles are often over-flowing.

Pico Boulevard between Patricia and Overland is primarily small one-story commercial 'mom and pop' shops and restaurants with a strongly walkable neighborhood village aspect. At the intersection of Patricia and Pico pedestrians and drivers experience a distinct sense of "entry" as one travels westward from Rancho Park and multi-family residences to the east. Pico's small shops have been on the street for generations and many are beloved by their neighboring residential customers.

The neighborhood feeling declines sharply where the Westside Pavilion's tall profile dominates between Overland and Westwood Boulevards. The pedestrian

space here transitions to the fast-paced commercial/ industrial zone between the Pavilion and the 405 Freeway. The street tree in front of the Pavilion is the Mexican fan palm; they are few and are now as tall as the Pavilion itself and no longer provide pedestrian scale. The sidewalk here is only 10' wide in most places and, primarily due to the building height, the pedestrian way feels narrow and unfriendly.

At Midvale Avenue, Pico transitions to individual commercial stores and restaurants, though without the small 'mom and pop' neighborhood ambience east of the Pavilion.

Industrial uses begin at Bentley Avenue and continue to the Freeway, interspersed with commercial and government uses. The pedestrian fabric rapidly deteriorates at Sepulveda Boulevard, with poor quality crosswalks, broken concrete and no sidewalk at all at the northeast side of Sepulveda Boulevard. The concentrated presence of homeless people with no amenities at this end of Pico is generally dispiriting, to both the homeless people and to the general society.



The 405 Freeway marks the westernmost end of the streetscape project.



Westside Pavilion, fronted by a barren landscape, dominates this section of Pico Boulevard between Westwood and Overland.



Small local stores mark the easternmost end of the Project between Overland and Patricia Avenue.



Heavy traffic occurs throughout the day on Pico.



Roadway needs reconstruction.



Bus benches attract graffiti.



Merchant-provided trash receptacles overflow with trash.



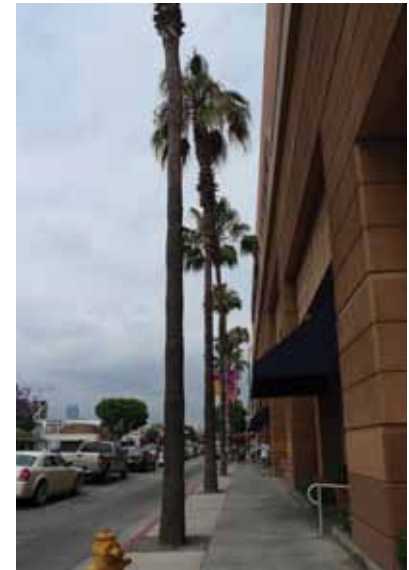
Dense ficus canopies may provide shade but also block shop signs and create a dark unfriendly tunnel on sidewalks.



Ficus roots lift sidewalk paving.



Efforts to control aggressive ficus growth lead to the butchering of the trees.



Mexican fan palms in front of the Westside Pavilion are too tall to provide shade and scale for pedestrians.



Tree grates harm growing trees.



Lifted paving is a danger for pedestrians. Cyclists who use the sidewalk because of heavy traffic along Pico may also pose danger for pedestrians.



Some trees are illegally removed.



Unmaintained sidewalks have paved-over tree wells and weeds.