

Moving L.A.'s

I grew up in Los Angeles. But I spent my summers in Stockholm, Sweden, where I could walk and take transit anywhere, even at night. When I began driving in L.A., I felt guilty pressing the gas pedal. I did it anyway, of course (though I tried to drive conservatively and carpool often).

I was keenly aware of the pollution I was emitting. L.A. consistently has the worst air quality in the nation. Vast quantities of vehicle emissions contribute to environmental health problems and global warming, and the city's reliance on cars poses serious issues of accessibility, and equity as well.

I have always been interested in figuring out how to fix these problems, so I decided to write my honors thesis at Cal on public transportation in L.A. Originally, I conceived of the issue as a subway problem, or more accurately, a lack-of-subway problem. However, I quickly realized that the problem was bigger; a solution must address compounding factors to L.A.'s reliance on cars, such as parking policies, neighborhood zoning, and building designs not conducive to walking, biking, or transit.

Researching my thesis allowed me to approach this wide-reaching topic from multiple disciplines. I looked at economic incentives and disincentives and market-based controls, transportation-related policies, and city planning and architecture. I learned about the historical obstacles facing L.A.'s public transit. And I analyzed the city's current plans to extend the rail system.

One part of the problem is parking: Los Angeles has the highest parking coverage rate in the world, at 81 percent.

(Compare that to 31 percent in San Francisco.) Parking lots are typically located at the front of stores, directly off the street. This is convenient for drivers, but detracts from the façade and

street beauty and makes it hard for foot and bike traffic to access stores. Ostensibly free or cheap parking helps make driving the preferred mode choice. However, consumers are unaware that they pay for their parking in the higher costs of their goods, creating market failure. We have to ask ourselves: why does Los Angeles have the high minimum parking requirements that it does? What purpose do they serve, and are we satisfied with the results?

Things like parking lot size and location affect the way that we relate to the city, its streets, and our fellow citizens. I dove into the theoretical and philosophical questions that arise in contemplating a city dominated by single-person vehicles and parking. Class barriers are created when venues are only accessible via automobile. Personal vehicles separate the individual from the city. Public streets once functioned as vibrant meeting places, but have now become "vectors" for vehicles to travel from point A to point B. Random interactions are minimized, and city charm is lost.

If L.A. is to improve, we need to get people out of their cars. We can do this by creating spaces for people—not just cars—and by adding density to urban cores and making them walkable, bikeable, and transit-accessible. This will require more mixed-use and transit-oriented developments where housing, entertainment, and work sites coexist, and large amounts of parking are replaced with infill developments. In addition, subway lines will need to be extended, and "bus rapid transit," designed to give buses the efficiency and appeal of light rail,

Frustrated with car culture, Daria Mazey, Conservation and Resource Studies '07, looks at the past, present, and future of Los Angeles transportation.



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Edward Carreon

should be put in where appropriate. Finally, a comprehensive bike path network needs to be built. Biking is an under-valued, very viable option for L.A. in particular, given its good weather, health-conscious culture, and flat terrain. With supportive policies and comparatively little investment, this infrastructure could yield great results.

Possibilities like these reassure me that my hometown is not doomed. And if my research experience did nothing else, it impressed upon me the importance of consumer choices and demand. So, on a personal level, I have sworn off driving to work.

Perhaps that's why my new job isn't in Los Angeles. 🇺🇸

After graduating, Daria Mazey started a job in plan formulation with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in San Francisco. She will get experience and training in a number of federal environmental arenas. Her new office has a gym and locker room with showers, which will make it easier to bike and take transit to work.



Street view

Daria Mazey's research synthesized economics, policy, and history—but to put her data in context, she also got behind the wheel, video camera in hand, to document the car-centric landscape of L.A. neighborhoods. Check out the narrated video at <http://nature.berkeley.edu/breakthroughs>.