

# ARE L.A.'S TRANSIT PLANS TOO BIG FOR ERIC GARCETTI?

A New Mayor Inherits the Ambitious Task of Kicking a City's Car Habit



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Story by *Nate Berg*  
Photography by *Teshira Nobie*



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Next City  
1315 Walnut St.  
Suite 926  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

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Cover image: Eric Garcetti, then a councilmember, poses in front a Metro train. Photo from [his own Flickr](#).

Here are a few things you probably think you know about Los Angeles: It is a freeway-riddled, car-dependent traffic jam where nobody walks past their driveway. This is the cartoon version of L.A., a cheap shorthand of stereotypes and decades-old perceptions that the city has struggled to shake.

Yet the image isn't totally inaccurate. Los Angeles has the worst traffic congestion in the country, according to the [INRIX Traffic Scorecard](#); the worst travel times, according to the [Urban Mobility Report](#) from the Texas A&M Transportation Institute; and the busiest urban interstate in the country, according to a [report](#) from the U.S. Department of Transportation. The average travel time to work in Los Angeles County is 29.1 minutes, according to a [five-year estimate](#) from the U.S. Census Bureau, and 76 percent of commuters drive alone. A scant 7 percent take transit. Three percent walk. One percent bike. Among the county's nearly 10 million residents, there were more than 6 million drivers' licenses and 7 million cars and trucks registered by the end of 2012, according to the California Department of Motor Vehicles. The city itself covers 469 square miles and contains about 6,500 miles of public streets and 181 miles of freeways. It's a city in a region so wide, populous and economically interconnected that traffic is inevitable.

But there's a relatively new and rapidly evolving counterpoint to the idea that Los Angeles is simply overrun with the car and its attendant infrastructure. L.A. is gradually becoming a multimodal city, with a growing armature of transit buoyed by a public more willing than ever to get around without getting behind the wheel.

It's a shift occurring in many U.S. cities, but in Los Angeles the pace and impact is likely the greatest. Over the past 25 years, L.A. County's mass transit system, Metro, has grown from only running buses into a robust system with a six-line, 80-station rail network, more than 180 bus lines covering 1,400 square miles, and an average weekday ridership of more than 1.5 million. A countywide bicycle master plan was approved in 2010, and the city has added 125 miles of bikeways over the past fiscal year. And in 2008, Los Angeles County voters approved a half-cent sales tax that will, over 30 years, generate a projected \$40 billion specifically for transportation projects —

an investment many cite as one of the most important drivers of transportation development in L.A. history.

Much of the city's transformation became especially tangible in the waning years of the administration of former Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who termed out in June. The passage of the sales tax, known as Measure R, as well as the opening of a new rail line connecting downtown with the city's Westside, helped bolster Villaraigosa's reputation as the transportation mayor. This had him shortlisted to step in as the new Transportation Secretary during President Obama's second term. (The position eventually went to Anthony Foxx, former mayor of Charlotte, N.C.) But Villaraigosa is out of office now, and it will fall to his successor, Eric Garcetti, to try to keep up the momentum.

Counter to Villaraigosa's sometimes-extravagant style, Garcetti comes off as a calm pragmatist. The 42-year-old native Angeleno twice graduated from Columbia University with a major in political science and urban planning and a Master's in international relations. He's worldly, brainy and personable, but also politically savvy — he was City Council president for six years leading up to his mayoral campaign, and the son of former L.A. County District Attorney Gil Garcetti. In an almost unsurprising L.A. sort of way, he even had a recurring role on TV shows *The Closer* and *Major Crimes* playing, yes, the mayor of Los Angeles.

Standing on the steps of L.A. City Hall on June 30 for his inauguration, Garcetti beamed as he prepared to become mayor for real. But when he made his first official speech, Garcetti tempered the excitement with a tone of measured practicality.

"As a back-to-basics mayor, I'll prioritize the city services that make our neighborhoods beautiful and make our city shine," Garcetti told the crowd in the early evening warmth. "We'll fix the potholes and pave the streets. Pick up the litter, fix the sidewalks and trim the trees."

If tree-trimming and street paving don't quite conjure visions of a super-efficient city of the future, it's because Garcetti seems intent to draw more attention to small-scale projects than the big blockbusters — the opposite approach of his predecessor. But that doesn't mean the Garcetti administration will ease off the throttle on transportation. The big money and big





Commuters at a stop for the 460, which runs through Downtown Los Angeles.

projects will keep rolling, and he's set his sights on a handful of major initiatives, like finally connecting the airport to the rail system, expanding the subway and tunneling a rail line under the perpetual clog that is the 405 Freeway.

While Villaraigosa may have ushered in a new era of transportation in Los Angeles, it is Garcetti and his probable two-term, eight-year tenure that have the potential to manifest policy changes and infrastructure projects to create a truly multimodal city. He'll face the dual challenges of trying to maintain the momentum of change that has taken the city this far, while also trying to keep up with shifting preferences of the public. L.A. is in the midst of one of the most dramatic turnarounds any American city has seen on its transportation front. Garcetti will determine how successful it shapes up to be.

## A CRITICAL MOMENT

It's Monday afternoon rush hour in downtown Los Angeles, and from a sloping bridge on 4th Street

you can look down on the traffic creeping along eight lanes of the 110 Freeway below. It's packed, and moving so slowly it might be faster to just get out and jog.

A few blocks away, there's another, notably different scene. Hundreds of people are streaming in and out of the entrance of the 7th Street/Metro Center station, where four of the city's train lines pick up. Business suits and people carrying bikes crowd down the stairs into one of the city's busiest train stations. A line of buses turns the corner. Cyclists splice themselves between lanes of traffic. While the freeway hums in the near distance, Los Angeles has found new ways to get around.

Much anecdotal evidence suggests that more people, especially younger generations, are choosing to live car-free, in L.A. and beyond. Some data can back this up: Only 70 percent of 19-year-olds had driver's licenses in 2010, a drop from 87 percent in 1983, according to a [study](#) from the University of Michigan's Transportation Research Institute. Of those surveyed without a license, 22 percent said they

had no plans of getting one ever. Nearly 20 percent said they prefer to ride transit or a bike. And another study from the Frontier Group and U.S. PIRG revealed that transit ridership had increased 40 percent since 2001 among people 16 to 34. Public transportation, once seen as a reluctant crutch for those with no other options, is becoming a first choice.

Earlier this fall there was some very visceral proof of the city's transformation. Thousands of cyclists, skaters and pedestrians filled the streets in downtown L.A., taking over space typically dominated by cars. It was CicLAvia, a South American-inspired public space event in which miles of city streets are closed off to cars and opened up to all manner of non-motorized transport options. For a few hours on a Sunday, the roads of L.A. swarm with bikes, turning otherwise car-crammed arterials into an urban playground. The first CicLAvia, in October 2010, brought out an estimated 100,000 people, many experiencing the streets outside of a car for the first

director of the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition. "I definitely feel like we're at a critical time for transportation in Los Angeles."

Politicians are starting to catch up to these changing preferences. On the morning of July 2, Garcetti boarded the 92 bus near his home in the Silver Lake neighborhood to commute to his second day on the job at City Hall. Newly elected councilmember Mike Bonin also made an early commute to his new job on public transit. "Even if it's just symbolism, the fact that they felt the need to, the fact that they thought it mattered [is important]," says Dana Gabbard, executive director of Southern California Transit Advocates.

These were minor press events for both officials, but indicate a new generation of political leadership. Garcetti's commute is a small bit of visual evidence that he understands the potential of public transit and multimodality in the city.

During his campaign, Garcetti highlighted

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time. Though originally started as a trial, its popularity has led organizers to push for the city to allow the event more often. During the campaign, Garcetti pledged to make it permanent. There have been eight iterations so far, three of them this year. Organizers hope for four in 2014.

On a day-to-day basis, cycling has markedly grown in the city. There is no official city or county tally of cyclists, though one has been proposed, but a second-best option is the volunteer-run, biennial pedestrian and cyclist count conducted by the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition. In 2009, 14,222 cyclists and 62,275 pedestrians were counted. In 2011, those numbers rose to 15,115 cyclists and 76,740 pedestrians, increases of 6 percent and 23 percent, respectively.

"People are a little bit more open minded about transportation than we were 10 years ago, 20 years ago, 30 years ago," says Jennifer Klausner, executive

five major projects he hopes to either finish or have underway by the time he leaves office: Extending the subway down Wilshire Boulevard, the so-called Subway to the Sea; finishing the Crenshaw line, a rail line in the works to connect an underserved part of South Los Angeles; bridging the 1.5-mile gap between the Green Line rail spoke and Los Angeles International Airport; creating a north-south connector in the rail system, linking the forthcoming Crenshaw line to the expanding line along Wilshire; and building a tunnel for rail through the heavily congested Sepulveda Pass on the 405, site of the widely publicized 2011 weekend freeway closure known as "Carmageddon."

While impressive, these big, shiny ambitions are to be expected from anyone coming into power in 2013 L.A. But for Garcetti, they are only a piece of the puzzle.

Speaking to a group of employees at Google's Venice office in early May, candidate Garcetti stressed

the need to look beyond infrastructure for solutions to transportation problems. “If the city begins to understand a collection of livable communities and brings back quality of life through a public transportation system,” he said, “through a bikeable, walkable city, through a place that has access to good food, good restaurants and culture, that’s as important to our strategy as the more formal things that we can do.”

On the informal side, Garcetti came into power just as the city was embroiled in a debate over whether to allow on-demand ride sharing app providers Uber, Lyft and Sidecar to operate in the city. The city’s taxi industry opposed the companies, arguing that their privately operated cars and drivers were unregulated and therefore had an unfair advantage. The city agreed in June, issuing cease-and-desist letters to the ride sharing companies, who yawned at what they called an empty threat. Days after taking office, Garcetti sided with the ride sharers and called on the taxi industry to “adapt and adopt” – a position that emphasizes his interest in the potential of technology and new ideas to improve the system. In late September, the California Public Utilities Commission unanimously voted to issue new rules on supporting and regulating ride sharing companies. Despite threats from the city, they never stopped operating.

Garcetti, by all outward appearances, is of the mindset that L.A. can’t build its way out of a traffic jam. His administration plans to embrace the interrelationship between neighborhood development and transportation planning, according to Bonin, who serves as chair of the city council’s Transportation Committee and is one of Garcetti’s three appointees to the 13-member Metro board of directors. He says the city will focus on getting more people to embrace car alternatives such as transit and bikes, and on being more “neighborhood friendly and neighborhood serving.”

“It’s a more holistic view of how you do transportation policy in a city,” Bonin says, “particularly a city like Los Angeles, which doesn’t have the same urban core as other cities.”

Cities like New York, for example. L.A.’s larger counterpart is often held up as a gold standard. Progressive transportation and urban planning in New York has brought about an impressive amount of

streetscape improvements, bike lanes and public spaces, largely at the hand of Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan, and many wonder if there is or could be an L.A. equivalent. Systematically, that seems unlikely. L.A.’s so-called “weak-mayor system” places the power to propose legislation and fire department heads in the hands of the 15-member city council. In New York the mayor has those powers, and during the administration of Michael Bloomberg they’ve certainly been utilized.

“It’s tough, because we just don’t have the political and bureaucratic system that New York has that enables that kind of leadership,” says Deborah Murphy, executive director of pedestrian advocacy group Los Angeles Walks. That doesn’t, however, mean everything. As of late October, Garcetti seems to have flexed some of his political muscle, working behind the scenes to draw the widely expected resignation of L.A. Department of Transportation head Jaime de la Vega.

But where Garcetti will have the most power is on the board of Metro. He and his three appointees form a four-vote bloc that can have significant sway. Through Metro, he’ll be able to advocate strongly for the sort of large-scale infrastructure projects he mentioned during his campaign, like expanding the rail system. And the power he’ll wield on the Metro board will carry even more weight due to the \$40 billion in transportation funding provided by the voter-approved sales tax of Measure R.

## POTHOLE POLITICS

“Hang on,” Denny Zane says over the phone. “My assemblymember is walking by. I gotta say hello.”

Zane, a former Santa Monica city councilmember, was the main driving force behind Measure R. He’s standing on the steps of the Capitol in Sacramento, a place he’s become very familiar with in recent years.

“Hey, Denny,” says Richard Bloom, of California’s 50th District.

“Hey, Richard.”

A moment later, he spots another colleague, Mary Nichols, chair of the powerful California Air Resources Board. “Hey, Mary. How are you?”

Connections and coalitions like these were



crucial to the passage of Measure R. The idea of asking voters to tax themselves to fund transportation projects was something of a tough sell leading up to the 2008 elections. The country was nose-diving into a recession, and adding another half-cent to L.A. County's already-high sales tax had little chance of becoming popular. But for Zane, it was absolutely necessary. In 2007 Metro officials announced that, absent any new forms of revenue, there would be virtually no money to make

transit projects, \$10 billion to bus and rail operations and \$8 billion to highway improvements. "It's a local revenue stream that is unmatched in any other part of the country," says Zev Yaroslavsky, a longtime L.A. County supervisor.

It's also a form of power for the mayor — Villaraigosa then and Garcetti now. The latter's role on the Metro board, along with Yaroslavsky, will enable Garcetti to have a loud voice in how the funding



Seventy-six percent of Metro ridership is on buses.

any significant improvements to the transportation system for the next 30 years. In response, Zane founded Move L.A., a group aimed at creating a coalition of political, business and environmental leaders to try to find that new revenue source. The sales tax idea was born, and Zane began collecting support at nearly all levels throughout the county, none more important than then-Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa. In November 2008, the measure passed with 67.93 percent of the vote.

Of the projected \$40 billion that Measure R will raise, \$14 billion will go to new rail and bus rapid

gets used.

"We're talking about \$40 billion over 30 years, or sooner, that will put nearly a quarter of a million people back to work in this county," Yaroslavsky says. "So it's L.A.'s own stimulus package, if you will. And I think he gets that."

Sitting at his first Metro board meeting in late July, Garcetti has a restrained look of amusement on his face. Theater with moments of policymaking, these board meetings are monthly feeding frenzies for transportation gadflies — the guy who namedrops his blog's web address at the beginning and end of each of

his frequent minute-long public comments, the repeat speaker with the black-and-white “FUCK U” t-shirt. For Garcetti, with 12 years on the city council, it’s old hat.

The Metro boardroom will be a place for very different, hopefully highly consequential conversations. All five of the large transportation projects Garcetti campaigned on will hinge on what happens there.

“The politics of the MTA board are quite intense,” says Ron Kaye, a longtime observer of city politics and former editor of the *Los Angeles Daily News*. Garcetti and the three votes of his appointees speak for the city’s interests, but also have to contend with those of the five county commissioners on the board as well as representatives from parts of the county far removed from Los Angeles. Kaye says that Garcetti’s time on the city council may have spoiled

into the conversation.”

The big projects that Garcetti is after will likely come to pass, in one form or another. But not, according to Kaye, because of the mayor. He acknowledges that Garcetti is very smart and analytical, but worries that he may be too passive to bring about any dramatic changes in the Metro boardroom. “He’s not a warrior.”

Except it wasn’t his role on Metro that got Garcetti elected. Throughout the campaign, he emphasized his “back to basics” focus, foreshadowing a tenure dedicated to all those small and simple roles municipal government is supposed to play. That means, according to the issues polled as being most important to voters, creating jobs and filling potholes.

Promptly after taking office, Garcetti launched what he called a “neighborhood blitz,” in which road crews rushed out to fix roads, neighborhood by

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him because of its rarely contentious nature. A study by the *L.A. Weekly* found that during 2011, the city council voted unanimously 97.5 percent of the time. Another study of the first seven months of 2009 by the Center for Governmental Studies found unanimous voting 99.3 percent of the time.

Kaye says unanimity is important to Garcetti, and that he’s not likely to get it on the Metro board without either forging strong new coalitions or bending to the demands of those around him. But he’s not optimistic about Garcetti’s leadership on the board. “I think everything in his record says he will go along for the ride of what the power structure wants,” Kaye says. “What the developers, the contractors, the engineers, the lobbyists and the unions all want.”

He notes that the five main projects Garcetti has pledged to push forward — the subway and rail lines, the tunnel under the 405, the connection to LAX — are all projects that this power structure has a stake in. “None of those ideas are his,” Kaye says. “He’s just supporting the plan. There’s nothing he introduced

neighborhood. But the issue of busted streets will require much more than a few weeks worth of patch jobs. City officials say there’s a 60-year backlog of streets in need of repairs in Los Angeles. Tree root- and earthquake-cracked sidewalks are in such poor shape that one *Los Angeles Times* columnist recently had himself photographed beneath an upturned chunk as if the concrete were eating him alive. Garcetti and city council members know these problems all too well, and recently approved a move to find funding for an ambitious \$3 billion street and sidewalk repair effort on the drawing board — “for now, for our children, and for our children’s children,” said councilmember Mitchell Englander at a recent council meeting, underscoring the city’s sometimes-sensationalist fervor about potholes.

Pothole politics is hard to ignore in a car-rich city like Los Angeles. But Garcetti hasn’t lost sight of the larger, more time-intensive mobility issues facing the city and region — and isn’t naïve about how he can use the promise of smooth streets to keep support for





Tuesday evening rush hour at a Metro station.

new financing instruments like Measure R that pay for roads, along with other transportation infrastructure.

“I’m going to be a straight talker to let people know this is going to cost money,” Garcetti told a crowd during a debate with opponent Wendy Greuel a few weeks before the runoff election in May. “If we want to do it, for about a third of what it costs us right now to repair our cars, we could each pave all of those streets. But we have to figure out the best way to do that and use some of the transit funds that we have right now through Measure R that are local returns for paving streets. We can wait 30 years to do them, or we can accelerate them and do them in the first four years.”

One near miss was Measure J, a local effort to extend the transportation-focused sales tax increase from Measure R out another 30 years. On the November 2012 ballot, the measure fell slightly short of the two-thirds vote required by California state law, gathering a nail-bitingly close 66.11 percent. Zane and many other transportation watchers in L.A. say a new version of that measure will almost certainly appear on the ballot

in 2016. And if Zane and others can convince the state legislature to revise the two-thirds voter threshold down to 55 percent for local measures, they may even bump it to the 2014 ballot. Zane is already making the case in Sacramento, and Garcetti is likely to follow.

Another city the mayor will undoubtedly become familiar with is Washington, D.C. Toward the end of his tenure, Villaraigosa spent increasing amounts of time in Washington rallying support for what became known as America Fast Forward, a federal bond program that would allow local governments with secured revenue streams — like Measure R — to issue bonds secured by that funding in order to speed up the money’s delivery. With a little federal help in the form of tax credits for the private investors buying up the bonds, so-called self-help cities could use more of their locally raised funding more quickly. In L.A., that would mean being able to invest the \$40 billion in transportation projects over 10 years instead of 30. Congress included the America Fast Forward provisions in its most recent two-year transportation bill, but it’s unclear whether it will make the cut in the

next iteration. Garcetti will likely have to take over Villaraigosa's role in lobbying for its inclusion.

"Funding and finance is going to be a challenge in almost every city and every metropolitan area in the coming years," says Robert Puentes, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution's Metropolitan Policy Program. "And that's not that insightful to say, but what's new is that they recognize that they're going to have to do it themselves." Villaraigosa's administration has shown that the real transportation power in the mayor's office may lie in developing new funding and financing methods.

"Every mayor who's made an impact on transportation — that's Tom Bradley and Antonio Villaraigosa, primarily — have made Washington their second home when it comes to transportation," Yaroslavsky says. If Garcetti wants to keep up that momentum, he'll have to start spending a lot of time in Washington.

"Why wouldn't he?" Yaroslavsky demands. "After 38-and-a-half years, I still take red eyes to Washington. So a new, young, vigorous mayor should find it a lot easier to take those red eyes."

He's already got the connections there, at least within the current administration. Garcetti was an early supporter of President Obama's 2008 presidential run and became co-chair of his campaign in California. He's called the president "a personal friend," and the two had some tarmac face time when Obama visited L.A. in June. A handful of administration officials contributed to his mayoral campaign, as did representatives of various D.C. lobbying firms. And Garcetti has already headed back east to talk transportation, scheduling a meeting with Transportation Secretary Foxx in mid-July. But before they could meet, Garcetti had to cut his trip short and return to a small transportation emergency back home: Locals protesting the verdict in the George Zimmerman murder trial had filed onto the 10 Freeway to block traffic.

## "THE MOST DEEPLY FELT ISSUE"

For as much as transportation in Los Angeles has changed in recent years, it's still dogged by the same problems it has faced since the mid-20th century: traffic, safety and the challenge of balancing investments.

Speaking at Google's office in May, Garcetti called traffic "the most deeply felt issue" for Angelenos. "It's what corrodes the quality of our life," he said. "It's about the hours we lose away from our friends and family, it's the billions of dollars of lost productivity, and the health costs when people are stalled in traffic right now."

"There is no silver bullet to solving traffic in Los Angeles," Garcetti spokesperson Yusef Robb says. "That one-size-fits-all approach was tried once. It's called freeways, and it's not working so well nowadays." Robb says the mayor will approach the issue through leveraging a combination of rail, bus, cycling, pedestrian and car improvements. "It requires a holistic approach, and it requires innovation."

Jennifer Klausner, at the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, says she thinks Garcetti is savvy enough and has the potential to bring about that holistic approach. But he has a long way to go.

"Our transportation system doesn't give us enough choices," Klausner says. Countywide, only about 1 percent of transportation funding is spent on walking and biking combined. But pedestrians and cyclists make up 19 percent of trips and 39 percent of roadway fatalities. She's hopeful that this imbalance will change, and there are some indications that non-motorized transportation has earned some more attention. In 2012, the city hired two "pedestrian coordinators" to focus on such issues as safety and access.

In terms of public transit, some say the progress resulting from Measure R has been disproportionately focused on rail, underserving the 76 percent of Metro ridership that occurs on one or more bus lines.

"Most of the money — not just Measure R, but MTA's existing funding — is being eaten up and sucked up by overambitious construction plans," says Sunyoung Yang, lead organizer of the Bus Riders Union. "How Mayor Garcetti is going to navigate through that is going to be a real question. Because many times we've seen that happen on the backs of bus riders."

One improvement suggested by advocates is the addition of busways and bus-only lanes, an idea that's starting to roll out, albeit slowly. The first bus-only lane has been planned for Wilshire Boulevard, a main east-west corridor, and buses will have exclusive



use of the lanes during the morning and evening rush hours. When completed, it will cover a total of 7.7 miles, but so far only a 1.8-mile stretch is operational. The rest is scheduled for completion by November 2014.

If that effort expands, it could be very effective. Paris, France recently implemented a citywide network of bus-only lanes, and congestion and car use has changed dramatically, according to transportation consultant Jarrett Walker, who says it's probably only a matter of time before L.A. has to follow Paris' lead.

the city," Garcetti said at a mayoral candidates forum hosted by the Los Angeles chapter of the American Institute of Architects in March 2012. "I think it's a great way on the cheap to be able to put a great transit infrastructure down."

But Yang at the Bus Riders Union says Garcetti was less supportive in the City Council chambers, where it actually counted. The Wilshire bus-only lane generated a heated debate in the city's Westside, where affluent residents along a small stretch of Wilshire adamantly opposed the project. That segment of the



Metro passengers purchasing TAP cards. Tickets were phased out in 2012.

"We've got to have a way of getting around the city reliably," Walker says. "The private car has failed at that task because each one takes too much room and therefore causes congestion. Only transit, protected from congestion, is capable of being reliable. There's not enough road space to achieve reliable travel times by car in a city that is that dense and that busy."

It's an idea candidate Garcetti was quick to support. "I'd like to see rapid busways throughout

road has been left out.

"During that struggle he, as the president of the city council, was kind of silent on it, because he knew it was a contentious item on the Westside," Yang says. "Maybe as mayor he might feel more authority and leadership. But we won't know until we push. And nothing comes out of this municipal government without pushing really strongly."



## REWRITING THE CODE

In October, L.A.'s mainstream media marked Garcetti's first 100 days in office with celebratory reviews of his high approval numbers and softball interviews. Not so for the pro-bike and pedestrian transportation blog Streetsblog Los Angeles. The popular website **rated the mayor with a 2.5 out of 5**. "Garcetti has yet to offer any real vision on transportation," wrote Damien Newton, Streetsblog L.A.'s founding editor. "And whether you liked his predecessor or not, you have to admit the man had vision."

Garcetti's ears must have been burning, because the same day Newton's criticism went live, the mayor introduced an executive order called the "Great Street Programs." It's a plan to coordinate eight city departments with the goal of upgrading up to 20 of the city's major corridors with better pedestrian amenities, bus stops, pocket parks and other streetscape improvements. Expanding on the Transit Corridors Cabinet created during the Villaraigosa administration, a working group is being dispatched to identify target streets and push these ideas forward. While funding has not yet been nailed down, even Newton conceded that perhaps he "should have been patient another few hours."

Another announcement made in early October — a call to study the possibility of creating a regional bike share system — has also inspired hope among transportation advocates. Garcetti and four other Metro board members hope to revive a long-stalled plan to bring bike share to the city and county. Metro staff will be reporting back in January on what a more comprehensive system could look like.

These initiatives fall in line with much of what candidate Garcetti said about his plans for transportation if elected. Walkability and bikeability are increasingly what big-city officials have their eyes on, and Garcetti seems to appreciate the idea of improving mobility on multiple fronts. The city is currently in the process of rewriting its zoning code, originally adopted in 1946, which should give some opportunities to redraw the connection between land use and transportation. And it's updating the mobility element of its general plan, an additional chance to change to the way L.A. looks ahead.

In his inaugural address, Garcetti talked about

bringing "a rotary phone government into the smartphone era," and he often mentions the potential for technology to improve the way the city works. His first motion as a member of the Metro Board focused on studying new ways technology can improve the transit experience: Open data, mobile apps, Wi-Fi — all the tech buzzwords one might expect. That's a good sign, if perhaps a vague one, that he sees room for improvement.

But as a member of the Metro Board, and as the mayor of the biggest city in Southern California, he'll have a bit more weight on his shoulders than figuring out a new app for your smartphone. Los Angeles is the top player in a region of 22 million people, but it will have to collaborate, especially with neighboring L.A. County cities, if it is to continue pulling in the sort of large-scale, countywide funds needed for major transportation projects. One effort at camaraderie was a Garcetti-hosted summit in August that invited the mayors of each of the county's 87 other cities. A decent 63 mayors or mayoral representatives showed up to discuss various regional issues, from jobs to public safety to traffic congestion.

"For too long other cities in the county viewed us as the big bully. And sometimes we acted like it," says Yusef Robb, the mayor's spokesperson. L.A. will have to work with its neighbors, he says, if it's going to generate the two-thirds vote needed (as of now) to extend the sales tax of Measure R.

"[Garcetti has] made it clear that he wants to be a regional mayor in the sense that he wants to have good relationships and coalitions with other communities," says Denny Zane, from Move L.A. "And if he's successful with that, he'll be a perfect follow-on to Mayor Villaraigosa's energetic style of leadership."

Slightly below the radar is L.A.'s role as a port of entry for international goods. The neighboring ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach are some of the busiest in the world, and receive goods from Asia that are distributed all across the country. Technological advances could help to improve the efficiency of the ports, and also reduce their huge environmental impact. A port improvement project known as Green Rail Intelligent Development is now under study, and if implemented it could greatly increase the port's efficiency and international competitiveness, according to Bart Reed, executive director of the Transit

Coalition. Implementing a new system is something a mayor could have the power to do. “Mayor Garcetti could shift the whole paradigm of the port business,” Reed says.

Again, though, he’ll have to work regionally to make improvements to the freight system that operates throughout Southern California. Working with railroads and trucking organizations will be a critical if slightly less sexy element of Garcetti’s agenda, according to Marnie O’Brien Primmer, executive director of the transportation lobbying

The funding is certainly a boon. There could be more on the way, depending on how things shake out in Congress and whether local forces will come together to push for the extension of Measure R. Inevitably, the city is changing, and its transportation preferences suggest an L.A. of the near future that’s sweepingly different from the car-dependent city of the past. In Garcetti, the city has a progressive, thoughtful mayor who’s capable of enabling and encouraging that transition. In terms of transportation infrastructure, the planning is already set for the high-profile projects,

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group Mobility 21. “Having a strong interregional transportation network is essential,” Primmer says. “And the new mayor is going to play a strong leadership role.”

Many in L.A. are hoping for the best, but in the end they aren’t exactly sure what to expect. Transportation wasn’t one of Garcetti’s main priorities as a city councilmember, and some worry that he’s wandering into a foreign territory. But he’s kept on the three transportation staffers from the Villaraigosa administration, which some see as hope for continuity.

“He needs to make transportation a priority, and I think he will,” says Zev Yaroslavsky, the county supervisor. “We all have to address the traffic and transportation problems of the region. The good news is that the groundwork has been laid for it, and a lot of the heavy lifting has been done, especially in terms of identifying a funding source.”

and he’s so far shown little sign that he’ll make any dramatic changes to what’s in the pipeline. He’ll have a chance to make transportation and neighborhood development operate in conjunction, but that will likely be a slow, decades-long transition. His most influential role will probably be on the financing side of the equation.

In late October, Garcetti made another trip to Washington, D.C. to argue for more federal support, meeting with both the president and the transportation secretary. This lobbying has been, and will continue to be, crucial to building out L.A.’s new transit dreams. And if, in four or eight years, Garcetti has moved the funding ball forward, he will be considered a successful transportation mayor for L.A.

In the meantime, Garcetti will have his share of significant milestones to tout. But he’ll be cutting ribbons for projects that came long before he did.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nate Berg is a writer and journalist covering cities, architecture and urban planning. Nate's work has been published in a wide variety of publications, including the *New York Times*, NPR, *Wired*, *Metropolis*, *Fast Company*, *Dwell*, *Architect*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, *LA Weekly* and many others. He is a former staff writer at The Atlantic Cities and was previously an assistant editor at Planetizen.



## ABOUT THE PHOTOGRAPHER

Teshira Nobie is a Brooklyn-born photographer raised in Trinidad and based in Los Angeles. Her artistic approach and atmospheric sensibilities from growing up in Trinidad influence her work in portraiture, fashion, architecture and landscapes, lending dreamy, elemental and theatrical attributes to her imagery.