

Orange County sees future in transit-oriented development as freeways get more jammed



An artist's rendering shows the parking structure near Metrolink's Orange Station that is under construction at Chapman Avenue and Lemon Street, which will provide additional parking for train riders and patrons of businesses in Old Towne Orange. (Orange County Transportation Authority)

By **Daniel Langhorne**

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Terri Swanson lives at the Crossing apartment community, a transit-oriented development adjacent to the Anaheim Canyon [Metrolink Station](#).

Swanson and her husband moved to the complex in June so she could take a Metrolink train to Orange Station, from which she walks to her administrative assistant job at Chapman University's Attallah College of Educational Studies.

"That's the main reason we decided to live there," Swanson said.

The Anaheim community rents a one-bedroom, one-bath apartment for \$1,743 to \$2,072 per month, according to the building's website.

Swanson said she usually sees one other passenger get on her morning train while employees disembark on their way to Kaiser Permanente Orange County-Anaheim Medical Center or the PacifiCenter office park. Her husband uses his car to commute to work.

“I see other cars leaving all the time,” she said.

The Southern California Assn. of Governments encourages city governments to offer incentives for residential development, especially affordable housing, near transit hubs to alleviate traffic on some of the most congested freeways in the country.

Since transit-oriented development is a land-use issue, the Orange County Transportation Authority does not take a policy stance on the practice, said Eric Carpenter, an OCTA spokesman.

“OCTA does, of course, encourage people to use public transportation, including the Metrolink rail system as an alternative to getting behind the wheel and adding congestion to our crowded freeways,” Carpenter said.

In 2016, Anaheim adopted the Canyon Specific Plan, which rezoned commercial properties on both sides of Anaheim Canyon Station as a transit-oriented area that could include workforce housing.

OCTA plans to start construction in 2019 on a second track and platform at the Anaheim Canyon Station. The new platform will be on the same side as the Crossing apartments, allowing residents to board trains without crossing tracks.

From July to November 2017, a daily average of 338 Metrolink riders boarded at the Anaheim Canyon Station on weekdays. In that same time, a daily average of 1,614 riders boarded in Fullerton, 862 riders boarded in Santa Ana and 711 riders boarded in Orange.

While transit-oriented living at apartment buildings such as the Crossing may not be incredibly popular now, public officials such as Placentia City Administrator Damien Arrula say Orange County’s demand for this type of housing will increase as the 91 Freeway becomes even more crowded.

Arrula spearheaded Placentia’s role in a planned Metrolink station and a 246-space parking structure in the city’s historic downtown. OCTA plans to advertise for bids on the station’s construction in late April or early May. Placentia will be the first new station on the Union Station-to-Riverside line in a decade.

“As city employees it’s our job to serve the community and to plan for the needs of our citizens, residents and visitors, and to support our local economy,” Arrula said.

The low vacancy rate among industrial or commercial properties can make it expensive for developers to purchase and redevelop them as high-density housing. Arrula said cities and developers who miss opportunities to build workforce housing run the risk of higher land costs in the future. This could translate into higher rents.

Placentia plans to sell a parcel that formerly held a deteriorating packinghouse to a developer for a future transit-oriented development. It's preparing to request proposals from developers interested in acquiring the site.

To capitalize on this planned transportation hub, the Placentia City Council approved dual plans to encourage redevelopment of the industrial properties south of the BNSF railroad and revitalization of buildings in its historic downtown.

Another common strategy in transit-oriented development is to build parking structures so people can drive from their homes, park in a structure, and take trains to downtown Los Angeles, the Inland Empire or south Orange County.

Construction crews are excavating space for underground parking at the site of a future parking structure near the Metrolink station in Old Towne Orange. The structure is also expected to serve as desperately needed nighttime parking for merchants.

In 2016, Chapman Crafted Beer opened its brewery and tasting room next to the site of the future parking structure. Once the structure is done, Chapman Crafted co-owner Wil Dee plans to work with the city to transform an alley on the side of his building into a paseo that will allow pedestrians to walk unimpeded to the train station.

With the temporary loss of a public parking lot, Chapman Crafted's customers have to park a little farther, but the long-term benefits to business owners, residents and train riders will be huge, Dee said.

"As far as the structure goes, it's a long time coming," he said. "It's fantastic for the city to be able to partner with OCTA" to get the parking.

Langhorne writes for Times Community News.

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