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### Authors

Houston, Douglas, PhD

Zuniga, Michelle E., PhD

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# Perceptions of Neighborhood Change in a Latinx Transit Corridor

Douglas Houston, Ph.D., and Michelle E. Zuñiga, Ph.D.

Department of Urban Planning and Public Policy, University of California, Irvine

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## Issue

Understanding how residents feel about neighborhood changes due to new development along transit corridors (often referred to as transit-oriented development) remains understudied despite growing concerns over displacement and gentrification. Studies that examined these concerns are largely based on analyzing land use, housing values, and socio-economic shifts (i.e., who is moving in and out of neighborhoods), and do not provide conclusive evidence that transit-oriented development (TOD) is linked to neighborhood gentrification and displacement.<sup>1</sup> Prior surveys of residents living near transit indicate a generally positive assessment of TOD in terms of improved walkability and accessibility but also express concerns over pedestrian safety and parking related to increased traffic and new commercial development.<sup>2</sup> However, recent studies counter this relatively positive assessment of TOD, particularly among activists and community organizers in low-income communities of color.<sup>3</sup>

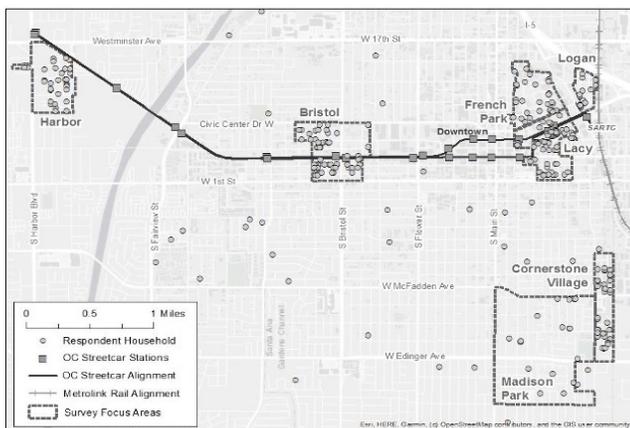


Figure 1. Study focus areas in Santa Ana, California.

These seeming contradictory perspectives could reflect the fact that available research about transit-induced neighborhood change has not fully accounted for the social and psychological impacts of “indirect” displacement, which happens when changes disrupt a resident’s sense of place and community-based social networks, resources, identity, and power.<sup>4</sup> To address this gap, we surveyed residents in regards to their perceptions (negative and positive) of neighborhood change and associated development along an existing commuter rail corridor and planned route of the new OC Streetcar in the City of Santa Ana, a largely low-income, Latinx community in central Orange County, California. A total of 329 surveys were collected between August and October 2019.

## Key Research Findings

**On average, residents were satisfied with the physical aspects of their neighborhood.** On a scale from 1 (“Strongly Dissatisfied”) to 5 (“Strongly Satisfied”) the residents’ average assessment of neighborhood access to highways and public transportation and to amenities such as grocery stores, restaurants and friends, was 3.8, suggesting moderate satisfaction. Residents expressed less satisfaction about crime, noise, ease of walking/cycling and park access (3.0).

**Residents that expressed a strong sense of place attachment and social cohesion reported greater neighborhood satisfaction.** This suggests social factors including how well respondents know and trust their neighbors and how emotionally connected they feel to their city play an important role in how satisfied they feel regarding their neighborhood’s physical conditions.

**Residents were mostly positive but also concerned about neighborhood impacts associated with new development.** Residents generally agreed that recent development improved neighborhood infrastructure and public transportation, and reduced the number of vacant lots (an average rating of 3.4 on a scale from 1 to 5). At the same time, however, they mostly agreed that development posed challenges in terms of pedestrian safety, and less parking due to increased traffic and new businesses (an average rating of 3.7).

**Residents living near transit had stronger concerns that development brings neighborhood challenges.** Concerns varied by neighborhood and included housing costs, displacement, and parking. This includes residents living near the Santa Ana commuter rail station, an area that has experienced several large redevelopment projects and gentrification pressures.<sup>5</sup> It also includes residents living near the streetcar route that have seen the conversion of several vacant and large industrial parcels into new residential developments. As seen in previous studies,<sup>6</sup> residents who recently moved to the neighborhood were

more positive about neighborhood change near transit compared to longer-term residents. Older adults were more positive about change than younger adults, though this seems counter to other prior studies.<sup>7</sup>

**Residents had mixed expectations about the impacts of the OC Streetcar project.** Among the two-thirds of survey respondents who were aware of this new transit service, fewer than half (46%) expected the streetcar would have positive impacts while nearly a third (30%) expected the impacts would be negative. Although this is a less optimistic assessment compared to previous research on other new rail services,<sup>8</sup> residents who moved to Santa Ana in the past two years and older respondents had a more positive assessment of the OC Streetcar’s anticipated impact.

### More Information

Douglas Houston, Michelle E. Zuñiga, Perceptions of neighborhood change in a Latinx transit corridor, *Journal of Transport Geography*, Volume 94, 2021, 103097, ISSN 0966-6923. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jtrangeo.2021.103097>

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<sup>1</sup>Padeiro, M., Louro, A., and Marques da Costa, N. 2019. Transit-Oriented Development and Gentrification: A Systematic Review. *Transport Reviews* 39(6):733-754.

<sup>2</sup>Brown, B.B., and Werner, C.M. 2011. The Residents’ Benefits and Concerns Before and After a New Rail Stop: Do Residents Get What They Expect? *Environment and Behavior* 43(6):789-806.

<sup>3</sup>Sandoval, G.F. 2018. Planning the Barrio: Ethnic Identity and Struggles over Transit-Oriented, Development-Induced Gentrification. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 41(4): 410-424.

<sup>4</sup>Nilsson, I., Schuch, J.C., Delmelle, E.C., and Canales, K.L., 2020. Should I Stay or Should I Go? A Survey Analysis of Neighborhood Change And Residential Mobility Concerns Around New Light Rail Stations in Charlotte, NC. *Journal of Transport Geography* 86(5):102790.

<sup>5</sup>Sarmiento, C.S. and Sims J.R. 2015. Façades of Equitable Development: Santa Ana and the Affordable Housing Complex. *Journal of Planning Education and Research* 35: 323-336.

<sup>6</sup>Fan, Y., and Guthrie, A., 2012. Winners or Losers Resident Perceptions of Transit-Induced Neighborhood Change. *Transportation Research Record* 2276: 89–100.

<sup>7</sup>Jackson, S.L., and Buckman, J. 2020. Light Rail Development With or Without Gentrification?: Neighborhood Perspectives on Changing Sense of Place in Denver, Colorado. *Journal of Transport Geography* 84:102678.

<sup>8</sup>Jackson and Buckman.

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