

Transit-Oriented Development Without Displacement:

Strategies to Help Pacoima Businesses Thrive

Project Lead: Samikchhya Bhusal, Bertha L. Calderón Chiñas, Talia S. Coutin, Laura Daza García, Lauren Hiller, Charlotte Will
Faculty Advisor: Vinit Mukhija
Client: Pacoima Beautiful

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16. Abstract Bounded by mountains and freeways, the culturally-rich, working-class community of Pacoima faces a legacy of environmental degradation and historical injustice. Power plants, landfills, toxic release sites, lead contamination, freeways, and a municipal airport create a powerful cocktail of airborne and ground soil pollution, causing substantial impacts to community public health. Through the State's Transformative Climate Communities Program (TCC), Pacoima received a historically significant amount of capital for green infrastructure investments. The Green Together Collaborative secured a \$23 million TCC grant in 2018 to implement urban greening and streetscape improvement projects in Pacoima and Sun Valley. At the same time, Pacoima is anticipating an at-grade light rail transit line through the San Fernando Valley. Considering the risks of displacement, gentrification, and cultural erasure associated with transit expansion, this research focuses on commercial anti displacement strategies that can support the predominantly immigrant-owned small business community in the corridor. Our findings will support Pacoima Beautiful, the only environmental justice organization in the neighborhood and part of the Green Together Collaborative, in completing a Displacement Avoidance Plan to mitigate the potential impacts of the TCC investments, particularly the East San Fernando Rail Line extension. This research answers two questions: (1) What are the concerns, experiences, and priorities of Pacoima small businesses facing transit-related displacement pressures? (2) How can community groups respond to displacement pressures from rail transit expansion to ensure thriving community businesses?			
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Disclaimer

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Transit-Oriented Development Without Displacement: Strategies to Help Pacoima Businesses Thrive

UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies

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Executive Summary

The East San Fernando Valley light rail will bisect Pacoima's main commercial corridor, Van Nuys Boulevard. Considering the displacement, gentrification, and cultural erasure risks associated with rail expansion, this research asks (1) how can community groups respond to rail-related commercial displacement pressures?; and (2) what are the concerns, experiences, and priorities of Pacoima small businesses? To address these questions, we undertook a literature review, draw on lessons learned through case studies of three transit-oriented communities in Los Angeles, and developed and implemented a small business survey along Pacoima's commercial corridor.

From our literature review, we learned that extant scholarship on commercial anti-displacement is limited, but that there are several anti-displacement tools, including commercial community land trusts (CCLTs), right to counsel, commercial rent control, and cultural heritage commercial corridors that may be viable. Through our case studies, we learned that businesses benefit from a formal association, technical assistance and funding, and community-owned land. Lastly, through small business surveys, we found that Pacoima small businesses are not formally organized, have limited information on the light rail, and would like technical assistance and financial support.

Based on our literature review, case studies, and small business survey, we identified recommendations that fall into four categories: (1) further research on defining and measuring success of commercial anti-displacement work; (2) strategies for building community power: business associations and specialized assistance; (3) residential anti-displacement strategies and cultural districts as tools for preserving Pacoima's vibrant commercial community; and (4) opportunities for Metro to support small businesses earlier and with more funding.

Foreword

Bounded by mountains and freeways, the culturally-rich, working-class community of Pacoima faces a legacy of environmental degradation and historical injustice. Power plants, landfills, toxic release sites, lead contamination, freeways, and a municipal airport create a powerful cocktail of airborne and ground soil pollution, causing substantial impacts to community public health. Pacoima residents, who are 85% Latinx and 7% Black, experience hospitalization from asthma and heart attacks at rates significantly higher than the rest of California (Pacoima Beautiful, 2016). In Pacoima, eight per 10,000 people get rushed to the emergency room from heart attacks – higher than 45% of other California census tracts (*CalEnviroScreen 3.0*, 2016). Climate change-induced extreme heat and wildfires exacerbate these health and environmental vulnerabilities for residents of Pacoima, a Los Angeles neighborhood located in the Northeast San Fernando Valley.

In 2018, the Green Together Collaborative secured a \$23 million Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) grant to implement urban greening and streetscape improvement projects in Pacoima and Sun Valley. The statewide Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) Program “empowers the communities most impacted by pollution” to develop projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, strengthen the local economy, and improve public health and the environment (*Green Together: Northeast San Fernando Valley*, 2019). Working with community partners, TCC directs dollars from California’s cap-and-trade program toward neighborhood-level development and infrastructure projects in historically underinvested communities. Components of the Green Together Collaborative plan for Pacoima include street enhancements to improve pedestrian mobility, electric buses and EV Charging Stations, solar installation on single-family homes, park improvements and stormwater management, tree planting, and workforce development in the green sector (*Green Together: Northeast San Fernando Valley*, 2019).

Introduction

Located in the East San Fernando Valley, Pacoima is home to a bustling small business community, especially along Van Nuys Boulevard, the neighborhood's main commercial corridor. Murals embellish businesses, many of which have served the community for decades.

The Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro) plans to build a 9.2-mile, at-grade light rail transit line through the San Fernando Valley, connecting the Van Nuys Metro G Line (Orange) station to the Sylmar/San Fernando Metrolink Station. The East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Project will run along Van Nuys Boulevard, the heart of Pacoima's commercial corridor, increasing transportation access throughout the San Fernando Valley (*East San Fernando Light Rail Transit Project*, n.d.).

Despite increased access and mobility, transportation infrastructure investments in historically underinvested communities carry inherent concerns of gentrification, displacement, and cultural erasure, including for ethnic small businesses. Specifically, the light rail project will directly displace several businesses through site acquisition, create construction disruptions that impose long-term impacts on business health, and potentially contribute to long-term gentrification and displacement in the commercial corridor.

The Transformative Climate Communities grant requires the Green Together Collaborative to develop and implement a Displacement Avoidance Plan (DAP) that assesses displacement vulnerability among residents and small businesses and implements anti-displacement strategies. The plan, which Pacoima Beautiful will carry out with support from the UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge, emphasizes the combined risks that this green infrastructure investment and the new rail transit line present for the community. To date, Pacoima Beautiful's DAP work has focused on residential displacement avoidance strategies; this research addresses the gap in commercial anti-displacement strategies, specifically related to the rail project.

1. How can community groups respond to commercial displacement pressures from rail transit expansion and ensure thriving community businesses?
2. What are the concerns, experiences, and priorities of Pacoima businesses that will be affected by rail-related displacement pressures?

Our report begins with a summary of existing academic literature on the need for commercial displacement avoidance strategies, existing policies and practices, and the dearth of research in this area. We then pose our two related research questions. Third, we describe our two methodologies for addressing these questions — case studies of transit-oriented communities and a small business survey — and follow each with our findings and key takeaways. We conclude with our recommendations, which we divide into four categories, as shown in **Table 1** below.

Table 1. Recommendation Categories

RECOMMENDATION CATEGORIES
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Further research on defining and measuring success of commercial anti-displacement work;2. Strategies for building community power: business associations and specialized assistance;3. Residential anti-displacement strategies and cultural districts as tools for preserving Pacoima’s vibrant commercial community; and4. Opportunities for Metro to support small businesses earlier and with more funding.

Background and Literature Review

While attempting to provide car-free mobility, rail investments can accelerate the displacement of historically marginalized residents and small businesses. Transit-oriented development (TOD) tries to cure auto-dependency, curb city sprawl, and cut air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions by building medium-density, mixed-use developments within half a mile of transit stations. TOD improves transportation access and provides mobility beyond cars. This is especially relevant for Pacoima, where the percentage of transit-dependent riders is more than 100 percent higher than the County average, and zero-vehicle households is 77 percent higher (*Final Environmental Impact Statement/Final Environmental Impact Report (Volume 1) for the East San Fernando Valley Transit Corridor Project*, 2020). TOD, while seeking to advance equitable outcomes for low-income communities of color suffering the brunt of air pollution, climate change, and traffic violence, carries the inherent risk of exacerbating gentrification and displacement in those same communities (Zuk et al., 2018).

The existing literature describes gentrification and displacement as interrelated, but distinct, phenomena. Gentrification in the residential context occurs when investment and people with educational and income levels higher than those of the current residents move into a neighborhood. Displacement occurs when lower-income residents move out because they are priced out of the neighborhood. While displacement generally follows gentrification, gentrification does not always precipitate displacement (Chapple & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2019).

As the affordable housing crisis in Los Angeles County pushes families farther to the periphery, incumbent families and businesses in Pacoima face rising precarity and vulnerability. The Urban Displacement Project, a joint effort by UC Berkeley and UCLA, found four indicators of residential gentrification in Pacoima in and around the project area, from Van Nuys Boulevard to Osborne Place and San Fernando Boulevard to Glenoaks Boulevard: shifts in (1) racial/ethnic composition of residents, (2) educational attainment, (3) median household income, and (4) share of renter households (Community Partners, 2018a). Commercial and residential gentrification operate in tandem; identifying which comes first depends on regional context (Kasinitz et al., 2015). In Los Angeles, residential gentrification significantly predicts commercial gentrification. Though the academic literature lacks consistency in defining commercial displacement, the rising costs of commercial rents and the loss of lower-income clientele drive displacement (Chapple & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2019). The Urban Displacement Project also found evidence of commercial gentrification in Pacoima. Since 1990, Pacoima businesses face higher churn rates of discretionary shopping businesses, and decline in shares of minority-owned and non-chain small businesses (Community Partners, 2018b). These indicators of gentrification in Pacoima's commercial corridor point to the need for anti-displacement policies and programs, especially with the infusion of capital coming with the East San Fernando Light Rail Transit Project.

Impacts of rail transit investments on communities

Unlike the study of residential gentrification and displacement, the study of commercial gentrification and displacement — and therefore the study of anti-displacement interventions — remains limited and inconsistent. The literature examining the connection between rail-transit investments and commercial gentrification and displacement is even thinner. One study found that between 2010 and 2013, eight percent of transit neighborhoods in Los Angeles County experienced residential gentrification and displacement (Chapple & Loukaitou-Sideris, 2019). Regression modeling did not establish a causal relationship between the presence of transit stations and either residential or commercial gentrification and displacement. However, Chapple & Loukaitou-Sideris found that census tracts with a transit station were more likely to experience gentrification and displacement than census tracts without. Much of the analysis on the impacts of rail transit investments focuses on rising property values (Ray, 2015). For example, a study by Weinberger (Weinberger, 2001) found that commercial properties located within a quarter-mile radius of transit stations in Santa Clara County experienced higher rents compared to those within a half-mile radius. Another study showed that commercial properties within a quarter-mile radius from the transit station were 12.2% more expensive than residential properties (Debrezion et al., 2007). However, the ways in which real transit investments directly impact property values remain unclear (Giuliano & Agarwal, 2010). Consequently, important questions arise: To what extent do transportation investments instigate commercial gentrification and displacement in environmental justice communities? How does rail transit construction affect business revenue during the construction phase? What are the impacts on ethnic small businesses once the transit line becomes operational?

LA Metro's Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) Policy

Metro launched a pilot Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) program in 2015 and formalized its TOC Policy in 2018 to recalibrate TOD within an equity framework: “TOCs promote equity and sustainable living by offering a mix of uses close to transit to support households at all income levels, as well as building densities, parking policies, urban design elements, and first/last mile facilities that support ridership and reduce auto dependency” (*Transit Oriented Communities*, n.d.). Metro finds itself in the unique role of putting transportation dollars toward housing through the Joint Development Program, its real estate arm. Thirty-five percent of new housing units built on Metro-owned property must be affordable units, reserved for households earning 60% or below of the area median income (AMI) (*Metro Joint Development Program*, n.d.). While the TOC Implementation Plan aims to integrate equitable planning into all Measure M funded projects, including the East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Transit Project, its strategies for business stabilization and commercial

anti-displacement are inchoate and ambiguous (Carvajal et al., 2020). It is unclear how Metro's TOC policy will apply to ethnic community businesses in Pacoima.

Practices to stabilize small businesses at risk of displacement

Given the displacement risks that businesses face, small businesses and community organizations across the United States have advocated for and secured a range of business stabilization strategies. These range from commercial rent regulation assistance to set-asides of affordable commercial space for locally-owned small businesses to commercial community land trusts (Cassola, 2018; PolicyLink, n.d.). For example, the City of Seattle General Fund and Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) supported the establishment of the small business stabilization fund to help businesses facing displacement risk (City of Seattle Office of Economic Development, n.d.).

Commercial community land trusts (CLTs) as anti-displacement

Impacted businesses and community-based organizations have also pushed for community ownership of commercial spaces through commercial community land trusts (CLTs). Commercial CLTs in Albuquerque and New Orleans offer successful models for community land ownership (Policylink, n.d). Established in 1994, the Sawmill CLT in Albuquerque is a mixed-use model that contains both commercial and residential developments. The Sawmill CLT was achieved through a community-driven planning process to redevelop a neighborhood between Old Town and downtown Albuquerque (*Sawmill | Community Land Trust*, n.d.). Underinvestment in the neighborhood and pollution burden from industrial facilities prompted the establishment of the Sawmill CLT. Similarly, in New Orleans, the Crescent City CLT (CCCLT) incorporated commercial spaces in its CLT model (*Affordable Solutions*, n.d.). The CCCLT emerged after Hurricane Katrina, and commercial spaces owned by the CCCLT help nonprofits and small businesses in Crescent City stay without the risk of being priced out (Sorce, 2012).

Cultural preservation as community asset-building and anti-displacement

Establishing a commercial corridor for cultural preservation is one of the many approaches to commercial anti-displacement and community asset-building. As the nucleus of Latinx cultural and economic activity and political activism, the Calle 24 Latino Cultural District in San Francisco's Mission District provides a model for how businesses, community groups, and city agencies can unite to protect and preserve small businesses facing displacement pressures. The 24th Street commercial corridor is home to hundreds of community ethnic businesses. This corridor has been a beacon of the muralist movement since the 1930s and depicts the lives, livelihoods, history, and activist struggles of the Latinx community. The corridor, situated in close proximity to a Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) station, has also undergone gentrification since the mid-1990s.

Through a collaboration between community leaders, merchants, the District Supervisor, and two preservation organizations, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted unanimously in

favor of a resolution to adopt the Calle 24 Latino Cultural District (Calle 24 LCD) in 2014 (Strategic Economics, 2016). The resolution legitimized the importance of stabilizing businesses that face rising rents and other economic pressures by giving Calle 24 LCD the opportunity to work collaboratively with the San Francisco Planning Department. This led to the creation of a special use district, a zoning modification designed to preserve cultural and commercial assets in the community (Calle 24 Latino Cultural District, n.d.). A formal organization that supports small businesses can foster a community space that brings together advocacy efforts to gain more equitable access to capital and technical support resources for small businesses (Strategic Economics, 2016). Today, the Calle 24 LCD operates as a nonprofit organization with a mission to “preserve, enhance, and advocate for Latino cultural continuity, vitality, and community in San Francisco’s touchstone Latino Cultural District and the greater Mission neighborhood” (*Mission and Vision*, n.d.).

The collaboration of small business owners and the artist community in San Francisco produced a strategy that uplifts Latinx businesses, caters to the needs of the surrounding community, and contributes to the cultural vibrancy and diversity of the city. Moreover, this consolidated partnership provides stakeholders of the 24th Street corridor a powerful seat at the decision-making table, especially as it relates to the future development of the corridor.

Literature Review Conclusion

Promising residential anti-displacement strategies that may also support commercial anti-displacement movements include commercial rent control ordinances (Diamond et al., 2018), tax abatements or contract requirements with landlords with the provision that they not raise rents (Phillips, 2020), and tenant protections via right to counsel during eviction proceedings (A. Loukaitou-Sideris, personal communication, April 22, 2021; New York City Office of Civil Justice, 2020). Overall, the literature on commercial anti-displacement remains in its infancy. A comprehensive assessment methodology to determine the efficacy of proposed commercial anti-displacement strategies is lacking. Acknowledging this gap, our research conducts case studies of similar TOD communities to understand the strategies implemented in each case.

Research Questions

Our research seeks to understand how communities can respond to displacement pressures from light rail transit projects to help inform Pacoima Beautiful's organizing efforts. Further, our research analyzes the existing business conditions on Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima to gauge potential commercial displacement risks, as well as business owners' perspectives on the proposed light rail project. Given these interests, our research addresses the following questions:

1. How can community groups respond to commercial displacement pressures from rail transit expansion and ensure thriving community businesses?
2. What are the concerns, experiences, and priorities of Pacoima businesses that will be affected by rail-related displacement pressures?

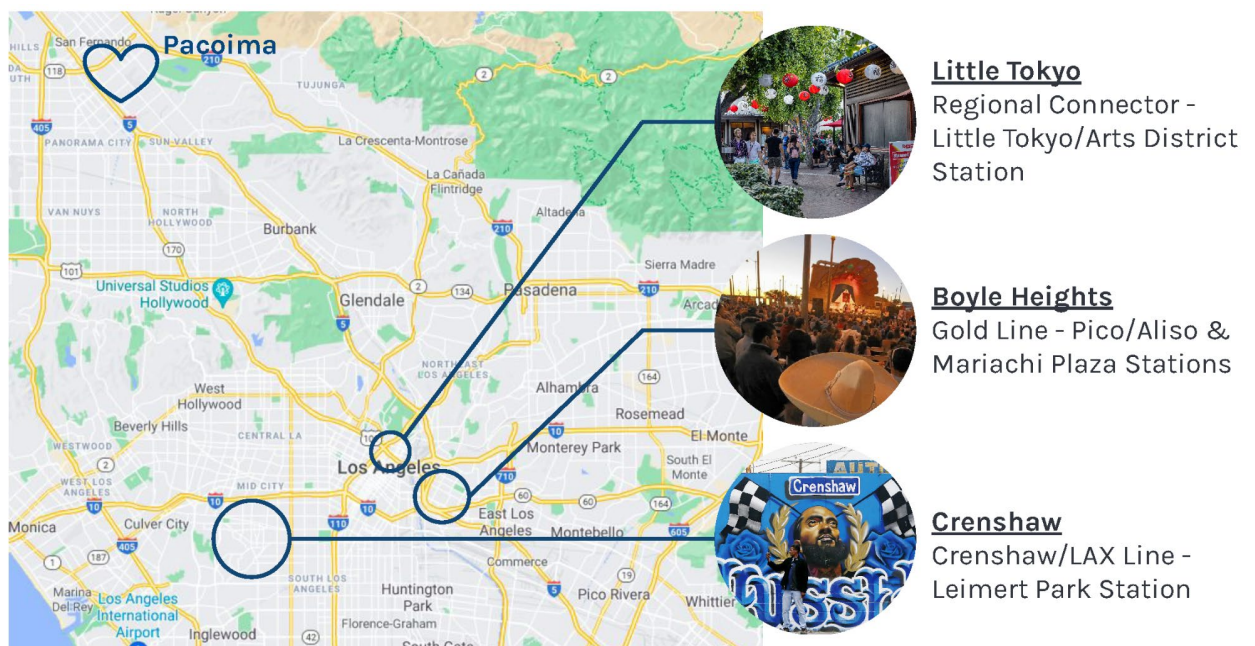
Research Approach and Methodology

Our research methodology pursues two main avenues: (1) case studies of transit-oriented neighborhoods in Los Angeles through the lens of community-based organizations involved in anti-displacement advocacy; and (2) a survey of Pacoima small business owners and managers along Van Nuys Boulevard to assess their needs and perspectives on the proposed transit investment.

Case Studies

The purpose of the case studies is to understand other communities' responses to transit-related commercial displacement pressures. Following a review of media reports and academic literature related to commercial anti-displacement, we prioritized three Los Angeles communities with major light rail investments, robust community responses, thriving business communities, and household income and non-white population profiles similar to Pacoima's. These communities are Little Tokyo in Downtown Los Angeles, Crenshaw in South Los Angeles, and Boyle Heights in East Los Angeles.

Figure 2. Map of Case Study Communities



For these case studies, we interviewed three community-based organizations involved in community-led responses to the light rail project in their respective neighborhoods, an organization focused on small business financing and advocacy across the region, and LA Metro, the local transit agency. These organizations are listed in **Table 2** below. For each

organization, we interviewed a staff member with direct experience advocating for, developing, or implementing commercial displacement avoidance strategies.

Table 2. Summary of Interviewees

ORGANIZATION	RELATIONSHIP TO PROJECT
Little Tokyo Service Center	LA Metro Regional Connector - Little Tokyo/Arts District Station
Destination Crenshaw	LA Metro Crenshaw/LAX line - Leimert Park Station
Community Power Collective	LA Metro Gold Line - Pico/Aliso and Mariachi Plaza Stations
Inclusive Action for the City	Small business financing and advocacy work
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority	Agency implementing light rail projects in three case study communities

The interviews covered a series of questions about (1) organizing strategies and challenges, (2) business needs and support services, (3) adequacy of Metro’s support programs, and (4) displacement avoidance strategies. We conducted all interviews via Zoom, and each lasted approximately an hour. Interview questions are in Appendix A. An overview of the interviewee organizations follows.

Little Tokyo Service Center

Founded in 1979, Little Tokyo Service Center (LTSC) provides social welfare and community development services in Downtown Los Angeles and Los Angeles at large (*Home*, n.d.). LTSC’s work focuses on community revitalization and cultural preservation in Little Tokyo. To ensure that transit investment supports communities, LTSC has advocated for benefits for neighborhood residents and preservation of the history and culture of the area, particularly in relation to the development of Metro’s Regional Connector that passes through Little Tokyo (Ray, 2015).

Destination Crenshaw

Destination Crenshaw is a community-inspired project that evolved in response to Metro’s construction plans for the Crenshaw/LAX light rail line. This project leverages Crenshaw Boulevard and a 1.3-mile-long outdoor art and cultural experience to honor and celebrate Black Los Angeles. Destination Crenshaw also helps small businesses thrive and survive the construction period (Destination Crenshaw, personal communication, May 5, 2021).

Community Power Collective (formerly part of the East Los Angeles Community Corporation)

Founded in 2020, Community Power Collective works to build power with low-income tenants and pushes for transformative changes, including community control of land and housing and economic justice in Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, and Los Angeles as a whole (“About Us,” n.d.). The organization was formerly the organizing arm for the East Los Angeles Community Corporation, an organization that led many of the community’s responses to Metro’s investments in Boyle Heights (Community Power Collective, personal communication, April 30, 2021). Since becoming its own organization, Community Power Collective focuses on “development from the root” - in other words, development without displacement.

Inclusive Action for the City

Founded in 2008, Inclusive Action for the City works to uplift low-income urban communities through policy, research, and economic development (*Who We Are*, n.d.). From supporting the LA Street Vendor Campaign (LASVC) to supporting small businesses in gentrifying neighborhoods, Inclusive Action works to strengthen local economies and increase opportunities for small businesses.

Metro

Metro plans, designs, builds, and operates transit projects across Los Angeles County (*About Metro*, n.d.). This agency developed and constructed the light rail projects in Little Tokyo, Crenshaw, and Boyle Heights.

Small Business Survey

The purpose of the small business survey is to understand the concerns, priorities, and attitudes of the Pacoima business community about the East San Fernando Valley light rail. Given that Van Nuys Boulevard represents a major commercial corridor in Pacoima and that part of the Metro line will run along this street, we focused our survey on businesses located on Van Nuys Boulevard between San Fernando Road and Laurel Canyon Boulevard.

We based our survey questions on a combination of initial findings from our literature review and Pacoima Beautiful’s interests. Our survey questions consisted of four sections: (1) existing business conditions (including rent changes, lease type, and primary mode of transportation for customers), (2) perceived light rail impacts, (3) overall priorities, and (4) COVID-19 impacts and public funding opportunities.

To comply with the university’s COVID-19 restrictions on in-person field work, we distributed the majority of surveys remotely. Remote survey respondents responded either online (via Google Forms) or over the phone with researchers. Due to concerns about respondents’ likelihood to access a digital survey, we conducted a wide range of outreach methods to recruit participants for the survey. We distributed flyers, hung posters, engaged local community partners, and called businesses directly. We also offered a \$25 gift card to the first 50 respondents to the

survey. During our final outreach campaign, we increased this incentive to \$25 for every business referred. Finally, we partnered with a community member to distribute in-person surveys.

On April 17th, 2021, members of the research team began outreach by distributing a bilingual informational flyer (Appendix H) to 112 small businesses on Van Nuys Boulevard between San Fernando Road and Laurel Canyon Boulevard. To avoid person-to-person contact in compliance with UCLA COVID-19 policies, we taped flyers to the doors of businesses or slipped them under business doors. We also posted several on light poles throughout the Van Nuys corridor. The flyers invited business owners and managers to participate in the survey and included the survey link, purpose, and initial deadline of April 30th, 2021 (later extended to May 17, 2021 to accommodate a final outreach push).

In addition to flyer distribution, the team worked with Neighborhood Legal Services, a community organization located in our area of interest, and our client, Pacoima Beautiful, to assist in outreach to businesses. Both organizations agreed to post a recruitment poster (Appendix I) in their front windows on Van Nuys Boulevard and made phone calls to known businesses to invite them to participate in the survey. Neighborhood Legal Services also shared the survey information with their small business group and a local priest at the Mary Immaculate Catholic Church. Pacoima Beautiful shared the flyer digitally on their social media channels.

Between April 24th to May 16th, the research team, Neighborhood Legal Services, and Pacoima Beautiful followed up with small businesses over phone, text, email, and social media. We made calls on different days of the week and at different times of the day to accommodate small businesses' limited availability. If business owners were busy during the time of an outreach call, the team scheduled another time for follow-up.

As a final outreach push, a community member went door-to-door to businesses along the corridor to hand out paper surveys in a socially distant manner. This outreach took place on May 15 and May 16.

Findings

Case Studies

Case Study Communities

The case studies focus on community responses to light rail construction in three Los Angeles communities: Little Tokyo, Crenshaw, and Boyle Heights. This section begins with an overview of these three communities, the associated Metro light rail projects, and support services secured for businesses. The section concludes with a discussion of our findings, which **Table 3** below summarizes.

Table 3. Summary of Case Study Communities and Findings

COMMUNITY (LOCATION)	TRANSIT LINE (STATION)	CONSTRUCTION COMPLETION	METRO-LED OR FUNDED SERVICES	COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAMS
Little Tokyo (Downtown LA)	Regional Connector (Little Tokyo/Arts District Station)	Expected 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Interruption Fund - LTSC Business Counselor - Go Little Tokyo marketing campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct technical assistance - Community owned real estate
Crenshaw (South LA)	Crenshaw/LAX Transit Project (Leimert Park Station)	Expected 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Interruption Fund - Business Solution Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TEC Leimert social media trainings - Door-to-door technical assistance
Boyle Heights (East LA)	Gold Line (Pico/Aliso & Mariachi Plaza Stations)	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved engagement process for joint development of Mariachi Plaza Station 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training workshops - One-on-one assistance - Metro 101 trainings

1. Little Tokyo (Downtown Los Angeles)

The Japanese American business community in Little Tokyo dates back to the late 19th century (*Little Tokyo Historic District*, n.d.). For decades, this community has continued to grow, building a legacy of thriving businesses. With this rich history and with the introduction of many development pressures, the community also has a long legacy of organizing around issues of residential and commercial gentrification and cultural preservation (Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021).

In recent years, LA Metro has been planning a light rail station, known as Little Tokyo/Arts District station, in the heart of the community as part of the Regional Connector — a line that will connect Little Tokyo to the Financial District of Downtown Los Angeles, while also improving existing transit connections between Santa Monica and the San Gabriel Valley (*Regional Connector Transit Project*, n.d.). This station is planned to open in 2022. Since the inception of this line, community organizations such as Little Tokyo Service Center have been organizing for community-informed improvements and to help businesses remain in place.

As a result of this advocacy, community groups in the neighborhood have secured several forms of business support from Metro. First, organizers negotiated funding for small businesses impacted by light rail construction through Metro's Pilot Business Interruption Fund (Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Second, to support businesses with needed technical assistance, community groups secured funding to host a Business Counselor at the Little Tokyo Service Center. This support includes a Metro-provided office space. In addition, the community secured Metro funding to provide marketing for the community and its businesses through the Go Little Tokyo program. These services were the result of organizing among the community organizations and businesses in the Little Tokyo area.

2. Crenshaw (South Los Angeles)

Crenshaw Boulevard has served as a center for Black businesses since the 1950s and 1960s. Following the end of redlining and racist covenants in the late 1940s, Black Angelenos moved into the Crenshaw area and the Leimert Park neighborhood (Meares, 2019). By the 1960s, Black businesses were flourishing, and the adjacent Leimert Park green became a central location for community events. With this long history of Black businesses, Crenshaw Boulevard has been referred to as the “main street of [Black] LA,” and local organizations have called Leimert Park the center of Black culture in LA (*About the Crenshaw Subway Coalition*, n.d.; Meares, 2019).

Not surprisingly, the introduction of the Crenshaw/LAX light rail line, which will run along Crenshaw Boulevard to connect Metro's existing infrastructure with LAX International Airport, has raised concerns about gentrification and displacement among residents and business owners in the Crenshaw community (*Crenshaw/LAX Transit Project*, n.d.). The line has been under construction since 2014, and Metro plans for it to open in 2021. Since its inception, community groups have voiced concerns about the impacts that this transit investment will have on the Black-owned businesses in the area and for the overall community (About the Crenshaw

Subway Coalition, n.d.). As a result, groups such as Crenshaw Subway Coalition have organized around the transit project since its early beginnings to advocate for business support programs, as well as infrastructure changes such as a station at Leimert Park — which they won — and an underground alignment — which they did not. Organizing strategies included coalescing business owner interests through organizing meetings, submitting comments to the Metro Board, recruiting large groups to attend Metro Board hearings, and working with the local councilmember (*Motion to Study Crenshaw Blvd Subway Approved*, 2009).

In terms of business support programs, both community organizations and Metro have provided assistance to local businesses. First, Metro's Business Interruption Fund is also operating in the Crenshaw area (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, personal communication, May 18, 2021). In addition, Metro launched a technical assistance program and office space in 2014 called the Business Solution Center. This pilot program provides one-on-one support and workshops for businesses along the entire affected corridor. We could not determine the origin of these two programs in Crenshaw. In addition, community organizations such as Destination Crenshaw have been leading their own business support programs. For example, Destination Crenshaw has been partnering with TEC Leimert to provide social media assistance to local businesses (Destination Crenshaw, personal communication, May 05, 2021). Destination Crenshaw also goes door-to-door to provide businesses with specialized support in other areas such as financial services. This combination of Metro-led and community-led programs has been serving local businesses since the early stages of construction.

3. Boyle Heights (East Los Angeles)

Boyle Heights is a majority Latinx neighborhood located in East Los Angeles (LA Times Data Desk, n.d.). Within this neighborhood, the intersection of East First Street and Boyle Avenue has long been a hub of community activity. Small businesses, street vendors, mariachis, and rasquache (a term that has been reclaimed as a cultural intervention of the built environment resulting from disinvestment, i.e. “a parked car [becoming] a place of business”) are some of what has made this place a landmark in Boyle Heights (Rojas, 2015). Metro has also long recognized this site as a potential transit node, unsuccessfully eyeing it for a Red Line station during the 1990s, and ultimately completing construction for the Mariachi Plaza Gold Line station there in 2009.

Though the Mariachi Plaza station construction took place about a decade earlier than our other two case studies, and though Metro provided local businesses with fewer support programs during that time, the Boyle Heights community has still been able to organize and secure several wins in recent years. Since at least 2014, Metro has been negotiating a joint development project on the Mariachi Plaza site (Sulaiman, 2014a). Originally, the agency pursued limited public engagement for the project and favored big developers and chain store tenants (Sulaiman, 2014b). This project and Metro's approach raised concerns for the community, especially the surrounding small businesses and the mariachis who use the site to acquire work. Mariachis in particular were concerned that the site's redevelopment would prevent them from using the site altogether. In response, the community rallied around securing a community vision for the proposed development at Mariachi Plaza (Sulaiman, 2014b).

Ultimately, organizing led by groups such as the East Los Angeles Community Corporation (ELACC) successfully pushed Metro to provide a more robust community engagement process for this proposed development, as well as a community-informed Request for Proposal process to select a developer (Community Power Collective, personal communication, April 30, 2021).

Interview Findings

Through our five interviews, we identified the following key findings:

1. **Business Organizing Strategies:** A business association and key representatives from the business community help unite businesses;
2. **Business Needs and Support Services:** Business owners require a range of support, which requires partnerships between community organizations and with Metro;
3. **Adequacy of Metro's support programs:** Metro's programs can provide more support to businesses earlier; and
4. **Displacement Avoidance Strategies:** Community ownership of land can stabilize businesses.

1. **Business Organizing Strategies:** A business association and key representatives from the business community help unite businesses.

Organizing business owners presents unique challenges. First, planning meetings are often infeasible for business owners. To attend an organizing meeting, owners often have to shut down their stores (Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021; Community Power Collective, personal communication, April 30, 2021). Because not all owners can afford to close their businesses to join a meeting, ensuring robust business owner participation in planning and organizing meetings is difficult. As a result, organizers often have to meet businesses where they are through door-to-door outreach or individualized phone calls (Destination Crenshaw, personal communication, May 05, 2021). This form of outreach requires more capacity than a series of planning meetings, but our interviewees also noted its effectiveness.

Given the challenges in organizing businesses, advocates stressed the importance of a small business association. Consolidating businesses into an association can improve communication among businesses. For example, in Boyle Heights, ELACC supported the establishment of a street business association. This association eased communication among business owners as well as with Metro (Community Power Collective, personal communication, April 30, 2021). In addition, a business association helps small businesses gain recognition and visibility from public agencies and other officials, which can help with the negotiation process.

Further, community organizations emphasized the benefits of a strong set of representatives from the business community to provide a unified voice for the business community. Advocates noted that elected officials and legislators are often interested in listening to business owners.

For instance, during the community planning process in Little Tokyo, elected officials shared with community organizers that they wanted to make sure the business community was heard (Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021). This finding suggests the benefits of identifying key business representatives to advocate for the business community.

2. Business Needs and Support Services: Business owners require a range of support, which requires partnerships between community organizations and with Metro.

Across the case study communities, business owners required a wide range of specialized assistance through a variety of partnerships. **Table 4** summarizes the technical assistance programs that Metro and CBOs have provided. Common forms of technical assistance include social media and Yelp.com trainings, grant application support, website development, online delivery support, digital payment services, and business operations best practices more generally (Destination Crenshaw, personal communication, May 05, 2021; Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Interviewees noted that one-on-one advising was often the most effective way to accommodate the specificity of each business' needs and each owner's complex schedules; however, some organizations had success with wider workshops (Destination Crenshaw, personal communication, May 05, 2021; Community Power Collective, personal communication, April 30, 2021). Given the range of services needed, community organizations often partnered with specialized service providers and with Metro to increase capacity.

In Little Tokyo, the Little Tokyo Service Center secured funding from Metro to hire a business counselor to provide specialized technical assistance to businesses (Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021). This counselor provides one-on-one assistance to long-term Little Tokyo businesses, many of whom have been in business for several decades, as well as businesses across Los Angeles County ("Small Business Assistance," n.d.). This assistance ranges from providing social media tutorials to sharing COVID-19 resources, and in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, counselors helped some businesses adapt to provide online delivery for the first time (Kwan Peterson, 2020). A key component of this technical assistance is a Metro-funded, local office in the area for providing these business support services (Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021). This brick-and-mortar space enhances the counselor's presence in the area and provides an additional place for community events.

In Crenshaw, Metro launched a similar technical assistance program called the Business Solution Center, which began in 2014. Metro hired a team of three local organizations, two of which are located in South Los Angeles, to run the center, which provides a wide range of services from support with online forums such as Facebook, Yelp.com, and the City of LA Business Portal, to support applying for loans and Metro's Business Interruption Fund grant program (*Success Stories*, n.d.). The Center serves all small businesses on the corridor. The Business Solution Center model will be implemented for all Measure M-funded projects, including the East San Fernando Valley light rail line (Spearman & Baldwin, 2019).

Community organizations, such as Destination Crenshaw, are supplementing this support in the Crenshaw area. Destination Crenshaw connects small businesses to specialized technical assistance through their partner organizations (Destination Crenshaw, personal communication, May 05, 2021). This technical assistance includes helping businesses set up computer programs such as Microsoft Suite, payroll systems such as ADP, and social media profiles.

Finally, in Boyle Heights, a local community organization planned a series of educational workshops focused on topics such as updates on the local economy, tips on how to run a small business, and information on how to develop a co-op, while also collecting feedback on what businesses want to see in the community (Community Power Collective, personal communication, April 30, 2021). Similar to the other communities, this organization also provided one-on-one assistance to businesses through door-to-door outreach.

Table 4. Summary of Business Support Programs through Metro and CBOs

ASSISTANCE PROGRAM	ASSISTANCE TYPE	ADMINISTRATOR / FUNDER	DESCRIPTION
Metro Crenshaw/LAX Transit Line Business Solution Center	Technical Assistance	Metro / Metro	Resource center with one-one-one technical assistance (for all Measure M-funded projects)
Little Tokyo Service Center Business Counselor	Technical Assistance	Little Tokyo Service Center / Metro	In-house counselor at Little Tokyo Service Center that provides one-one-one technical assistance
TEC Leimert	Social Media Technical Assistance	TEC Leimert / Destination Crenshaw (partial)	Destination Crenshaw partner trains youth to provide social media trainings to businesses
Educational Workshops	Technical Assistance	ELACC / ELACC	A series of educational workshops focused on tips for running a small business, entrepreneurship, & co-ops

In addition to technical assistance, community advocates emphasized the importance of pairing these services with dedicated funding to support businesses during construction disruptions (Community Power Collective, personal communication, April 30, 2021; Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021). This is not surprising given that many businesses utilized technical assistance services to apply for financial resources (Destination Crenshaw, personal communication, May 05, 2021; Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

One major funding source is the Metro Business Interruption Fund. Due to advocacy from the Little Tokyo community, Metro developed this pilot grant program to provide direct grant assistance to businesses experiencing negative impacts from light rail construction (Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021). In its current iteration, the program requires eligible businesses to have fewer than 25 employees, be located “immediately adjacent” to the transit line construction, be able to demonstrate that the rail construction has negatively impacted revenues, and meet several criteria for business health ([Business Interruption Fund, n.d.](#)). Eligible businesses can request a maximum of \$50,000 or 60% of annual revenue losses, and according to our interviewee, Metro does not deny funding to eligible applicants, but simply determines them to be ineligible if they do not meet the stated requirements (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

The Metro Board currently allocates \$10 million annually to the Business Interruption Fund, which now serves the Little Tokyo and Crenshaw communities, as well as the areas surrounding the Purple Line. Because this is a pilot program, the Metro Board has not yet extended the fund to new transit projects such as the East San Fernando Valley line (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

3. Adequacy of Metro’s support programs: Metro’s programs can provide more support to businesses earlier.

Advocates stressed that Metro could improve its existing programs to better support businesses. First, advocates emphasized that funding from the Business Interruption Fund was insufficient to make up for lost business revenues due to construction (Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Importantly, Metro has not reached its \$10 million yearly allowance in any year of the grant program (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, personal communication, May 18, 2021). This finding suggests that Metro could have the means to increase its award maximum and better address business needs.

In addition, interviewees stressed that the Business Interruption Fund’s funding eligibility requirements are too narrow, especially the requirement that eligible businesses be located adjacent to construction (Little Tokyo Service Center, personal communication, April 28, 2021). Many businesses outside of these adjacent areas would benefit from additional financial support during construction.

In addition, advocates stressed that the community is often the last to know about Metro’s light rail construction projects (Destination Crenshaw, personal communication, May 05, 2021). This lack of information can cause confusion among business owners and residents alike. Historically, Metro has not started outreach for its Business Solution Center until after construction has started. In Crenshaw, this delay was due to the fact that the Metro Board approved the Center for this line after construction crews broke ground (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, personal communication, May 18, 2021). Further, though Metro extended the Business Solution Center model for all Measure M-funded projects in 2019,

and though site acquisition and utility relocation for the East San Fernando Valley light rail line could begin as soon as this year, Metro has not yet started outreach for the Business Solution Center in the valley (Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, personal communication, May 18, 2021). The Business Solution Center model of one-on-one technical assistance and outreach provides a well-suited vehicle for sharing information about construction timelines and impacts, and thus, there is an opportunity for Business Solution Center outreach to precede construction.

4. Displacement Avoidance Strategies: Community ownership of land can stabilize businesses.

During our interviews, we heard about one example of the community ownership of commercial property for stabilizing businesses. Community-Owned Real Estate (CORE), a partnership of Inclusive Action, East Los Angeles Community Corporation, Little Tokyo Service Center, and the group's lender Genesis LA, is leading this work with five Los Angeles buildings in gentrifying areas. This strategy aims to prevent displacement, slow gentrification, and bring tenants into the ownership model over the long-run (Inclusive Action for the City, personal communication, May 18, 2021).

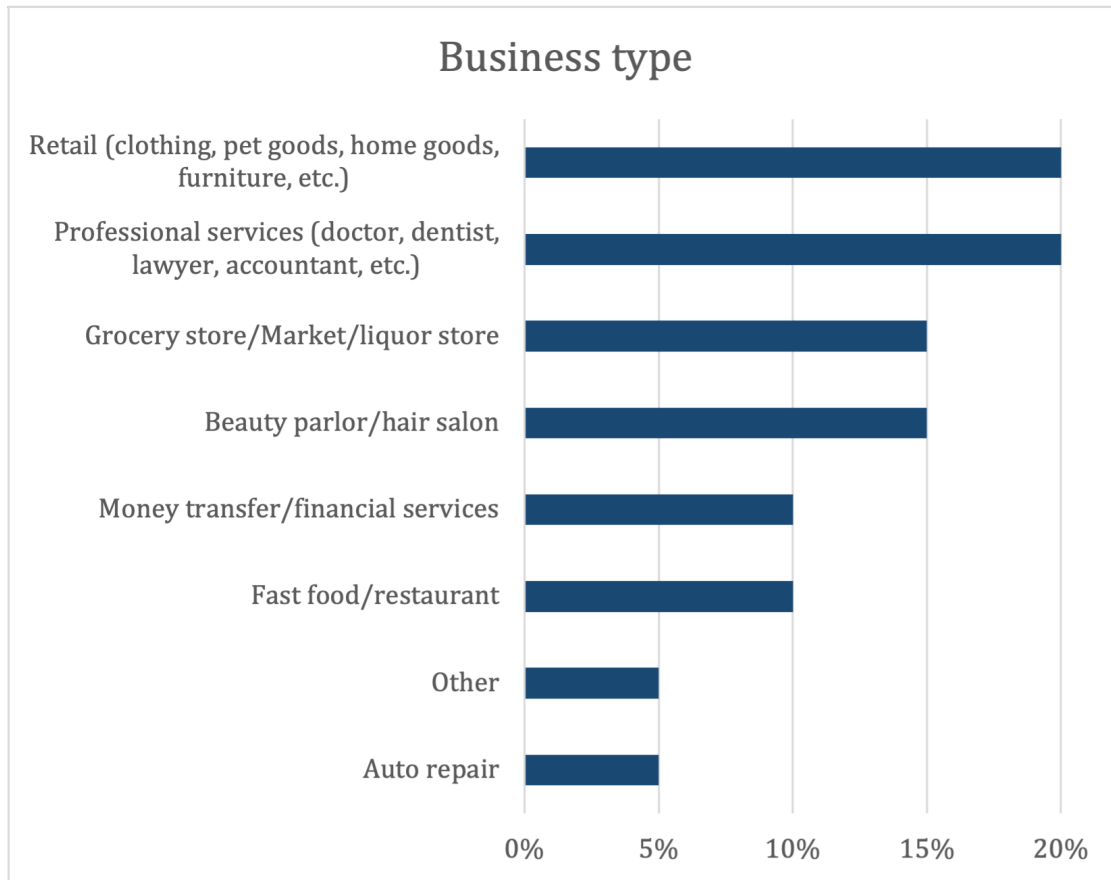
One of the major challenges of this model is its heavy reliance on capital and investors. At the project outset, the partners had to secure enough funding to buy the properties at market value (Inclusive Action for the City, personal communication, May 18, 2021). In addition to securing this substantial down payment, they also needed to demonstrate that they could collect enough monthly rental income to meet their financial obligations. This meant that they had to ensure that existing and prospective tenants could reliably pay rent. Further, once the partnership purchased the five buildings, they then took on the role of "landlord," meaning that they needed to address tenant disputes, maintenance, and rent payments. These skills can be challenging and time-intensive.

Despite these challenges, this model has shown proficiency in stabilizing businesses. Owning the building allows these mission-driven organizations to provide tenants with payment flexibility, especially during difficult times (Inclusive Action for the City, personal communication, May 18, 2021). During the COVID-19 pandemic, the partners worked with their tenants to meet their investors' requirements while also providing for more flexibility. This included helping tenants identify grant funding opportunities. As a result, throughout the pandemic, no businesses have needed to move out of a CORE-owned building due to an inability to meet rent payments.

Small Business Survey

Our survey received 20 responses from small businesses located on Van Nuys Boulevard from San Fernando Valley Road to Laurel Canyon Road during a period from April 17th to May 17th. The majority of responses were in Spanish — 60% in Spanish and 40% in English. This pool of respondents reflected the diversity of businesses in Pacoima, summarized in **Figure 3**.

Figure 3. Business types reflected in respondent small businesses



Small Business Survey Findings

1. Conducting outreach to and recruiting Pacoima small businesses to participate in the study was a challenging and time-intensive process.

Despite distributing over 110 bilingual flyers to small businesses along the corridor, mobilizing local partners with existing community relationships, translating flyers and the survey into Spanish and English, and multiple follow-ups with businesses via phone, text, email, and social media, we were only able to turn this outreach into 20 responses — a response rate of just 18%. We attribute this challenge to multiple factors.

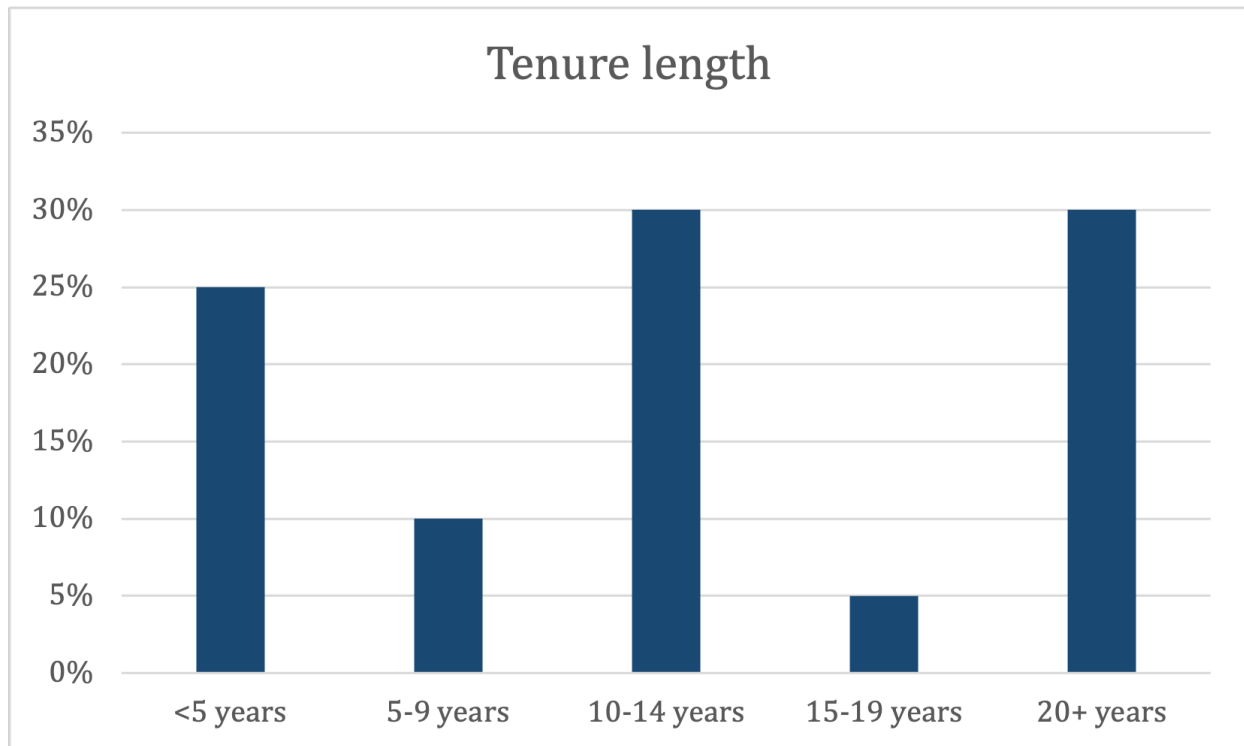
First, many small businesses operate with few employees, or just a single employee. Time spent over the phone to complete a survey competes with business capacity and the opportunity to make a sale. Second, encouraging business owners to complete the digital survey on their own often proved to be unfruitful. Even when business owners expressed interest over the phone, they often did not complete the survey later. In addition, despite the research team’s outreach initiatives, attempted transparency, and partnership with local organizations with an established presence, many business owners were still reluctant to complete a survey. We believe that this reluctance was due to a lack of familiarity and established trust with the survey team. Third, the logistics of conducting an online survey may present accessibility challenges for some business owners because not everyone is

accustomed to or comfortable with the technology needed to complete an online survey. The same diversity that enriches the business community in Pacoima requires deeper understanding of each member of the community and unique engagement strategies to prompt and secure participation. For this reason, we believe that establishing trusting relationships and building alliances with small-business owners is key to future organizing and advocacy efforts.

2. Most respondent small businesses are long-term features of the Pacoima community and rent their building space.

As shown in **Figure 4**, the majority of respondents (65%) reported being in operation at their current address for over a decade. The average age of respondent businesses is 14.8 years. This longevity points to the long-term function that these businesses have played in the Pacoima community. Despite the length in establishment and the strong sense of community in Pacoima, only one of the survey respondents reported being part of a business association or group. This finding suggests that the Pacoima business community may benefit from organizing given that our case studies found that business associations were key in supporting advocacy efforts and providing access to information and services to small businesses.

Figure 4. Tenure length of Pacoima small business respondents



Additionally, 95% of respondents rent their commercial space in the corridor, and 80% of them reported having a written lease agreement. As presented by the literature review, renters face greater vulnerabilities in the face of investment, and the surveys reflected the concerns of the business owners in regards to displacement and the potential for being priced out of the neighborhood. One respondents reported owing several months in rent and being pressured by the property owner to vacate. These findings point to the importance of rent-control and eviction protections for commercial tenants given that the rail line extension could exacerbate the financial impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. Almost all respondents were deeply and negatively affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

An overwhelming share of respondents (75%) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on their businesses. The same number of respondents (75%) reported that they had to close at some point during the pandemic to comply with public health guidelines, averaging 4.5 months among the 15 businesses that did close. Respondents also reported an average reduction in staff of 2.4 employees. Though the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was not the focus of our research, and though these reports only capture a small view of the impacts Pacoima small businesses experienced during this period, these results demonstrate the vulnerability of businesses prior to the construction of the East San Fernando Valley line.

Table 5. Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on small businesses

“Overall, how has your business been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?”	
Large positive	0%
Moderate positive	10%
Little/no impact	15%
Moderate negative	25%
Large negative	50%
CLOSED DURING COVID-19	
Yes	75%
No	25%
Average time closed (months)	4.5
STAFF SIZE	
Average number of employees (pre-pandemic)	4.5
Average number of employees (post-pandemic)	2.4
Average change in staff size	-2.4

4. The majority of respondents have heard about the light rail project in Pacoima, but are unaware of details regarding its location, timeline, or the legal and financial implications for their businesses.

Of the surveyed businesses, 85% reported having heard about the Metro rail line planned for Pacoima. However, when the survey asked them to explain the details of what they knew, all respondents to this question expressed some degree of confusion or emphasized how little they did know. Comments included, “not much,” “nothing,” “very little info,” and “too much confusion.” Three of the respondents expressed frustration about the lack of information and the project’s limited community engagement process and impact analysis, and expressed a desire for opportunities to provide input on the project. Some respondents mentioned that while they have been aware of the project for years, Metro and other authorities have not informed them of the details or timeline of the project.

5. Respondents largely hold negative or pessimistic opinions about the light rail project and its potential impact on their businesses.

A majority of respondents expressed pessimistic or expressly negative sentiments towards the light rail project’s construction and concerns that this project will trigger the displacement of their business. Of the respondents, 55% expressed a negative opinion of the project. These respondents noted that they felt that this project was not for them:

- “[The light rail is] not for businesses.”
- “I think it will only benefit the owner of the building given that he insists on raising my rent.”
- “It is bad for the small business. There will be more people that will use it, and more cars parked without moving.”

Other respondents believed that the impacts of construction and the operation of the line would create an unpleasant and disruptive environment for them to conduct business, deter customers from patronizing their business, and ultimately be fatal to their business:

- “On the street all businesses will go bankrupt they should do it underground or aerial”
- “I don’t want this project to move forward because it affects everyone economically, and we may lose our homes, the bank may take away the property and we would be a total chaos, misery and desolation. It would be worse than a tsunami. Please analyze first the disaster that you would bring to us. Put the project on pause for 5 to 10 years before it starts.”
- “It will force our businesses to close down. I have seen this in other cities”

- “...there will only be losses and anguish. This would be worse than the Coronavirus pandemic because we did not have work for almost a year and now with this project, it will totally kill our business. Move it somewhere else.”

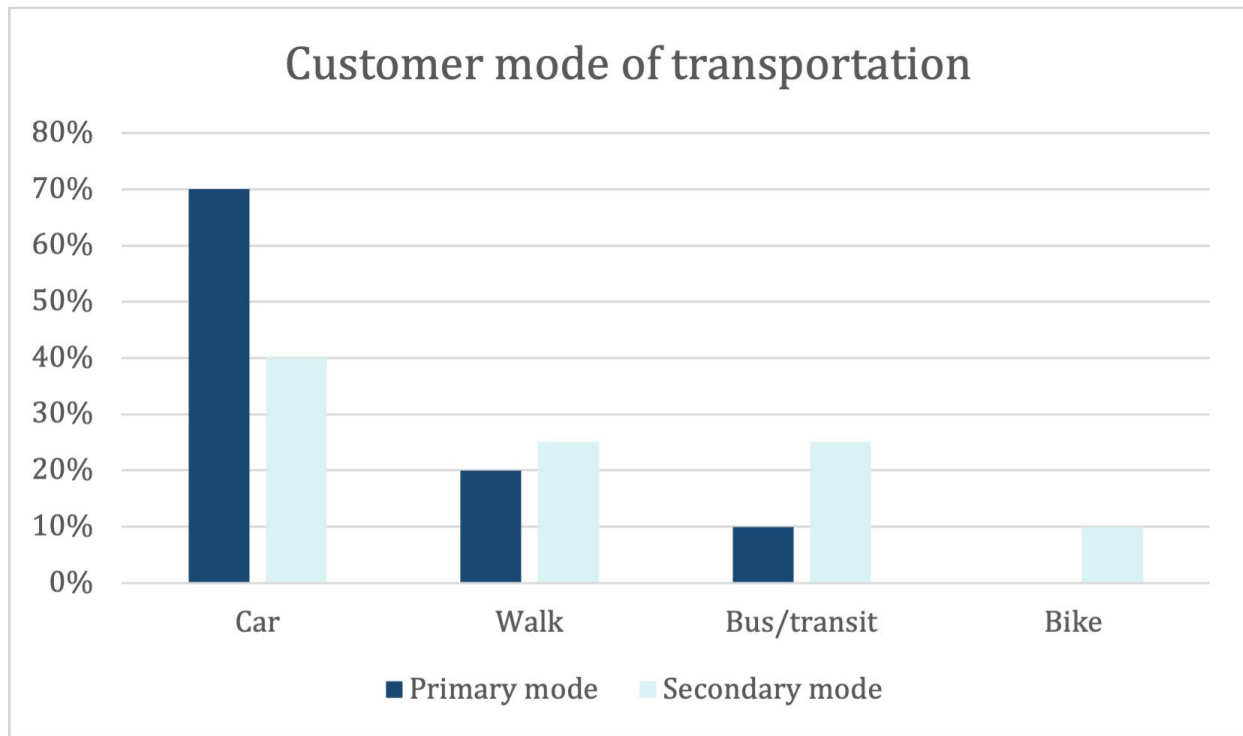
While the majority of respondents reported negative potential impacts or general uncertainty about the potential of the light rail project, some businesses expressed hesitant optimism that the project could benefit their businesses and the community at large:

- “I hope it does benefit my business in some ways. I feel like there should be more information being provided to the business owners on Van Nuys Blvd so we can voice our concerns and expectations to this massive project.”
- “As someone managing a grocery market, the number of people walking by my store will heavily depend on where the metro stops are being established. It is exciting and worrisome at the same time.”
- “I think it is a good idea for reducing car usage and the environment”
- “Maybe yes, because there’s more pedestrian traffic. Better.”

6. Most respondents are concerned about the availability of parking and the potential impact of reduced parking availability on their business.

Of the respondents, 95% identified driving as a mode of transportation their customers used to access their businesses, and 70% reported that it was their customers’ primary mode of transportation to their business. Given this fact, it is unsurprising that most businesses expressed deep concerns about Metro’s proposal to eliminate many parking spaces on Van Nuys Boulevard. One business commented that the elimination of parking would make their business inaccessible to their customers and spell the demise of their livelihood.

Figure 5. Customers of small business respondents' primary and secondary mode of transportation



The only respondent who did not identify the car as a primary mode of transportation for their customers also expressed concern about the elimination of street parking as it relates to the availability of commercial loading space for deliveries. Moreover, this and other respondents expressed concern that the construction of the light rail project would close streets or otherwise make the sidewalks and roads unwelcoming to customers that walk and bike to the business.

7. Respondents are interested in a diversity of technical and financial support services.

Immigrant and ethnic businesses make immense contributions to local economies, yet our survey found that small businesses were operating with low-technology assets, and lacked a network to increase their capital and development capacity. The survey asked participants to select all relevant responses to the question, “are there any resources that you think could help your business respond to the impact of the light rail construction and opening?” We expected the most popular response to this question would involve financial support in the form of rental assistance or space improvements. Beyond expressing a need for just financial support, however, respondents identified a wide range of services that they believed would be most essential for supporting their business’ longevity during the construction and operation of the light rail line. The top five responses were: (1) legal assistance, (2) advertising and marketing services, (3) training opportunities for employees, (4) technology and device training, and (5) rental assistance.

Table 6. Respondents' support service priorities

“Are there any resources that you think could help your business respond to the impact of the light rail construction and opening? Select all that apply.”	
Legal assistance	50%
Advertising services & marketing strategies	45%
Training opportunities for employees/managers	35%
Technology training and devices	30%
Help paying for rent	30%
Other	30%
Social media development	25%
Building/space improvements	25%
Help applying for permits or licenses	20%
Assistance in hiring employees	5%

Those respondents that expanded upon their “other” services selection also identified a desire for a reduction in parking enforcement and fewer parking tickets, training on how to use faster payment methods, support with unhoused people and stealing occurring at businesses, and additional parking facilities. Further, through conversations with two business owners, we learned that some owners lack the financial resources to upgrade their payment methods, or lack familiarity with newer payment technologies, like Square.

The overwhelming interest for legal support services could help small businesses understand their rights during the project period. As mentioned previously, most of the respondents expressed some degree of confusion or limited knowledge about the light rail project set to begin construction later this year.

8. Respondents value public space improvements, especially increased landscaping and greenery

Public infrastructure and space improvements have the potential to improve the overall community environment and attract more engagement from customers. Respondents prioritized (1) enhanced landscaping and greenery, (2) building facade improvements, (3) increased street lighting, and (4) slowing traffic.

Table 7. Respondents' public space improvement priorities

“Have you seen improvements elsewhere that you would like to see near your business? Select all that apply:”	
Trees & greenery	60%
Facade improvements	55%
Better street lighting	40%
Slower car speeds	40%

Public seating areas	35%
Better sidewalks	35%
Better crosswalks	35%
Signage	20%
Other	20%

These priorities echo observations we made while on site for outreach — the streets are largely filled with vibrant community activities, such as street vending and casual conversations, particularly during the lunch hour. Shade, benches, and other public infrastructure that uplift and physically reinforce the existing communal life would then be an incredible asset to businesses and the community at large.

Under “other” improvements, respondents identified increased police patrols, street cleaning services, and bike facilities as improvements they would like to see on or near Van Nuys Boulevard. One respondent noted that they would like to see, “more structures to park bicycles. A lot of people leave and enter [my business] quickly because they may steal their bikes.” Another small business owner suggested to us during outreach that if customers were confident their bikes remained safe while they shopped, they could spend more time browsing consumer products, and benefit both customer and business owner. In-person, we also observed that a significant number of residents ride their bikes around the corridor, despite a lack of bike parking facilities along the corridor.

Recommendations

Based on our literature review, case studies, and small business survey, we identified recommendations that fall into four categories:

1. Further research on defining and measuring success of commercial anti-displacement work
 - a. Conduct comprehensive studies in transit neighborhoods that evaluate the impact of anti-displacement interventions on the vitality of local community businesses
2. Strategies for building community power: business associations and specialized assistance
 - a. Facilitate the creation of an association of small businesses in Pacoima to develop community power
 - b. Provide a wide range of support services to the Pacoima small business community
3. Residential anti-displacement strategies and cultural districts as tools for preserving Pacoima's vibrant commercial community
 - a. Model commercial anti-displacement strategies after existing residential anti-displacement strategies that have demonstrated success
 - b. Establish a Cultural Commercial District in Pacoima
4. Opportunities for Metro to support small businesses earlier and with more funding
 - a. Metro has an opportunity to fulfill its TOC vision by engaging and supporting the Pacoima small business community now, before construction begins.

1. Further research on defining and measuring success of commercial anti-displacement work

1a. Conduct comprehensive studies in transit neighborhoods that evaluate the impact of anti-displacement interventions on the vitality of local community businesses.

Our review of academic and gray literature revealed that scant research has been conducted to document commercial displacement and gentrification, or assess the efficacy of commercial anti-displacement measures. The existing literature largely refrains from defining and measuring success in commercial anti-displacement work, posing a challenge to communities attempting to

learn of or weigh the potential efficacy of different anti-displacement strategies. Therefore, we recommend that future research:

1. Identify indicators that could be used to assess business health and turnover rate in a wide range of communities;
2. Track business health indicators before and after the implementation of anti-displacement strategies to assess the efficacy of various interventions; and
3. Interview businesses physically displaced by site acquisition and assess the extent to which compensation mandated under the federal Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act and the state California Relocation Act provided sufficient financial support.

2. Strategies for building community power: business associations and specialized assistance

2a. Facilitate the creation of an association of small businesses in Pacoima to develop community power.

From our case studies, we learned that organizing into an association provides business owners with a unified platform through which to negotiate with public agencies, as well as a dedicated space for aligning their needs and visions. From our small business survey, we also learned that only one of the participating businesses is part of an association in Pacoima. Therefore, we recommend that Pacoima Beautiful work with other community organizations in the area to help businesses create such an association in Pacoima. Other groups or coalitions that may be able to provide support with or advice on this process include ACT-LA, Healthy LA Coalition, Small Business Alliance for Equitable Communities, Inclusive Action for the City, and Community Power Collective.

2b. Provide a wide range of support services to the Pacoima small business community.

From our case studies, we learned that businesses require a diverse range of technical assistance and support services, and that partnerships with specialty groups are a helpful way to provide this wide array of support. From our small business survey, we also learned that participating Pacoima business owners are most in need of legal services, marketing support, and digital services assistance.

Based on these findings, we recommend providing and advocating for a wide range of technical assistance for Pacoima businesses, with a focus on legal, marketing, and digital services. We recommend that Pacoima Beautiful advocate for these services from Metro's Business Solution Center and partner with specialized business support groups to supplement this technical assistance, as needed. Potential partners include ICON Community Development Corporation, Neighborhood Legal Services, and Inclusive Action for the City.

3. Residential anti-displacement strategies and cultural districts as tools for preserving Pacoima’s vibrant commercial community

3a. Model commercial anti-displacement strategies after existing residential anti-displacement strategies that have demonstrated success.

Our literature review found that residential anti-displacement strategies are both well-documented and frequently found to be successful in mitigating some forms of displacement. Strong evidence supports rent control as a method of tenant stabilization, as displacement is frequently a result of rising rents. In addition, our survey found that a vast majority of small business respondents rent their place of business and some expressed that rental assistance could help them adapt to the upcoming community changes. Given these findings, a commercial rent stabilization ordinance may help ensure the longevity of community businesses in Pacoima.

In addition, many rent stabilization ordinances are paired alongside other tenant protection ordinances, such as “just cause” eviction policies — ordinances that limit the reasons landlords can evict their tenants — and right to counsel policies — which guarantee tenants legal representation during unlawful detainer, or eviction, cases.

In addition to rent stabilization and tenant protection policies, community ownership of land models have been implemented in several communities to increase community control of land, ensure long-term affordability, and mitigate commercial displacement. These models include expanding lease-to-own opportunities for small business owners, exploring shared-equity ownership structures of both land and commercial property, collaborating with or mirroring existing commercial community land trusts (CCLTs), and identifying public land for stewardship by a CCLT or business cooperative.

3b. Establish a Cultural Commercial District in Pacoima.

Pacoima is a predominantly Latinx community with a rich culture and local character. Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima, like San Francisco’s Calle 24 Latino Cultural District, is renowned for its vibrant murals. We recommend that Pacoima Beautiful partner with cultural organizations and business associations to explore the establishment of a cultural commercial district. This proposed district might include policies such as differentiating and separately zoning for local-serving vs. visitor-serving retail, limits on chain retailers, and legacy business grants or policies. A cultural commercial district would be a step towards acknowledging and institutionalizing the role of Pacoima’s unique Latinx culture and small businesses in its community identity.

4. Opportunities for Metro to support small businesses earlier and with more funding

4a. Metro has an opportunity to fulfill its TOC vision by engaging and supporting the Pacoima small business community now, before construction begins.

From our case studies, we learned that Metro's Business Interruption Fund could better support businesses during construction and that outreach for the agency's Business Solution Center could start earlier in the construction process. More specifically, we learned that the Business Interruption Fund is still a pilot and is not yet planned for the East San Fernando Valley project. In addition, we learned that the fund's awards do not provide enough funding to meet business needs and that its geographic limits on grantees are too narrow. We also learned that while the agency would have benefitted from additional outreach time for the Crenshaw Center, Metro has not yet started outreach for the East San Fernando Valley's Business Solution Center. Lastly, from our survey, we learned that participating businesses highly value rent support and technical assistance.

Based on these findings, we recommend that Metro make several changes to the Business Interruption Fund. First, we recommend that Metro make the fund permanent for all light rail projects, including the East San Fernando Valley project. This would demonstrate a long-term commitment to supporting businesses during construction. In addition, we recommend that Metro increase the maximum award amount beyond the current threshold of \$50,000 or 60% of business losses and work with community representatives to determine the appropriate award maximum. This would provide more reliable support for businesses incurring disruptions from construction. Lastly, we recommend that Metro expand the eligibility for this program beyond those businesses located directly adjacent to construction impacts. This would allow more businesses to benefit from this program and help the agency meet its annual funding allocation for this program.

Further, we recommend that Metro launch the Business Solution Center for the East San Fernando Valley as soon as possible and begin outreach to businesses now before construction begins later this year or early next. Doing so would allow the agency to educate owners about the project and its potential impacts before they are felt and to begin providing services to prepare businesses for construction interruptions.

Lastly, for more information about these programs, we recommend that Pacoima Beautiful and other community organizations reach out to Metro's Diversity and Economic Opportunity Department. In addition, these groups can reach Metro's Real Estate Unit for more information on site acquisition and its Transit Oriented Communities division for more information on the agency's TOC plan.

Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 1. Recommendation Categories

RECOMMENDATION CATEGORIES
<p>5. Further research on defining and measuring success of commercial anti-displacement work;</p> <p>6. Strategies for building community power: business associations and specialized assistance;</p> <p>7. Residential anti-displacement strategies and cultural districts as tools for preserving Pacoima’s vibrant commercial community; and</p> <p>8. Opportunities for Metro to support small businesses earlier and with more funding.</p>

Table 2. Summary of Interviewees

ORGANIZATION	RELATIONSHIP TO PROJECT
Little Tokyo Service Center	LA Metro Regional Connector - Little Tokyo/Arts District Station
Destination Crenshaw	LA Metro Crenshaw/LAX line - Leimert Park Station
Community Power Collective	LA Metro Gold Line - Pico/Aliso and Mariachi Plaza Stations
Inclusive Action for the City	Small business financing and advocacy work
Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority	Agency implementing light rail projects in three case study communities

Table 3. Summary of Case Study Communities and Findings

COMMUNITY (LOCATION)	TRANSIT LINE (STATION)	CONSTRUCTION COMPLETION	METRO-LED OR FUNDED SERVICES	COMMUNITY-LED PROGRAMS
Little Tokyo (Downtown LA)	Regional Connector (Little Tokyo/Arts District Station)	Expected 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Interruption Fund - LTSC Business Counselor - Go Little Tokyo marketing campaign 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Direct technical assistance - Community owned real estate
Crenshaw (South LA)	Crenshaw/ LAX Transit Project (Leimert Park Station)	Expected 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Interruption Fund - Business Solution Center 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - TEC Leimert social media trainings - Door-to-door technical assistance
Boyle Heights (East LA)	Gold Line (Pico/Aliso & Mariachi Plaza Stations)	2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved engagement process for joint development of Mariachi Plaza Station 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Training workshops - One-on-one assistance - Metro 101 trainings

Table 4. Summary of Business Support Programs through Metro and CBOs

ASSISTANCE PROGRAM	ASSISTANCE TYPE	ADMINISTRATOR / FUNDER	DESCRIPTION
Metro Crenshaw/LAX Transit Line Business Solution Center	Technical Assistance	Metro / Metro	Resource center with one-one-one technical assistance (for all Measure M-funded projects)
Little Tokyo Service Center Business Counselor	Technical Assistance	Little Tokyo Service Center / Metro	In-house counselor at Little Tokyo Service Center that provides one-one-one technical assistance
TEC Leimert	Social Media Technical Assistance	TEC Leimert / Destination Crenshaw (partial)	Destination Crenshaw partner trains youth to provide social media trainings to businesses
Educational Workshops	Technical Assistance	ELACC / ELACC	A series of educational workshops focused on tips for running a small business, entrepreneurship, & co-ops

Table 5. Impacts of COVID-19 pandemic on small businesses

“Overall, how has your business been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic?”	
Large positive	0%
Moderate positive	10%
Little/no impact	15%
Moderate negative	25%
Large negative	50%
CLOSED DURING COVID-19	
Yes	75%
No	25%
Average time closed (months)	4.5
STAFF SIZE	
Average number of employees (pre-pandemic)	4.5
Average number of employees (post-pandemic)	2.4
Average change in staff size	-2.4

Table 6. Respondents' support service priorities

“Are there any resources that you think could help your business respond to the impact of the light rail construction and opening? Select all that apply.”	
Legal assistance	50%
Advertising services & marketing strategies	45%
Training opportunities for employees/managers	35%
Technology training and devices	30%
Help paying for rent	30%
Other	30%
Social media development	25%
Building/space improvements	25%
Help applying for permits or licenses	20%
Assistance in hiring employees	5%

Table 7. Respondents' public space improvement priorities

“Have you seen improvements elsewhere that you would like to see near your business? Select all that apply:”	
Trees & greenery	60%
Facade improvements	55%
Better street lighting	40%
Slower car speeds	40%
Public seating areas	35%
Better sidewalks	35%
Better crosswalks	35%
Signage	20%
Other	20%

Figures

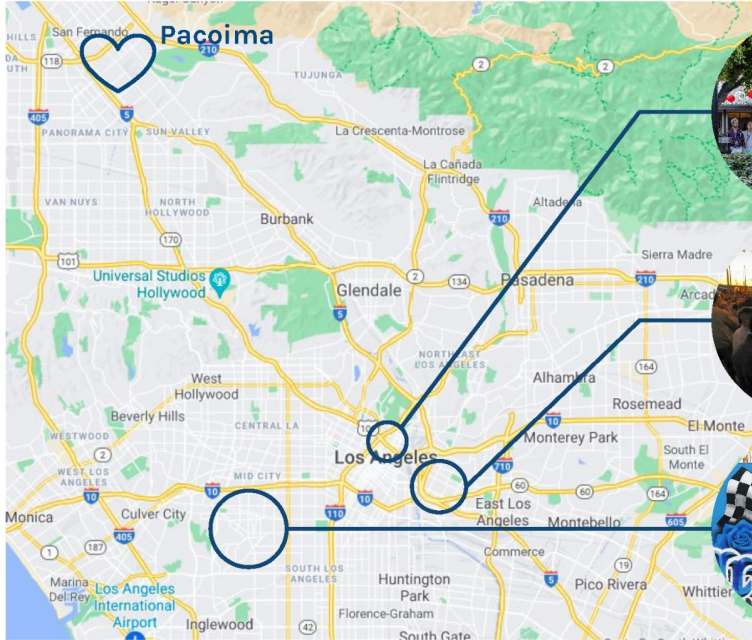
Figure 1. East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Project Area

East San Fernando Valley Light Rail Transit Project Study Area



Source: Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority, 2020

Figure 2. Map of Case Study Communities



Little Tokyo
Regional Connector -
Little Tokyo/Arts District
Station



Boyle Heights
Gold Line - Pico/Aliso &
Mariachi Plaza Stations



Crenshaw
Crenshaw/LAX Line -
Leimert Park Station

Figure 3. Business types reflected in respondent small businesses

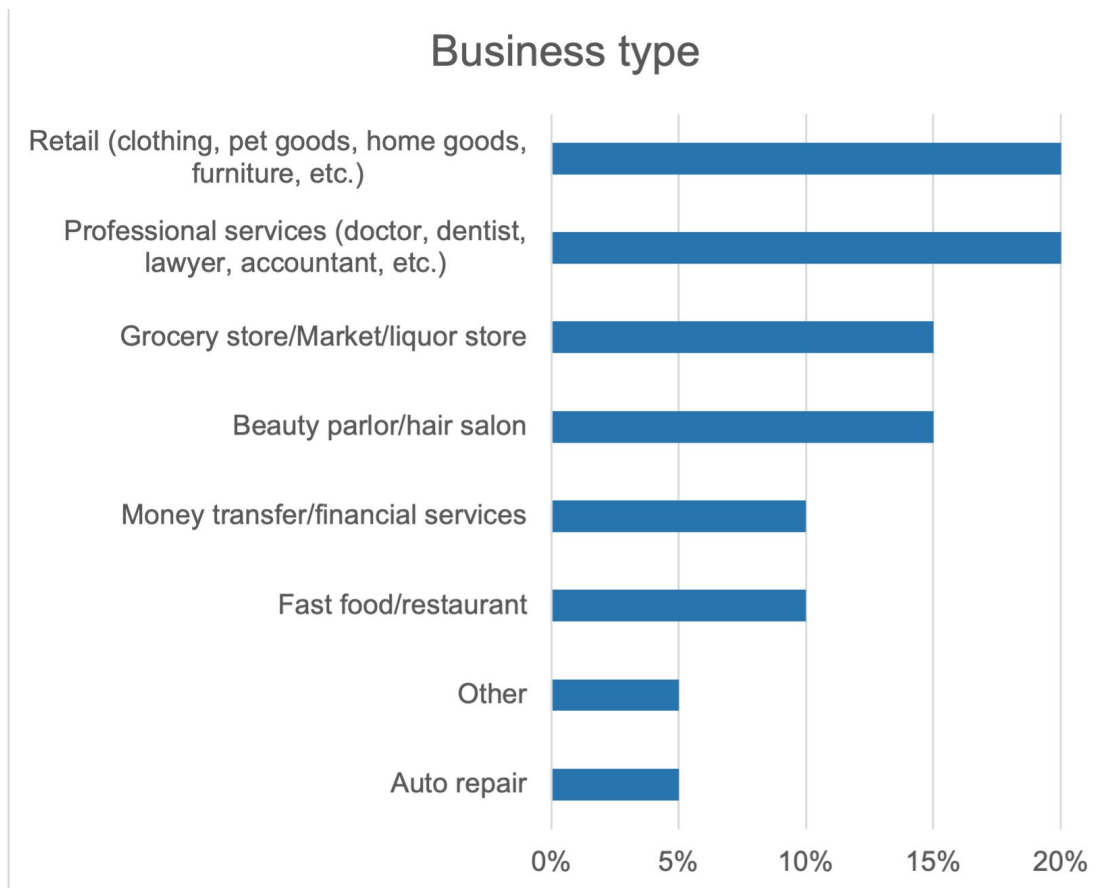
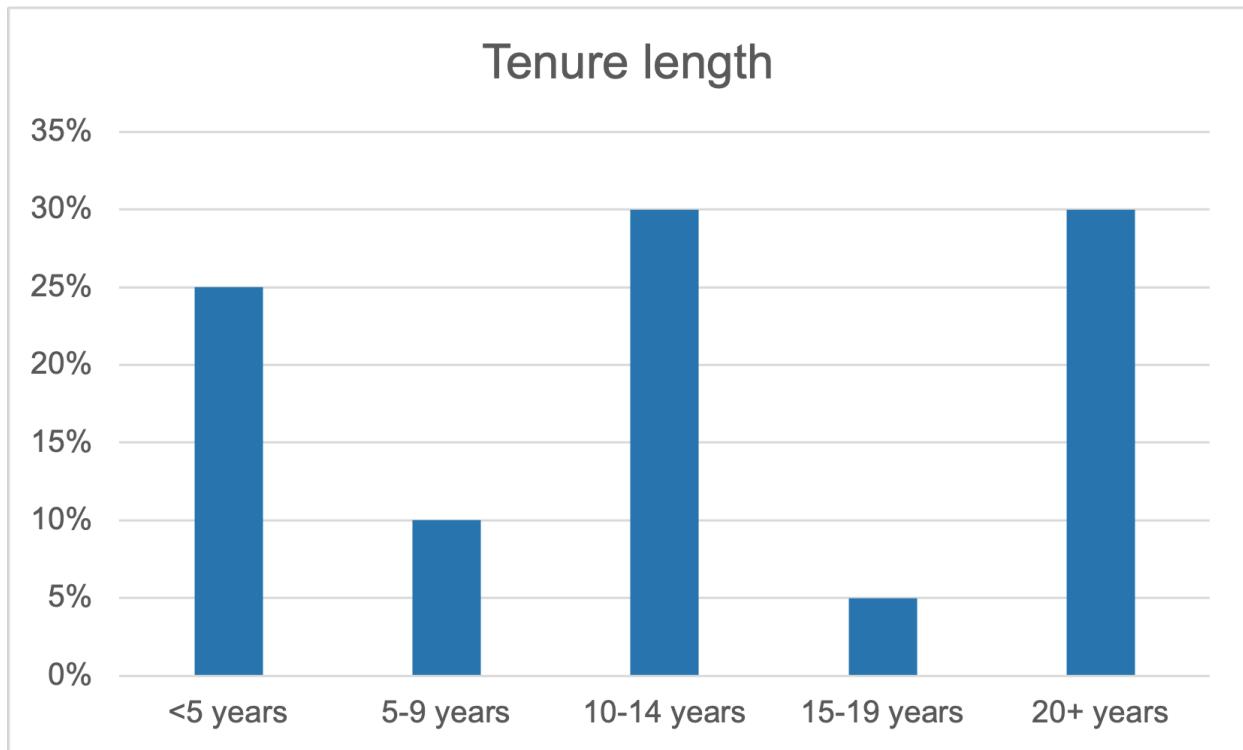


Figure 4. Tenure length of Pacoima small business respondents



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