

## Measuring Commerce by Foot

Movie theaters take starring role in transforming neighborhoods into pedestrian-friendly business hubs.

By Greg Laemmle

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Laemmle Theaters began as a chain of neighborhood theaters in 1938. Families would walk together to the theater and meet their neighbors on the way. Local retailers who were a part of the community reaped the benefits of this plentiful foot traffic. More than 75 years later, we still see encouraging Angelenos to walk – as well as ride bikes and take public transportation – as essential to the way we do business and to the future of Los Angeles.

To accomplish this, I see opportunities for both good policy and innovative business practices that will encourage richer local commercial hubs and build greener neighborhoods in Los Angeles.

First, a top priority for our community must be to support fully implementing the Climate and Clean Energy Law, AB 32. Passed in 2006, the law aims to cut our greenhouse gas emissions to 1990 levels by 2020. It's a common-sense solution to clean up our air as well as accelerate the growth of alternative fuels and transportation.

With upcoming implementation of AB 32, the California Air Resources Board will cap greenhouse gas emissions and require oil companies to buy permits to exceed those caps. Funds raised through the program will then be invested in alternative transportation projects and other important local projects.

I'm excited to see California take the lead on carbon emissions in ways that will make our local economies better. We should encourage our state legislators to be leaders on this issue. I'll be calling on Assembly members Mike Gatto, Chris Holden, Ed Chau and Roger Hernandez to support AB 32 and urge our local business community to do the same.

Second, innovative business practices and good urban planning are much needed in Los Angeles to make our city more sustainable. We want to encourage the kind of infrastructure that will make our theaters easier to get to by pedestrians and cyclists. If we foster the pedestrian experience and get people out of their cars, our neighborhoods and local businesses will thrive.

When we built the Playhouse 7 in Pasadena in 1999, we used shared-parking agreements. There was an understanding that as the area grew, the Playhouse District would add parking. Once the Gold Line started running in the area, many of the surface parking lots in the immediate vicinity of the theater were developed into mixed-use buildings with retail on the ground floor and residential units above. The area became denser, more vibrant – a real 24-hour neighborhood.

The Playhouse District never did add more parking but our business hasn't suffered. Instead, people are finding alternative ways to get to the area – walking, biking or taking public transit. The economic boom that made the neighborhood more vibrant happened without adding parking – instead, we helped create a more authentic neighborhood commercial experience, and the city of Pasadena saved money for other vital needs.

### **Hitting streets**

In the coming months, we will break ground on a project in Glendale that exemplifies this kind of approach to how and where we build our theaters. Together with our partners at Mapleton Investments, we're moving forward with a \$12.8 million mixed-use project called the Laemmle Lofts. It will include a five-screen theater, 42 apartments and 6,000 square feet of commercial space. The only new parking will be a level of underground parking for residents. Otherwise, the theater and retail patrons will use existing parking. For the residents, we'll be incorporating bike parking and shared car slots for services like Zipcar.

There's no law that says that every person over the age of 16 needs to have their own car in order to get around Los Angeles. Other options exist such as walking, biking and public transportation. There are huge savings in both the public and private spheres in encouraging those ways of getting around. So why cater only to the most expensive, least-efficient form of transportation?

In June we held the first Tour de Laemmle to encourage community members to bike 125-plus miles in a continuous loop to each one of our seven theaters. For many participants, it was an experience that affirmed that Los Angeles is not a series of freeway exits but a set of communities with their own flavors and local businesses.

I believe that we can build a Los Angeles that is more accessible for pedestrians and bike riders and that encourages the use of public transportation. That starts with good policy and urban planning and smart business practices. I urge our leaders in Sacramento and here in Los Angeles to join in this effort. Together, we can help a greener, more connected Los Angeles take root.

*Greg Laemmle is president of Laemmle Theaters.*