



# Report from the 2024 UCLA Arrowhead Symposium: Mega Events, Major Opportunities

October 2024

## About the UCLA Lake Arrowhead Symposium

Since 1991, the UCLA Lake Arrowhead Symposium has tackled the connections between transportation, land use, and the environment. Arrowhead's diverse and influential group of policymakers, private sector stakeholders, public sector analysts, consultants, advocates, and researchers dive into these pressing policy issues every day. The Symposium is presented by the UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies. [www.uclaarrowheadsymposium.org](http://www.uclaarrowheadsymposium.org)

## Acknowledgments

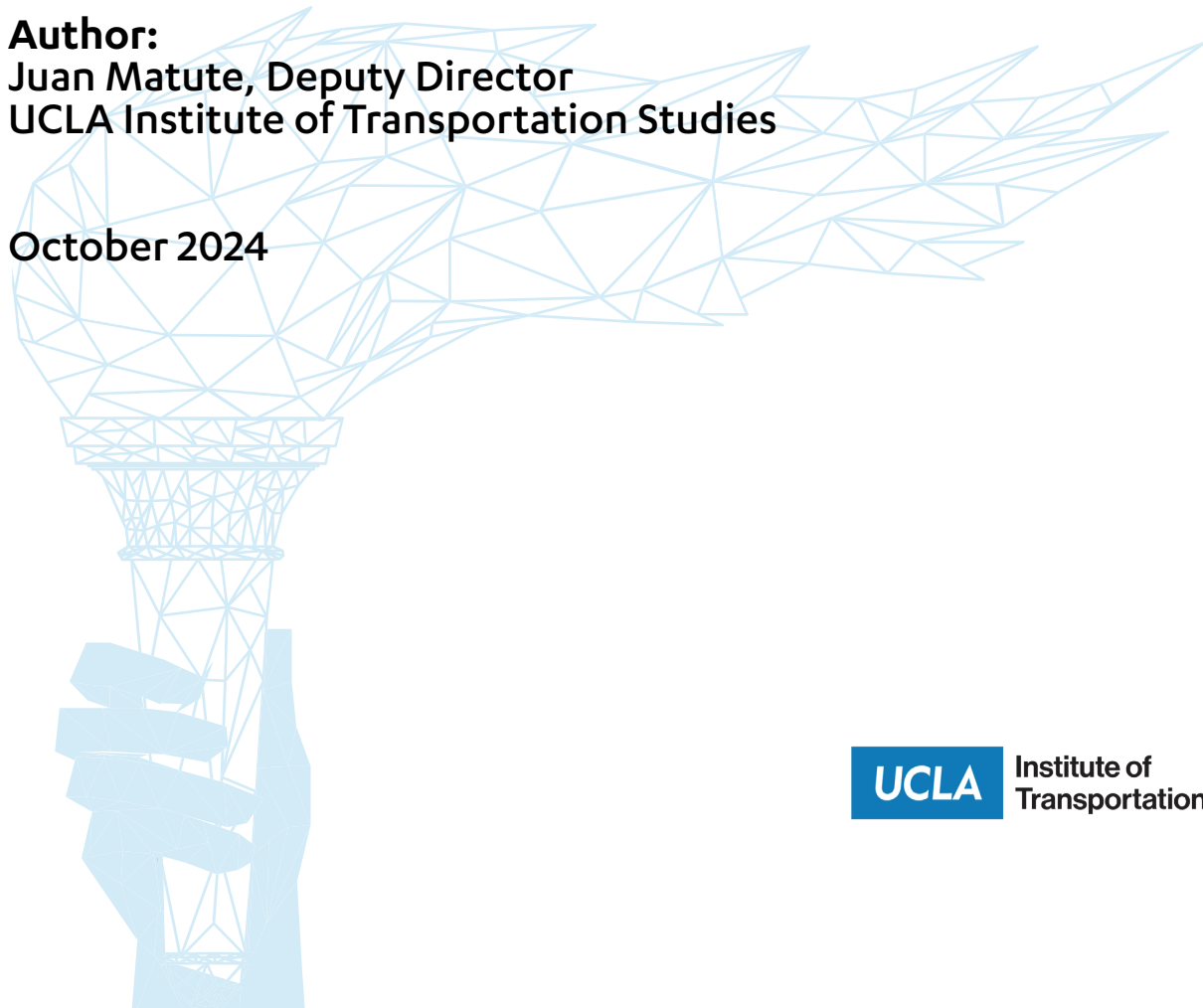
The UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies, which presents this UCLA Lake Arrowhead Symposium, acknowledges the UCLA campus presence on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the peoples who today use the names Tongva, Gabrielino, and Kizh.

Furthermore, we acknowledge the UCLA Lake Arrowhead Lodge & Conference Center's presence on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territory of the Yuhaaviatam Indigenous people.

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On October 13 – 15, 2024, nearly 170 representatives of government, private sector consulting firms and companies, non-profit and advocacy groups, and universities joined the 2024 UCLA Lake Arrowhead Symposium on Mega Events, Major Opportunities. This report summarizes the discussions, lessons learned, and action items from the convening.

Attendees heard from government and civic leaders in Los Angeles, mega event transportation experts, advocates for people with disabilities, people working in the civic sector to improve Los Angeles, professors of urban planning and public policy, and those who had studied the urban planning and transportation changes that Paris made in advance of this summer's games.

Attendees discussed Los Angeles's preparations for upcoming mega events, particularly the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games, emphasizing the need for permanent changes that benefit the region beyond the events themselves. There was a particular focus on creating a positive legacy through infrastructure improvements, particularly in underserved areas, and enhancing civic sector capacity to assist government in advancing legacies through inclusive planning, coalition building, and economic inclusion.

To encourage open discussion, Symposium attendees agree to uphold Chatham House Rules. Under these rules, participants are free to use the information they learn at the convening but not to attribute what they learned or what was said to any one individual. However, this limitation can also limit the potential for shared lessons learned and action items to inform both the future work of participants and also the ability to share with those who did not attend the Symposium.

This report aggregates the contributions of speakers and attendees, both orally and via audience response activities administered by smartphone. Overall, participants collectively learned:

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Meeting the urgency of hosting the world is a challenge and opportunity that requires changes to approach, especially prioritizing people with disabilities, to create lasting benefits.

- **Meeting the urgency of hosting the world is a challenge and an opportunity:** The soft power behind international hyper-visibility, media perception, and potential operational failure can be a strong motivator for elected officials and decision makers to consider streamlining bureaucratic processes or innovative ideas. Several speakers referenced the metaphor of hosting the world for mega events being like rushing to clean one's house before guests arrive on an immovable deadline.
- **That requires changes to approach:** Successfully hosting mega-events, especially the 2028 Summer Paralympic and Olympic Games, will require changes in how Los Angeles area governmental entities and civic organizations engage communities, collaborate on shared goals, and deliver infrastructure (both physical and cultural).
  - **Especially prioritizing people with disabilities:** Chief among these changes is the proactive inclusion of people with disabilities in all processes, from planning to delivery.
- **To create lasting benefits:** If government and civic organizations in Los Angeles can successfully manage these needed changes, it would be a lost opportunity for this newfound capacity to only benefit the city for 6 weeks in the Summer of 2028. Instead, people agreed these changes should be leveraged to serve more Los Angelenos before and after the Games.

# Action Items

During the Symposium, participants set forth several actions for themselves, their organizations, and Los Angeles:

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# Inclusive Community Engagement and Planning

Recognizing that diversity defines Los Angeles means that community planning and engagement processes must respect the breadth of perspectives and priorities amongst the city's many communities. In Los Angeles, inclusive and authentic representation is not merely a formality; it's essential for the success of any project or program. Without it, efforts will stall and entire initiatives will falter.

While mega events on the horizon create urgency, urgency is also a detriment to inclusive and authentic community engagement, which takes time and people who are skilled in active listening, multi-cultural communications, and building trust.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass's recent [Executive Directive 9](#) to streamline and embed equity within the city's approach to improving the public right of way will help to deliver more neighborhood and corridor projects with the same amount of funding. This action further motivates the need for scalable models for inclusive community engagement.

Scalable models for inclusive community engagement do not let urgency take precedence over understanding a community's needs. One model may be LADOT's approach to community engagement: to "flood the field" with a saturation of people, information, and an emphasis on direct and honest communication about project goals and a willingness to adjust plans based on community feedback.

However, participants expressed difficulties in realizing this vision for scalable models for inclusive community engagement. Agencies and organizations lack sufficient funding and staff to directly conduct or contract with community organizations to facilitate extensive community outreach and engagement activities.

The region's universities can create community planning schools to help build capacity among community organizations so that neighborhoods are better prepared to advocate for their needs during governmental engagement processes.

## Inclusion of People with Disabilities

To ensure a truly inclusive and successful LA28 Games, it is crucial for all involved partners, including LA28, the City of Los Angeles and other venue cities, Los Angeles Metro, the University of California at Los Angeles (which will host athletes), and the University of Southern California (which will host media) to comprehensively consider the accessibility needs of individuals with disabilities, based on their direct inclusion in the planning process. Conducting audits with people with diverse identities and disabilities to inform plans is one means of facilitating inclusion.

# Identifying Shared Goals

Los Angeles is diverse. The region is poly-centric, poly-cultural, and poly-morphic. Even in a physical sense, there are many LAs. The region has varying microclimates and landscapes ranging from palm tree lined beaches to deserts and jagged peaks that shape the skyline.

The economy of LA looks outward, exporting culture and entertainment, importing goods for distribution throughout North America, and developing the industry that will carry humanity away from Earth and into space.

But Los Angeles often struggles with introspection. In its heterogeneous identity and nature of governance, the Los Angeles region prefers to project an image of success and optimism, which can make it reluctant to confront difficult truths. At its core, Los Angeles culture values creative individualism to an extent that hinders collective introspection and collaborative problem-solving.

## Who Can Convene LA? (Besides the Dodgers?)



*Attendee responses to the question: What entity brings everyone together in LA?*

The emergence of an entity that can coordinate interests across governmental, civic, and private sectors and consider perspectives ranging from local to regional is an attractive framework to help find common goals and opportunities from these varying perspectives and interests. But participants were unclear what this entity would be.

Participants suggested that philanthropy could fund convenings and listening sessions to generate community-defined goals and ensure that the legacy of the games is shaped by those who represent the future of Los Angeles.

Participants suggested that universities can play a crucial role in convening a “coalition of the willing” representing entities that saw benefit in advancing collective understanding and action in Los Angeles. These initial convenings would explore the structures needed to create a durable and inclusive “table” for collective action in the Los Angeles region.

However, the vast differences between coastal and inland communities, as well as local and regional priorities, led some to believe that a unified set of goals was unlikely, even after multiple convenings.



## A Unifying Goal? Striving for Universal Accessibility in Los Angeles

Attendees stressed that improving accessibility can expand customer bases, create job opportunities, serve an aging population, facilitate adaptability for people who are experiencing a new disability, and enhance social inclusion.

The City of Los Angeles is the subject of the largest disability access settlement in U.S. history. In settling *Willits v. City of Los Angeles* in 2016, the city committed \$1.37 billion over 30 years to provide and maintain accessible sidewalks, curb ramps, and crosswalks. Symposium attendees expressed concern at the lack of progress in implementing these improvements, that the piecemeal approach to fixing sidewalks was too slow and costly, and the potential for ongoing costly litigation related to accessibility of sidewalks, transportation networks, and parks.

In the summer 2024, the U. S. Access Board adopted [Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines](#). This document creates consistent national guidance for accessibility improvements and can serve as the basis for multi-stakeholder collaboration on improving accessibility. Participants emphasized that the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) should be viewed as a minimum standard rather than an end goal for accessibility and called for a shift in mindset from ADA compliance to embracing universal design principles that go above and beyond ADA standards.

The recent introduction of a framework to create a 5, 10, and 20-year Capital Improvement Plan in the City of Los Angeles offers an opportunity to counter its long, inaccessible past.

# A Transit-First Games

## The Challenge

Homeland Security protocols require 2028 Games venues to have secure perimeters. Because many venues in Los Angeles are located in a sea of parking, the secure perimeter permits access by official vehicles but prohibits spectator parking.

This security-driven requirement for spectators to arrive at venues without personal vehicles creates an opportunity for a “Transit-First” or “Car-Free” Games.

## The Solution

Because they can provide efficient, scalable, and flexible transportation solutions, buses will be critical to serving mega event transportation needs.

**Efficient:** Public transportation can carry more people through limited space than personal vehicles and is an efficient way to move a high number of people in a short amount of time, as will be needed during mega events.

**Scalable:** Los Angeles will need to borrow transit capacity from other regions to meet surges in public transit demand. According to the FTA’s National Transit Database there are 63,558 public transit buses and 20,194 rail vehicles in the United States. In addition, the World Resources Institutes estimates that there are 480,000 school buses in the United States.

Due to national standardization, buses from one region of the United States can operate in California (though some may not meet the state’s stricter emissions standards). While some rail vehicles may be moved into the Los Angeles area from other regions, a lack of standardization limits this option mostly to commuter rail cars (Metrolink).

**Flexible:** Buses can easily be deployed to different areas of the region based on event schedules and transportation needs. Other event mobility options such as people movers and gondolas operate on a fixed right of way and cannot be redeployed when a venue is not hosting an event.

## Limitations of a Business-as-Usual Approach

However, buses in Los Angeles currently lack the reliability and consistency that maximize their efficiency and effectiveness as a transportation option. Buses encounter many efficiency limitations that can be addressed with technology or roadway engineering. If the bus is not prioritized in traffic, it is susceptible to the same congestion delays that city officials and organizers fear will create gridlock and spectators, workers, officials, media, and even athletes to miss scheduled events.

Past projects to prioritize public buses have been characterized by delays due to the Government’s community engagement capacity, political opposition, and the intricacies of intergovernmental coordination.

## The Opportunity

The urgency of the 2028 Olympics and Paralympics can be a catalyst for accelerating projects to prioritize public buses. At the 2024 UCLA Arrowhead Symposium, participants, discussed a number of changes that would accelerate the deployment of projects that prioritize public buses:

### Enhancing community engagement:

- Develop additional governmental and non-governmental capacity for community engagement through training programs to create neighborhood ambassadors and establishing an employer-recognized skill or credential for community engagement abilities.
- Work to identify community needs early in bus lane projects as a strategy to overcome resistance that can produce delay. If possible, include streetscape improvements like trees, shade, street furniture, and public art with a bus lane project.
- Develop a comprehensive communication plan that addresses the concerns of all stakeholders, including residents, businesses, and elected officials.

### Overcoming political opposition:

- Create resources to educate more people about the role and advantages of bus lanes in a region like Los Angeles through narratives and data-driven storytelling. Communicate the co-benefits of bus-only lanes for transportation affordability, mobility, climate, and equity.
- Explore alliances between transit advocates and labor interests to organize political constituencies for bus improvements.

### Streamlining intergovernmental coordination:

- The regular meetings of the Games Mobility Executives can serve to improve coordination between fragmented decision-making. However, this improved coordination should serve not only the immediate needs of the mega events but also the travel needs of people who live in Los Angeles.
- The possible embarrassment of self-inflicted delays that inhibit governments in Los Angeles's ability to move people during the Games could lead to once unthinkable process changes where individual officials cede power in order to reduce bureaucratic delays.
- Government agencies should collaboratively develop a policy framework that links bus lanes with the state's emerging policies to mitigate increases in vehicle miles traveled that would be caused by expanding highway capacity.
- Funding agencies should establish a dedicated funding source for bus-only lanes to ensure that they are implemented in a timely manner.

Breaking through the bureaucracy-as-usual approach can ensure that Los Angeles is prepared for the unique transportation needs of future mega events, especially the 2028 Games, and provide a lasting legacy of quality public transportation service and infrastructure for Los Angeles.

# Inclusive Housing for Los Angeles

Maximizing the use of existing venues and supporting infrastructure is a key component of the International Olympic Committee's new bid strategy outlined in [Agenda 2020](#) and [Agenda 2020+5](#). To reduce costs, the 2028 Summer Paralympic and Olympic Games will host athletes and media in existing student housing at USC and UCLA rather than creating new housing that could be used after the games.

However, participants saw the lack of new housing construction as a lost opportunity, especially when considered along with Games-driven market trends that are expected to remove long-term housing supply in favor of short-term rentals. Participants saw the following opportunities:

- **Workforce housing for tourism industry workers:** Create workforce housing for those working in the tourism industry, who must work in-person.
- **Temporary worker village workforce or supportive housing:** The City of Los Angeles and the region should look beyond the temporary housing needs of athletes and the media and consider the temporary skilled workforce that may be necessary for mega event operations, such as drivers licensed to operate transit buses. Governmental stakeholders should consider production of a major housing cluster for the 2028 Summer Paralympic and Olympic games, not for athletes or media but for workers relocating to Los Angeles temporarily for the Games. After the games, this housing may be repurposed as workforce housing or permanent supportive housing.
- **Enhance capacity to enforce short-term rental regulations:** AirBNB is a Worldwide Olympic Partner. Symposium participants discussed that the platform would seek to add 100,000 units in advance of Summer 2028, above and beyond the 45,000 units currently listed by Inside AirBNB and discussed by speakers. According to speakers, existing AirBNB regulations in Los Angeles are strong but unenforced. Speakers noted that enforcement is essential to prevent additional homelessness amidst this Games-driven market trend.

## Small & Medium Business Development

Los Angeles is a diverse region with a diversity of businesses. Los Angeles County's economy is heavily reliant on small businesses, with 94% of companies having fewer than 20 employees. The prevalence of small businesses in various industries provides a foundation for a resilient regional economy, where businesses can be more agile and adaptable, workers can be more connected to owners, and more people have an opportunity to own their own business.

However, small and medium businesses often face challenges in meeting the procurement requirements of governments and large businesses. Participants suggested that the 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games present significant opportunities for small, local, and diverse businesses through direct contracting opportunities and opening of additional markets.

The City and County of Los Angeles are working to prioritize local, small, and diverse businesses in procurement opportunities related to the games and beyond through the [Regional Alliance Marketplace for Procurement](#). Programs to onboard more small and medium businesses into this marketplace are vital to create connections between small businesses and event-related opportunities. Other public entities can join and procure from the marketplace in order to support a growing ecosystem of small and medium businesses providing goods and services to governments.

Economic development entities in the Los Angeles region can work to develop industry clusters that can support various sectors including sports and entertainment can create opportunities for small and medium businesses that extend beyond mega events.

# Neighborhood Improvements

The diversity of the Los Angeles region is reflected in its neighborhoods. From districts that grew up along streetcars to suburban town centers, from culturally historic neighborhoods to newer ethnoburbs; from park-poor areas where people gather in the public right of way to areas with capacious central plazas: the region's neighborhoods embody its diverse character.

Symposium participants emphasized the importance of improving public space in local neighborhoods as a key legacy opportunity from hosting mega events.

**Neighborhood gathering places as a hub for community and economic development:** The idea of community-based gathering places for watching the events ranging from the Summer 2028 games to Dodgers playoff appearances can be a salient call to action to help overcome the bureaucratic hurdles that often delay neighborhood improvement projects. And the opportunity that these spaces will provide local communities for the Summer 2028 games, coupled with regional plans to support small and medium businesses, can help to secure economic development funding for these projects.

**With the neighborhood, for the neighborhood:** Participants stressed the need for a bottom-up approach to community development that involves local residents in the planning and decision-making processes. One essential constituency is local artists, who can ensure that projects reflect the unique character of each community. This approach not only leads to more effective and desired improvements but also fosters a community sense of ownership and pride, which is essential to the durable vitality of public space.

**Remaking public space using universal design:** Participants underscored the importance of focusing on accessibility and universal design in all neighborhood improvement efforts. They stressed that these enhancements will benefit all residents, including those with disabilities, and contribute to creating more inclusive and equitable communities.

**Diverse cultural programming:** Community-driven placemaking and cultural programming, such as public art installations, cultural hubs, and local events, can strengthen neighborhood identities and create lasting legacies.

**A call to philanthropy as a catalyst:** Participants emphasized the importance of the confluence of community engagement and self-determination, political will, and cross-sector collaboration in accelerating neighborhood-oriented public space improvements. They called for increased support from local governments, via process improvements to maximize resources going to community engagement, project delivery, and cultural programming. Philanthropic organizations fund those who will create this initial confluence to catalyze action, and also fund community-driven projects that serve as examples of the new approach. In the long-term, a combination of funding from local governments, local businesses, and philanthropy will be necessary to fund improvements in more areas and to ensure their long-term viability.

# Conclusion

Future mega events, including the 2028 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games, present a unique opportunity to address long-standing challenges to transportation, housing, economic development, and neighborhood investments in the Los Angeles area. By leveraging the Games as a catalyst for change, the region can make significant progress towards creating a more equitable, sustainable, and vibrant future for all Angelenos.

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