

ULI Panel Finds Benefits to Locating Sports Complex in Railyards If Designed Well

Sacramento, California—The intermodal transit facilities and entertainment and sports complex (ESC) can be accommodated in the southern section of the Sacramento Railyards in a symbiotic way that creates public space, provides connectivity to and achieves synergies with surrounding districts, according to an interdisciplinary panel of urban planning and development experts assembled by the ULI Rose Center for Public Leadership in Land Use.

In a follow-up to their January 25-28 study visit to the City as part of Sacramento’s participation in the 2010-2011 class of the Daniel Rose Fellowship program, the Rose Center organized a panel visit from July 13-14 to address the most recent proposal concerning the entertainment and sports complex. While the City’s goals of building an entertainment and sports complex and intermodal transit facilities in the Railyards are achievable and desirable, the panel said that policy makers will need to commit to resolving key design challenges if they are to attain the public benefits envisioned in the adjacent districts of downtown, the future redevelopment of the Railyards, and the region as a whole.

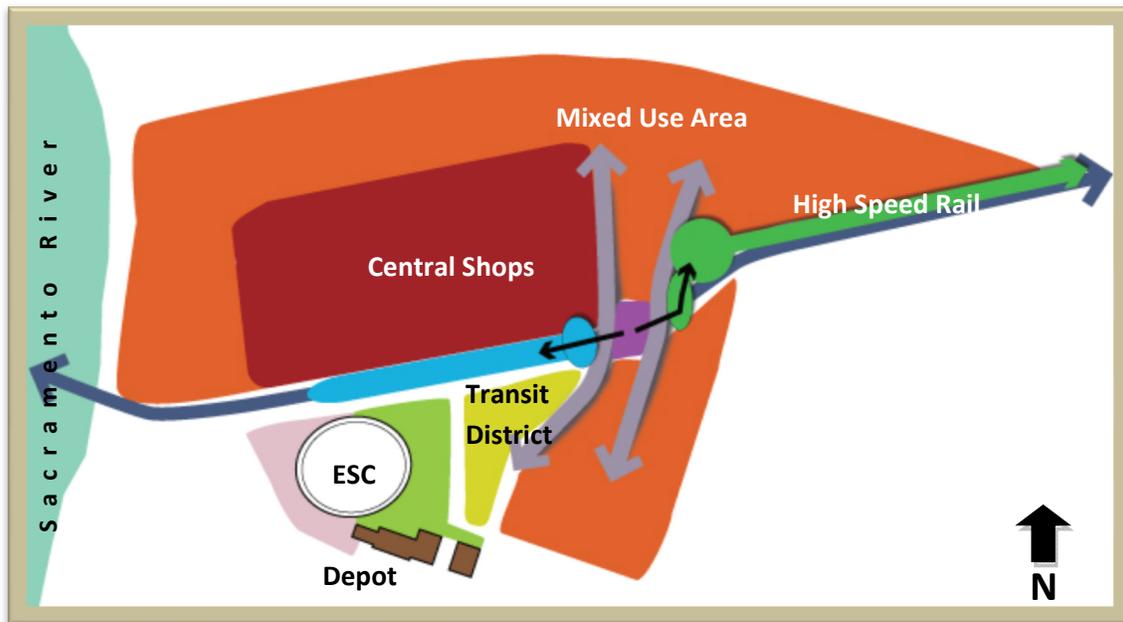


Figure 1 - Conceptual site plan showing location of high speed rail terminus and station (green) with connections (purple) from 5th and 6th Streets to the rest of the intermodal transit district (yellow). The area is surrounded by mixed-use development (orange) and the historic central shops (dark red). Black arrows show the pedestrian connections between high speed rail and the intermodal transit district. The proposed entertainment and sports complex (white) is located southwest of the rail tracks (dark blue) adjacent to the public plaza (light green) and north of the historic depot building (brown). (Courtesy of City of Sacramento)

Site Planning

The panel agreed with City staff's and California High Speed Rail Authority's (CHRSA) idea of moving the future high-speed rail station east of 6th Street in order to avoid the cost, complexity and design issues associated with constructing a terminal over the tracks (refer to Figure 1). In addition, the panel also agreed with City staff's idea of moving the entertainment and sports complex as far west as possible and shifting the intermodal transit facilities slightly to the east (refer to Figure 2).

The intermodal functions can have a compact footprint and do not all need to be in the same location. Moving the light rail station and bus bays slightly to the east would open up potential joint development opportunities that would contribute to a vibrant public plaza space between the entertainment and sports and intermodal facilities. However, shifting the intermodal facilities to the east necessitates the acquisition of additional land, specifically Lot 40. These movements can create the opportunity for a well-designed, functional public space between the entertainment and sports complex and the intermodal, framed with development and programmed with activity.

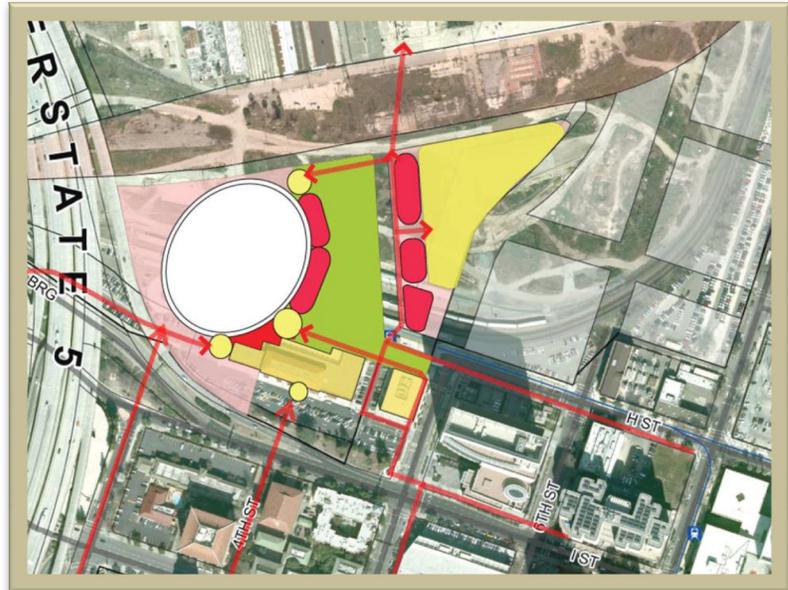


Figure 2 - Conceptual site plan showing location of entertainment and sports complex (white oval) and intermodal transit district (yellow triangular area). Green area denotes public plaza and view corridor to the central shops, yellow circles symbolize potential entrances, and red areas represent possible locations for active uses and joint development sites. The red area between the historic depot and the complex indicates a possible physical (structure) or open (plaza) connection between the two. Red arrows represent pedestrian access paths.

Entertainment and Sports Complex

The panel emphasized that the design of the complex should be a 21st century solution that respects the historic context of the site. While the historic Southern Pacific depot building can serve as an iconic front door to the southern Railyards district, the scale and massing of the entertainment and sports complex must not overwhelm the historic depot and central shops. The panel encouraged the City to investigate the feasibility of excavation in order to address its height, and to ensure that access points can be as close to ground level as possible. The panel also said that the entertainment and sports complex should have multiple access points to reduce conflicts among users, servicers and through traffic, and be wrapped in commercial development with active ground-floor uses on the side facing the public plaza.

Intermodal Transit District

Building on the panel's original recommendations from their January visit, they concurred with City staff's proposal of shifting the main intermodal axis slightly east and creating a transit district rather than a centralized facility. The panel agreed this would provide a better connection to the proposed high-speed rail station east of 6th Street, and be more cost effective to construct. Importantly for both placemaking and financing, it also preserves the opportunity for joint development lining the east side of a new street between the entertainment and sports complex and the intermodal facilities (roughly aligned with the planned Crocker Street north of the central shops). This street would provide connectivity between the extensions of H Street west of 5th Street and F Street west under the 5th Street bridge, and provide access to the entertainment and sports complex, public plaza and joint development.

The panel emphasized that it was important to understand which transit modes most needed to be adjacent and which could be dispersed. For instance, to serve the needs of regular commuters, intercity rail and bus (such as Amtrak) should be located close to regional light rail and bus (such as Sacramento RT). On the other hand, high-speed rail and street car could be dispersed within the district—as long as they were within comfortable walking distance of other transit modes. While the historic depot could have services and functions designed for travelers, the platforms would have electronic ticketing serving the needs of regular commuters. This would allow additional uses in the depot either related to the entertainment and sports complex or for commercial purposes.

Joint Development and Public Plaza

The panel expects the uses in the joint development to be commercial in nature. The ground floor should contain active uses (such as retail shops and restaurants) with transparent fronts to animate the street and plaza even when there are no events programmed at the complex. The upper floor(s) would likely contain uses such as employment that wants to be near the entertainment and sports complex; near unparalleled local, regional, and intercity transit service; near the courthouses; or just in a high-activity area.

Should it pursue implementation of these design concepts, the panel encouraged the City to work with development consultants to determine a footprint for the joint development buildings feasible for these uses. The exact alignment of the new street and the size of the plaza will be determined by the footprints of the joint development buildings, the transit functions behind them, the entertainment and sports complex and the footprint of the buildings wrapping the complex. The panel believes there is enough real estate to accommodate these buildings and an appropriately sized public plaza that, if well-designed, will help provide pedestrian staging into and out of the complex and feel safe no matter how many people are using the space. The location of the plaza also preserves a visual connection to the central shop buildings from the south side of the tracks, which is important to the overall Railyards identity.

Access

The panel urged the City to ensure that access to the district be designed with a hierarchy of users in mind: pedestrians as the first priority, then transit, then private autos. Clear and multiple pedestrian routes are needed from parking, transit, and the surrounding uses and activities with adequate lighting, security, and clear signage, which will also enhance the development value of the surrounding area. Automobile ingress/ egress to the site should minimize conflicts with broader circulation needs, especially those of pedestrians and transit.

The key pedestrian paths identified by the panel were: 5th Street from the south, H Street from the east, the F Street extension from the east, 2nd Street from Old Sacramento in the west, through the depot and between it and the Railway Express Agency (REA) building from the south, the west tunnel under the tracks from the northwest, the central tunnel under the tracks from the north, the 5th Street bridge from the north, a new signalized pedestrian crossing of I Street (and the I-5 entrance) the panel recommends to connect to the historic depot entrance aligned with 4th Street to the south, and a new pedestrian bridge the panel recommends connecting the new street to the central shops district in the north. It may be advisable to have a mid-block crossing of the new street between the H Street and F Street extensions as well.

The entertainment and sports complex should have multiple entries to serve these different access paths: an Old Sacramento entrance in the south, a “front door” entrance behind the depot aligned with H Street, and an entrance close to transit in the northeast, while service functions should be located on the I-5 side of the complex, hidden from view. Servicing vehicles could enter the complex from 3rd Street (under the I-5 access ramp from I Street). The panel recognized that the servicing facilities required further study in order to resolve circulation and access issues for service vehicles, pedestrians and others.

Parking

Given the large amount of parking in close proximity to the site, the panel recommended utilizing the existing, dispersed parking resources in order to spread economic activity throughout the surrounding area and use the Railyards site more efficiently. This will require thoughtful modifications and management of parking facilities, routes and streets, especially during event times. As with other infrastructure needs in the site (such as drainage and water detention), parking solutions should be shared in the district among the different uses (entertainment and sports complex, intermodal, joint development).

While parking is important for intercity travelers, the panel recommended using Lot 44 (located north of G Street between 5th and 6th streets). The elevation of the ramps for 5th and 6th street bridges limit the development possibilities for Lot 44, however, the site is well-situated for a parking garage given its proximity to the intermodal transit district and potential to have multi-level entrances from the ground and the bridges. In addition, the panel encouraged the City to explore opportunities for surface parking north of tracks as interim use prior to development there.

Other Considerations

Keeping in mind the future of the Railyards, the panel urged the City to explore uses for and activation of the historic depot and central shops, especially uses ancillary to the entertainment and sports complex such as team offices and retail stores, and restaurants and bars. The panel noted that as the design for both the entertainment and sports complex and the transit facilities progress, the City should stay focused on sustainability, especially with an eye on building-energy performance and access-mode split. The site's multiple users, concentration of activities, and event timing will require careful security planning for the area as well.

Cost Considerations

The panel recommended that the City conduct further analyses of site infrastructure and design costs, but believes that additional costs are likely to be more incremental than exponential. Above all, the panel emphasized the need to "do it right or don't do it." They cautioned that too many design compromises could diminish the functionality of the both the entertainment and sports complex and the transit facilities, and diminish the regenerative potential of the surrounding areas.

About the ULI Rose Center and Panel

Both panels were led by Sacramento's Rose Center Faculty: Andre Brumfield, principal in charge of urban design and planning and the Chicago office of AECOM; and Con Howe, managing director of CityView's \$150 million Los Angeles Fund for workforce housing. Brumfield has broad experience in the fields of urban design, planning and architecture including downtown mixed-use projects, large-scale urban infill projects, and brownfield redevelopment. Howe previously served as planning director of Los Angeles (1992-2005) and New York City (1987-1991).

The follow-up visit panel also included Bill Crockett, AECOM's national director of sports architecture based in San Francisco; and Al Raine, AECOM's national practice leader in transit-oriented development (TOD) based in Boston. Crockett has more than 20 years of experience in the planning, design and construction of professional athletic and sports facilities including the AT&T Center (San Antonio Spurs), Time Warner Cable Arena (Charlotte Bobcats), and the under-construction Barclay's Center at Atlantic Yards (Brooklyn Nets). Raine has 35 years of experience in senior level management of transportation and urban development projects including the 65-acre Assembly Square Station joint development in Somerville, Massachusetts; 19-acre Union Station intermodal hub and joint development in Denver, Colorado; and the restoration of Union Depot as an intermodal center in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The panel was staffed by Gideon Berger, fellowship program director at the ULI Rose Center. Berger was formerly a complete streets project manager for the City of Denver, TOD planner for the Denver Regional Transportation District, economic development researcher for the Central Philadelphia Development Corporation, and public affairs journalist in Washington, DC.

Created in 2008 with a \$5 million endowment by Daniel Rose, chair of New York City-based Rose Associates, Inc., the Rose Center is part of the Urban Land Institute (ULI), a nonprofit

education and research organization with a mission to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. Established in 1936, ULI has nearly 30,000 members worldwide representing all aspects of land use and development disciplines.

The flagship program of the Rose Center—the yearlong Daniel Rose Fellowship—focuses on leadership, integrated problem solving, public-private collaboration, and peer-to-peer learning for city leaders. Each fall the Rose Center invites the mayors of four large U.S. central cities to select a team of fellows from their city who will work with the center on a local land use challenge under their mayor’s leadership. Charlotte, Detroit, Houston, Minneapolis, Nashville, Philadelphia and Phoenix have also participated in the first two years of the Rose Fellowship program.

Mayor Johnson selected Assistant City Manager John Dangberg, Sacramento Area Council of Governments Executive Director Mike McKeever, and The Hodgson Company President John Hodgson to serve as Sacramento’s Rose Fellows with the challenge of determining what actions will catalyze investment in and redevelopment of the Railyards. They are supported by Desmond Parrington, Infill Coordinator with the City’s Community Development Department.

Since October 2010, Sacramento’s Rose Fellowship team has been working with their Rose Center Faculty of Brumfield and Howe along with other experts assembled by ULI, Rose Center advisory board members and staff, and their peer Rose Fellows from Charlotte, Detroit and Houston on this challenge. At the request the city’s fellowship team, the Rose Center organized this follow-up visit. To learn more about the Rose Center and its initial visit to Sacramento, visit www.uli.org/rosecenter.