



Smart growth advocates are lamenting a [judge's decision yesterday](#) to toss out the environmental impact report (EIR) on Hollywood's years-in-the-making plan for higher-density growth around the city's subway stops. Hollywood is one of the few communities in California willing to increase growth around transit stops and along transit corridors, and the demand for housing and office space there is apparently sufficient to accommodate new development without the need for public subsidies. So in some ways it was a sad outcome that the city's plan failed in court. Los Angeles — and the rest of California — needs cities to step up and zone for compact development around transit, or else we are doomed to a future of more sprawl along the urban fringe and a perilous mix of high housing costs and increasing inequality in the urban core.

But the decision against Hollywood was not about stopping smart growth — it was about a bad EIR. Hollywood had relied on outdated population figures in trying to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), which required the EIR. The 2010 census data were released just before the draft EIR, with figures that dramatically departed from the original population estimates and projections. Yet the city refused to modify its EIR (perhaps understandably, as it would have meant throwing out years of work). But without updated population figures, its assessment of basic impacts from growth on the water supply, sewer system, and electricity usage, among other areas, was fundamentally flawed. Surely even smart growth advocates see the need for accurate infrastructure assessment and planning. Without it, infill projects are bound to run into complications during construction and/or operation.

Yet while I see the value of CEQA review for infrastructure-type impacts from infill plans, I

wonder how well CEQA functions in general for infill specific and community plans. For example, analyzing parking and traffic impacts can be counter-productive for an infill plan. More infill by definition creates more parking and traffic problems in that immediate area. However, infill reduces *regional* parking and traffic problems, which is not often credited in an EIR ([recent legislation](#) may change that dynamic, at least for transportation impacts). Similarly, an alternatives analysis that doesn't account for the regional alternative may also fail to assess how one city's infill plan can benefit the whole region. After all, where will future residents who would have lived in downtown Hollywood buy or rent homes if there aren't options in the urban core going forward? Most likely they will have to live farther away from their jobs, leading to lost open space from development pressure, worse air quality, and more traffic congestion. This is the consequence of making infill harder to build.

Hollywood now has an opportunity to revise its EIR with more accurate population figures and create a monitoring program for future development, as required to be consistent with the Los Angeles general plan. I hope these revisions will not be too onerous and that the City can fulfill its vision to build around the multi-billion subway network its lucky to have. But going forward, policy makers at the state level may need to take a serious look at how CEQA can better help cities plan for infill. Analyzing more impacts at the regional scale — or not at all in some cases — may make the most sense if we truly want to accommodate future growth in our cities instead of on our open space and agricultural land.