

# INVESTING *in* PLACE

## SUMMARY OF

### A City That Works: Public Space as a Civic Promise

#### 16 Actions to Reform the Way Los Angeles Budgets for and Manages the Public Right-of-Way

*A 2025 roadmap from the Public Space Leadership Council, led by Investing in Place*

Los Angeles spends more than \$1 billion a year on its sidewalks, streets, parks, and plazas. But the City's approach to public space is fractured across more than 20 departments and agencies with no shared structure, no clear responsibility, and no long-term plan.

Many people are working hard to deliver a city that works for Angelenos. But we can't succeed if LA doesn't have a process for setting a vision for its public infrastructure, and for setting long-term budgets and plans to realize that vision. That's a Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP). "A City That Works" is a roadmap to a CIP for LA.

**LA's Broken System:** It's nearly impossible to achieve improvements in LA's infrastructure without a CIP.

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| <b>Infrastructure management is fragmented:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 20+ different players</li><li>• No long-term plan</li><li>• Budget 1 year at a time</li><li>• No shared vision or unified direction</li><li>• No comprehensive list of projects</li><li>• The public is in the dark</li><li>• Inconsistent investments and services across neighborhoods</li></ul> | <b>We see the results every day:*</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 10-year wait list for access ramps</li><li>• 50,000+ sidewalk repairs pending</li><li>• Trees should be trimmed every 5 years, LA does it every 21 years</li><li>• 200,000 empty tree wells</li><li>• 120 days to fix broken street lights</li><li>• 1.5 million people lack easy access to a park or nearby green space</li></ul> |
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**The Costs:** \$1 billion budget shortfall this year, and a pattern of neglect and inefficiency. This is urgent:

- The devastating January 2025 fires have deepened the deficit and further strained resources.
- The 2026 World Cup, 2027 Super Bowl, and 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Games are coming.
- Los Angeles is on track to pay at least \$320 million this fiscal year in liability claims and lawsuits.

**Los Angeles is the Only Major U.S. City Without a Capital Infrastructure Program.** As a result:

- We are less competitive than other cities for state and federal grants.
- Infrastructure investment remains piecemeal, reactive, and—more often—stalled.
- City staff have no clear direction and no way to measure progress.

**A Roadmap for Progress:** 16 actions to reform the way LA budgets for and manages the public right-of-way.

- The core recommendation is this: the City of LA must adopt a Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP).
- The additional 15 recommendations will help the City put a CIP into action. (See page 2 for details.)
- These recommendations were developed by the Public Space Leadership Council, a 2025 initiative convened and led by Investing in Place.

**Why This Matters:** Public space is where life happens.

- It's where we walk to school, catch the bus, sell fresh fruit, celebrate birthdays, and rest under a tree.
- When well maintained and accessible, public space supports health, safety, opportunity, and connection.
- When neglected, it becomes a barrier—especially in neighborhoods that have already been left behind.

For a **healthy** community, we need shady and well-lit places to run, walk, and connect with family and friends. For an **equitable** community, we need safe and functional sidewalks and streets so we can walk, roll, ride, or drive to jobs, schools, healthcare, and services. For a **sustainable** community, we need infrastructure that supports clean energy, stormwater capture, and reliable transit. These 16 reforms will help us get there.

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## How to Improve Los Angeles' Public Realm 16 Recommendations for Reform

### Fix the Governance Structure

1. Adopt a clear, citywide vision that centers outcomes, not activities or department checklists.
2. Amend the City Charter to require a 5-year comprehensive Capital Infrastructure Program (CIP).
3. Amend the City Charter to dissolve the Board of Public Works. Hire a Director of Public Works.

### Align City Departments

4. Create an Office of Public Space and Infrastructure Management.
5. Clarify the Department of City Planning's (DCP) role in public infrastructure strategy.
6. Explore LADOT consolidation into the Department of Public Works.
7. Clarify the role of Recreation and Parks in capital planning and coordination.

### Center Community and Workforce Needs

8. Establish local hire and workforce development goals as part of CIP implementation.

### Improve Budgeting

9. Commit to no new taxes related to public space without Charter reform requiring adoption of a 5-year CIP.
10. Transition the City budget to a two-year cycle and ensure adequate staffing to support CIP implementation. This process should remain distinct from the CIP, which serves as a separate multi-year infrastructure program.

### Build Better Systems

11. Implement a citywide asset management system that tracks real-time condition, use, and performance of public infrastructure.
12. Establish a "State of Good Repair" policy with enforceable standards and maintenance funding.
13. Require Life-of-Project Cost Estimates for all capital projects.

### Strengthen Accountability and Resilience

14. Integrate climate resilience and equity benchmarks into project selection and design.
15. Implement a metrics-based project delivery system.
16. Mandate annual Controller audits of CIP projects, budgets, and timelines.

### The Bottom Line

A Capital Infrastructure Program is not just a planning tool; it is a chance to use public dollars wisely, build trust, and ensure every neighborhood gets the care it deserves. Now is the time for Los Angeles to plan ahead and follow through. Let's move from reactive to intentional and build a city that works for everyone.

**Read the Full Report @ [InvestinginPlace.org](https://investinginplace.org)**

For more detail about the recommendations and how they were developed.

\*Sources: 2021 Audit: Repairing L.A.'s Broken Sidewalk Strategy; 2023 We've Got LA's Number: An Inventory of LA's Public Right of Way; 2025 Los Angeles ParkScore Special Report: Creating L.A.'s Park Legacy.

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