

Investing in Place

A Decade of Building Better Public Spaces

Since 2015, Investing in Place has worked to improve how Los Angeles plans, funds, and governs the public spaces people rely on every day.

What began as a focus on transportation funding, sidewalks, and access to transit evolved into a broader effort to understand how cities care for the public realm as a whole. Along the way, we have conducted research, organized dozens of workshops and public convenings, partnered with community organizations, and brought together residents, practitioners, researchers, public agencies, and civic leaders to develop practical solutions for Los Angeles.

While the work has changed over time, a common question has remained:

How can Los Angeles better care for its sidewalks, streets, parks, and public spaces?

This memo highlights key chapters in that journey.

By the Numbers

- **10+ years** advancing public infrastructure and public space policy
- **90+ convenings** including workshops, policy discussions, leadership forums, and cross-sector gatherings
- **Metro's first dedicated active transportation funding program** established through Measure M
- **Metro's first countywide transportation equity framework** helping shape the agency's Equity Platform and Equity Focused Communities framework
- **125+ categories of public infrastructure documented** in Los Angeles' first comprehensive public right-of-way inventory
- **Public Space Leadership Council convened** to develop recommendations for public realm governance and stewardship
- **Billions of dollars in public investment influenced** through research, policy development, and systems reform efforts

Building the Foundation: 2015–2017

Early work focused on improving conditions for people walking, bicycling, and accessing transit. The organization elevated conversations around sidewalk accessibility, Safe Routes to School, active transportation funding, and the need to prioritize public investment based on community need rather than political boundaries.

During this period, Investing in Place organized the Tripping Point conference series, brought attention to the City's sidewalk repair obligations following the ADA settlement, and led efforts to secure dedicated funding for walking, bicycling, Safe Routes to School, and access to transit within Measure M, Los Angeles County's fourth transportation sales tax measure.

Through original polling, coalition building, public education, and policy development, Investing in Place helped demonstrate broad voter support for investing in sidewalks, crosswalks, bicycle infrastructure, and safer access to schools and transit. Measure M ultimately became the first transportation sales tax in Los Angeles County history to include dedicated funding for active transportation, establishing a long-term source of investment for neighborhood infrastructure throughout the region.

A key lesson emerged:

Public investment decisions should be guided by need, safety, and quality of life outcomes.

Selected Milestones

- Founded Investing in Place (2015)
- Helped shape Safe Routes to School planning and implementation efforts
- Elevated public awareness around sidewalks, accessibility, and public health
- Led efforts to secure dedicated active transportation funding within Measure M
- Helped establish Metro's first countywide active transportation investment program
- Organized the Tripping Point conference series

Equity, Transit, and Community Voices: 2018–2022

As transportation investments accelerated across Los Angeles County, Investing in Place increasingly focused on who benefits from those investments and how public agencies define and measure equity.

At the time, Metro had no formal countywide definition of transportation equity. In response, Investing in Place convened the Los Angeles County Transportation Equity Technical Work Group, bringing together advocates, practitioners, researchers, and public agencies to develop a shared framework for understanding transportation equity and prioritizing investment in historically underserved communities.

Through research, policy development, and a series of Just Growth convenings, Investing in Place helped advance a regional conversation about how transportation investments could better address disparities related to income, race, access to opportunity, and community need.

This work contributed to Metro's adoption of its Equity Platform and Equity Focused Communities framework, creating a countywide methodology for identifying and prioritizing high-need communities. The effort ultimately helped lay the foundation for Metro's growing equity initiatives, including the establishment of a dedicated equity office and department.

During this period, Investing in Place also elevated the experiences of bus riders, caregivers, youth, and residents of historically underserved communities through initiatives such as Moms and Mobility, Better Buses for LA, and community-based transportation research.

A second lesson emerged:

Good infrastructure decisions require both data and lived experience.

Selected Milestones

- Convened the Los Angeles County Transportation Equity Technical Work Group
- Published a regional transportation equity framework and policy recommendations
- Helped advance Metro's Equity Platform and Equity Focused Communities framework
- Contributed to the foundation of Metro's dedicated equity office and department
- Chaired the inaugural Measure M Policy Advisory Council
- Launched Moms and Mobility community research efforts

- Advanced bus priority and transit access improvements
 - Published rider-focused transportation research
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Understanding the Public Realm as a System: 2022–2024

Over time it became increasingly clear that many of Los Angeles' infrastructure challenges shared common roots.

Sidewalks, bus stops, parks, curb ramps, street trees, lighting, and other public assets were often managed separately despite shaping the same public experience. Fragmented responsibilities, inconsistent funding, and limited public understanding made it difficult to maintain infrastructure over time.

In response, Investing in Place began expanding its work beyond transportation alone to examine the broader public realm.

This shift included interviews with Angelenos about their favorite public spaces, documentation of public infrastructure assets, and research into how cities manage and maintain shared spaces.

The resulting work helped establish a new framework:

Public space is not a collection of projects. It is a system that must be planned, funded, maintained, and governed.

Selected Milestones

- Conducted interviews exploring favorite public spaces across Los Angeles
 - Published Common Ground
 - Published We've Got LA's Number
 - Documented more than 125 categories of public infrastructure assets
 - Expanded research focus to public realm governance and stewardship
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Public Space as a Civic Promise: 2024–Present

Recent work has focused on helping Los Angeles develop the systems necessary to

care for public infrastructure over the long term.

Through the Public Space Leadership Council, comparative research, policy memos, public convenings, and the report *A City That Works*, Investing in Place has advanced recommendations related to capital planning, infrastructure governance, asset management, and accountability.

This work helped elevate public discussion around Los Angeles' need for a Capital Infrastructure Program and contributed to broader conversations about charter reform, infrastructure coordination, and public stewardship.

Today, Investing in Place focuses on the intersection of governance, finance, operations, and quality of life.

The central insight is straightforward:

Public space is a civic promise. Delivering on that promise requires systems that work.

Selected Milestones

- Convened the Public Space Leadership Council
- Published *A City That Works*
- Advanced recommendations for a Capital Infrastructure Program
- Developed comparative research on public realm governance
- Contributed to public discussions surrounding infrastructure governance and charter reform

Looking Ahead

Los Angeles faces significant challenges related to infrastructure, accessibility, climate resilience, public trust, and quality of life.

Addressing these challenges requires more than individual projects. It requires stronger systems for planning, funding, maintaining, and governing the public realm.

Investing in Place will continue to bring together research, community experience, civic leadership, and practical policy solutions to help Los Angeles better care for the public spaces people rely on every day.