

## **INTRODUCTION**

In 1993, a UCLA research team published a comprehensive study of the food system, *Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City*. The study included a detailed case study evaluating the ability of the food system to meet the needs of the residents of one South Central Los Angeles neighborhood. As part of that evaluation, the study documented a wide range of food insecurity indicators:

- 27% of area residents reported they went hungry an average of five days every month;
- The absence of nearby supermarkets was compounded by lower than average vehicle ownership. Further, bus lines did not correspond to market location. As a result, the lack of transportation for food buying purposes was defined by residents as a major community problem;
- Food prices for residents of the case study area — who spent 36% of their annual income on food — averaged \$275 more per year than residents of a selected suburban area who spent 12% of their income on food;
- The lack of fresh quality produce illustrated the issue of nutritional deficiencies and related health and learning problems that are endemic in low income areas.<sup>1</sup>

In response to such pronounced food security needs, the *Seeds of Change* study also analyzed a number of recent, largely exploratory strategies designed to empower communities and shift the focus of intervention from “hunger” to “food security”, a concept that had up to then been used primarily in the international development literature. The study pointed out that the concept of hunger had been predominantly associated

with individual needs in securing an adequate diet, while the lack of food security referred to community and ownership issues: access, availability, resources, price, quality, environmental considerations, income levels, and other community-related factors. Food security strategies might include direct grower-to-consumer programs like farmers’ markets, urban agriculture opportunities such as community gardens, or community food production facilities such as bakeries or tortillerias. Programs designed to address supermarket location and transportation access needs also represented possible food security initiatives. These could include joint venture operations to attract supermarkets in low income areas as well as to create community benefits such as new paratransit services for residents without cars, or other innovative transportation programs for increased food access. Thus the concept of food security, particularly in the context of food access, emphasizes the importance of **location** or **place** in regional, municipal, and neighborhood-level (e.g., community) settings.

Among the range of food insecurity indicators, the issues of access stand out as a primary problem area in which several other factors such as price, nutritional quality, or storage capability are significantly related. Yet despite the prominence of access needs in urban food systems, research by food system analysts regarding transportation issues has been relatively sparse. Transportation planners, meanwhile, have undertaken specific research involving equity considerations in transportation planning, including the limits of transportation systems addressing the needs of low income communities and the problems associated with low vehicle ownership in car-dependent communities like Los Angeles.<sup>2</sup> Only a few studies, however, have explored the connection between access and availability of fresh, high

quality, competitively priced food in such communities, even as surveys have indicated that the access/availability link remains a powerful concern in low income communities.<sup>3</sup>

The most common focus, both of research and advocacy work on those subjects, has been the relationship between vehicle ownership and supermarket location.<sup>4</sup> As described in this Report, the trend towards supermarket abandonment of low income neighborhoods that significantly escalated during the 1960s and 1970s exacerbated an already existing problem of transportation access. Even with the renewed interest of food chains in relocating to certain low income urban communities, supermarkets have failed to directly address the transportation question. In analyzing retail industry approaches, for example, project team researchers have noted the nearly complete absence of any discrete transportation policy of the major supermarket chains. This situation prevails despite the clear (and often recognized) benefits of such a policy, such as an increased customer base or the possible reduction in the replacement cost of shopping carts (which represent a considerable, though hidden, cost associated with transit dependency and the lack of food access). Where food retail managers have sought to develop transportation programs for their stores, they have been influenced primarily by “goodwill” and “community service” considerations, rather than an evaluation of transportation/access factors in the context of store performance.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the absence of a supermarket ap-

proach to customer transportation needs and the dearth of transportation planning initiatives that incorporate food access, there have nevertheless been recent attempts by community organizations, food market managers, and government agencies to address this issue. Out of these efforts, a variety of transportation/food access programs are currently in operation, at a development stage, or represent concepts still needing to be implemented. And while these programs do suggest that opportunities for a food access approach do exist, they remain separate from any more integrated transporta-

tion strategies on the part of either retailers, transportation planning agencies, or various service providers. For food access to be more successfully addressed as a community food security approach it needs to become part of a transportation planning as well as food system planning process.

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Homeward Bound is divided into five Sections. Section I, **Food Access and The Transit Dependent**, identifies a range of issues concerning the lack of food access in low income communities. It elaborates the specific contributions to the problems of food insecurity associated with access needs, such as supermarket location or nutritional deficiencies. It includes a literature review on access issues from both a food systems and transportation planning perspective. Section II, **Current Policies**, reviews and analyzes the nature of the programs and policies that have been established regarding food access by both public and private sector groups. These include local and federal food and transportation programs, and the approach of the food retail industry. Section III, **Exploratory Pro-**

**grams — Case Studies**, describes various exploratory and innovative programs that have emerged in recent years, representing opportunities available for improving food access in low income communities. These programs are primarily, though not exclusively associated with paratransit services. While many of these programs have been successful in terms of their (often loosely defined) objectives (as well as certain unanticipated benefits), they remain discrete, distinctive examples, not linked to any broader policy or planning approaches.

Section IV, **New Models for Greater Food Access**, in seeking to build on the potential applicability of the kinds of programs described in Section III, identifies three types of models for developing new policy and programmatic approaches in the food access area. These include a private, joint venture (public/private partnership), and non-profit approach. Finally, a concluding section details the Report's policy and programmatic recommendations for expanding food access.

Food access, we have concluded, is an issue that has yet to fully locate its own policy and programmatic niche. Yet, in an era of transit dependencies and growing food insecurity indicators, food access has become a growing topic for both anti-hunger activists, the food industry, and policymakers. By integrating food security and transportation planning and policy development, policymakers, transit officials, the food industry (including most crucially the food retail sector), and community groups have the capacity to establish more expansive food access strategies beyond the limited, ad hoc measures that exist today. The opportunities, our Report makes clear, are available, even if programs and policies still need to be nourished and systematized.

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**ENDNOTES: INTRODUCTION**

1. Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City, Linda Ashman et al., Department of Urban Planning, University of California, Los Angeles, June 1993

2. See for example "Social Impacts of Urban Transportation Decisions: Equity Issues", David Hodge, in The Geography of Urban Transportation, Edited by Susan Hanson, New York: The Guilford Press, 1995; The Car and the City: The Automobile, the Built Environment, and Daily Urban Life, edited by Martin Wachs and Margaret Crawford, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992

3. See for example Community Retail Needs Assessment, A Market Research Report Prepared for RLA, ConsumerQuest, Los Angeles, May 3, 1995; see also The Relationship Between Transportation Services and Urban Activities: The Food Retail Distribution Case, Youngbin Lee Yim, University of California, Berkeley: Institute of Transportation Studies, June 1990.

4. See, for example, Public Voice for Food and Health Policy, No Place to Shop: Challenges and Opportunities Facing the Development of Supermarkets in Urban America, Washington D.C.: Public Voice, February 1996

5. *Seeds of Change*, p.133 In one interview for this Report, a supermarket executive actually defined shopping cost losses as constituting their transportation policy; that is, since stolen carts provided a means to transport the bags of groceries to the home, that, in effect, created a transportation "service".

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**SECTION I:**

**FOOD ACCESS AND THE TRANSIT DEPENDENT:  
WHERE TO GET FOOD AND HOW TO GET THERE**

**Food Access and Community Food Security**

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**A** crucial beginning point in evaluating community food security is the relationship question of food access and transit dependency. Food access can be defined as the ability of people to obtain the food items they need from the food outlets available in a given area, within the limits of their ability to get there and get back, among other factors. Any part of that relationship — the nature of the food items and outlets available, the means and availability of transit, and the distance between residence and outlet — contributes to the measure of food access for the residents of a particular community. Put another way, the measure of access is one crucial yardstick of how much food insecurity exists within that community.<sup>1</sup>

Transit dependent areas, in turn, can be defined as communities with a lower than average vehicle ownership within a given region, defined for the purposes of this study as less than 80 percent. This definition reflects the dominant role of the automobile in both transportation planning and the transportation infrastructure that has been established in relation to that dominance. The problem of transit dependency is particularly exacerbated with respect to food access concerns, given the problems of location, pricing, and quality of both food and transportation services available. Indications of food insecurity then also underline the problems associated with transit dependency.

This section describes access-related problems in transit dependent communities involving two types of food outlets: full service food markets (e.g., supermarket chains) and direct marketing arrangements (e.g., farmers' markets). Several different dimensions of those food access/transit dependency relationships are explored: a) food insecurity indicators in low income commu-

nities, such as supermarket location, that are access-based or have food access implications; b) the absence or availability of fresh or high quality produce in different communities, such as through farmers' markets, and the health or nutritional implications of lack of access to such fresh produce; and c) the nature of the transportation issues associated with food access in low income communities, including equity considerations, and the focus or lack of focus on intra-neighborhood needs, such as food shopping, in relation to some of the current transit planning approaches.

## FOOD INSECURITY INDICATORS

### Supermarket Location and Food Access

Low income urban areas across the country are disproportionately underserved by the supermarket industry. In one analysis of 21 medium to large sized cities sampled, supermarkets in 19 of those cities were shown to be inequitably distributed.<sup>2</sup> Of those 19 cities, there were 30% fewer stores per capita in the lowest income zip codes than in the highest income zip codes. Similarly, those zip codes with the greatest number of persons on public assistance had 20% fewer supermarkets than the zip codes that have a low percentage of persons receiving public assistance.<sup>3</sup> Studies in cities such as Cleveland, St Paul, East St Louis, IL, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Austin, Texas, underscore these statistics, painting a more detailed picture of the lack of food access in specific neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup>

In Austin, Texas, for example, only one supermarket serves every 3,910 households in the primarily Latino low income neighborhood of the Eastside as compared to one per 3,170 households in Travis County as a whole. An analysis of the supermarket in-

dustry reveals that increasing levels of concentration and centralization resulted in the loss to Texas communities of 500 supermarkets from 1982 to 1987. Within the past year, three stores serving low income communities in Austin have closed while another three have opened up in suburban communities. According to Kate Fitzgerald, director of Austin's Sustainable Food Center, the sponsoring organization of "Access Denied," a report detailing food insecurity on the Eastside, "Each of these supermarket relocations show how affluent neighborhoods gain food resources at the expense of lower income areas."<sup>5</sup>

Fitzgerald's comments raise the issue of supermarket redlining and abandonment of inner city areas. Los Angeles represents an excellent case study of how the industry restructured over the past two decades, disproportionately affecting low income residents. The issue of food access became highly visible as a result of the 1992 civil disturbances, and subsequent public commitments by virtually every supermarket chain to rebuild in the "impacted areas." In what is generally considered one of the most competitive food retailing markets in the nation, our research has documented how food store location patterns in Los Angeles evolved so that large areas came to be dramatically underserved by the food retailing industry.

Computer mapping of supermarket locations overlaid with census data reveals that over one million persons in Los Angeles County reside in areas where access to supermarkets may be problematic. These "supermarket deficient areas" (see Map 1) are defined as places without a supermarket within walking distance (.5 mile radius), and with a transit dependent population (>17.7% of households, or the 80th percentile in the 1990 Census). By way of compari-

son, in 1990, there was one full service food store for every 26,400 people in what is broadly defined as inner city Los Angeles, versus one store per 15,200 people in the suburban San Fernando Valley area. In economic development terms, this deficit can be viewed in light of its potential for supporting new stores. In the 52 square mile "impacted area," there exists \$412 million of unmet annual demand for groceries, which translates into 750,000 square feet of selling space, or the equivalent of about 20 average size supermarkets.<sup>6</sup>

The absence of supermarkets in core urban areas has not always been the case. The shift from urban core locations has its roots in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, when supermarket industry restructuring and the migration of the middle class to the suburbs led to what has been identified by some analysts as an "abandonment" of inner city neighborhoods. Supermarket flight during this period has been documented in multiple locations across the country. In Los Angeles, the number of chain supermarkets within an area broadly defined as part of the inner city or urban core shrunk from 44 in 1975 to 31 in 1991.<sup>7</sup> Also, in 1975, one study found that low income communities in eight cities (Birmingham, Boston, Chicago, Detroit, LA, Newark, St Louis, and San Antonio) had on the average 32.7% fewer supermarkets than higher income areas within those same cities.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, in 1984, a Hartford, Connecticut report found that 11 of 13 supermarkets within city limits had closed their doors.<sup>9</sup>

As described in several studies, the shift of supermarket locations outside the urban core coincided and ultimately converged with parallel trends regarding population shifts and new transportation corridors.<sup>10</sup> The move made sense from a development perspective. Further, it was easier to build larger stores in the suburbs because large

**MAP 1**



tracts of land were still available. This enabled stores to stock more non-food items with higher profit margins, increasing their cash flow and profits. Supermarkets also had an easier time extracting concessions from expanding suburbs in need of a tax base and services for their residents. Demographics, development forces, shifts in transportation patterns and the pressures of the market all pushed the supermarkets to target their efforts toward the suburbs.

While the industry focused its resources on building new stores in suburban locales, it simultaneously began to sell or close down urban core markets located in or adjacent to low income neighborhoods. This further reinforced the trend toward increasing concentration of the supermarket industry. In Southern California, our research indicates that from 1963 to 1991, the number of chains with four or more stores decreased from 34 to 14, while the average number of stores operated by each chain rose by 283%. The top four chains controlled 73% of the stores in 1991 as compared to 43% in 1963. The acquisition of entire chains in this process fueled the drive toward concentration in ownership, leaving the remaining companies with heavy debt burdens. In order to generate needed capital, heavily indebted chains sold off smaller, less profitable stores, many of which were located in or adjacent to low income neighborhoods.

#### **Location and Equity: Issues Facing Urban Supermarkets**

The problem of location is exacerbated by the operating conditions of inner city mar-

kets. Inner city stores tend to have higher operating costs than suburban stores. Security costs, greater "shrink" (loss of product due to employee theft, shoplifting, etc.), greater numbers of bad checks, and high labor costs, due to frequent turnover and more inexperienced employees, account for a large percentage of the difference in operating expenses. Other factors include higher real estate taxes, insurance, repair and maintenance to older stores, depreciation, and shopping cart loss.<sup>11</sup> Intra-firm logistics make it more expensive and labor-intensive to operate older inner city stores. Smaller,

less mechanized loading docks make for more complicated delivery schedules and higher labor costs. The demand for culture specific foods also can be problematic for standardized product mixes.<sup>12</sup> Finally, monthly food shopping patterns are uneven with purchases concentrated toward the beginning of the

month (when government benefits are distributed), resulting in greater labor scheduling costs and difficulties.

Inner city stores typically experience lower sales and profits. Because of customers' modest disposable incomes and large elderly populations which often inhabit inner city areas, per customer expenditures are frequently lower than average, affecting total sales volume. Older, smaller stores have less shelf space to stock non-food and luxury items with high profit margins. As a result, profit as a percentage of sales (and on a per square foot basis) tends to be substantially lower than for suburban markets.<sup>13</sup>

Despite an increasing concentration in ownership, the supermarket industry remains a

highly competitive business with razor thin profit margins that are as low as 1%. Competition results in lower prices, and is most prevalent between chains in the same trade areas (the geographical confines from which markets draw their clientele), typically limited to a few square miles. In inner city communities however, the absence of supermarkets often translates into a lack of competition, as a single store may dominate a given trade area. Little competition combined with high operating costs and low sales volume often results in higher prices for inner city shoppers.<sup>14</sup> This problem is exacerbated for supermarkets in areas with low vehicle ownership rates, which are likely to face even less competition, as patron immobility shrinks the trade area.

### **Transportation Barriers for Urban Supermarkets**

Inner city residents not only have fewer supermarkets in their neighborhoods, but less food access due to restricted transportation options. Automobile ownership is less common among the poor than among the non-poor. Only 22% of food stamp recipients drove their own car to purchase groceries as compared to 96% of non-food stamp recipients according to a USDA study.<sup>15</sup> In the majority of the 21 cities studied by the University of Connecticut's Food Policy Marketing Center, those zip codes with the fewest supermarkets per capita also had the lowest percentage of vehicle ownership. In some cases, such as New York City, the poorest zip codes as defined by percentage of households receiving public assistance, had car ownership rates of less than 40%. In the other cities, it hovered between 60% to 80%. By comparison, wealthier neighborhoods in these cities have vehicle ownership rates generally in excess of 95% (with the noted exception of New York).<sup>16</sup>

For those households without access to a vehicle and at a lengthy distance (e.g. > 3-5 miles) to a full service food market, transportation options are both limited and problematic. Transport via taxis and/or buses or paying for a ride can be costly, reducing a family's food budget by up to \$400 per year.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, bus lines rarely are designed to serve intra-neighborhood food shopping patterns, as described elsewhere in this Report. Instead, as in the case of one South Central Los Angeles community, they are planned around commuter routes, feeding into downtown.<sup>18</sup> The recent examples described in Section III of the Austin circulator route and the K-Trans route extension in Knoxville are especially significant as exceptions to the rule.

Because of the high cost of door to door transportation (taxis) and the inconvenience of mass transit (long waits, multiple transfers, long walks to bus stops), carrying groceries home becomes a frequent occurrence despite its problematic nature. In one low income neighborhood in South Central Los Angeles, one third of the residents surveyed reported difficulties carrying their groceries home, roughly the same number of persons without access to a vehicle.<sup>19</sup> On a more anecdotal level, a 1995 *Los Angeles Times* article profiled a young woman with two children riding the bus back from the supermarket, descriptive of one of the numerous daily obstacles confronting transit dependent urban residents. The article specifically chronicled the woman's struggles getting home while carrying several bags of groceries. At the same time, shopping choices became constrained (e.g., she had to choose between purchasing a gallon of milk and a jug of laundry detergent, given her inability to carry both home).<sup>20</sup>

As a result of the difficulties in carrying several bags of groceries long distances, many

inner city residents opt to “borrow” grocery carts. In some neighborhoods, removal of the carts from the premises may be so endemic that it results in cart shortages. Shopping cart loss has proven to be such a problem at one East St Louis store that they are locked up and patrons charged a quarter deposit.<sup>21</sup> Waits of up to 20-30 minutes for a shopping cart are not uncommon in another Austin market.<sup>22</sup> (Section II provides a more detailed discussion of the shopping cart/food access link).

In sum, transportation obstacles prevent inner city residents from shopping where they would like. For those households without access to a vehicle, distance, not price or selection, is the primary factor determining choice of food store.<sup>23</sup> Food shopping becomes a question of not what one would like to buy, but what is available, given mobility restrictions. In this context, the development of a centralized supermarket-based food distribution system, as facilitated by the growth in popular ownership of the automobile, and in conjunction with the unresponsiveness of the mass transit sector to the food shopping-related transportation needs of the poor, has substantially diminished the food security of many inner city communities.

## HEALTH AND NUTRITIONAL IMPLICATIONS

### The Small Store Syndrome

Poor food access negatively affects the health of inner city consumers through three fundamental avenues. As shown above, transit dependent residents often must dedicate substantial resources to obtain transportation to and from the store, reducing funds available for food purchases. Similarly, high prices reduce the buying power of the poor.

In both cases, the ensuing result of reduced purchasing power from an individual standpoint is increased hunger and reduced ability to purchase non-staples with greater price elasticity such as fruits and vegetables. Up to one billion dollars in food stamp purchasing power may be lost due to higher prices in inner city markets.<sup>24</sup> A price comparison in Los Angeles found that a market basket containing items necessary for a minimally nutritionally adequate diet would cost a family of three \$285 more per year when purchased in inner city supermarkets than in comparable suburban markets.<sup>25</sup> While supermarkets in low income neighborhoods may charge high prices (for the reasons described in the previous section), corner mom and pop stores’ prices are often astronomical. With their lack of an economy of scale, small stores often purchase their items at near retail prices at “cash and carry” outlets, and must charge substantial margins on their goods. Prices at mom and pop stores have been reported to be 42%-64% higher than at surrounding supermarkets.<sup>26</sup>

Just as mom and pop stores must charge high margins to be economically viable, they must stock goods with high profit margins. Limited shelf and cooler space combined with the costs of spoilage preclude them from carrying a full line of healthy foods and produce. Surveys of mom and pop stores have found little in the way of produce, which, when present, includes an abundance of packaged processed foods, is often of poor quality and aged, and often provides little selection of low-fat products, such as skim milk. Research of Los Angeles “mom and pops” found it impossible to purchase a nutritionally adequate diet as defined by the USDA’s Thrifty Food Plan in any one or combination of these stores. By way of example, in another low income community, only five of 38 convenience stores stocked the ingredients for a balanced meal. Of these

stores, only half carried milk, while all sold alcohol.<sup>27</sup>

### Diet and Health Consequences

The lack of availability of healthy foods can aggravate high rates of diet-related diseases to which Latinos and African Americans (who often are the primary demographic groups in inner cities) are most vulnerable. One of the most important outcomes of poor nutrition is increased incidence of chronic disease; studies show that 35-60% of all cancers in the US are diet-related.<sup>28</sup> According to a leading expert on the relationship between disease and diet among minorities:

Dietary factors are epidemiologically linked to chronic diseases, include overconsumption of kilocalories, and fat, leading to diabetes mellitus, obesity, cardiovascular disease and certain cancers, excess intakes of sodium or salt- cured or pickled foods-, leading to hypertension or stomach cancer and inadequate consumption of foods or nutrients that may protect against cardiovascular disease, cancer, or osteoporosis, (e.g. vitamin A, caretenoids, vitamin C, potassium, calcium, fiber, and complex carbohydrates, fruits and vegetables, cruciferous vegetables, or beta carotene rich fruits and vegetables).<sup>29</sup>

Latinos and African-Americans in the US suffer from higher than average rates of chronic disease. Poverty, lack of education, and access to health care may influence disproportionate morbidity levels for many minorities. African-Americans have a 110% higher rate of low birth weight infants, which is a

typical measure of maternal nutrition. Childhood anemia, due to poor nutrition, is found in 20-33% of all black children. Heart disease (related to saturated fat intake among other factors) is twice as common among African Americans as among whites. African Americans tend to suffer from obesity at greater rates than among whites. Blacks also have higher rates of diabetes and stomach cancer than whites.<sup>30</sup>

Latinos suffer from higher rates of a variety of diet related diseases than whites. Latinos have three times the likelihood of contracting diabetes than whites. Latinos also suffer from excess incidence of cancers of the stomach, pancreas, esophagus, gallbladder, and cervix, and lower rates of breast and colon cancer. Obesity and higher prevalence of cardiovascular diseases are also common among Latinos.<sup>31</sup>

### Farmers Markets: Unrealized Opportunities

Farmers markets can play an important role in providing access to healthy foods in inner city communities. Farmers' markets carry fresh, high-quality produce, often

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picked the very day of sale. They are relatively easy to establish, requiring only a few thousand dollars in start up costs and perhaps 6 months to one year lead time, as compared to a new supermarket which may require 2-5 years and millions of dollars in capital

outlays. Produce is usually priced competitively with or below supermarket prices, depending upon the season and loss leaders.<sup>32</sup>

However, farmers' markets have not

emerged as a option for improving inner city food access to high quality foods. Farmers' markets, to begin with, carry only a finite selection of goods, such as produce, eggs, nuts, honey, fish, juices and jams, and breads. Canned and dried goods, or other manufactured foods are normally prohibited from sale. They are also limited in time and space, open only once a week for a few hours a day, when many people are at work or have other access constraints. Moreover, efforts to establish farmers' markets in low income neighborhoods have been few and not universally successful. In Los Angeles, while there are eight farmers markets in the relatively compact middle and upper income Westside neighborhoods, there are only two serving the geographically more expansive supermarket deficient areas of the city. These patterns have been repeated in other urban communities as well.

**Ultimately, inner city transit services have not been oriented toward intra-neighborhood needs such as food shopping.**

## TRANSPORTATION BIASES

### Equity Issues

Low income/transit dependent communities almost invariably face a double bind regarding food access issues. On the one hand, as described above, low income communities have fewer full service food markets, fewer farmers' markets, higher priced food items, and health and nutritional problems exacerbated by the lack of food outlets. At the same time, low income communities have fewer automobiles per capita and ultimately rely on transportation services that are often not only inconvenient but also inequitable in their pricing and in the way transportation routes are established. While some attention has been paid to this double

bind from food system analysts, most of the analysis of the nature of transportation services for low income communities has been limited to the discussion of concerns about equity — particularly pricing — and only tangentially to the question of access to community services, such as food shopping.

Equity issues have primarily been examined by evaluating the net distributional effects of benefits and costs of transit subsidies among different income and racial/ethnic groups.<sup>33</sup> Benefits are typically defined as including the level and quality of service, access to transit services, and types of service (e.g., bus, rail, subway).

Costs are defined as including revenue sources such as taxes, and fares charged per customer. Equity considerations also address the allocation as well as the types of benefits and costs. While a few studies have pointed to certain favorable distributional impacts on the poor, other studies that have focused on allocation decisions have clearly suggested that federal policies, including subsidy payments, create powerful inequities in transit resource allocations which ultimately encourage regressive fare pricing approaches which most heavily impact lower-income transit riders.<sup>34</sup>

Among such inequities, the most prominent form of transit subsidy, above and beyond the historic funding of automobile-oriented infrastructure such as the federal highway system, has been the federal focus on commuter rail, which in turn has been the mode used by the most affluent transit users. By subsidizing longer distance commutes between home and work (primarily designed to accommodate central business districts as

opposed to neighborhood locations), other transit operations such as inner city bus routes tend to cross-subsidize the longer trips. As a consequence, low income and/or minority riders receive fewer subsidy benefits than their more affluent, primarily Anglo counterparts. This problem of unequal subsidies is further exacerbated in periods of fiscal retrenchment among public agencies, including the federal government. When there is decreasing federal revenue support for transit, combined with such factors as declining farebox revenues and/or falling transit patronage, transit operators, such as the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), have raised the fares impacting low income transit users, reinforcing rather than reversing the bias toward longer as opposed to shorter trips. In the case of the MTA, this longer distance/higher fares for the poor transit bias ultimately became the basis of a class action suit based on Title VI of the 1994 Civil Rights Act.<sup>35</sup>

### **Food Access Implications**

The long distance/commute bias in transit operations has significant consequences in terms of food access. Food outlets within urban areas are primarily residential based; that is, locations are determined in relation to such factors as housing density, neighborhood demographics, and land availability for such considerations as store and parking lot size. Where transportation factors come into play are those areas of lower density offset by more favorable demographics (e.g., suburban locations which were responsible for much of the growth in the food retail sector during the 1970s and 1980s). But the transportation focus in these instances has been associated with auto use factors such as proximity to a freeway exit and parking lot size. Along these lines, the extension of the freeways into suburban areas has had

a dynamic effect on both the size and location of food retail outlets during the postwar period, most notably in the decades of the 1970s and 1980s. One study, which focused on the interaction between transportation systems and food retail distribution systems in the Seattle metropolitan area, emphasized that supermarket trends in location and size had become most heavily influenced by freeway location in that region. Thus the development of a postwar freeway system, the trends towards suburbanization, and the shift towards larger food stores requiring longer trips for routine food shopping became the dominant pattern in the food retail/transit relationships.<sup>36</sup>

The current concerns regarding food access, however, have coincided with the modest though nevertheless significant reorientation of the food retail sector toward urban inner city sites and variations in store size, particularly in regions such as southern California where the availability of favorable suburban sites has decreased. While freeway travel and high rates of automobile ownership favored suburban locations and the development of food stores (including the superstores) of 50,000 square feet and greater, the problems of scarce (and expensive) land, lower rates of automobile ownership and a transit system favoring longer distance/commute rather than community needs have created significant barriers for the development of full service food markets in the inner city while increasing the problems of food access. Even in areas where inner city transit systems such as bus service have been operational, the issues of quality of service, the routing of the bus service, and fare/equity considerations have compounded food access concerns. Ultimately, inner city transit services have not been oriented toward intra-neighborhood needs such as food shopping.

### The Promise and Limits of Paratransit

The conceptual failure in transportation planning to link transit development with community services has been most directly associated with the lack of services for specific constituencies, including commuters as well as special needs populations, such as seniors, the disabled, and others who are not capable of using (as opposed to owning) an automobile. New paratransit services emerged in recent years in part to fill that vacuum. Two of the groups that became targeted constituencies for such services were AIDS victims and seniors. During the 1980s and 1990s, when the debilitating effects of the AIDS pandemic started to become clearer, it also became apparent that those with AIDS were a prime food access/transit dependent constituency. Many AIDS victims, for example, were no longer able to drive and had major dietary concerns. AIDS service organizations in turn established a range of paratransit services to address those needs and consequently emerged as a significant advocate for food security and greater food access.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, paratransit programs for seniors oriented towards such needs as shopping, food preparation and delivery, and health care, were developed and expanded in this same period. Aside from these efforts, paratransit options also became linked, during the 1980s and 1990s, with the increased focus on work related automobile trip reductions as a consequence of increased air quality regulations. Paratransit services were specifically initiated through employer-based commute programs, such as ride sharing or van commute programs, in response to such air quality regulations as the South Coast Air Quality Management District's Regulation XV.

These trends began to elevate paratransit as a promising transportation strategy, particularly for transit-dependent constituencies

and communities. A term coined in the 1970s to describe the "full spectrum of transportation options that fell between the private automobile and the conventional bus,"<sup>38</sup> paratransit has come to be seen by transportation planners as a more flexible, service-oriented approach that is capable of connecting multiple places with multiple publics, including potentially for food access considerations. By way of example, the Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey (NPTS), which evaluates travel patterns from randomly sampled households, indicated, in its 1990-1991 survey, that passenger vans accounted for 4.7% of all motorized shopping trips, compared to less than 1% (0.8%) by bus transit. (The survey did not account for walk-in traffic, which other estimates have placed as high as 1/4th to 1/3rd of shopping trips at inner city food markets).<sup>39</sup>

Despite its promise as a flexible transit strategy, and the strong indications that existing paratransit programs, such as van and jitney services, have been substantially used for shopping purposes, the development of a "shopping" focus for paratransit has remained minimal. Moreover, the concept of paratransit has yet to establish a specific food access dimension (that is, transportation strategies designed to facilitate access to food markets). Ultimately, the intersecting problems of food access and transit dependency continue to reside at the margins of or distinct from the domains of food and transportation planning.

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**ENDNOTES: SECTION 1**

1. Food access is sometimes used as a term that serves as a surrogate for food security itself. For example, one USDA study defines access as “the availability of a variety of nutritious and affordable food from places that are well maintained and offer products reflecting the cultural makeup of the community. Underserved areas are those in which residents face barriers to access, such as high prices, limited food choices, poor quality products or long distances to stores or markets. This latter factor — distance to a food outlet — is the key determinant (as used in this report) linking food access to transit dependency. See “Study Fact Sheet”, Study of Access to Nutritious and Affordable Food, United States Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, Conducted by CRP Inc., FY 1995-1996.
  2. Data from the 21 SMSAs reviewed were organized by zip code. Sources included census data and the 1995 database from *Progressive Grocer*, a food retail industry trade publication. See, The Urban Grocery Store Gap, Ronald Cotterill and Andrew Franklin, Food Marketing Policy Center, Storrs, CT: University of Connecticut, April 1995
  3. No Place to Shop: Challenges and Opportunities Facing the Development of Supermarkets in Urban America, Washington D.C.: Public Voice for Food and Health Policy, 1996
  4. Grocery Store Market Potential Study. Los Angeles: RLA, October 1995; Whetten, Michelle. The Development of the East St Louis Farmers’ Market. Winstanley / Industry Park Neighborhood Organization, East St Louis, IL May 1994; Improving Access to Food in Low Income Communities: An Investigation of Three Bay Area Neighborhoods. San Francisco: California Food Policy Advocates, January 1996; Ashman, Linda et. al. Seeds of Change: Strategies for Food Security for the Inner City. Los Angeles: UCLA Department of Urban Planning, 1993; Sustainable Food Center, “Access Denied: An Analysis of Problems Facing East Austin Residents in Their Attempts to Obtain Affordable Nutritious Food.” Austin, Texas, 1995; A Status Report on Hunger and Homelessness in America’s Cities, Washington D.C.: U.S. Conference of Mayors, December, 1992.
  5. Access Denied, p. 11
  6. See Grocery Store Market Potential Study, pp. 2-3
  7. Seeds of Change, p. 86
  8. “Toward Revitalizing Inner-City Food Retailing”, Donald Marion, USDA / Economic Research Service, *National Food Review*, Summer 1982, No. 19, pp. 22-25
  9. The Poor Pay More: Food Shopping in Hartford, Hartford, Ct.: Citizens Research Education Network, et al., February 1984. p. ii
  10. Shopping Trips and Spatial Distribution of Food Stores, Youngbin Yim, University of California Transportation Center Working paper No. 125, Berkeley, CA: UCTC, 1993
  11. “Toward Revitalizing Inner-City Food Retailing”, p. 23
  12. Poor Pay More, pp.8-9
  13. See Poor Pay More, pp. 6-8; “Toward Revitalizing Inner-City Food Retailing”, pp.22-23
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14. See, for example, price comparisons in Seeds of Change, pp. 161-166; See also, Poor Pay More, p. 12; No Place to Shop, pp. 34-35.
15. Store Selection by Food Stamp Household, Paul Nelson & James Zellner, *National Food Review*, Summer, 1980, p. 24, Cited in Obtaining Food: Shopping Constraints on the Poor, Report of the U.S. Select Committee on Hunger, U.S. House of Representatives, December 1987, p. 5.
16. See The Urban Grocery Store Gap
17. Access Denied
18. Seeds of Change, pp. 155-156
19. Seeds of Change, pp. 171-172
20. "Getting There the Hard Way Every Day", Jane Gross, *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1995, p. 1
21. The Development of the East St. Louis Farmers' Market
22. Access Denied
23. Seeds of Change, p.170
24. No Place to Shop, p. 10
25. Seeds of Change, pp. 161-165
26. Improving Access to Food in Low Income Communities
27. Seeds of Change; Access Denied
28. "Nutrition and Cancer Prevention Knowledge, Beliefs, Attitudes, and Practices: the 1987 National Health interview Survey", N. Cotugna, A.F. Subar, et. al, *Journal of the American Dietetic Association*, 92 (8), August 1992.
29. "Diet and Chronic Disease for Minority populations", Shiriki Kumanyika, *Journal of Nutrition Education*, 22(2) as cited in Seeds of Change, pp. 31-32
30. "Hispanic Health in the United States", Council on Scientific Affairs, *JAMA*, 265 (2); "The Slave Health Deficit: Racism and Health Outcomes", W. Michael Byrd & Linda Clayton, *Health PAC Bulletin*, 1991
31. "Food Sources, Dietary Behavior, and the Saturated Food Intake of Latino Children", C.E. Basch, S. Shea, and P. Zybert, *American Journal of Pediatric Health*, 82 (6), June 1992; "Hispanic Health in the United States"
32. Interview with Marion Kalb, Southland Farmers' Market Association, January 1996; Seeds of Change, pp. 212-213
33. On equity issues in transit resource allocation and financing, see "Equity in transit finance: Distribution of transit subsidy benefits and costs among income classes", John Pucher, *American Planning Association Journal*, 1981, 47:387-407; "Socioeconomic characteristics of transit riders: Some recent evidence", John Pucher, C. Hendrickson, and S. McNeil, *Traffic Quarterly*, 1981, 35:461-83; "Distribution of the Tax Burden of Transit Subsidies in the United States", John Pucher and I. Hirschman, 1981, *Public Policy*, 29:341-367; Efficiency and Equity Implications of Alternative Transit Fare Policies, Robert Cervero, M. Wachs, R. Berlin, & R. Gephart, 1980, Washington: Urban Mass Transportation Administration.
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35. "Variations in Fare Payment and Public Subsidy by Race and Ethnicity: An Examination of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Transit Authority", Brian Taylor et al., Working Paper, UCLA Institute of Transportation Studies", January 1995

36. Shopping Trips and Spatial Distributions of Food Stores, Youngbin Yim, Working Paper UCTC No. 125, Berkeley: University of California Transportation Center, 1993; also Travel Distance and Market Size in Food Retailing, Youngbin Yim, Working Paper UCTC No. 124, Berkeley: University of California Transportation Center, July, 1990; The Effects of Transportation Services on the Scale of Food Retailing, Youngbin Yim, Working Paper No. 112, Berkeley: University of California Transportation Center, July, 1992

37. Testimony of Marcy Fenton at the Hearings on Food Security and Hunger, Los Angeles Voluntary Advisory Council on Hunger, April 20, 1995

38. Commercial Paratransit in the United States: Service Options, Markets and Performance, Robert Cervero, University of California Transportation Center, Working Paper No. 299, Berkeley: UCTC, January 1996, p. 11

39. 1990-91 Nationwide Personal Transportation Survey, cited in Commercial Paratransit in the United States, p. 13

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**SECTION II:**  
**CURRENT FOOD ACCESS  
PLANNING AND POLICIES**

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The absence of any well developed food access framework for planning or policy activity has meant a relative dearth of food access legislation as well as federal, state, or local agency programs. Food planning is itself a relatively new concept, often segmented into distinctive and separate constituent and policy arenas, such as the federal food commodity or nutrition programs. Recent efforts to establish food planning initiatives at the state and local level, discussed below, are perhaps the most promising forms of government related activity with the potential to address food access needs. These planning initiatives, however, are limited in scope, and at best represent the seeds of a new type of planning process capable of intervening in the food security and food access arenas.

### **Federal Initiatives: USDA and the Community Food Security Act**

At the federal level, the Department of Agriculture is the government agency that most directly addresses food system issues, primarily in terms of producer / grower related issues. The origins of many of the food programs associated with consumer needs, such as the food stamp program, were primarily linked to efforts to support farmers through government acquisition of certain surplus commodities rather than efforts designed to increase the food security of program participants.<sup>1</sup> More recently, the Food and Consumer Service (with its focus on consumer nutrition issues), the Agricultural Marketing Service (with its interest in direct marketing strategies such as farmers' markets), and the Office of Analysis and Evaluation within FCS (which has sponsored research on issues facing low income residents, such as food stamp recipients) have all touched on food access issues. However, none of these offices has established programs, grants activities, or policy initiatives specifi-

cally in the food access area.

The most substantial effort to develop such an approach was a September 1995 USDA Food Access conference hosted by the Office of Analysis and Evaluation. This two day meeting brought together anti-hunger activists, supermarket executives, community development practitioners, academics, representatives from the financial community, and government officials from a variety of agencies to explore the multi-faceted issues associated with food access in low income communities. The conference primarily focused on the specific dynamics associated with supermarket development, and only tangentially explored other community food security strategies such as farmers' markets, urban agriculture, and community-based transportation programs. The goals of the conference included:

- Present successful strategies for increasing access to food through the development of full-line food stores and alternative means such as farmers' markets. Transportation options were also noted as a potential goal;
- Provide a discussion forum for experts in supermarkets and food-store development, economic development, and food policy;
- Identify and support continued efforts to link improved food access to local economic development.<sup>2</sup>

While participation in the conference was below USDA expectations, the conference was nevertheless significant for a number of reasons. First, it gave prominence to the issue of food access within the framework of USDA. While the Office of Analysis and Evaluation, the sponsor of the event, had contracted for a couple of studies related to food access, including a food security questionnaire to be included in a Census Bureau survey, it had not formally addressed the

issue through any program or policy.<sup>3</sup> The September 1995 conference represented instead a type of surrogate planning effort by a subagency to frame a complex issue that cuts across subagency and department lines and has no actual institutional home for any planning or policy initiative. As such, the conference (and related FCS sponsored studies) provided at best tentative first steps toward formalizing inter-agency linkages identified through the conference, with the longer term objective of developing comprehensive policy responses to food access deficiencies.

However, the conference also reflected the influence of a growing national movement around community food security and food access, and legitimized food access as a matter of national policy significance. While follow-up activity from the conference by USDA (and FCS in particular) remains uncertain, the most likely constituency for programmatic development in the food access area are food stamp recipients, especially in terms of their purchasing power and need to access nutritious foods. Another arena for possible food access activity through USDA is the Community Food Security Act. This legislation, the outcome of an eighteen month campaign by a wide range of food security advocates, may also come to represent a new policy direction for the USDA involving the funding of policy-related grassroots projects.

Recently enacted as part of the 1996 Farm Bill, the Community Food Security Act (CFSA) provides \$16 million in competitive grants to non-profit organizations over the next seven years for food-related projects in low income communities. Its stated goals are to meet the food needs of low-income people; increase the self reliance of communities in providing for their own food needs; and promote comprehensive responses to

local food, farm and nutrition issues. The passage of the CFSA within the context of massive budget cuts in nutrition and agriculture programs proposed by the 104th Congress attests to its political appeal. It enjoyed the support of a broad range of stakeholders in the food system, including family farming, anti-hunger, community gardening, food banking, community development, and environmental organizations.<sup>4</sup>

The CFSA is especially significant for the issue of food access through a number of contexts. First, improving access to healthy foods is a core component of community food security and to the legislative mandate of the Act. A number of the proposals submitted to the USDA under this Act during its first funding cycle included programs designed to improve access to food for low income communities.<sup>5</sup> Second, as food access remains largely a local issue, with local causes and local solutions, the CFSA provides a basis for funding community-based strategies, such as transportation programs, farmers' markets, and community gardens. Finally, the CFSA establishes the validity of multi-sectoral strategies to food access problems. In doing so, it provides a framework for the USDA to develop a more coordinated inter-agency policy approach to this issue.

### **State Programs: Proposals for Texas and Connecticut**

At the state level, most food-related programs are associated with grower-related activities, such as technical assistance programs or agri-chemical use regulations. The state's role in more "urban"-oriented anti-hunger or food assistance related programs is primarily administrative in nature or involves pass-through activities related to federal food programs.

One potential route for state-level food ac-

cess planning or policy activity can be found in the model legislation developed in Texas in 1995. The legislation, introduced as an amendment to the Human Resources Code, sought to establish a broad based planning and funding entity called the Texas Food Security Council. The bill was passed by the Texas legislature in 1995, but vetoed by Governor George Bush Jr.. The legislation, drafted by the Austin, Texas Sustainable Food Center, provided for the establishment of a Council composed of representatives of state agencies and nonprofit organizations to inventory resources and develop food security programs, including the development of "a coordinated plan to create opportunities to increase access to food in low-income communities."<sup>6</sup> While transportation/food access planning mechanisms and/or policy initiatives were not specifically identified in the legislation, the Council concept intended to provide a statewide entry point for stimulating food access activity, whether through a planning process, pilot projects, or grants activities.

Another approach, more elaborate in nature, is the legislative package proposed by the Ad Hoc Task Force on Food Security of the Connecticut General Assembly. This legislation was passed by the General Assembly in 1996, but did not make it to a vote in the Senate. The legislation called for a number of measures, including the formation of a task force to guide the Connecticut Department of Agriculture in playing a lead role for the development and implementation of a food security policy for the state. In terms of food access and transportation, it proposed that Connecticut Development

Authority's bond funds be used to leverage private financing of supermarkets in inner cities across the state. It also called for the Department of Transportation to create a pilot program that would improve food access through local transportation coordination. Despite the bill's failure to be enacted during the 1996 legislative session, the measure establishing a Food Security Task Force was included in other legislation which was passed and signed into law. According to Mark Winne, director of the Hartford Food System and a likely member of the Task Force, food access and transportation will continue to figure prominently in the task force's future work.<sup>7</sup>

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**It is noteworthy that municipal and regional planning departments across the U.S. have few if any functions associated with food security or overall food system functions.**

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**Local Initiatives: Food Policy Councils**

At the local level, much of the interest in food planning is of recent origin. It is noteworthy that municipal and regional planning departments across the U.S. have few if any functions associated with

food security or overall food system functions. Most of these are handled by other departments, agencies, or through state or federal programs, such as food stamp administration. During 1995 and 1996, the absence of municipal food planning functions was further underlined by food program-related changes proposed in the 104th Congress, based on the devolution to the states and cities of a number of federal anti-hunger programs. Yet such a transfer of funds and responsibilities was being promoted at a point when the capacity to handle such issues among local and regional governments continued to be minimal or non-existent.

The most visible, contemporary forms of

local food security planning have involved the development of Food Policy Councils (FPCs), or Food Policy Commissions, that have been established in several different communities and regions (e.g., Hartford, Knoxville, St. Paul, and Toronto), and broadly parallel the type of statewide Council established through the Texas legislation described above. FPC structures and activities have varied. The two most prevalent models are municipal/government-based entities and non-profit organizations. FPC roles also vary, whether in terms of policy development or program implementation, or whether they serve as catalyst or facilitator. All, however, have sought to construct a comprehensive approach to agriculture and food related problems.<sup>8</sup>

Food Policy Councils have generally sought to focus on the multiple pathways of the food system, including both urban food security concerns such as hunger, nutrition, access, community development, and urban agriculture opportunities, as well as grower-related considerations such as direct marketing. Despite their system-wide focus, however, Food Policy Councils and community food planning efforts have tended to remain marginalized efforts at advocacy and intervention, primarily due to a lack of funds and institutional support. Even organizations established within municipal governments have suffered from limited resources, due to tight government budgets, jurisdictional issues, and the problem of institutional autonomy.<sup>9</sup>

FPCs, nevertheless, represent a potential region-wide or municipal organizational and/

or administrative home for food security planning, including food access and transportation initiatives. As described in Section III, a number of food access/food transportation programs have been developed by FPCs in cities like Knoxville, Tennessee and Austin, Texas. Such programs have been designed to meet specific neighborhood concerns (e.g., access to a supermarket) rather than through an overall planning and evaluation process. Beyond those programs, the efforts to design an FPC in Los Angeles, described in Section IV, identifies one possible model for food security and food access planning.

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**Despite their system-wide focus, however, Food Policy Councils and community food planning efforts have tended to remain marginalized efforts**

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## TRANSPORTATION SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

### Federal Programs

Within the world of transportation planning, the focus on food access has been, at best, a stepchild to the larger emphasis on commuting and vehicle mobility. Where available, links between federal transportation policies and local programs and food access for inner city transit dependent residents are primarily found in an ad hoc assortment of services which attempt to meet the intra-neighborhood needs of communities. These paratransit services tend to comprise the workhorses of such transit systems. Such programs, which most often include the use of vans, taxis, carpools, and jitneys, are well suited to enhancing mobility for food shoppers, given their ability to respond flexibly to variations in travel demand as well as route, and their generally low capital and operating costs with respect to conventional transit.<sup>10</sup>

While no federal transportation policies deal explicitly with the issue of food access or of the servicing of intra-neighborhood needs, the 1991 Intermodal Surface Transportation Enhancement Act (ISTEA) and the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) do create certain opportunities for addressing these issues. The ADA, which includes a set of detailed regulations for both private and public entities, specifies, among other provisions, that transportation vehicles and facilities be made accessible for those who use wheelchairs. Creating this legislative focus on access, moreover, has also brought attention to the disabled as a transit dependent population, including this population's significant concerns about food access. Those programs and services that were ultimately developed as a direct or indirect result of ADA, however, have remained tailored to this specific constituency.

### ISTEA

Without a direct constituency focus as with the ADA, ISTEA nevertheless provides possible funding for a wide range of urban transportation programs, a few of which also have the potential to address food shopping needs. The proposed ISTEA legislation evolved as the National Interstate and Defense Highway Program was winding down in the late 1980s, and the principal transportation policy thrust among legislators and transportation planners focused on urban congestion issues. A strategic planning process, including 65 public forums across the country, was initiated through the Transportation 2020 Task Force. The Task Force's final recommendations included more funding for surface transportation and increased attention to land use and environmental considerations that were also embedded in the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments. That planning and political process contributed to the drafting of the Intermodal Surface Transpor-

tation Enhancement Act of 1991, a complex piece of legislation that seeks to take into account land use considerations and their relationship to different transportation modes. The legislation authorizes the expenditure of \$155 billion over six years for a wide range of programs ranging from highway construction and environmental improvements such as stormwater mitigation to "transportation demand management", the area in which support for paratransit programs can be located. Within that context of program support, mobility (e.g., reduced congestion) remains ISTEA's primary measurement of success. Transportation control measures for reducing traffic congestion and achieving air quality standards are also prominent.<sup>11</sup>

Metropolitan Planning Organizations (such as the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) in Los Angeles) are given great flexibility in setting funding priorities, within broad categories. For example, in Los Angeles, while the MTA has employed ISTEA funds for rail projects, it has also made funding available for the transportation demand management (TDM) programs that are the primary route for food access initiatives. TDM guidelines, in a 1995-96 MTA application package, allow for such projects as "innovative shuttle services... that serve a variety of needs and that have new or innovative features. Such projects may serve multi-modal transportation centers, community based needs, and community based purposes".<sup>12</sup> However, despite its potential applicability, ISTEA funding for food access planning or programs has yet to be pursued, a function in part of the lack of interaction and functional separation between food or human service and transportation policy.

## Local Programs: Los Angeles and Cambridge

In Los Angeles, most of the paratransit initiatives established through the City of Los Angeles Transportation Department, under the heading of the city's Community Transit Program, are targeted toward elderly and disabled clients, and establish no direct food access/transit dependency relationship. (See Chart 1.) The City's Dial-a-ride program, for example, provides shared rides to the elderly and disabled in lift-equipped vans. Fares are subsidized, typically costing 2 scrip vouchers (60 vouchers may be purchased quarterly for \$12, or \$7 for low income individuals). Recent data suggests moderate usage for an undifferentiated "shopping" category and for "nutrition" purposes. For December, 1995, the "shopping" category comprises from 0-10% of total rides in the different geographical areas of the City. Interestingly, trips for "nutrition," presumably to congregate meals for the elderly, comprise up to 41% of total rides during the same period (which is also the highest in the low income South Central area).<sup>13</sup> Shopping is apparently limited by space constraints; the service restricts patrons to three grocery bags per trip, and does not allow shopping carts on the vehicle.<sup>14</sup>

For the general public, however, the City does operate *DASH* shuttles in 16 targeted communities. These circulator routes cost 25 cents, operate in clockwise and counter-clockwise directions, and are designed to facilitate non-commuter needs, such as medical appointments, shopping trips, etc. According to Chief of Transit James Okazaki, the *DASH* program was established to address concerns about conventional transit's high price and inconvenience for local intra-neighborhood trips. Community residents from different areas of the city played a crucial role in advocating for these shuttles

as well as planning their routes, developed in consultation with community leaders. Interestingly, the *DASH* shuttles are funded with sales tax receipts rather than federal monies, because of DOT concern that there are "too many strings attached" associated with union approval of expenditures. Okazaki also noted that the *DASH* shuttles represent a cost efficient means of transportation, receiving a one dollar subsidy per passenger, as compared to over \$30 for rail passengers, and a comparable amount for the city's dial-a-ride curb to curb service for the elderly.

Recently surveyed Midtown and Crenshaw *DASH* riders cited price and convenience as their primary reasons for riding *DASH*. Riders referred to bus stop distances from home and/or travel destination as well as time factors (upwards of 45 minutes or more for short distance trips) on a RTD bus. The *DASH* service travel time within each community, on the other hand, was estimated at less than 20 minutes, while the cost for the service was a dollar less than RTD. Trips were scattered among a variety of purposes, the most common being work or school. Grocery shopping was cited by 8% and 7% respectively, of the riders.<sup>15</sup>

The development of the "smart shuttle" also represents another possible direction toward facilitating food access in Los Angeles. A generic term for a wide range of services with flexible routes driven by customer demand, and advanced technologies such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and computer dispatching, the smart shuttle operates akin to a taxi, and will be operated privately. The City of Los Angeles Transportation Department has put out requests for proposals on the operation of a two year demonstration project in the high density, low income immigrant neighborhood of Westlake. According to MTA planner Scott

Green, this service will cost 75 cents, (25 cents for a transfer), and take riders to any location of their choice within a defined service area, with an approximate 1.5 mile radius. The shuttle will be able to operate on narrow streets that conventional transit is not capable of entering, increasing accessibility for individuals who have limited mobility. The project will be heavily subsidized with local funding in its first two years, and then will have to operate as an entrepreneurial activity, free of subsidies. Future MTA plans incorporate the construction of a new supermarket adjacent to the recently constructed Red Line subway station, which the smart shuttle could help service.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, Tom Connor, the deputy general manager of the city of Los Angeles' Transportation Department was not familiar with any food transportation program involving the use of paratransit services such as vans, by either the city or by food stores.<sup>17</sup> However, MTA planner Scott Green did mention that after the 1992 civil disturbances RTD established special routes to help residents of impacted areas get to supermarkets. Entitled Operation Foodbasket, this project, no longer in existence, is noteworthy in that it was defined within the context of emergency/natural disaster planning. By subsequently eliminating the program, it further indicated the lack of any food access framework in the **ongoing** transportation planning and implementation process. Food access became a concern as a result of a large-scale social upheaval, not as a day-to-day problem.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, food access issues have been directly linked to community concerns about the lack of nearby supermarkets in specific Cambridge neighborhoods. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, two Cambridge area supermarkets closed down, leaving significant neighborhood ar-

reas within the city's boundaries without proximity to a full service market. In 1991, an advisory "Food Policy Referendum" was held in the Cambridge Township that called for the city to establish food access as a citywide priority. While the referendum did not specifically direct any policy or agency activity, with 80% of the voters voting in support of a food access approach, elected officials and municipal agencies quickly elevated food access, and specifically new supermarket development, to the top of the public agenda.

In December 1994, the Community Development Department issued a Report to the Cambridge City Council that focused on how the city itself could become part of a process of ensuring "adequate access" for all Cambridge residents to full-service markets", as well as identifying alternative methods of providing access to food.<sup>18</sup> The Report defined supermarket access in terms of "walking radius" (identified as one half mile or less) rather than "driving radius" (defined as two miles or less). Cambridge, like a number of other eastern seaboard cities, had a significant percentage of households without vehicle ownership, though transit dependency concerns were mediated in part by the fact that Cambridge is a pedestrian-oriented city with an extensive public transportation system. Given the high percentage of walk-in shoppers, the issue of supermarket proximity was particularly significant.

The CDD Report both provided information to inform an access approach while calling for a series of public initiated activities designed to address the access problem. These included: a site analysis of possible supermarket locations as defined by food access considerations; regulatory interventions, such as permitting waivers or zoning approaches to facilitate the siting of supermar-

kets; and the development of special grocery store regulations, transfer of development rights, and exemptions regarding store size in areas where there were retail limits.<sup>19</sup>

The Cambridge situation is also of interest insofar as a community-based political action (the advisory referendum) in response to a food access concern (supermarket departure) resulted in a set of municipal actions, which included a broad-based analysis and review, a set of recommended actions, and the beginnings of a public process to support for food access initiatives.

Today, transportation planning's nexus to food access is often limited to a discussion of bus stop location and routing in terms of shopping centers, rather than a more community-based approach to helping connect the transit dependent with food retailers. But as the Cambridge situation reveals and ISTEA legislation suggests, an integration of transportation and food access planning remains a viable option at both the legislative and agency level.

## FOOD RETAIL SECTOR APPROACHES

### Industry Attitudes

The food retail industry has played a significant role in both contributing to and being impacted by access related issues. This study has elaborated how supermarket location decisions have exacerbated transportation concerns of residents in areas with lower than average vehicle ownership who need to travel longer distances to use full service food markets. At the same time, the supermarket industry in particular has come to recognize that "inner city" locations today represent a relatively undeveloped market for a highly competitive industry. Improved access could potentially expand a

market's customer base; access-sponsored programs, in turn can enhance a market's community good will, a crucial concern for a customer based industry. Access-related problems may also be reflected in other additional costs, notably the loss of shopping carts and the threat of impoundment charges from municipalities. The ability to address access concerns for supermarkets (and the food retail sector as a whole), then, represents both a business opportunity and a competitive advantage.

Yet, similar to the absence of food access related planning among transportation and other public agencies, the food retail industry has not developed a consistent or systematic program to meet customer transportation needs. "There is no organized discussion within the food retail industry about transportation approaches", according to a staff member of the California Grocer's Association, an absence that is also reflected in trade publications and program initiatives.<sup>20</sup> For example, the Food Marketing Institute's "Urban Initiatives Task Force" established in the wake of the Los Angeles civil disorders of May 1992, was specifically charged with "recommending ways for the supermarket industry to broaden and strengthen its participation in neglected communities while serving the FMI membership".<sup>21</sup> These recommendations included program initiatives in such areas as education, job training, mentoring, and store development, but not specifically access or transportation needs. Other FMI publications listing supermarket initiatives in "underserved communities" have failed to include any transportation or access-related programs.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, an awards program of FMI and the National League of Cities that highlighted seventeen different successful collaborative programs between communities and supermarkets, listed only one transportation-related program, a shuttle service sponsored

by the Kroger Co. in the city of Savannah, Georgia. Even when food retail chains have established transportation programs, they have been employee rather than customer-based. In Southern California, for example, the Vons company, influenced in part by local air quality regulations, purchased two vans through CalTrans grant funds to provide a rideshare/van service program for employees. Although the vans were not in use during non-commute down times, Vons decided against any customer shuttle program because of possible additional insurance costs.<sup>23</sup>

Discussions with — and presentations by — food retail industry executives reveal a similar lack of organized response to transportation and access questions. Former Lucky Stores executive vice president John Benner, in a presentation at the 1995 California Grocer's Association annual meeting, detailed a range of food security and anti-hunger initiatives that could be undertaken by supermarkets in recognition of the "community" role of the industry. Such initiatives included product donations to food pantries and food banks (e.g., damaged cans, unsold produce), financial contributions to anti-hunger organizations through shopper receipts and other charitable donations, and educational materials made available at store sites. Access and transportation initiatives, however, were not included.<sup>24</sup> In that context, a "community" role is defined as the broad social responsibilities of the business rather than reorienting or restructuring the activities of the business to address community needs.

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**The divorce of "access needs" from "community function" is noteworthy for an industry that is so heavily place-based and customer-oriented in its economic or market share considerations.**

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The divorce of "access needs" from "community function" is noteworthy for an industry that is so heavily place-based and customer-oriented in its economic or market share considerations. Where a store is located is considered to have direct bearing on how to attract customers to a store, and vice versa. At the same time, availability of land (influenced significantly by parking requirements which in turn elevates car transport as the primary if not exclusive transport factor to be considered) represents a major barrier to supermarket development in inner city areas, according to the FMI Urban Initiatives Task

Force.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the customer focus tends to be linked to product availability and differentiation, often tailored to customer demographics. Inner city stores, despite lower than average vehicle ownership and a pattern of increased walk-in traffic, have tended to be focused more on crime (e.g., by making parking lots safer) than access.

Walk-in customers, in turn, have become the prime constituency for the use of shopping carts, given the absence of any defined transportation approach at the inner city store. Ultimately, the use and disposal of shopping carts becomes, as one food retail executive put it, a substitution for a store-based transportation program.<sup>26</sup>

**Shopping Cart Loss As A Food Access Proxy**

For the food retail industry, shopping cart loss has emerged as a major financial burden and highly sensitive policy question. Cart loss in turn has been directly linked to transportation and access issues; i.e., cart

losses tend to be greatest at stores located in communities with lower than average vehicle ownership. The financial impact of cart losses is clearly a significant expense for food retailers. The replacement cost of a single cart runs between \$60 and \$120, depending on cart size. More than a dozen cities in California also have shopping cart impoundment laws that contribute to the costs and potential liabilities for supermarkets.

Where impoundment laws exist, a food store can be charged for each cart retrieval, with charges in California ranging from as low as \$4 to as high as \$25 a cart.

Many supermarkets contract with private cart recovery or retrieval services to locate missing carts, and, in some cases, have established their own Shopping Cart Retrieval Service which in turn pays independent contractors to retrieve carts. Payments for retrieved carts also vary, both in terms of the cost per load and the cost per cart (depending on the size of the load), although cumulative payments can be substantial in areas where the number of carts taken off the store premises might run as high as 10% or more of the carts in use.<sup>27</sup> In 1992, FMI estimated that the grocery industry lost 1.85 million carts, including a loss of 190,000 carts in car dependent southern California. The California Grocer's Association has estimated that 750,000 carts are taken from stores in California, with losses about \$17 million a year, and \$9 million a year in Southern California alone. The cart retrieval business, though often operating as a kind of fly-by-night operation, has nevertheless, according to *Forbes* magazine, come to represent a \$12 million market, partly a reflection of the high volume and expense of cart loss.<sup>28</sup> One in-

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**Cart loss and retrieval costs could amount to upwards of \$67,000 a year in some inner city stores.**

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dependent contractor for a Los Angeles-based Shopping Cart Service estimated that he alone retrieved about 200 to 250 carts a day, and that as many as one fourth of some store's carts might be taken off site during a shopping day. The City of Inglewood, with a population of 114,000 as well as 19 small to medium size independent food stores and general merchandise stores, estimated that as many as 400-500

shopping carts are removed from Inglewood stores and abandoned on city streets **each day**, with figures increasing during periods of holiday shopping. As another example, A-State Kart Kleen, a Mesa, Arizona-based cart retrieval company, with a staff of nine "retrievers", picks up an average of 900 carts a day in the Phoenix area. A-State Kart Kleen's largest customer, a food chain with 16 stores, many of which operate in low income, transit-dependent communities, alone loses 700 carts a day. Another Southern California food store executive estimated that the Food-for-Less chain (now merged with Ralphs) made upwards of fifteen cart retrieval trips **per day**, and that cart loss and retrieval costs could amount to upwards of \$67,000 a year in some inner city stores.<sup>29</sup>

There is widespread recognition both inside and outside the food retail industry that cart loss is a direct outcome of lack of transportation. "Carts go AWOL because they are used as wheels for folks who don't have cars", according to a *Forbes* article on the issue, a sentiment widely shared by cart retrievers who are constantly seeking to identify neighborhoods where the highest number of abandoned carts may be located. According to a Public Voice report on urban

supermarkets, the Cleveland-based Finast Supermarket chain reported that it loses an average of 300 shopping carts annually in urban locations, compared to 20 in its suburban locations. Another transit dependent constituency, senior citizens, are also seen as potentially responsible for cart loss problems. In the Phoenix area, with its large number of retirement communities, for example, there is a high volume of shopping cart losses in middle class areas with majority retiree/senior populations.<sup>30</sup>

However, despite the significant concerns regarding cart loss and its assumed links to transit dependencies, no transportation-based intervention within the food retail sector has emerged as a preventative strategy to reduce or eliminate the problem. Most stores create or contract with retrieval service companies to minimize their losses, although retrieval costs have also come to represent a significant, stand-alone expense. Other factors, such as organized theft operations, are also identified as major contributions to the problem. However, organized theft rings often represent “after-the-fact” manifestations of the issue; that is, the cart theft operations are the mirror opposites of cart retrieval services by searching for carts that have been abandoned by those who have already used them. Where programs have been initiated, shopping cart loss has often been institutionalized as the store-based transportation policy. For example, KV Mart, a 13 unit chain headquartered in Carson, in southern California, has established a program that allows customers to take their groceries home in carts and then contracts with a private retrieval company to locate the carts that are not brought back to the store. Since KV Mart estimates that as many as 35% of its customers walk to the store, the cost of loss and retrieval payments — upwards of \$300,000 annually — is absorbed in order to maintain its transit-de-

pendent customer base, while avoiding the cost of instituting its own transit service.<sup>31</sup>

The issue that has generated the most concern among food retailers is the recent interest of municipalities in impoundment laws, particularly in cities with high numbers of abandoned shopping carts. Although a few cities have targeted the taking of carts as their focus of action — e.g., the city of Lawndale in southern California stipulated in a municipal ordinance that abandoned shopping carts created a “visual blight” and contributed to “a reduction in the value of properties within the community”, and that it would thus be illegal to remove them from store premises<sup>32</sup> — most of the ordinances have targeted food stores themselves. For example, the city of Inglewood established an “Abandoned Shopping Cart Ordinance” in 1995 that sought to remove abandoned carts by forcing retail stores to pay a \$15 administrative fee for each cart that the City had retrieved. After carts have been located and stored at a city facility, a notice is sent to the retailer, and the retailer has thirty days to pick up and pay for the cart. After the 30 day period has passed, the city then sells the unclaimed carts to a private retrieval service at a reduced cost (between \$5 and \$25 depending on the size and type of cart). Though Inglewood evaluated its first year of operation as a money loser (more than 1600 carts had been retrieved in that time, but the fees and sales of carts did not fully offset the costs of the program, which included primarily staff time in the collection and administering the program, as well as storage costs, according to Inglewood staff), its primary motivation for the ordinance was to eliminate the “blight and nuisance” factors associated with abandoned carts. The retail industry, however, continued to remain strongly opposed to the municipal impoundment approach, and in 1996, the Vons company filed a law suit against the

city of Inglewood challenging the city's right to impound carts.<sup>33</sup>

By 1995, seventeen cities in California had enacted abandoned shopping cart ordinances similar to Inglewood and upwards of thirty more cities had begun making inquiries about enacting similar laws. In response, the California Grocer's Association pushed legislation that would restrict cities from enacting such ordinances, partly by limiting the impoundment/retrieval fee to \$5 per cart and exempting any store that had itself retained a cart retrieval service, including their own in-house as well as contracted service. The CGA-endorsed legislation, which was also supported by many of the largest food chains in the state, was opposed by the California League of Cities and 26 different California municipalities. Though the bill passed both houses of the Legislature, it was vetoed by Governor Wilson.<sup>34</sup>

The Inglewood example is noteworthy, since both city officials and food retailers engaged in extensive discussions prior to the enactment of the ordinance concerning possible solutions to the problem of shopping carts leaving store premises. Both store owners and city officials recognized that a primary reason for the problem was inadequate transportation to the stores and the large number of walk-in customers. Most of the discussion, however, centered on the cart retrieval process; namely, how could stores more effectively get the carts off the streets. One transportation-based program was initiated: a subsidized taxi service for food shoppers. This program, however, never succeeded, given the difficulty of "bunching" up customers and creating a higher ratio of shoppers to rides.<sup>35</sup>

The shopping cart loss problem, despite its obvious relation to food access and transit dependency, remains a concern defined out-

side the framework of a transportation/food access approach. Whether seen as a problem of "blight" or homelessness, as many municipalities have defined it, or, for food retailers, an unwelcome though widely anticipated cost of business in transit dependent communities, shopping cart loss has emerged as the one single, consistent substitute for transportation/food access planning. This problem of policy (or lack thereof), promises to become more protracted, given current and anticipated food insecurity and transit dependency indicators.

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**SECTION III:  
EXPLORATORY PROGRAMS:  
CASE STUDIES OF  
FOOD ACCESS INITIATIVES**

Despite the absence of any comprehensive food access-related transportation programs initiated by government agencies or through the food retail industry, a small number of exploratory programs have been developed at the store or local government level. These programs have been established in response to specific concerns, primarily those that have been constituent or customer-driven. This Section describes a number of these programs as individual case studies grouped together in relation to the type of transportation service offered or the constituencies served. What primarily characterizes these programs is their ad hoc nature as well as their lack of relationship to broader policy or industry-wide efforts. As programs often associated with the ability to establish "good will" in a customer service industry, they have not been evaluated for certain key transportation or food access-related criteria, such as increased store sales, declining cart losses, or even, for some, the overall cost of service itself. They are presented here as signposts of both the opportunity and need for such programs, despite the difficulty of being able to analyze criteria (e.g., costs and benefits or customer feedback) that could be used to evaluate program objectives and implementation.

### **STORE INITIATED VAN SERVICES (From the Store to the Home)**

#### **El Tapatio Supermercado/Los Angeles**

Located in a former tortilla factory in South Central Los Angeles, El Tapatio, an independent full service market with 18,000 square feet and outdoor merchandise displays, runs one of the more popular shuttle services within the food retail industry. The immediate area served by the store (within a square mile) is 80% Hispanic and 10% Afri-

can-American. Income levels and vehicle ownership are significantly lower than countywide averages. Although the area is densely populated and there are some bus routes that cross near the store's location, the neighborhood is also considered a high crime area and there is substantial community concern about the safety of bus stops after dark. Dial-a-Ride services are also minimal in the area.

Soon after the family-owned El Tapatio opened its store in 1993, its manager decided to initiate a Customer Shuttle Service program. The van service idea was a familiar one to store management, since it had been previously utilized at the Numero Uno market, another medium sized independent market in South Central Los Angeles which had been owned and operated by another member of the family.<sup>1</sup>

From its inception, the El Tapatio shuttle program established itself as a high profile, customer-oriented service providing the store with a strong community/ethnic-related reputation and loyal clientele. The shuttles offer a "store-to-home" service in order to address the needs of such transit-dependent customers as senior citizens and families with small children. There is no charge to the customer for use of the shuttle. There is, however, a \$25 minimum purchase requirement which is loosely monitored by store personnel (e.g., by checking the number of bags per passenger). The shuttle operates 7 days a week from 7:00 AM to 9:30 PM.

The immediate success of the program caused the store to expand its fleet of 3 vans to 5 shuttle buses with 6 drivers who work staggered hours. Each shuttle bus holds between 12 to 14 people. There is no set route; instead, passengers announce their destinations when the van is full. The service seeks

to maintain a 3-4 mile radius to the route, although the program's popularity has attracted customers from far greater distances. First time requests to use the service are honored; however, customers are alerted to the preferred boundaries for drop off locations. The service is most heavily used during evening hours and van departures during these peak periods tend to be a half hour or less.

The El Tapatio Customer Shuttle Service represents a classic trade off between operational costs and multiple customer-related benefits, many of which are not quantified. El Tapatio's manager, Ed Torres, estimates that the service costs about \$4,000 per month. This includes labor costs (primarily the drivers) which amount to \$2,200/month, as well as vehicle purchase/replacement, maintenance and insurance. There are also significant permitting and licensing requirements for the operation, including the need for a Class B (bus driver) license for the van drivers. Competing transportation services such as taxi companies have also sought to undermine the program by filing complaints regarding permit or license infractions.

Despite the costs and operational burdens, the Customer Shuttle Service has become the primary marketing tool for El Tapatio in attracting customers and developing strong community support. Advertising the service in itself represents a powerful publicity advantage. The use of the service also helps reduce parking lot overflow, a key issue for a store requiring a continuing customer flow. Reducing shopping cart loss is another shuttle service objective. Although there has been no direct comparative analysis regarding cart loss, store manager Torres argues that there has been a relationship between the success of the shuttle program and the declining number of carts taken off the premises. Ultimately, the most significant ben-

efit of the program, according to Torres, has been its "goodwill" dimension. A large sign on the front of the store says, "SHOP HERE AND WE WILL TAKE YOU HOME", a message that directly expresses the community service/access link that El Tapatio management wishes to convey.<sup>2</sup>

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### **Fine's Community Van Service/East Los Angeles**

Fine's Market in the East Los Angeles neighborhood of Boyle Heights is a 15,000 square foot full service independent food market. A family-owned business for fifty years with a nearly exclusive Latino customer base, Fine's offers a number of additional programs beyond its grocery store business, including a Friday/Saturday swap meet in its parking lot. In 1990, the store initiated a "store-to-home" van service in response to the store's largely elderly clients who were concerned about both crime and access issues. Though Fine's sold bus tokens at the store, given the large numbers of customers who took public transportation, the development of the van program was seen as assisting those who might not otherwise shop (or reduce their amount of purchase) at Fine's, including seniors without cars and families with children.

Currently the program operates a single, brightly painted van which holds ten passengers and runs daily on a nearly continuous basis from 9:00 Am to 6:00 PM.. On weekends, the van runs every ten minutes and averages more than fifty trips a day. Shoppers are required to purchase at least \$30 worth of groceries in order to obtain their ride, though the driver doesn't check receipts. There is no charge for the ride.

Van routes are not predetermined. The driver asks for passenger destinations before leaving the parking lot and brings custom-

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ers directly to their doorstep and assists them with their bags if they need help. Most routes fall within a one mile radius of the store. On occasion, customers, on request, are picked up to come to the store. To make that arrangement, a customer first calls the store to order the pick-up service. The store then beeps the van driver. Once the van's route has been set, the van driver phones the customer and arranges a pick up on the van's return to the store.

Similar to the El Tapatio program, the Fine's van service is costly, estimated to run as high as \$4,000/month. Although Fine's has no special permits from the city to run the service, it is obliged to insure the van through an automobile insurance company, which has become a major expense of the program. There is no special driver for the vehicle; instead the store's regular employees are utilized. The popularity of the program has grown steadily and Fine's is considering expanding to a second van.

Despite the costs, the Fine's managers see the program as creating significant benefits. Although it has not emerged as the type of signature program that El Tapatio offers, the Fine's Customer Van Service has established important benefits, including increased merchandise sales (although only estimated, not measured), reduction of parking lot use (again an estimate) and, primarily, its goodwill function. The van service is advertised throughout the store and in distributed newsprint flyers which in turn represents an important marketing tool for the store itself. Customer goodwill has also expressed itself in a number of ways, most notably during the May 1992 civil disorder when Fine's customers stopped people from breaking into the store. As a community service, the van program establishes, according to store owner Allan Fine, a way for Fine's to "put something back into the community". Rec-

ognition of that role creates an intangible value for a business seeking a community identity.<sup>3</sup>

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## **STORE INITIATED VAN SERVICES (Pick Up and Drop Off)**

### **Fiesta Market/Houston, Texas**

Fiesta Market is a major Texas grocery chain with 33 stores; 30 in Houston, Texas, 2 in Dallas, and 1 in Austin. A number of the Fiesta stores are located in low income or bridge communities, and several of these serve immigrant populations (mostly, though not exclusively, Latino). Part of Fiesta's marketing approach for these stores has been to recreate an environment familiar to immigrant shoppers by "importing the confusion and profusion of food of a Third World Market," according to one Fiesta store manager.<sup>4</sup> This strategy includes offering additional services, ranging from cashing payroll and government checks onsite, providing free vaccinations, an ear piercing service, and the sale of money orders and bus tokens. Among its other operations, Fiesta also owns an airport shuttle service. Currently, at two of its stores, Fiesta provides a van shuttle service that picks up and subsequently returns Fiesta shoppers to their homes.

The most innovative Fiesta shuttle originated as a program conceived by an African-American employee of what was then a Safeway store. When the Safeway store went out of business, a group of its workers purchased the store and created a new food market, known as Appletree. The van service continued and expanded under the new Appletree management. When Fiesta bought out Appletree, it decided to continue the van service, a decision that reflected the program's popularity. Fiesta store manage-

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ment also sought to restructure the program to tie it directly to its airport shuttle business.

The Fiesta service has pick up and drop off destinations at a set route, with regular stops at eleven different apartment complexes within approximately a one mile radius from the store. The stop locations have been identified in conjunction with managers of the apartment complexes who in turn take responsibility for posting bilingual van schedules at each building site. The van operates seven days a week, with at least one apartment complex served each day and some complexes served several times during the week. Van service begins at 10AM and runs continuously until 5 PM, at about 30 minute intervals during the busiest periods such as weekends. The vans have a 17 person capacity and groceries can be placed on the luggage racks. The service is free. Most customers tend to be women and children (a second Fiesta program about four miles away serves primarily senior citizens). On a given weekend day, the program might transport 60-70 shoppers from a single apartment complex. The three drivers used for the service are employed by Fiesta and also work in other capacities for the store. Fiesta's umbrella insurance plan covers the vans and costs (and benefits) are not segregated out.

This Fiesta van service is considered a model program by its store manager, and has received national attention (most notably a National Public Radio news segment that aired November 22, 1995). However, the program is also a product of the store's own history, circumstances and management interests (the van service is store specific and not a company wide policy), including its origins as a Safeway / Appletree program. There is significant walk-in traffic and cart loss has also been a major factor. Fiesta has maintained its own cart retrieval service,

which, at its peak, (before the expansion of the van program) had included two drivers and an 18 foot trailer used almost continuously. "Lack of transportation is a significant issue my customers face," explains Fiesta manager Tom Skelley, arguing further that the program has successfully allowed Fiesta to develop both a loyal customer base and a highly visible marketing strategy with respect to its major constituency from the apartment complexes. Food access in this context represents more than a transportation service, but the ability to identify community needs and interests and maintain a valuable historical identity.

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### **The Spirit of Kroger Transportation Shuttle/Savannah, Georgia**

In March 1993, the Kroger Company initiated a transportation service called "The Spirit of Kroger Transportation Shuttle". The shuttle was established to pick up shoppers at specific sites, such as public housing units and senior citizen complexes, and deliver them to the Kroger stores closest to each site. At a designated time (usually one hour after shoppers had been dropped off at the stores), those using the service would be returned to each of the pick up points. A few of the shoppers using the service (e.g., apartment residents, those who are physically handicapped, etc.) are brought directly to their doorsteps. The driver is a Kroger employee (a former department head) who is well versed in the customer service aspect of the program; that is, helping establish an environment of Kroger service for people with specific transportation needs.<sup>5</sup>

The Spirit of Kroger shuttle operates six days a week, Monday through Saturday, between 9AM and 7PM. There is no cost to the shopper, and, in its first three years of operation, five of Kroger's ten stores in the Savannah

area participated in the program. There are 27 routes as part of the program, three of them repeat routes. The shuttle has a 15 person capacity and, as of April 1996, approximately 200 to 220 customers used the service each week. The shuttle's schedule is printed in the "Penny Saver" magazine which in turn has served as an important source of positive publicity for the store chain. Kroger has not undertaken a full cost-benefit analysis of the program, but has assumed that, aside from the public relations benefits, the service has created a larger volume of sales to partially offset the specific costs of the program. Cart loss issues have not figured prominently in the program's assessment, although some of the participating Kroger stores have had a chronic problem with carts being taken by walk-in customers.

The primary motivation for the program had its origins in the public controversies associated with Kroger's decision to close one of its stores located in a low income community where there had been considerable walk-in traffic, according to Ken Lane, the shuttle program's director. "We received a lot of adverse publicity about the store closing," Lane commented, "including complaints that local area residents would no longer be able to shop at a supermarket."<sup>6</sup> By establishing the shuttle service, Kroger hoped to counter the negative publicity and enhance its reputation as a service-oriented operation in a highly competitive market. In terms of that objective, Kroger management sees the program as an important success.

## **CONSTITUENT SERVICES (Transportation for Senior Citizens)**

### **Von's Leisure World Shuttle Service Laguna Hills, California**

One of the primary constituencies for food access programs are senior citizens, particularly in communities with large senior populations and residential homes or centers, such as retirement communities. Among the best known retirement communities in Southern California (where many such housing arrangements can be found) is the Leisure World complex in Laguna Hills in Orange County. Leisure World houses 18,000 residents in a 3.27 square mile area. Although a number of residents own and use cars, a substantial constituency of residents cannot or do not choose to use their vehicles for getting around Leisure World or to access neighboring services, including food stores. The closest full service food market for the majority of Leisure World residents is a Vons' market, a major retailer in the region (Vons is the second largest supermarket chain in Southern California). While there is public transportation adjacent to the Leisure World complex and a shuttle bus service within the complex with 12 routes serving nearly 60,000 riders per month, a number of residents prefer or need a door to door service for their grocery shopping. By having to carry groceries from the Leisure World bus stop to their homes, it limits the amount of groceries that could be purchased.<sup>7</sup>

Until the early 1990s, one of the more frequently used door-to-door services was the Dial-a-ride program. When Dial-a-ride canceled its services in Orange County in the fall of 1994 due to budget cuts, SuperShuttle, a transport service primarily used for airport routes, was approached by Leisure World residents to provide a replacement

service for Dial-a-ride for two grocery stores, the nearby Vons store as well as an Albertsons market which was at a slightly further distance from Leisure World. Dial-a-ride had charged each customer 90 cents per trip, while the SuperShuttle program was established at a \$2.00 charge per person. The SuperShuttle program, despite a fee of \$2 per passenger for the door-to-door delivery, was a money loser for SuperShuttle, which estimated a charge of \$4.00 per person in order to make any profit. The program, however, in response to strong community interest, was also initiated in part as a loss-leader to establish specific marketing goals (e.g., attracting seniors to use the airport shuttle). The Leisure World citizen group hoped to make the program more permanent by obtaining long term funding from Leisure World's own Golden Rain Foundation. When the foundation funding was not obtained, the citizen's group started a "Shopping Shuttle Group" to raise the additional \$2 per person. As a result of that effort, the program kept operating for another several weeks. SuperShuttle, however, finally suspended the service when the additional funds were no longer generated.<sup>8</sup>

As soon as the shuttle service was canceled, Leisure World residents began mobilizing to reestablish a shuttle program. Albertsons, meanwhile, contracted with another charter transportation company (which had other Albertsons accounts) to provide a van service, though the service did not include door to door service. Vons then became the focus of community activity, with residents mobilizing for a service which represented their only venue for continued grocery shopping at that store. In response to the vigorous and well organized campaign as well as the fear of competition represented by the Albertsons service, Vons decided to initiate its own program, based on the use of

SuperShuttle resources. A new store-to-home shuttle service from Vons to Leisure World was initiated in March 1995, just one month after the SuperShuttle service had stopped, with an increase in service from two to three days a week.

The program consists of the following: residents are encouraged to take the public transportation to the store and then Vons returns customers to their doorstep, with the driver frequently carrying groceries into the homes. Vons leases the shuttle and driver from SuperShuttle at a slightly discounted hourly rate. (The general, non-discounted hourly charter rate for SuperShuttle vans in Orange County has been \$40/hour — \$30/hour at the time the Vons program was initiated). In return, SuperShuttle assumes all vehicle labor, insurance, and maintenance costs and liabilities. The shuttle runs between 10:00 AM and 4:00 PM Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays. The service is limited to Leisure World residents who shop at Vons. There is no charge to the passenger, though a number of residents tip the driver when bags are carried into the home. The store has an in-house passenger numbering and announcement system to help customers queue up for rides when they finish shopping. Departures are not scheduled; instead, the van leaves when it is full or nearly full, depending on the elapsed time involved. Each run is about one hour in length and the van holds a maximum of seven passengers. There is an average of six runs a day, and the van is almost always full. The average passenger count is 35-40 passengers on Mondays, and 45-50 passengers on Thursdays and Fridays. There is also assistance for mobility-impaired riders.<sup>9</sup>

The shuttle service is advertised in the local paper and is seen by Vons as a useful marketing tool. Though Vons was pressured by residents to continue the service, store man-

agement subsequently recognized the significant community benefits of the program, even though no effort had been made to quantify such benefits as increased purchases or reduction in car use. The program instead is seen as a "community service" that helps distinguish Vons from its competitors, as store manager Barry Kidd characterized it. Soon after the service was reinstated, for example, Vons received upwards of 100 to 200 letters from Leisure World residents complimenting the store's action. It has ultimately become a showcase for that Vons outlet.<sup>10</sup>

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### **Grocery Delivery Service for Homebound Seniors/Hartford, CT**

In 1978, the city of Hartford, Connecticut provided the startup resources for an independent food security advocacy organization, the Hartford Food System. This organization helped sponsor a range of innovative food security-oriented programs, including a downtown farmers' market oriented towards low income buyers, community gardens, local food stands, and a cooperative buying program. The organization also focused on issues of transportation and food access, noting both the lack of supermarkets in Hartford's low income communities and the low vehicle ownership figures for those same communities. Many residents in low income communities in Hartford and other cities in Connecticut had also become heavily dependent on public transportation for food shopping; one ridership survey by Connecticut Transit found that 25% of the responding bus passengers indicated they used the bus specifically for trips to food stores.<sup>11</sup> These transit dependencies are particularly a concern for senior citizens who lack both mobility and transportation resources.

In response to this need, the Hartford Food System established in 1992 a grocery delivery program for home bound seniors. The program, formally known as the Grocery Delivery Service for Homebound Seniors (the "Service") is largely supported through small grants and provides about 150 deliveries per month. Between January 1, 1995 and September 30, 1995, for example, the Service made 1,156 deliveries to 92 different customers for a total grocery value of \$40,000, with average order size approximately \$35. The most frequently cited reasons for using the service were access related (e.g., those who "could not get out" or "just got out of the hospital", according to a Grocery Delivery Service survey of program participants). Though the program has been small and limited in its ability to address the needs of homebound seniors in the Greater Hartford area, it nevertheless represents a modest beginning, according to Hartford Food System executive director Mark Winne. "Seniors as a group are often left out of the food system," Winne argues. "This type of program helps them maintain their independent lifestyle. In many cases it is the only way people can get affordable food."<sup>12</sup>

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## **PUBLIC TRANSIT PROGRAMS**

### **Bus Services/Knoxville, Tennessee**

Use of public transportation continues to represent one of the most important yet often more problematic methods of achieving food access. People without cars rely on busses, and, occasionally where available, public paratransit programs to reach food stores not immediately accessible by foot. Bus routes and services, however, as previously discussed, are not oriented towards intra-neighborhood needs such as food shopping. However, some communities

have developed programs that have sought to influence existing municipal bus and transportation services to address access issues. Programs initiated through the Knoxville, Tennessee Food Policy Council provide an important example of that effort.<sup>13</sup>

The Knoxville Food Policy Council, one of the first such Councils to be established at the municipal level, initiated several bus-related access programs soon after it was created. The most ambitious of those efforts, the Knoxville Shop and Ride Program, was developed as a direct food transit service. The Food Policy Council received from the municipal transit agency a full sized bus which was retrofitted with racks and shelves for grocery bags to serve as a "grocery bus". The bus route included both a low income housing project and a senior citizen high rise housing complex that terminated at a local food store. The service was partly subsidized through general bus operation funds, with remaining funds generated through a small charge for bus riders. In order for the service to break even, riders needed to be batched; though efficiency of service remained a continuous problem when there were not enough riders to batch effectively. The program worked best when a key volunteer helped outreach efforts to identify riders for the program; when that volunteer left the program, effective batching became even more problematic. As a result, the service was terminated after only a few months.

The Knoxville Food Policy Council was more successful in lobbying the municipal transportation agency to extend by a few miles regular bus service from a low income neighborhood to a shopping center with a concentration of grocery stores situated in a middle income neighborhood. This program was judged a success, both in terms of increased sales at the stores (including an increase in sales of individual mini folding

carts) and in establishing a better communications link between the Food Policy Council and the transit agency. Subsequently, the transit agency began to regularly consult with the FPC regarding changes in bus routes with respect to food access issues. One notable example included a remapping of another bus service route to include stops at a shopping center and a nearby farmers' market which had previously not been well served by public transportation. In this case, while transit planning came to be associated with food access needs, it was facilitated by the presence of a food policy and planning process.

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### **The Grocery Bus/Austin, Texas**

Austin, Texas's "Grocery Bus" is perhaps the only publically run bus line in the country specifically designed to take shoppers from a food access deficient community to supermarkets in neighboring communities. Traveling north-south through the low income, primarily Latino community known as the Eastside, its endpoints are two supermarkets, each a few miles to the north and south respectively of the heart of the Eastside community. This line provides access for 23,000 Eastside residents, many of whom are without vehicles and have been dependent on more costly and/or inaccessible food outlets.

Initiated in January 1996, the Grocery Bus runs 7 days a week, 12 hours a day, at 30 minute intervals. Passengers are charged 50 cents per ride. It was established at the request of the Austin/Travis County Food Policy Council, in response to a study issued by the Sustainable Food Center (SFC), a food security policy and advocacy organization described in Section I. The study, *Access Denied*, chronicled the lack of competitively priced supermarkets on the Eastside while

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documenting the need for affordable transportation programs to take transit dependent residents to outlying supermarkets.

The route was developed as a collaboration between Capital Metro (the local transit authority), the Food Policy Council, community members, and the supermarkets. Kate Fitzgerald, executive director of the SFC and member of the Food Policy Council, notes that it was relatively easy to convince Capital Metro to start up the route. "After seeing the need for the route, they inventoried their resources and determined that they could do it."<sup>14</sup> Capital Metro did however require proof of community interest and need. As part of this process, the Sustainable Food Center conducted more than 200 interviews, documenting where community members wanted the bus line to go, where they like to shop, and at what times they would like the bus to run. As a consequence, Capital Metro decided to establish the program based on a circular route pattern; that is, a route that remains primarily within a defined community or neighborhood's boundaries. Shifting to such an approach reflected a change in route planning for Metro. It was, according to Metro's general manager, Michael Bolton, "the whole notion of having the bus work within the neighborhood. Everything doesn't have to go downtown."<sup>15</sup>

Fitzgerald believes that the primary reason that Capital Metro established the Grocery Bus was to improve its public image, which has suffered due to poor service. This strategy appears to be working. In its first few weeks of operation, ridership was low. Soon after the service began to receive greater visibility within the community, however, the program took off. "It was like wildfire, with packed busses and lots of word of mouth" commented Grocery Bus driver Mary Mitchell to the *Austin Statesman*.<sup>16</sup> Commu-

nity members have embraced the program for its added convenience and financial benefits. Cost savings are associated with both the reduced time in getting to a store which has lower prices, and, for many, the elimination of one or more bus rides, or taxi fares. In addition, the route may not prove as costly as initially anticipated. While Capital Metro has lost money and thus needed to subsidize its other routes, preliminary indications suggest that the Grocery Bus might achieve the strongest financial results among all Capital Metro routes. Thus, the agency has become extremely pleased with the initial outcome, and has approached the Food Policy Council about expanding this service into other underserved communities.

Key to the success, both present and future, of the Grocery Bus is the partnership between the Sustainable Food Center's community connections and innovative outreach efforts, the resources provided by Capital Metro, and the interest of the supermarkets. While Capital Metro paid for the printing of 50,000 flyers announcing the new line in both Spanish and English, SFC obtained the volunteer services of a graphic artist to design the flyers, and has taken responsibility for distributing them. Once Capital Metro dedicates buses entirely to this route, the SFC would like to have them painted with colorful illustrations of different food items to assist in outreach to non-English speaking and/or non-literate Eastside residents. Finally, the two supermarkets being serviced by the route have been very supportive. One of these, a Fiesta Market, has noted that the Bus has made a positive difference in their business, while a second store, HEB, has expressed interest in placing an advertisement in a local paper, showcasing the improved access to the store provided by the Grocery Bus. Nevertheless, there are still a number of residents who do not know about the new route, and continue to take other,

more inconvenient bus lines, according to Fitzgerald. Continued and innovative outreach is the key to making the new bus line a more permanent success.<sup>17</sup>

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### The HOP Shuttle/Boulder, Colorado

In 1994, The City of Boulder, Colorado initiated an innovative, alternative fuels, paratransit shuttle service called the HOP service. The program consisted of eight liquid propane shuttles that travelled a circular loop connecting Downtown Boulder (which included a pedestrian-only open air mall), the University of Colorado, and another major commercial thoroughfare which housed a large indoor shopping mall. Six shuttles run the route at any one time, at ten minute frequencies. The shuttles are smaller than busses and have periphery seating and large windows. One goal of the program has been to create a more inviting environment associated with the smaller, quieter, and airier vehicles, demonstrating a "different" way of providing transit service.<sup>18</sup>

Part of that difference included establishing the shuttle service as an integral part of street life, since the shuttles were low to the ground, had a large number of windows for viewing both in and out, and had been conceived of as pedestrian friendly (that is, not an obstacle or danger to pedestrian activity). In addition, by designing the program around the use of alternative fuel vehicles, the HOP also sought to create an environmental identity for the service.

The HOP program is advertised as a convenient way to access shopping, work, and recreational activities. While not specifically organized to address food shopping needs as such, one key aspect of the program that has been emphasized is its ability to provide access to a food store and a farmers' market

that are on the HOP route, particularly for use during working hours. More generally, shopping has been identified as a primary objective by HOP riders.

The HOP was initially funded through a \$1.4 million federal ISTEA grant which paid for capital costs, staff time in developing the program, and operating expenses for the first three months. The largest up front expense was the purchase of the liquid propane vehicles which cost \$125,000 per vehicle. Operating funds are now derived from a public-private joint venture between the City's Public Works Department (which provides 75% of the funds) and three other entities — the Central Area General Improvement District, the Boulder Urban Renewal Authority, and the University of Colorado, which account for the remaining 25%. While identifiable service costs (estimated at 95 cents per passenger or \$710,000 annually, including capital recovery costs) are greater than revenues derived from cash fares (25 cents per passenger, 15 cents for seniors, and various student passes and promotional fares), intangible benefits derived from reduced drive-alone trips, reduced congestion, and increased shopping, among others, are considered significant.

The HOP, in fact, has been judged successful from its beginnings. Ridership levels were originally forecast at 2000 riders per day, but already achieved 4300 riders a day by 1996. Those numbers are in excess of HOP's original perceived optimum carrying capacity of 4000 riders a day. A recent survey on municipal programs has also indicated widespread support for the concept of the shuttle service — 92.6% of survey respondents either "strongly supported" or "somewhat strongly supported" shuttle programs like the HOP, which represented the highest percentage received of any of the programs surveyed. However, the issue of

access and transit dependency has remained secondary to the visual and environmental attractiveness and "street life" aspects of the program.

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## HOME DELIVERY AND SHOPPER SERVICES

### **"Byerly's To You" Store-to-Door Service — Byerly's/Twin Cities**

One of the more rapidly expanding transportation-based food related activities in recent years has been the development of home shopping and food delivery services. These services, primarily defined as services for middle income consumers (particularly single parent or dual income households), are also likely to significantly expand in conjunction with growing computer on line services where food orders can be taken and deliveries set. These programs depend on phone, fax, or internet connections to place orders, many of which are catalogue based.<sup>19</sup>

The primary factors influencing the development of on-line services have been convenience and time savings rather than food access. Food markets participating in such programs tend to seek out higher end demographics for more expensive items. The home shopping/home delivery programs, moreover, are costly in their own right, often several times more expensive for the customer than a van service or other store-based transport program. Yet even higher cost programs may involve food access/transit dependent-related participation as well.

One recent example of this type of service is "Byerly's To You" Store-to-Door Service program. The Byerly's program, primarily aimed at the chain store's higher end demo-

graphics, is based on a home shopping service program where orders (based on specific items identified through an 8,000 item Byerly's catalogue) can be processed by phone (at a charge of \$9.95 per order) or through fax or computer (at a charge of \$8.95).<sup>20</sup> The service is available at nine of the ten Byerly's markets located in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area, and is under consideration but not yet available at Byerly's stores in Chicago. Orders placed before noon can be delivered between 6-9PM that day. Orders placed after 12 noon will be delivered the next day either between 1-4 PM or 6-9 PM. Although most of the orders are initiated by phone, as much as one third of the ordering has been done through fax or computer. Customers of the service, which was initiated in the Spring of 1996, have included working parents (including, for example, fathers with part time jobs), senior citizens, disabled, and other (largely middle income) transit dependent constituents. In its first several months of operation, about 200 orders per week were being processed.<sup>21</sup>

The motivation for establishing a home delivery service for Byerly's management has been to extend a service (and attract new customers) for those customers seeking time saving options, and for whom weekly shopping has become a time constraint. Linking a delivery service to a transport program, however, has not been explored. Instead, the delivery vehicles and labor utilized have been purchased through a third party contract. However, those evaluating the program for Byerly's have estimated that seniors and disabled — key transit dependent constituents — account for as much as one third of the delivery service customer base. Constituents have also inquired whether the program could include unpacking and putting away food items at a customer's home. Currently, there is no store-based transit program (other than the home delivery service)

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at any Byerly's market, although a few senior citizen high rise developments have established their own van service, which includes stops at Byerly's stores.

A more elaborate delivery service that has become its own "food business" is the Pink Dot program in southern California which has focused on both transportation and convenience factors for building its business. Initiated in 1988 at a single location, the Pink Dot program today consists of five locations with three different food stores providing the items ordered. Pink Dot items, listed in a catalogue that is widely distributed in the area to be serviced, includes standard brand name food items as well as bakery items, salads, sandwiches, and other prepared foods. Non-food items ranging from medicines to video games are also available. The cost of delivery is only \$1.99, although the items to be ordered are priced above most equivalent items at supermarkets. Orders are also made through phone or computer. The Pink Dot attraction is the delivery service itself rather than the items carried. And although convenience is the core marketing strategy, access issues for those who are homebound or without cars has also contributed to Pink Dot's attraction as a delivery service.<sup>22</sup>

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### **"Groceries-to-Go" — Kroger Stores/Atlanta, Georgia**

The Kroger Stores, the largest food chain in the state of Georgia, established a food delivery program called "Groceries-to-Go", which had originated in a program established in conjunction with an order and delivery service jointly owned by IBM and Sears. Though the program, as it evolved, was developed at several locations, by 1996 only one store in Atlanta continued to operate the program.<sup>23</sup>

"Groceries-to-Go" operates on the following basis. A customer calls in a grocery order over the phone to a Kroger employee who then does the "shopping" for the order. The groceries are subsequently delivered to the customer's house the next day. Orders must be placed at least a day in advance and can be faxed as well as phoned. Deliveries are made Monday through Saturday, during daytime and evening hours, at prearranged times. If a question about a particular item arises during the "shopping", or if an item is unavailable, the employee immediately calls the customer to clarify the order or to ask if the unavailable item should be replaced by an alternative product. The cost of the service is \$7.50 for seniors, and \$10 for all other customers. Payment for the groceries is made on delivery. Food stamps are also accepted. A modified "pick up" service is also available at a \$3 charge, where Kroger employees undertake the shopping based on the order, but the customer subsequently picks up the groceries at a specified time.

Several Kroger employees are used at different times to staff the program, including filling the approximately 20 to 30 orders that are received on average each day within approximately a five mile radius from the store. Most of the "Groceries-to-Go" customers are seniors. A few others are businesses, and as many as 4 orders a day come from low income customers who are assumed to not have access to a car. One Kroger employee identified 15 regular "Groceries-to-Go" customers who fit this low income/transit dependent profile.<sup>24</sup> For this constituency and others, "Groceries-to-Go" represents Kroger's only transportation-related program.

## EMPLOYEE AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS

### **Multicultural Relations/Dallas-Fort Worth, Texas**

In 1994, Minyard Stores, a food retail chain with 80 stores in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, decided to establish a new community outreach staff role which it called the "multicultural relations coordinator" position. The Minyard Stores chain, several of whose outlets had been located in low income communities, served a broad and diverse constituency of shoppers. These included walk-ins or those dependent on public transportation systems. Those area transit systems, in turn, had not been oriented towards food or other intra-neighborhood services. Minyard management was also interested in drawing on a more ethnically diverse work force, hoping especially to hire a larger number of Spanish speaking employees.

Minyard's multicultural relations coordinator position was unique for the food retail industry. The position's definition was relatively open-ended. It included efforts at increased purchasing from minority and female vendors; community liaison activity at different store sites; creating linkages between store employees and their ethnic counterparts in communities; and establishing stronger ethnic representation in the Minyard work force. While store specific issues such as access, cart loss, or other transportation-related issues were not part of the profile of the position, the community relations aspect of such an outreach position could conceivably draw attention to such issues. However, decision-making on transportation programs at Minyard remained significantly a financial issue outside the multicultural relations coordinator's sphere of activity.<sup>25</sup>

This division of power was most notable in the situation that unfolded in the Fairpark area of Dallas, a low income, ethnically diverse neighborhood where, until August 1995, Minyard had operated two full service food markets, sized at 16,000 and 20,000 square feet, respectively. In August 1995, Minyard closed both stores and opened instead a much larger, 51,000 square foot full service market (equivalent to a small sized supercenter). By doing so, Minyard created significant food access problems for the large walk-in trade associated with the stores that had closed, particularly for one site more distant from the new market. A number of community meetings ensued, which included discussions with the multicultural relations coordinator, but the issue of a new access-related program was never addressed. Minyard management instead sought to change the bus routes of the Dallas Area Rapid Transit agency (DART) so that shoppers could access the store by taking only one rather than two busses. At the same time, Minyard allowed an informal "transit" service provided by an "independent contractor"; that is, a retired person who would offer a shopper a ride home for a fee that was less expensive than taxi service.

Minyard had, during this process, privately explored the option of developing a community van service program. But store managers quickly dropped the idea due to liability concerns and the uncertain benefits and community relations issues associated with such a service. Minyard's Director of Real Estate, David Hardin, explained that the area that needed to be served was a "rough neighborhood", conceivably jeopardizing the driver of the van. The difficulty of determining benefits in relation to costs was also never resolved; for example, cart loss, which was substantial, was never factored in on the benefit side. Even the good will

aspect of such a program was discounted on the basis that if a program were initiated but then discontinued because of concerns regarding costs and/or liabilities, then community discontent could become a troublesome and unwelcomed factor. "It's hard enough to figure out the benefits," Hardin argued, "but what happens when you take them away. We decided to let DART and the independent contractor handle the access issue. It is, after all, their business."<sup>26</sup>

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### **Worker Transit/Chaska, Minnesota**

The issue of community responsibility and transit needs associated with the food retail sector extends to questions of employee access to food manufacturing, food packaging, or retail store locations. Food companies that depend on and/or seek to recruit workers (many of whom reside in low income communities) to be employed at company sites (several of which are located at suburban sites often distant from worker residences) also confront the possibility of needing to address significant transportation needs. In 1991, Preferred Products inc., the private label operation of the Supervalu food store chain in the upper Midwest, sought to address this problem by establishing a van service program in collaboration with a non-profit inner city agency for one of its locations. PPI had a candy rebagging operation in Chaska, Minnesota which employed about 50 people year round. The company had a particular need for an additional 100 employees during its "seasonal spike" period from June to December when much of the packaging work was undertaken. Unemployment was low in the Chaska area, but significantly higher in low income communities in the Minneapolis region. The company at first sought to develop a taxi service for a few of its "hard-to-hire" employees who had been hired in part through the

company's relationship with the non-profit agency. A van service was subsequently developed, which expanded the possibilities of inner city recruitment. Between 12 and 15 employees used this reverse commute program while it was operating. The van program was eventually folded when the candy rebagging operations were sold.<sup>27</sup>

Though the van service idea was never extended to other operations, it did lead to increased attention to employee transportation needs, given the company's emphasis on recruiting a low wage labor force. Discussions were initiated with the area transportation agency, Southwest Metropolitan Transit, to extend bus service to various Chaska business sites, as part of a more extensive "reverse commute" strategy. Meeting employee transportation needs through improved bus service also became the goal of two suburban Cleveland food retail outlets (Twin Valu supercenter stores) within the Supervalu chain. About 40% of the two stores' employees required public transportation to get to work but the bus systems in those areas were not reliable. Store managers worked with transportation officials to create new bus stops, bus shelters, and arranged to sell bus passes at service desks. An unintended benefit of the changes in bus service was improved access for shoppers, many of whom relied on public transportation.<sup>28</sup> Despite those benefits, Supervalu has not explored further a shopper-based transportation program for its various outlets.

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### **California Food Policy Advocates/San Francisco, California**

Still in a planning phase is California Food Policy Advocates' (CFPA) paratransit service for senior citizens in San Francisco. The six month planning phase will be completed by the Fall of 1996 at which time a year long

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demonstration project will begin. The project will consist of connecting corporate owned and associated vans during their downtime period to senior housing projects in the SOMA neighborhood for the purpose of food shopping at a local Safeway store. The program has multiple goals. These include improving senior nutrition, increasing sales and enhancing community relations for the supermarket, fostering vanpooling through cost reduction for the corporations as well as encouraging corporate-required trip reductions, and meeting the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements for the multiple transit agencies involved.

Operating on a fixed schedule five days/week, five hours a day, the van (Chevron has already promised the use of a vehicle) will pick up the seniors living in high rise housing projects (population 2,000) near downtown San Francisco, take them to a Safeway adjoining the Mission District, and return them home again. According to Ken Hecht, co-director of CFPA and project director, many of the residents at the senior homes are low-income, with a high percentage of Asian descent. The residents obtain their food from a number of sources. Some have their families bring in food; others go shopping either in Chinatown or nearby supermarkets; a small percentage of the food comes from local convenience stores; while others (30%) participate in the housing projects' congregate meals program.<sup>29</sup>

The program hopes to extend the services provided beyond those offered through the van drop off/paratransit-type services commonly associated with food stores, such as those described in this report. Concerned about the problems associated with dropping off seniors in a potentially confusing and disorienting environment, volunteer "guides" will be made available to shepherd the seniors through the store as needed.

Safeway has expressed its eagerness in accommodating the seniors, many of whom are monolingual Chinese, through hiring Chinese-speaking clerks. Similarly, the National Coalition on Aging, a non-profit organization, has committed to using job training funds to train and pay Safeway-employed seniors in these mentor positions. Hecht noted that though the donated mentoring may make the program more successful, it also could reduce the project's replicability.

While the stated purpose of the project is to be self-sustaining beyond the first year's demonstration project, with Safeway to operate the service, numerous barriers exist. Senior citizens typically spend little on food. There is not a significant amount of shopping cart loss that can be attributed to senior citizens. To date, the seniors have expressed resistance to paying for the service. Like many other programs cited in this report, this program may have a high community relations value rather than a high monetary value from the supermarket's perspective. Hecht identified other barriers, including initial reluctance to pursue the program from both Safeway as well as from the seniors themselves.

Nevertheless, the project might have its greatest chances for success through its innovative links to other public benefits and players. Connections with transit agencies - who also have a stake in meeting the project's public policy goals of trip reductions and access for disabled persons- as well as with corporations with a desire for low-cost public relations efforts, bring additional stakeholders and resources into the food system. This diversification may make the difference between the project's success and failure.

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## JOINT VENTURES (COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS)

### **New Communities Center-Pathmark Joint Venture/Newark, New Jersey**

The Pathmark store in Newark's Central Ward is located in a neighborhood reminiscent of a bombed-out war zone, or downtown Managua, Nicaragua after the 1972 earthquake. Vast blocks of empty lots, strewn with rubble, weeds, and chain link fences dot the landscape. Nearby can be seen high-rise housing projects, a vast hospital, and a medical school. For nearly 25 years this Ward had no local supermarket. Supermarkets avoided the neighborhood, (due in part to its troubled history as a 1960s era riot zone) and its extreme poverty -- 40% of the population residing in census tracts adjoining the store have incomes under the poverty line. This has occurred despite evidence that the area could support a full service market. Although incomes are low, the area is densely populated.

New Communities Corporation (NCC), a community development corporation that was formed following the 1967 riots, initiated the process of developing a supermarket anchored shopping center in the area. In 1980, NCC met with Supermarkets General Corporation (SGC), the parent company of Pathmark supermarkets, to discuss the possibility of a joint venture. A few years earlier, SGC had completed a similar project in a joint venture with the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation. Although Pathmark management was initially hesitant about the Newark project, the Reverend William Linder, NCC's founder, eventually persuaded them to participate.<sup>30</sup>

After a lengthy ten year process in assembling the land and obtaining the necessary permits, the shopping center opened in July,

1990. It contains a 44,000 square foot supermarket, and 23,000 square feet of satellite shops, including a restaurant and donut shop. The store has been extremely successful, with the highest sales per square feet of all the Pathmark stores, and the most profitable store per square feet in all of New Jersey. Its sales have exceeded management projections by over 20%, encouraging NCC to consider its expansion, despite a lack of available adjoining land.<sup>31</sup>

New Communities owns all of the shopping center property, while Community Supermarket Corporation (CSC), a joint venture of NCC and Supermarkets General, owns the store itself. As a landlord, NCC receives rent from CSC. Since New Communities has a 2/3 interest in CSC, it receives 2/3 of the store's profits. Supermarkets General in turn receives a management fee, and the remaining 1/3 of the profits. In fiscal year 1993, the store generated \$1.2 million in profits.

The supermarket is only one of a series of projects that NCC operates. It is one of the largest CDCs in the country, and the largest non-profit housing developer in New Jersey. It has constructed 2,500 units of affordable housing for more than 7,000 people, and provides its own management, maintenance, and security. It also has developed a variety of health services, including a Home Health Care program, a Medical Day Care Program, and an Extended Health Care Facility. In addition, NCC is affiliated with Babyland Nursery, which operates six day care centers with more than 600 children, including a center for children with AIDS. Other projects include two employment centers, a credit union with approximately \$2 million in assets, and a for-profit monthly newspaper.<sup>32</sup>

Community participation occurs through New Communities Programs as well as in

more direct ways. The CSC board is composed of community members, and meets monthly with Pathmark to discuss problems or issues related to the store. Board members have made a number of recommendations which have contributed to the store's sales. For example, Pathmark followed the Board's suggestion to swap its proposed lobster tank for a fresh fish department. Pathmark also took the group's advice to style its produce department after a farmers' market, and include a selection of specialty fruits and vegetables targeted towards the area's largely African-American and Caribbean residents. Both recommendations have been successful: according to store surveys the two departments are the most popular in the store.

Another one of New Communities innovations is its van service. This service was a natural outgrowth of a transit program that they had operated previous to the opening of the Pathmark store, which took seniors from NCC-owned housing to other stores in Newark. Faithful to the needs of seniors living in their housing projects, NCC continues to operate a drop-off service, which takes them to the store on a weekly basis. Lynn Mertz, a planner with NCC explained this community-based approach, noting that the store "belongs" to the seniors, who helped them get it after ten years of fighting City Hall. The seniors formed the core of an effort to petition the Governor with 12,000 signatures to condemn the abandoned buildings on the 61 lots comprising the property through eminent domain.<sup>33</sup>

The primary focus of NCC's van service, however, lies in providing shoppers with a ride home after purchasing their groceries. While the store does have an ample parking lot, the majority of the store's customer base either walk-in (an estimated 40%) or take the bus, according to Mertz. Initially, the van

service charged a per cart load (\$2 + \$1 per child), but has since changed their fare schedule to \$5 per trip, with discounts for seniors (\$3) and for residents of NCC-owned senior housing projects (\$2). The van service does not have geographic boundaries, nor set routes, although most trips remain within a five mile radius. By comparison, one van driver estimated that \$5 will buy a taxi ride of 1.5-2 miles.

A dispatcher coordinates the service, which carries an average of 400 persons per day. NCC varies the number of vans it operates according to the store's monthly cash flow charts. During the first ten days of each month, the peak shopping period, the service will carry about 500 persons per day, employing all eight vans. During peak times, customers may have to wait only five minutes for a ride. By comparison, during off-peak times, when typically five vans are in operation, the wait may be about 15-20 minutes. Normally, the service operates from 9 am to 9 pm, without a set schedule. On Sunday the service stops at 6 pm. The service employs 13 drivers, all of whom are non-union, unlike the store employees, which, in turn, has lowered operating costs.

After initiating the service during the early days of the store's operation, sales per customer increased from \$8 to \$18, parallel to chain-wide averages. Mertz argues that it is difficult to evaluate exactly what percentage of this increase is due to the van service, as a number of other changes were made simultaneously. Unlike other stores that operate van services such as El Tapatio in Los Angeles, Pathmark does not advertise its van service. Mertz asserts instead that customers are already familiar with it, and there is no need to do so.

The built-in consumer base, comprised of seniors living in NCC owned housing as

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well as a number of other factors make the Newark Pathmark a unique store. Across the street from the store is the University of Dentistry and Medicine of New Jersey as well as a hospital which provides the store with a not unsubstantial flow of students, visitors, and employee shoppers. Through a series of actions, NCC has formulated what amounts to a broadly conceived "transportation policy", encouraging the use of its van service. First, for security reasons, it has fenced and walled off the property, providing only one entrance and exit to the street. In the middle of this narrow driveway, sits a booth, occupied by a security guard. The physical constraints of the property and the presence of the guard ensure that shopping carts are not taken off the premises. Second, the management has taken steps to remove the gypsy cabs which cluttered the narrow lanes of the parking lot, and competed with NCC for van customers.

Furthermore, NCC's vehicle pool is centralized into a separate business unit (the grocery delivery business), which operates the van service. The grocery delivery business leases the vehicles from the credit union arm of NCC which owns the vehicles. During their downtime, the vans are "borrowed", without payment, to the parent corporation or to other programs of NCC such as its Meals on Wheels program. This arrangement acts as a de facto subsidy on the part of the grocery delivery business to the parent corporation, making it difficult to identify an overall financial accounting of the van service itself.

Not only does the grocery delivery business subsidize NCC proper, but also SGC. Through paying the full cost of the service while owning only two-thirds of the store, NCC has in fact subsidized Pathmark's share in the operating costs of the service. Pathmark has incurred no expenses for the

van service, yet has gained through either increased sales volume or improved goodwill and community relations. Despite this general inattention to the financial costs of the van service, NCC pledges to continue it, insofar as it enjoys great popularity among the store's shoppers, primarily due to the CDC's commitment to serving the needs of the community. Ultimately, NCC's van service has served to reinforce the overall viability of the joint venture agreement, rather than the joint venture itself assuming responsibility for initiating and underwriting the program.

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  - 3 . Interview with Allan Fine, May 1995
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**SECTION IV:  
THREE APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM:  
ESTABLISHING THE FRAMEWORK FOR FOOD ACCESS**

**The Need for Planning**

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**F**ood access programs today remain problematic for both transportation agencies, local governments, and the food retail industry. Though issues such as cost of service are often cited, the difficulties in establishing such programs have been reinforced by the inability of government and industry to connect the issues of access and transportation needs to food security and food planning considerations. As a consequence, the costs of such programs almost invariably seem to outweigh their benefits, underlined by the fact that many of the benefits of a food access approach appear hard to quantify and are thus seen as items distinct from traditional balance sheet considerations. Transportation planning, often framed at the regional (or statewide and intrastate) scale, also tends to ignore the community side of transportation as related to such services as health care or food shopping. Where community-level transportation planning occurs, it is most often associated with special needs populations or other limited, constituency-driven programs. These programs are not, however, primarily defined by the type of access need, including, most prominently, food security considerations (i.e., where food markets are located and how to get there). Where food access/transportation initiatives exist, they also tend to be incidental to a broader agency or industry planning process and thus do not provide an easily reduplicated model.

This Section identifies three possible approaches with respect to food access for both supermarkets and farmers' markets or direct marketing outlets. These can be described as the private sector approach; the joint venture approach; and the non-profit approach. While none of these approaches is representative of the activities of markets or agencies at this time, possibilities of their development are reflected in various projects or programs that have been estab-

lished at varying levels. Such programs could be further extended or restructured to incorporate additional aspects of each of the approaches presented here. The purpose of the Section then is not so much to propose replicability as to explore the ability of each approach to help frame a food access planning process. These approaches, furthermore, are derived from the southern California region where problems of transit dependence and food insecurity remain substantial and clearly require some form of intervention and/or planning approach to identify solutions. Thus, the question of how the **policy** framework for such approaches can be established remains paramount, an issue explored below in the context of the evolving debate regarding food security policy in Los Angeles.

## **ESTABLISHING THE PLANNING AND POLICY FRAMEWORK**

### **The Los Angeles Food Security and Hunger Partnership**

The lack of a planning and policy framework regarding food security (including food access) has been seen for a number of years as a particularly compelling concern in Los Angeles where *Seeds of Change* and other similar studies had documented the nature and extent of food security problems in the region, including questions of food access. In 1994, a Voluntary Advisory Council on Hunger (VACH), appointed by the Mayor, the City Council President, and the Community Development Department, was established to document conditions of hunger and food insecurity and propose a food-related hunger policy for the City. Authorization for the VACH had its roots in a 1989 City Council action that called for the creation of a nine member advisory body to oversee the development, coordination and

promotion of a city policy on hunger. Implementation of the Council action, however, only occurred several years later in the aftermath of widespread publicity surrounding the publication of the *Seeds of Change* report, including a *Los Angeles Times* editorial supporting the report's recommendation calling for the creation of a local Food Policy Council.<sup>1</sup>

Once appointed, the VACH, recognizing the broader, community-based concerns associated with food insecurity in the region, undertook a series of Hearings on such issues as nutritional concerns, food concerns of children and seniors, implications of the federal devolution of safety net programs, and alternative strategies such as community gardens and farmers' markets. While food access was specifically highlighted during one of the Hearings, it was also referenced as a major food security indicator at several of the other sessions. At the conclusion of the Hearings, the VACH developed its proposed policy document on food security and hunger, which it issued in draft form in November 1995. A final policy document, as well as an organizational plan for implementation, was approved by the VACH in April 1996. Both the policy, the implementation plan, and initial funding for the approach were approved by the Los Angeles City Council in June 1996.<sup>2</sup>

The VACH proposal called for the creation of a "Food Security and Hunger Partnership" and adoption of a food security and hunger mission statement for the City that would provide the framework for future policy. The partnership concept was elaborated in part from an analysis of the activities of Food Policy Councils established in other communities, and discussed in Section II.<sup>3</sup> L.A.'s "Partnership" concept sought to draw from both the municipal/government and non-profit models by linking a type of

quasi-government commission with a non-profit arm, which would be capable of raising separate funds and stimulating pilot projects. The Partnership, in turn, would be guided by a board of directors consisting of specified slots for food system stakeholders, including one ex officio slot reserved for a transportation agency official. A third non-governmental entity, a research partnership between universities in the region, was also proposed to analyze issue areas and target opportunities for innovation and intervention. For the partnership concept to succeed, VACH members argued, it would need to be a central part of the regional policy and planning process, while also stimulating and mobilizing a non-governmental or community response to the issues. The value of such mobilization had been further underlined by the parallel development of a Los Angeles Community Food Security Network, consisting of a number of food security focused NGOs who had been monitoring the proceedings of the VACH while simultaneously developing their own community initiatives on these issues.<sup>4</sup>

Although food access emerged as only one of several issue areas under consideration by the VACH, it has nevertheless occupied a central place in relation to the **planning** aspects of the Partnership process. In that context, each of the three kinds of food access initiatives explored below (private; joint venture; non-profit) involve strategic planning based programs that could be stimulated and/or enhanced through the Partnership framework. The private initiative relies on a more elaborated form of cost-benefit analysis that incorporates certain factors (e.g., shopping cart loss) that have been absent from such calculations. The joint venture proposal addresses the link between food access, land use considerations (e.g., parking lot size) and supermarket location. The non-profit program identifies the food

access issues and opportunities available through a grower-to-consumer direct marketing approach. Thus, the approaches presented here, similar in some respects to several of the case studies described in Section III, combine a food planning as well as transportation planning process as the means by which such programs could be implemented. The existence of the Food Security and Hunger Partnership could at the same time initiate and/or help implement the policy dimensions of such programs.

### **PRIVATE OPPORTUNITIES: Stimulating Greater Access to Supermarkets**

One of the major barriers for initiating supermarket based transportation programs has been the prevailing assumptions — and narrowly construed information available — concerning the costs and benefits of such programs. Developing an approach for a private initiative, such as a van/transport service for local residents in transit dependent communities to and/or from a supermarket, requires a framework that is able to incorporate factors often ignored or defined as intangible or non-quantifiable in financial terms. It also needs to expand the kinds of calculations from which cost-benefit assessments are derived. Those types of calculations have often been associated with various environmental evaluation techniques, particularly a pollution prevention-linked total cost assessment (or full cost accounting) approach. TCA, in turn, provides one type of framework for cost-benefit analysis that supermarkets could uti-

lize in exploring the viability of a food access/transport service.<sup>5</sup>

TCA, for one, tends to be industry and even facility specific. As elaborated in Section III, the key to any transportation service for supermarkets are the local dynamics that influence each particular program (e.g., neighborhood vehicle ownership per capita, public transit availability, housing and residential densities, crime concerns, centralized locations for pick-ups, permit requirements, and so forth). Within each local setting, certain key aspects of a program can be identified, providing a broader cost accounting structure. By way of example, program costs for a supermarket store-to-home van service may include:

- Purchase of Vehicle
- Labor Costs for Vehicle Operation
- Insurance Costs
- Non-Labor Operation & Maintenance Costs
- Permit and Operating Fees
- Promotional Costs

On the other side of the assessment process, the sources of program revenues and benefits (both tangible and intangible) may include:

- Additional Shopping Trips from New and Long Term Customers
- Customer and Community Goodwill
- Free Publicity
- Increased Store Sales from Larger Purchases
- Van Service Fees
- Reduced Shopping Cart Loss

When retailers evaluate

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**Ultimately, a more complete worksheet or evaluative method is needed for any private venture to assess whether a food access/transport program is completely or even partially viable in terms of the presumption of strict bottom line considerations.**

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new programs to determine what are considered bottom line considerations, most assessments will attempt to quantify what is readily available information, such as vehicle and labor costs, permitting and insurance, and revenues generated from use of the service as well as any potential subsidies to mitigate start up costs. What does not get included are the intangibles (e.g., customer goodwill) as well as information that could be quantified but is often not associated with such a service (e.g., free publicity, increased store sales, or reduced cart loss).

Elaborating on those examples, promotional costs for retailers constitute an important expense, particularly in highly competitive markets like Los Angeles, where store differentiation (by product mix, price, etc.) is critical to the success of such promotion and advertising. Thus, quantifying in dollar terms the publicity generated with little or no cost (e.g., through scheduling information, media coverage, community newsletters) can have significant bearing for any cost evaluation matrix.

Similarly, the quantification of additional store sales would require a type of longitudinal analysis that, unfortunately, has not been undertaken to date, even by stores committed to a van service program such as those described in Section III. However, several of the programs profiled here have **assumed** but **not calculated** increased sales, in part due to the popularity of the program. Through anecdotal evidence and personal observation, store managers have stated their opinion that there have been new store customers and additional sales on the basis of their use of the service. By analyzing more specifically customer sales figures over time while controlling for other variables aside from the van service, the ability to quantify additional revenues as a result of the pro-

gram could become a more straightforward evaluative task. Information for such evaluation could include the number of new customers using the service; estimated sales receipts; average profit margin on sales; and increased purchases from long term customers due to participation in the service.

Finally, an evaluation of reduced cart loss can also be directly translated into information about decreased costs, influencing any overall assessment. However, determining the full extent of such reduced costs, moreover, is best addressed through the use of a total cost assessment framework. For example, the costs from cart loss should not be quantified solely in terms of the replacement cost of the cart. In addition, the retrieval costs of carts returned, the labor costs associated with handling retrieval and replacement of the carts, and the present or future costs associated with fees through impoundment laws or other regulations, need to be represented. By calculating, in turn, the cost savings accruing from the reduction of cart loss, fewer cart retrievals, lower labor costs, and lower fees, among other variables, all associated with a food access/transport program, a food market could, on the basis of a TCA approach, identify savings that could conceivably amount to several thousand dollars a year, representing a significant revenue offset.<sup>6</sup>

Ultimately, a more complete worksheet or evaluative method is needed for any private venture to assess whether a food access/transport program is completely or even partially viable in terms of the presumption of strict bottom line considerations. Beyond that type of calculus, the store's community identity (which itself can represent an economic value) is likely to be significantly enhanced through any food access program. For supermarkets, such considerations of community (and thus customer service) will remain paramount as long as place matters.

## JOINT VENTURES: A Public/Private Partnership

Inner city locations present unique challenges and opportunities for the construction of new supermarkets and associated market-based transportation services. In Los Angeles, perhaps the most significant barrier to building new stores in the inner city is a lack of sites of adequate size. Developers often must cobble together numerous parcels in an expensive and time-consuming process. This land scarcity, however, presents an opportunity for supermarkets and municipalities to revise their transportation policies in accordance with the needs and resources of inner city communities.

Municipal planning and supermarket transportation policies have largely revolved around an auto-centered approach to getting shoppers to and from stores. This approach is best seen through the large parking lots that legally must accompany all supermarket developments. In the City of Los Angeles, planning regulations require supermarkets to provide at least four parking spaces per thousand square feet of floor area. The parking lot for a typical 40,000 square foot store occupies about 57% of the total lot size, while a typical parking space itself is 333 square feet.

While large parking lot requirements may make sense for communities with virtually universal automobile ownership and abundant land, they can be burdensome for inner city areas with scarce land, poor food access, and high rates of households with-

out access to a vehicle. Retailoring parking lot sizes to meet community demographics combined with alternative transportation programs, such as van services, can form the cornerstone of a revised inner city supermarket transportation policy. In Los Angeles, for example, 24% of the households in the Food Access Deficient Area (see Section 2 for more details) don't have access to an auto, as compared to only 7% in the comparably sized suburban San Fernando Valley. Assuming that parking requirements are appropriate for the San Fernando Valley, such require-

ments may then be excessive for inner city areas where a high percentage of customers are walk-ins or arrive by bus.

Parking needs are affected by a variety of factors, including frequency and duration of shopping trips, number of persons served by the store,

and weekly and monthly shopping patterns. While supermarkets serve more persons in the inner city - 29,505 in inner city areas in Los Angeles, as compared to 16,629 for the average in Los Angeles County — targeted areas for inner city supermarket customers may be smaller, given the relatively high percentage in those areas of elderly residents, who often have limited mobility. Similarly, inner city consumers have been characterized as making frequent shopping trips, yet their trips may be of less duration given the few items purchased. Monthly shopping patterns also affect demand on parking. Although all markets have peak times such as weekends and evenings, purchases at inner city supermarkets also entail monthly cycles, with the first few days of each month the

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**While large parking lot requirements may make sense for communities with virtually universal automobile ownership and abundant land, they can be burdensome for inner city areas with scarce land, poor food access, and high rates of households without access to a vehicle.**

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busiest.

Community members and developers may present barriers to revising parking lot regulations. Businesses and residents want their neighboring supermarket to have adequate parking, in order to avoid overflow into their lots and streets. Smaller supermarket parking lots could in some cases result in adverse effects on surrounding residents and businesses, especially during peak shopping periods. Likewise, developers and supermarket chains also want large parking lots. They know from experience that adequate and “easy” parking lures customers while packed lots can present a serious barrier for potential customers, leading them to shop elsewhere.

Decreasing parking lot requirements could save supermarkets a substantial amount in land acquisition, paving, landscaping, and maintenance. With a 20% reduction, a 40,000 square foot store could reduce its parking lot size by 13,000 square feet. At a conservative price of eight dollars per square foot in the inner city, a store could save a total of \$85,200 in land costs alone, without counting development costs.<sup>7</sup> In exchange for granting the parking waiver, the city could stipulate that these savings be used by the market to amortize a van service. An annuity of \$10,300 per year for fifteen years (invested at 8.5%) could conceivably be created to partially subsidize such a service. Supplemental funding could be calculated on the basis of the kinds of revenue opportunities described above, such as reduced shopping cart loss and retrieval fees, additional business generated, and user fees.

The concept of reducing parking requirements to help establish a food access/transport program could be most effectively implemented through a public/private partnership, or joint venture, where a public

good (i.e., a food access/transport program) is established simultaneously with a private benefit (i.e., reduced parking lot size). Such a partnership would also in effect reorient the supermarket’s and city’s transportation policy toward a more realistic assessment of the needs and capacities of the surrounding community. As we have seen from multiple examples across the country, this type of approach is best achieved when it includes a measure of community ownership and engagement in the process.

Community involvement in developing an appropriate transportation policy can be important for a number of reasons. First, it creates a mechanism by which the retailer can receive input on the specific circumstances of the neighborhood, rather than assume a generic community with no distinguishing needs and resources. Community organizations can educate developers and chain executives about the issues associated with parking lot size relative to a shuttle service for the transit dependent. They can also work with the surrounding community to ameliorate parking overflow problems at peak times if required.

Community engagement can also prove financially beneficial to an inner city supermarket on the basis of other kinds of public good/private benefit arrangements. The partnership between New Communities Corporation and Pathmark Supermarkets in Newark led to a number of changes in the store’s format, including the grocery delivery service (see section 2), that enabled it to be one of the most profitable stores in New Jersey. A sense of community ownership and control over the market also can help reduce costs associated with security and shrink, as well stimulate sales and customer loyalty. Community organizations can help organize and conduct outreach to maximize the use and successful operation of transportation

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projects.

Finally, as the planning process in siting a supermarket can take years (and at times a decade), and be quite costly, the community plays a critical role in blocking or facilitating the store. Community ownership and support can help speed up the process, saving the supermarket thousands of dollars. It would also be essential to advocating for and obtaining a waiver in parking lot size requirements.

The most common and well-developed forum for community engagement in the supermarket industry is through the vehicle of a joint venture arrangement with a community development corporation (CDC). CDCs are private non-profit organizations involved in economic development projects in a disadvantaged neighborhood, such as child care facilities, real estate development, job training, and affordable housing.

Joint ventures vary in structure according to the needs and situation of the partnership interests, but generally fall into one of two categories. In the first type, the CDC owns and develops the land, in partnership with a commercial developer. This partnership organization acts as landlord, and leases the building to the supermarket. The supermarket has full responsibility for store management and operation, pays rent and sometimes a percentage of sales to the CDC. In addition, the lease may require the supermarket to meet other conditions, such as providing job training programs, hiring from the surrounding community, or selling certain products. In the second form, the CDC is actually a partner and co-owner of the supermarket. The supermarket is in charge of day to day operations, and receives a fee for this service. Profits are shared according to each partner's investment proportion in the project.<sup>8</sup>

Joint ventures offer significant benefits to the community (and the CDC) as well as to the supermarket. The roles of the partners are complementary, with the CDC providing its community development expertise and understanding of community needs, and the supermarket lending industry expertise in real estate and business operations.

The community profits in numerous ways from a joint venture project. Supermarkets create jobs, provide employment training, meet community needs for goods and services, and revitalize distressed neighborhoods. Satellite shops can provide entrepreneurial opportunities for local businesses. The CDC's participation creates a sense of community engagement and ownership, encouraging community involvement. Also, the CDC's share of the profits is reinvested into their economic development projects. In this way, local dollars are recycled back into the community.<sup>9</sup>

The joint venture also offers many advantages to the supermarket partner. With a CDC as partner, the project is likely to enjoy the support of community members, enhancing its potential for success. Community input can help management to more accurately fine-tune its product mix and services, contributing to higher sales volume. Shared ownership minimizes negative perceptions of outsiders exploiting low income residents by charging high prices for inferior goods. In addition, CDCs can attract grants and low-cost loans, reducing total project costs.<sup>10</sup> Aside from the Newark NCC/Pathmark arrangement, several joint ventures related to supermarket location have been established or are in the process of formation. Two of the most prominent advocates of food retail joint ventures are the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and the Los Angeles-based RLA. The Ford Foundation-sponsored LISC organiza-

tion had been a significant player in the low income housing development arena for a number of years but came to the conclusion in the early 1990s that successful housing needed to be associated with increased jobs and commercial activity in inner city areas. Formally launching what it called The Retail Initiative (TRI) in 1994, LISC sought to establish a framework for joint venture inner city commercial development, anchored by a local supermarket, similar to the Newark example. LISC hoped that the infusion of capital made possible through its limited partnership investment model combined with community participation through a joint venture would prove attractive to both supermarkets and communities. However, LISC found some of its proposed ventures controversial, partly a reflection of the large size of the markets proposed (60,000-80,000 square feet) and the issue of competition between small stores and the incoming (and subsidized) proposed food market.<sup>11</sup>

RLA (formerly Rebuild Los Angeles) is the organization established in the wake of the 1992 civil disorders, and was created in part to identify job creating, community economic development opportunities in the areas hardest hit by the riots. Originally conceived as an organization capable of "rebuilding" the community solely through private sector initiatives, the issue of supermarket location (or relocation) figured prominently in RLA plans, influenced in part by early supermarket chain pronouncements of interest in relocating into the inner city. However, the early ambitious targets of RLA quickly became casualties of the difficulties, complexities, and lack of private sector support for inner city reinvestment. RLA soon evolved into a research and service type organization, seeking to identify opportunities for specific investment and public/private type ventures, including for supermarket development. It demonstrated

through community surveys that the desire for greater food access, particularly access to supermarkets, was identified as the single largest community need by residents of one large South Central area. Unlike LISC, however, RLA sought to identify opportunities for smaller scale markets, at the 20,000 to 40,000 square foot size, which would require smaller investment and a more manageable joint venture type operation.<sup>12</sup>

While approaching the issue with a different set of considerations and a range of variables to address, both RLA and LISC have nevertheless identified the joint venture approach as the most effective method of securing supermarket investment in the inner city. While representing a breakthrough in identifying a new type of approach, what remains to be addressed is the access issue itself, namely how can the CDC/joint venture facilitate a program to increase access, above and beyond the siting of the supermarket into an inner city location where no supermarket previously existed. By including access in the negotiated arrangement, the joint venture approach extends the community development framework into the arena of food and transportation planning as well.

### **Non-Profit Initiatives: Bringing the Farmer to the Consumer and the Consumer to the Farmer**

In 1994, the Southland Farmers' Market Association (SFMA), a trade and lobbying organization representing 19 farmers' markets in the Los Angeles region, in partnership with the UCLA Community Food Security Project, sought to explore the possibility of initiating and evaluating the development of a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) type arrangement through the Gardena Farmers' Market in southwest Los Angeles. CSAs, as they have been developed

in recent years, typically establish a contractual relationship between a single grower and a group of urban residents or “shareholders” who agree to purchase on an annual basis some or all of the crops produced by that grower. CSAs have generally tended to be characterized for their emphasis on a kind of “lifestyle choice” for middle class consumers rather than for the range of food security benefits, particularly for low income residents, that can flow from grower-to-consumer relationships. A few CSAs, such as Twinhawks Hollow Farm in Wisconsin, have linked their program with low income participants by accepting food stamps as a form of payment, utilizing a subsidized price in their payment schedule, and establishing other innovative relationships.<sup>13</sup> But emphasizing the long term commitment of shareholders (e.g. payments on an annual basis) as a way to insulate the grower from the dictates of the food economy makes the participation of low income urban residents difficult. Most importantly, from the perspective of this study, CSAs have not emphasized issues of location and access from the urban side of the arrangement, thereby limiting the community or neighborhood appeal of such a program.

Given the difficulties of low income residents participating in farmers’ markets or CSAs, the UCLA/Southland Farmers’ Market Association team sought to establish a pilot program that would utilize features of both CSAs and farmers’ markets, with access a major component of the program, in an effort to attract both low and middle income participation. It was decided that such a project would be located in the Gardena area bordering Southwest and South Central Los Angeles. This area is highly diverse, both in terms of its income and ethnicity characteristics. City of Gardena residents are approximately 23% African-American, 23% Latino, 23% Anglo, and 33% Asian/Pacific

Islander. A substantial majority of the census tracts radiating for approximately three miles from Van Ness Avenue and El Segundo Avenue, the site of the Gardena Farmers’ Market, have a median income below the county average, including those in Gardena itself, although several census tract areas are higher income areas. Bus service for intra-neighborhood needs in Gardena is limited, with the closest bus line to the Van Ness and El Segundo intersection stopping more than a half a mile away.<sup>14</sup>

The Gardena Farmers’ Market, established in 1979, is one of the oldest established markets in the Los Angeles region. Many of the growers participating in the market have been involved from its origins, and derive a modest, though still significant share of their revenue stream from market sales. However, sales in recent years have been relatively flat, and the Farmers’ Market has not been able to expand its customer base, particularly in several of the surrounding low and middle income communities.<sup>15</sup> This has occurred despite the possibility of substantial interest in the program, given the small number of full service food markets (and sources of fresh produce) in those areas. Expansion, however, has been limited in part by the lack of any transportation-related program such as a van service that could both improve access and heighten awareness of the market itself, which has remained limited despite its lengthy history.<sup>16</sup>

Responding to the growers’ need to expand sales and the desire to attract a constituency whose participation might otherwise be limited due to access problems, the SFMA sought to explore a CSA model that could, at the same time, be associated with the farmers’ market operation itself. With support from the USDA’s Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,

the UCLA/Southland team designed a Market Basket Subscription Program to serve as a possible model for this and other regions.

The Gardena Market Basket Program was launched in October 1995, with the following features:

- **Step 1:** Several of the growers who sell at the Gardena Farmers' Market agree to sell some of their harvest through the Market Basket Program, at a price that is 15% below farmers' market prices.
- **Step 2:** Each week, the growers and the Market Basket coordinator decide, based on crop quality, quantity, and the need for diversity in the basket, which type of produce each grower will sell through the program. By combining the harvests of several farmers, the Market Basket is able to offer a variety of locally grown, seasonal produce.
- **Step 3:** The produce, purchased in bulk, is then assembled into "shares" and then distributed at drop-off points where they are picked up by participant subscribers. These drop off points, located in different areas of the city, are designed to reduce the distance subscribers have to travel.

The baseline price for a basket of produce (\$10) provides a cost savings over farmers' market prices. Subscribers pay up to a week in advance, with food stamps accepted as a form of payment. There are three share prices established: the baseline price, a subsidized price (30% below the baseline price) and a subsidizing price (at a cost 30% greater

than the baseline figure, but still competitive with supermarket prices).<sup>17</sup>

A core Market Basket Program goal was to utilize the resources of the community in order to build sustainability, with outreach to community organizations and constituency groups essential to the process of increasing community ownership of the project. For example, one successful link to the program was the partnership established with Crystal Stairs, an organization which serves over 2,600 family child care providers in Southern California. Among

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**A core Market Basket Program goal was to utilize the resources of the community in order to build sustainability**

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other activities, Crystal Stairs administers a program that establishes dietary/nutritional requirements for child care providers to qualify for income support for purchasing food for meals. By identifying a subscription to the Market Basket program as qualification, Crystal Stairs established a strong incentive for provider participation.<sup>18</sup> In this way, continued outreach can be conducted through community institutions like Crystal Stairs, as well as schools, churches, social service agencies, and emergency food providers, among others, while seeking to reduce the need for a continual Market Basket "subscription drive." This institutional link also aids in the process of identifying both those in need and those who can pay more. It also helps to identify specific barriers, such as access/transit dependencies, that limit participation.

In the first seventeen weeks after the program was launched, 69 individual subscribers purchased a total of 219 baskets, including 39 baskets at the subsidized price. (See Figure 1) A far greater number of potential subscribers (more than 175) made inquiries

about the program from articles that were published in the *Los Angeles Times* and *South Bay Daily Breeze*. Many of these respondents, however, indicated an inability or unwillingness to participate for a variety of factors. Of those factors, problems of access or transportation figured most prominently (27% of those surveyed cited access-related reasons for non-participation). A similar concern about transportation needs was also expressed by the nearly two dozen churches and community organizations who have indicated an interest and/or participated in the program. Despite the intent of the program to provide greater access by the development of "drop off points" that would shorten distances for participants, a number of potential shareholders, such as senior citizens, disabled, shut-ins, or those without cars, have remained unable to participate in a program that seeks to offer significant community food security benefits not otherwise obtainable. Thus, transportation and access needs have emerged as the single largest need for the stabilization and future expansion of the program.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 1:**

UCLA researchers have been seeking to evaluate the community food security, food access, and environmental benefits of the Market Basket program. These benefits potentially include: a) enhancing the viability of local growers and evaluating whether their participation in this type of direct marketing program influences their growing practices, such as pesticide use; b) expanding the availability of high quality, fresh from the farm, affordable produce for low and middle income city residents, many of whom lack access to any kind of fresh produce (with the project in turn seeking to determine reasons for participation or unwillingness or inability to participate); and c) evaluating the applicability of the program to other locations in California. Having identified, through this evaluation, that transportation and access-related needs represent a central, crucial factor for the program's success, the Market Basket project is currently exploring methods of addressing those needs. One area of research that has been identified involves assessing the feasibility of a delivery/transportation program as an additional component of the Market Basket program.

### **A Food Delivery and Transport Service**

In evaluating various food transport programs, some of which were described in Section III, one major consideration regarding such programs has been the existence of substantial "down time" when the use of the vehicle involved (most often a van) is not in operation and many of the program costs are not able to be recouped. A more cost-effective program would clearly require continuous use of the vehicle, most likely in conjunction with other programs. In terms of the Market Basket program, those wishing to shop at farmers' markets but who have transportation problems represent one

additional and logical use of such a transportation service. By linking access to farmers' markets to a transportation strategy for the Market Basket program, that is, by combining a Market Basket "delivery service" with a farmers' market "van service" program transporting farmers' market shoppers to their homes, the "down time" problem could potentially be eliminated. There are individual farmers' markets that operate every day of the week in the Los Angeles Region; thus a van service could operate up to seven full days a week. (See Figure 2)

**Figure 2:**

Monday	West Hollywood
Tuesday	Culver City
Wednesday	Santa Monica; San Dimas Adams/Vermont
Thursday	Redondo Beach Westwood
Friday	Venice; Monrovia
Saturday	Gardena; Santa Monica Pico
Sunday	Encino

Such a delivery/transport service would operate most efficiently if deliveries and transport were limited to the immediate communities surrounding the farmers' market and/or Market Basket assembly point. This can be accomplished by establishing a three to four mile radius from the delivery/transport point, which has been the demarcation point for outreach and participation in the Gardena Market Basket program. Thus the van would make frequent stops at short distances on each of the days it operated, maximizing the potential number of

participants, particularly if central delivery and/or transit stops were included (e.g., senior citizen homes or centers, child care centers or providers, large housing projects or commercial centers, etc.).

Such a transport/food access system could further establish key environmental benefits (as well as identify important sources of support for start-up costs) by utilizing an ultra low emissions vehicle, similar to the Boulder, Colorado HOP program. Though some alternative fuel vehicles are still in the demonstration stage, others are now available for use. A ULEV for a food access/transport program would be attractive for several reasons:

- Alternative fuel vehicles have been marketed for certain niche uses, such as fleet services, or for the environmentally-aware consumer, most often identified as the middle or upper income car owner who is interested in an additional, more environmentally benign vehicle for limited uses. By linking a ULEV to a program that significantly addresses the needs of low income residents, such a connection establishes a new and broader constituency for ULEV use. Part of the purpose of the project would be to make such links explicit to demonstrate their feasibility.
- ULEVs provide the most substantial pollutant reduction potential (in comparison to gasoline-powered vehicles) when used for travel characterized by short distance, non-freeway driving with multiple stops at reduced speeds. ULEV buses in center city areas offer one such opportunity; a food transport/delivery service could provide another important example.
- While the program under consideration

is designed for specific uses (delivery service for the Market Basket; transportation service for farmers' markets), it has significant potential applicability for a wide range of food service needs (e.g., van service for farmers' markets or supermarkets; meals-on-wheels, etc.) and for overall paratransit programs for targeted constituencies (e.g., van services for senior citizen centers).

potential critical intermediary in facilitating and addressing those policy considerations (e.g., arranging for permit exemptions on the basis of a non-profit operation). To accomplish the goal of food access in this and the earlier approaches described in this Section remains, ultimately, a policy and planning as well as constituency and organizational matter.

In sum, this model food access program could entail developing a delivery and transport service, potentially utilizing an ultra low emissions vehicle for market basket subscription programs in Gardena and farmers' markets throughout a region where such markets are concentrated, such as the Los Angeles region. Through such a transportation service, direct marketing opportunities can be expanded (e.g., by establishing additional Market Basket sites and increasing farmers' market participation), made feasible in part by expanding the transit-dependent constituent base for such a program through an already existing transport/delivery service. The key to such a service is the enlargement of functions and constituencies which have the potential of reducing the cost per service provided (by maximizing vehicle use) while significantly expanding food access opportunities.

The Market Basket delivery and transport service concept is also instructive in terms of identifying the central role of the non-profit organization (in this case, the Southland Farmers' Market Association/UCLA team) in stimulating food access approaches. To facilitate those approaches, policy considerations also need to be addressed; for example, how to offset the potential permitting, insurance, and liability costs associated with such a venture. In Los Angeles, the development of the Food Security and Hunger Partnership represents a

## ENDNOTES: SECTION IV

1. "Council OKs Funds for New Food Agency", Jodi Wilgoren, *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 1996; "Committee Transmittal: Community Development Department Recommendations for the Voluntary Advisory Council on Hunger Proposed Policy", Memorandum from Mayor Richard Riordan to the Los Angeles City Council, January 25, 1996.
2. "For Hunger, More than a Handout", Robert Gottlieb, Carolyn Olney, Elizabeth Riley, *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1994; Hunger and Food Insecurity in Los Angeles: Findings of the Volunteer Advisory Council on Hunger, Final Report, April 1996, Los Angeles: Voluntary Advisory Council on Hunger, City of Los Angeles; See also Letter from Richard Riordan, Mayor, City of Los Angeles, to Robert Farrell, Chair, Voluntary Advisory Council on Hunger, January 25, 1996. "Council OKs Funds for New Food Agency", Jodi Wilgoren, *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 1996.
3. One of the authors of this paper (Robert Gottlieb) is a member of the nine member VACH; the other (Andrew Fisher) is an alternate member as well as consultant.
4. See the Mission Statement, in the Minutes of the Los Angeles Community Food Security Network, June 14, 1996.
5. Deborah Savage and Allen White, "New Applications of Total Cost Assessment", *Pollution Prevention Review*, Winter 1994-1995, pp. 7-14; Stephan Schmidheny and Federico J.L. Zorraquin, with the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Financing Change: The Financial Community, Eco-Efficiency, and Sustainable Development, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996, pp. 137-148
6. One estimate from a Los Angeles-based supermarket executive placed aggregate inner city store cart losses at \$67,000/year. Seeds of Change, p. 133
7. Development costs, such as demolition, paving, and grading costs are estimated at \$5/square foot. Land costs are estimated at \$8 per sq. ft. Interview with Lisa Padilla, Associate, Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership, May 1996.
8. See Food Marketing Alternatives for the Inner City, Community Nutrition Institute, The Consumer Division, Washington D.C.: CNI, 1982, pp. 12-37; Seeds of Change, p. 248
9. See Jane Buckwalter, "Securing Shopping Centers for Inner Cities", in *Urban Land*, Washington D.C.: Urban Land Institute, 1987, p. 23; James J. O'Connor and Barbara Abell, Successful Supermarkets in Low-Income Inner Cities, Arlington, VA: O'Connor-Abell Inc., August 1992
10. Seeds of Change, p. 249
11. Interviews with Denise Fairchild, January 1995, Ralph Lippman, October 1995; The Retail Initiative: Models for Success, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, New York: LISC, September 1995; "City Sites", *Progressive Grocer*, November 1994, p. 12
12. Interviews with Linda Wong, RLA, September 1995, Virginia Oaxaca, May 1995; Rebuild LA (RLA): Progress Report, Los Angeles: RLA, March 9, 1995; Community Retail Needs Assessment: A Market Research Report, Prepared for RLA by ConsumerQuest, Los Angeles, May 3, 1995.
13. Interview with Sandy Eldridge, Twinhawks Hollow Farm, by Michelle

Mascarenhas, May 10, 1995

14. For a description of the background to the Market Basket project, see New Environmental Links: An Ultra Low Emissions Vehicle Food Delivery and Transport Service Connecting Farmers and Low-Income Communities, Prepared for U.S. EPA Region IX by the UCLA Pollution Prevention Education and Research Center, April 1996.

15. Interview with Mark Wall, Southland Farmers' Market Association, January 1995.

16. "Survey of Gardena Farmers' Market Growers", March 18, 1995. Revenues generated from sales through direct marketing at farmers' markets accounted from less than 10% to 100% of the total revenue stream of the farmers surveyed. A similar survey conducted at six farmers' markets in April and May 1993 for the Seeds of Change study found equivalent numbers, with farmer market sales averaging approximately 50% of grower revenues. Sales at the Gardena Market have also varied over time, according to the grower's survey, but have primarily remained flat.

17. New Environmental Links, p. 4

18. Interview with Karen Caldwell, Crystal Stairs, February 1996.

19. New Environmental Links, p.5

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**SECTION V:  
FRAMING FOOD ACCESS:**

**Policy and Planning Recommendations**

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This report has evaluated the intersection of transportation and food access issues. While specific programs and initiatives have been established, primarily at the community or facility level, there has been a notable absence of any directed planning or policy framework for food access for the transit dependent, either through government agencies or by the private food retail sector. This lack of planning and policy development represents the most substantial barrier in the development and implementation of a food access approach. Thus, the recommendations that follow are primarily directed at planners and policymakers, although much of the creative activity to date in the food access arena has been stimulated by constituent groups seeking to address a visible and often transparent food security need.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Federal Policy:

- **Reauthorization of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) should incorporate language to specifically encourage funding of food access-related programs by metropolitan transportation organizations.**

ISTEA provides a major source of funding for innovative transit programs. Two of the obvious advocates for such an approach are the Surface Transportation Policy Project, a coalition of organizations working on transportation and urban planning issues and a primary advocate of ISTEA, and the Community Food Security Coalition, a national network of food security organizations that helped secure passage of the Community Food Security Act. The development of an alliance between these natural allies and others could begin the political process needed

to develop such language for a reauthorized ISTEA.

- **USDA's Food and Consumer Services and Department of Transportation should create an interagency task force on transportation as related to food access.**

This task force could break ground for a more integrated policy approach on these issues. It could conduct research into food access and transportation on a national level, identifying arenas for collaboration between the two agencies, as well as administrative action that could be taken to improve food access. The task force could also assist in the development and funding of food access related transportation demonstration projects in targeted communities.

- **The USDA Farmers' Market Task Force should provide funding for demonstration programs that improve access to farmers' markets in transit dependent and/or food access deficient communities.**

Farmers' markets represent an important access point to high quality affordable produce in communities where such access is often lacking. As with supermarkets, access to farmers' markets in transit dependent communities can be problematic. The recent formation of a Farmers' Market Task Force within USDA with a mission that includes direct marketing to low income communities presents an opportunity to develop innovative programs to help link communities with these valuable food resources.

## Regional Policy:

Metropolitan Transportation Organizations (MTO) should take an active role in improving food access-related transportation. This should include:

- **Conducting needs assessments in transit dependent neighborhoods to determine transportation related food access deficiencies (in conjunction with municipal food policy organizations, where such organizations exist);**

MTOs operate much of the mass transit in the country. Their attention to the food shopping needs of transit dependent communities is vital to addressing existing food access deficiencies. As a first step, MTOs should identify those communities where supermarkets are inadequate and food access is hindered by a lack of appropriately structured transportation services. In communities where food policy organizations exist, such as Toronto, Hartford, Knoxville, Los Angeles, St Paul, and Austin, these organizations can assist the MTO in identifying food access deficient neighborhoods, and structuring any needs assessment process.

- **Formulate services specific to the needs of each community, including the creation and expansion of circulator routes such as Los Angeles's DASH program and Austin's Grocery Bus;**

Beyond the research and evaluation process, MTOs should develop and implement specific services which improve food access. These services should be tailored to the needs of each community. The kinds approaches that could involve services provided by MTOs (e.g., community paratransit services) have been identified in Section III.

- **In Los Angeles, reallocations of transit funds from rail to buses, if and when such a process were to occur, should include funds set aside for food access-related services.**

In particular, the lawsuit described in Section II that has been brought against the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) under the 1994 Civil Rights Act seeks a redistribution of funding from rail to bus services. If successful, any settlement agreement or judicial directive could specify that part of that funding be earmarked towards establishing food access related transportation programs.

- **Local planning agencies should consider reducing parking lot size for new supermarkets constructed in transit dependent communities, with the proviso that the supermarket be required to support a food access transportation program for transit dependent consumers, made feasible in part by utilizing cost savings from the reduced land requirements.**

Municipal planning regulations for supermarket parking lots are designed for middle income communities, many of which have 95% or higher per capita automobile ownership. Such regulations in turn can inhibit the construction of sorely needed new supermarkets in low income neighborhoods where per capita auto ownership figures are significantly lower. Reducing lot size in accordance with the vehicle ownership rates of the surrounding neighborhood would enable supermarkets to be located on smaller parcels, as well as fund services which better serve the transportation needs of the customer base.

- **Local planning agencies should require that new supermarkets develop a specific transportation plan tailored to meet the transportation needs of the surrounding community as part of the permitting process.**

The absence of a food access transportation policy has not been limited to the public sector. Most supermarkets have not formally articulated a transportation policy. Instead, such actions as the construction of large parking lots and the cycle of removal-retrieval of shopping carts has comprised such a de facto policy. The creation of an explicit transportation policy would force new stores to address the characteristics and needs of the communities in which they locate, rather than adopt a “cookie cutter” or “hands-off” approach to the ways in which shoppers transport their goods home.

#### **Private Policy:**

- **Supermarkets located in transit dependent communities should voluntarily develop transportation plans and programs tailored to meet the needs of the store’s customer base.**

Many supermarkets have recognized that store-based transportation programs can be excellent community relations, if not profitable operations when accounting for increased sales and reduced costs associated with shopping cart removal. Supermarkets operated as a joint venture between a chain and a community development corporation (CDC) are best positioned to take the lead in this arena, given the community relationships that are embedded in the structure.

- **The Local Initiative Support Corporation should require that transportation**

**plans and programs be incorporated in all of its supermarkets developed through The Retail Initiative (TRI), as part of its financing process.**

The Local Initiative Support Corporation (described in Section IV) enjoys a unique opportunity to greatly strengthen transportation planning and programming as a vital component of inner city supermarkets through its financing of multiple supermarkets across the nation. It should direct CDCs applying for TRI equity to develop transportation plans appropriate to the needs of the store’s customer base.

- **Communities should develop food planning/policy organizations that could facilitate food access, and, more broadly, food security approaches.**

The development of the Food Policy Council model, such as the Los Angeles Food Security and Hunger Partnership, represents a crucial opportunity to help identify and implement a range of policy and planning food access and food security initiatives. Such initiatives (which, absent a Food Policy Council, might not otherwise be undertaken) could be constructed at the neighborhood, community, or regional scale.

These recommendations constitute what amounts to a preliminary assessment and development process in reconstituting and ultimately integrating food access and transportation planning. Given the growing concerns and political interest in the subject, these recommendations can be considered a modest beginning for a new type of policy and planning process. Without such an initiative, the ability to address food access for the transit dependent remains uncertain at best. In the long run, without a proactive approach, lack of food access is likely to re-

main a problem area deeply entrenched in the realities of food insecurity that will exist for significant numbers of communities and for their resident populations.