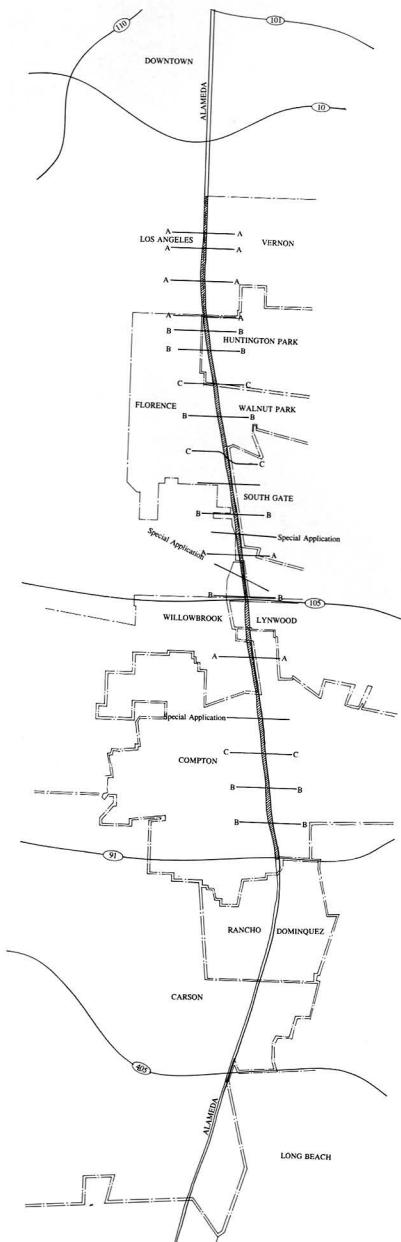


REmaking L.A. into the New City with Big Shoulders

Elizabeth Martin



Great streets often form the vibrant edge of two distinct neighborhoods. Streets, especially wide arterials, need simple broad-stroke design solutions, rather than overly detailed ideas that are lost on moving motorists. This statement can be said of Alameda Street, an industrial spine running through the body of Los Angeles. The Alameda Corridor is an urban design project to create a *steel highway* along Alameda Street connecting the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach to the rail lines across the nation. The 21-mile-rail route consolidates 90 miles of freight lines into one high-speed, high-capacity corridor formally controlled by three private railroads: South Pacific, Santa Fe and Union Pacific. A distinct improvement to the region will be the elimination of traffic conflicts at nearly 200 at-grade vehicular crossings, saving an estimated 15,000 hours of delay per day for automobiles sitting and waiting to cross as the trains pass. In addition, the project widens and improves Alameda Street, the major artery adjacent to the steel highway.

As many things in Los Angeles, the project is extremely controversial. The Corridor goes through the cities of Compton, Florence and Watts on the one side, and Huntington Park, South Gate, and Walnut Park on the other, *geographically* dividing not only cities, but races. The public's perception of this project for the longest time was that the area was going to be bulldozed and a Berlin Wall-like structure would be constructed.

As a result, the Corridor Cities were formed to begin to look at the project from the public's perception and communicate with each city and its neighborhood groups. This includes the participation of each community along the Corridor in understanding the reasons for the project and to what the future will be as the project is defined in more detail. Today, communities, on the one hand, feel detached from the planning process; developers, on the other hand, are wary of the unpredictability of city officials and communities; and city officials, to further complicate things, feel unable to generate enthusiasm for positive new ways of thinking about new kinds of building. As Urban Planners, we are looking beyond the tracklines and communicating to the public the opportunities that the Alameda Corridor will naturally create along its path.

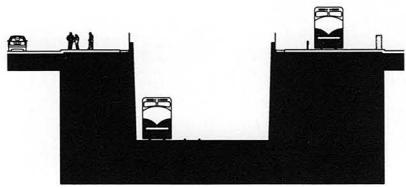
The steel highway concept stems from a healthy melding of streetscape improvements to the bottomline, providing a menu of additives establishing each city's own identity and needs. For example, defining specific options for dealing with intersections, fencing, landscaping, etc. What makes the steel highway concept adaptable is that it provides a framework that is both consistent, creating a district-wide design identity, and flexibility, accommodating a wide variety of uses, for instance, industrial, commercial, institutional, and residential. We are creating a revitalization plan that points to promis-

ing new directions for improving the environment for retail and industrial growth—all while increasing the capacity of an arterial street.

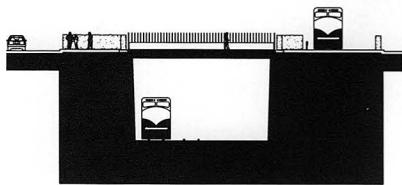
The Alameda Corridor revives the idea of a great multipurpose street with a grand scale at the intersections, where through traffic moves freely, and human scale at the edge, with local traffic buffering sidewalks and commercial areas. The preliminary layout plan includes lighting, a vine trellis or fence, flowering shade trees and decorative paving patterns at primary intersections to orient and add visual interest for pedestrians and motorists.

Since the Corridor is grade separated at certain areas, a pedestrian and vehicular barrier is required for safety purposes. This separation will consist of a K-rail and a fence. The K-rail is a concrete bumper-like element that keeps cars at street level. The design of the fence presented several challenges. Obviously, it is necessary for protection, but also it had to be difficult to climb or jump over, and be constructed in such a way that inherently discourages vandalism, graffiti or tagging. Also, we did not want to create a visual or physical barrier that separates one side of the street from the other.

In the profile view shown, the depressed railway indicates the trains and a service vehicle road running alongside the tracks for repairs, or possible expansion.



Profile View: Typical Section

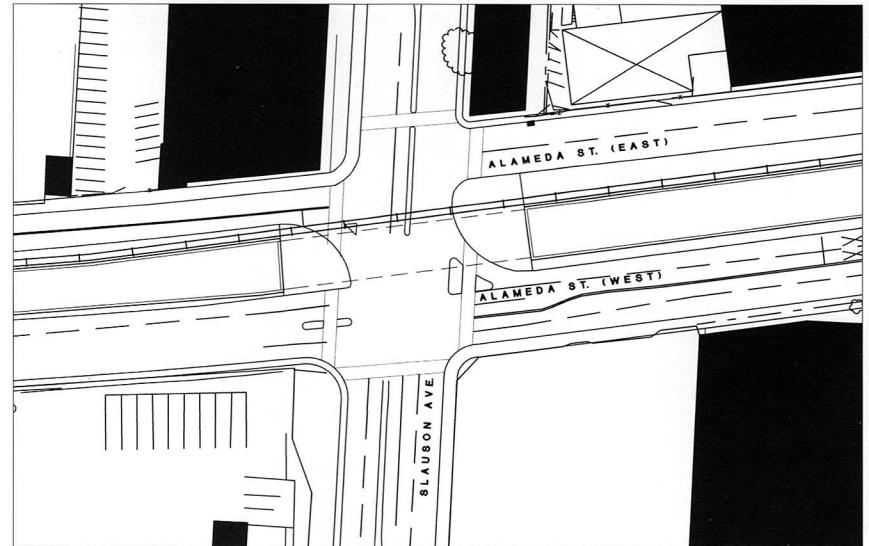


Profile View: Crossing Section

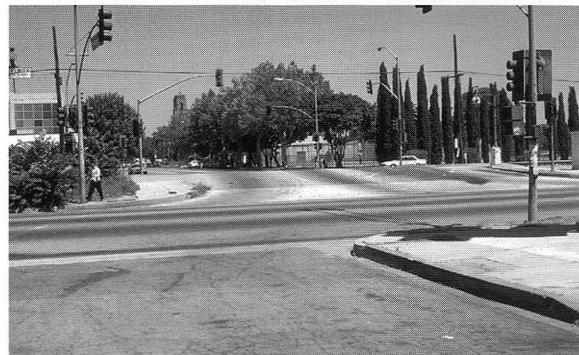
The train at street level uses the “drill” track, which is specifically for rail service to local businesses along the Corridor. These trains are typically one or two freight cars long that operate infrequently. Access to the drill track is an important opportunity for the business of the Alameda Corridor and it is thought that this convenience will help bring industry to the Corridor Cities.

Since intersections will be reconstructed as bridges in those areas where the railway is depressed, they provide a logical element to unify the length of the Corridor without adding cost or any unnecessary decoration. Curbs, gutters, sidewalks, groundcover and drainage systems will be replaced to meet engineering standards, Public Works specifications and the ADA Code. Each intersection, whether at grade or grade separated, is classified on an hierarchical scale, based on adjacent land-uses and perceived sensitivity, as follows:

Type A Crossing: Generally describes those intersections adjacent to industrial and manufacturing uses with little or no pedestrian traffic and as a vehicular connection is a collector or local street.



Type “A” Crossing Palmer Street

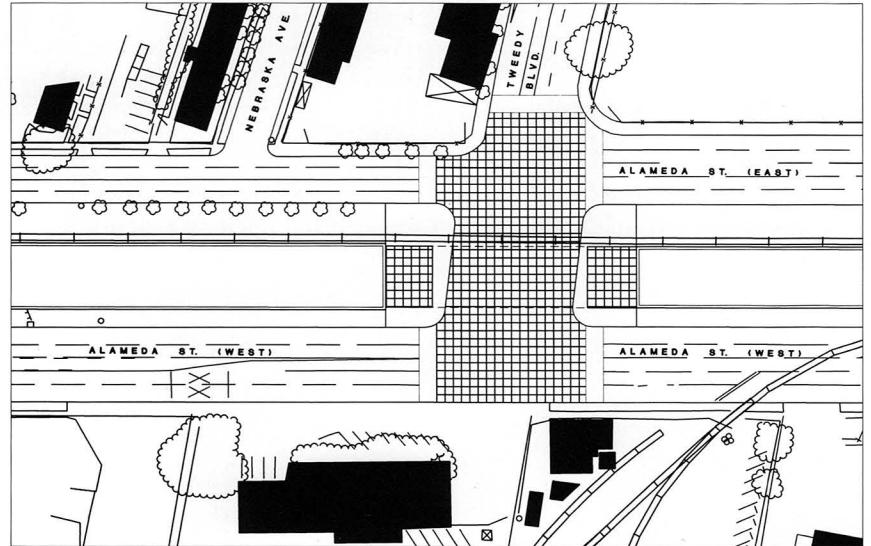


Palmer Street before

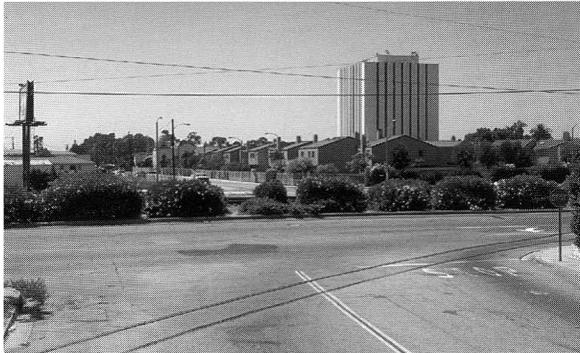


Palmer Street after

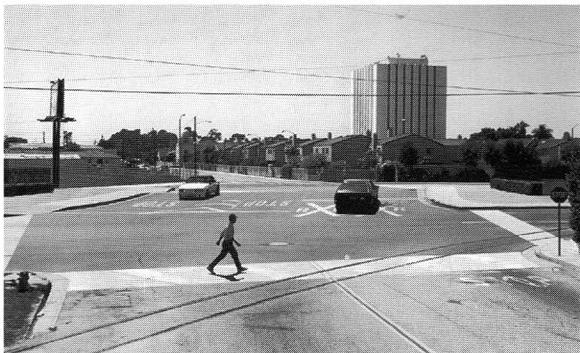
Type B Crossing: Generally describes those intersections adjacent to residential, light commercial or institutional uses with pockets of pedestrian activity and as a vehicular connection is a secondary highway usually with freeway access.



Type "B" Crossing Myrrh Street



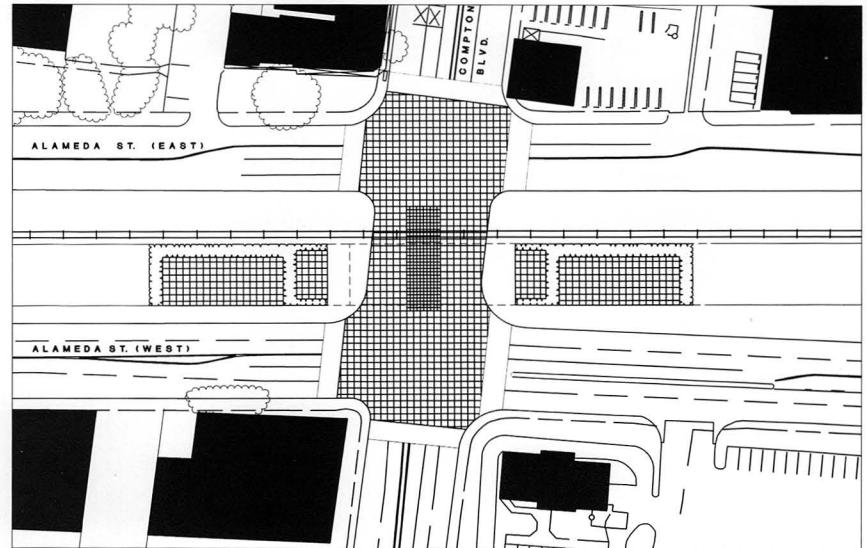
Myrrh Street before



Myrrh Street after



Type C Crossing: Generally describes those intersections adjacent to high levels of commercial or residential activities with a high level of pedestrian activity and as a vehicular connection is a major highway with freeway access.



Type "C" Crossing Compton Boulevard



Compton Boulevard before



Compton Boulevard after



Within the city, new development can bridge gaps between neighborhoods left by transportation expansion and commercial corridors. Sensitive attention to pedestrian linkages can reinvigorate the street life of commercial corridors, making them places for public interaction and urban living rather than as mere thoroughfares and barriers to communication among neighborhoods.

Envisioned for the Alameda Corridor is a big-shouldered future for Los Angeles County as an industrial and trading city-state. To understand this it helps to realize that not only is there a regional market, but companies in turn send exports to Asia and the Pacific Rim back through the Southern California ports. So this port assures an economical two-way trade. Such a vision is a very different forecast for Los Angeles, but it's a long awaited complement to Hollywood's glamour and *Melrose Place's* surf and romance.

Throughout history, the city has served as the center of civilization and the heart of the City has typically offered a focus to urban activity. The physical character of American cities can be distinguished into two categories—those that have evolved before the influence of the automobile and those cities that came afterward. A great deal of growth in urbanized areas over the past twenty years has occurred in the latter city of which Los Angeles is the largest example. Since the Alameda Corridor seeks to define a special form of human urban settlement, the improvements will create a strong impact by providing a source of economic life and urban renewal.

Note:

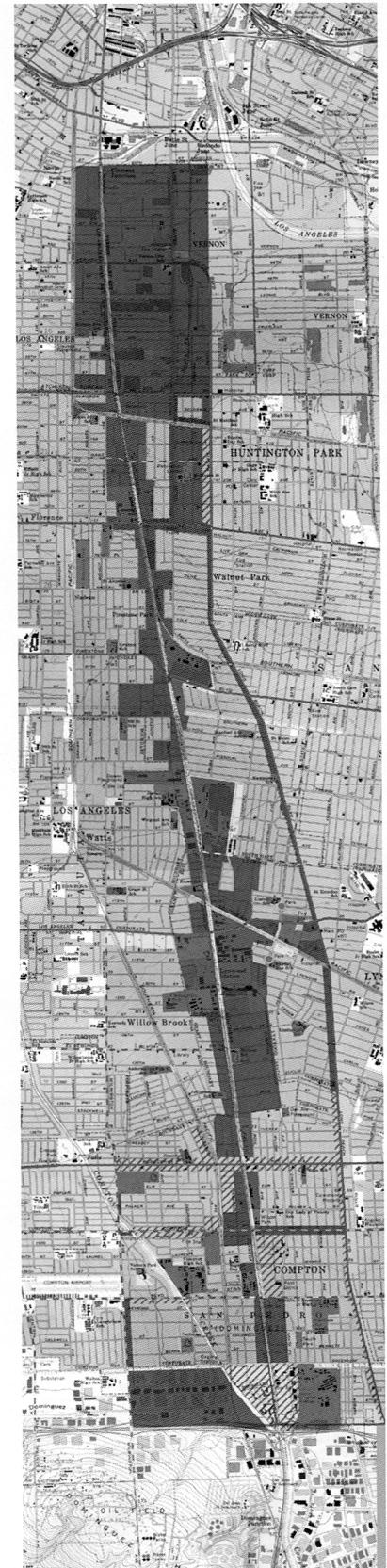
The Alameda Corridor Project is a joint venture under the auspices of the Alameda Engineering Team with the Urban Design portion of the project from the office of DMJM Keating in Los Angeles including: Richard Keating and Michael Mann, Principles-in-Charge; Liz Martin and Julio Palacios, Urban Planners; Rania Alomar, Ernie Ballada, Emily Jagoda, Cris Mendoza, Julio Llosa, and Kriztina Tockes, Project Team.



Aerial View before (1995)



Aerial View after (2001)



Land-use Map