



## LOS ANGELES UNION STATION HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Cory Zelmer,  
Deputy Supervisor  
LA Metro  
1 Gateway Plaza  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Ref: Additional and Updated Comments *opposing* LAART "Gondola" DEIR For Feb. 8<sup>th</sup> Meeting.

Dear Mr. Zelmer,

Given today's Zoom meeting for comments concerning LAART's "Gondola" DEIR the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Union Station Historical Society (LAUSHS Board) has directed me to send the followings additional and updated comments **opposing** the LAART "Gondola" DEIR.

The LAUSHS Board opposes the "Frank McCourt/LAART/Climate Resolve Gondola" (LAART) private, for profit cable car and real estate development scheme that proposes to link Union Station and Metro's supporting "Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain" project with Dodger Stadium, because it is contrary to Metro's public duty being a **unique special favor for LAART**. Our Board believes that LAART's proposed futuristic/carnival-like Union Station Alameda Street Terminal and Metro's supporting "Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain" project will **blight the viewscape** of the historic and architecturally significant West Facade of Union Station and the greenscape and skyscape of Los Angeles State Historic Park.

Moreover, Union Station, its trains and patrons could be physically harmed if aircraft from the nearby Los Angeles Police Department's "Hooper Memorial Heliport" airport were to be entangled in LAART's overhead cables and 13+ story support towers. Furthermore, the LAUSHS Board opposes Metro's planned **removal of all "Disabled Parking"** from the "Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain" area, without public hearings and reasonable alternatives, to accommodate a new, large **"water feature"** (a misting water fountain) which would cool LAART patrons cued-up for their cable car rides to Dodger Stadium. The water fountain would be **contrary to the state's water conservation policy** especially during Los Angeles current and likely permanent, record-breaking draught. (Even if the water feature recirculates, at least 10% of its water will be lost to evaporation day after day, year after year.)

The LAUSHS Board had originally chosen not to take sides in the above controversial, billion-dollar real estate development scheme. However, in view of Metro's obvious pro-active role supporting LAART, a potential competitor of its efficient "Dodger Stadium Express" motor coach service, as well as planning to "gild the lily" of Union Station with its Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain Project, done **"backstage,"** using Metro's without first consulting the public, LAUSHS Board had no choice but to take a firm stand against the various Gondola schemes.

Among the reasons for The Board's opposition are, but not limited to:

- A) Former Metro Board member, then Mayor of Los Angeles Eric Garcetti, who originally introduced the motion for Metro to assist LAART without public participation and to enlist Metro staff to "carry LAART's water" as it were, did receive, according to public records, millions of dollars in both political cash contributions and "behest" contributions from billionaire real estate and LAART developer Frank McCourt, his family and various entities which in the LAUSHS Board's opinion, is an unacceptable **conflict of interest**.
- B) In LAUSHS Board's opinion, Metro Deputy Executive Officer Cory Zelmer and/or subordinates and consultants (Zelmer, etc.) falsified an official environmental document--LAART's Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR)--by checking-off the DEIR box that states there is no airport within 2 miles (3520 yards) of LAART's proposed Union Station Terminal, when he had been informed repeatedly to the contrary by the LAUSHS Board. Moreover, The LAUSHS Board presented proof to Zelmer, etc. and Metro CEO Stephanie Wiggins, that the Los Angeles Police Department's "Hooper Memorial Heliport" (described as the world's busiest airport for rotary-winged aircraft (aka helicopters) is only 1/2 mile (880 yards) from LAART's proposed Union Station Terminal. Furthermore, The Board reminded Zelmer, etc. that according to the **Los Angeles Police Department, the California Department of Transportation, the California Public Utilities Commission, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the 8th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals, all heliports are airports** officially defined as any location where flying machines are serviced. The fact that some airports serve only rotary-winged aircraft (helicopters) while others serve fixed-wing aircraft (conventional aircraft) does not change the fact that all heliports are airports in the eyes of all governing agencies and the Federal Courts. Furthermore, the argument presented by Metro that Hooper Heliport is a police facility, not a civilian facility, and therefore not subject to LAART's DEIR, is **illogical and fallacious**. It stands to reason that a helicopter that becomes entangled in LAART's cables, gondolas, and 13+story support towers and consequently crashes into Union Station, its trains, and patrons, could cause **catastrophic harm** regardless had that aircraft launched from a police facility or a public facility. Simply put, **LAART's proposed location is not safe for the Union Station community** and helicopters from Hooper Memorial Heliport airport. Please note, the *Rules and Regulations of Los Angeles Union Passenger Terminal* (LAUS's former name) has for decades stated: **"General Notice A. Safety is of the first importance in the discharge of duty."**
- C) Contrary to the promises made to the LAUSHS Board by CEO Stephanie Wiggins, Zelmer, etc. and LAART, **no meeting has ever been organized between them and the LAUSHS Board to discuss the difference of opinions concerning the nature of LAPD's Hooper Memorial Heliport airport and the proposed location for LAART's Union Station Terminal**. In fact, Metro forbade The LAUSHS Board's examination of the only known 3-D scale model of Union Station's location because of, in LAUSHS Board's opinion, a **deliberate subterfuge** that the model is dated and furthermore the sharing of the model with the LAUSHS Board would **unexplainably be a conflict of interest**. This **"shadow play,"** the LAUSHS Board believes was performed by LA Metro and LAART to **obfuscate the issues and delay criticism** of LAART. Finally, in December 2022 Metro provided to the general public an aerial diagram of LAART's Union Station Terminal that would be in the **worst possible viewscape location--the front of Union Station's historic Hispanic-style West Facade!**
- D) In LAUSHS Board's opinion, LAART is designed to compete with Metro's "Dodger Stadium Express," a highly efficient motor coach service that could be environmentally improved if **Metro upgraded to modern, environmentally friendly, "green" electric buses** that it might fund by using a portion of the \$20,000,000 in Federal funds earmarked for the Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain project.
- E) Additionally, given the seasonal nature of baseball, it is also LAUSHS Board's opinion that **LAART is a "Trojan Horse" scheme** to facilitate year-around, for-profit retail and real estate development on McCourt controlled Dodger Stadium parking lots and in the adjacent community which would then be subject to **"gentrification"** forcing **the expulsion of working "ethnic minority" families** not able to afford dramatically increased rents.
- F) Metro's proposed Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain project, according to Metro employees--who wish to remain anonymous--will be funded by so-called **"overlap money"** that was **"peeled-off" from Metro's defunct LINK-**

**US project** that itself was rejected by the LAUSHS Board's and the public's opposition. Moreover, Metro has stated to LAUSHS's Executive Director, via telephone, that ultimately the Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain project will come to fruition by a two-step process. First, all public parking including **"disabled parking"** would be **"temporarily"** closed in front of Union Station for construction vehicles without public discussion or participation and Step two—well there really won't be a step two because the parking simply will disappear permanently when the construction vehicles depart. The LAUSHS Board believes **this conspiracy** would be a **violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)**. (A disabled motorist has already filed a formal complaint to the Federal authorities against Metro's Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain project.) Not only would this **negatively impact the "disabled"** but also the customers of Metro's tenants the Homebound Restaurant and Brewery, TRAXX restaurant and the numerous social and artistic events that take place in the adjacent former "Ticketing Hall." Furthermore, according to a retired Metro staff person, the Esplanade's water fountain will likely attract "homeless" citizens seeking "showers" contrary to Metro's official policy of not catering to the needs of the "homeless." In LAUSHS Board's opinion, Metro's Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain project is primarily designed to **cool future LAART and adjacent Olvera Street tourist attraction visitors during the hot baseball season**. (Note: while Olvera Street's right-of-way and some of its structures and art works are historic, the "Olvera Street tourist attraction" per se was invented in 1930 by a real estate development team who went on to develop Los Angeles' "New Chinatown tourist attraction." Ironically, Old Chinatown was demolished in a racist bid to rid Los Angeles of the Chinese who settled there after building the railroad to Los Angeles, then Union Station was built on top of Old Chinatown's rubble.)

- G) Building the Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain project's water-feature while semi-desert Los Angeles is experiencing **its worst drought yet** flies in the face of the State of California's policy to **conserve water now and the foreseeable future**. One only needs to recall the classic Los Angeles-based movie **"Chinatown"** to understand what LAUSHS Board believes is driving LAART and Metro's Esplanade-Forecourt-Fountain schemes—**the insatiable greed of billionaire land developers, Metro bureaucratic careerists and Metro's elected officials seeking evermore political contributions!**
- H) Finally, the proposed route of Frank McCourt's "Gondola" has it trampling the edges of Los Angeles State Historic Park that was **reserved in perpetuity** for the public's enjoyment of the open landscape and skyline that once was a hallmark of Los Angeles. Consequently, one is forced to ask what part of **"in perpetuity"** does **Frank McCourt and Metro not understand?**

For the above reasons, but not necessarily only because of them, the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Union Station Historical Society has joined: The Sierra Club, the UCLA Mobility Lab, the LA Parks Alliance, the Aliso Street Historical Society and local community organizations plus others who **oppose Frank McCourt's "greenwashing" Gondola scheme**.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Tom Savio

Executive Director, Los Angeles Union Station Historical Society