

BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS

Q: In light of Los Angeles' natural advantages, why does Los Angeles need so many massive infrastructure projects (rail, air, auto, port, water supply) and will they be sufficient to meet the needs of tomorrow?

The geography of Los Angeles has always presented a unique set of challenges. For example, as late as the 1920s, San Diego was assumed to have many advantages over Los Angeles. San Diego had a natural harbor and a new airport (LA had neither). San Diego was also a strong contender for a transcontinental railroad terminal and was better off than Los Angeles when it came to supplies of fresh water.

In his book, "Globalizing L.A.," Dr. Steven Erie examines the globe and concludes that Los Angeles has become one of the world's great regional economies and global laboratories. Dr. Erie gives the primary credit, not to LA's natural advantages, but to the citizens of Los Angeles who were willing to make the "huge public infrastructure investments" that were called for.

The accomplishments are impressive. The San Pedro ports (Los Angeles and Long Beach) are now the busiest container ports in the United States. Los Angeles is the principal air cargo and passenger hub on the West Coast. And the vast Los Angeles Alameda Corridor rail complex links the air and sea ports with downtown Los Angeles. It was the citizens of Los Angeles who chose to tax themselves to build the first aqueducts bringing water from the Owens Valley and the Colorado River to Los Angeles. And perhaps the most enduring achievement of all was Los Angeles' creation of municipal agencies to build and operate this vast infrastructure.

Dr. Erie emphasizes that the challenges continue. He notes that Los Angeles' major public works, like all infrastructure, require constant upgrades to meet the competition and to satisfy new laws and regulations. However, in Dr. Erie's view, an informed citizenry remains the single most important and essential ingredient for good public policy for Los Angeles.

CITATION

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