City of South Gate
Firestone and Atlantic
Station Area Plan

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Executive Summary

This report establishes a preferred alternative scenario concept for the City of South Gate’s Firestone and Atlantic station area. This concept creates a vision—rooted in the policy goals of the City’s General Plan and vetted by the community at-large and the City’s Planning Commission—to accommodate and leverage the benefits of the proposed rail transit being planned by the Eco-Rapid Transit Authority (ERTA), formerly the Orange Line Development Authority (OLDA). The proposed corridor is along the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way and is referred to throughout this report as the Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch.

This study was undertaken by a multi-disciplinary team led by Community Design + Architecture (CD+A), with Economic & Planning Systems (EPS), Estolano LeSar Perez Associates (ELP), and Fehr & Peers (F&P). The Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) Compass Blueprint program funded the study.

2012-2035 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy

In 2004 the Compass Blueprint Visioning Process led to the development of a Growth Vision to collectively address the major land use and transportation challenges facing Southern California, both at present and in the future. This growth vision formed the basis of the preferred scenario chosen as part of the development of the 2012-2035 Regional Transportation Plan/Sustainable Communities Strategy (RTP/SCS).

The Growth Vision is driven by four key principles:

- Mobility - Getting where we want to go
- Livability - Creating positive communities
- Prosperity - Long-term health for the region
- Sustainability - Promoting efficient use of natural resources

To realize these principles on the ground, the Growth Vision encourages:

- Focusing growth in existing and emerging centers and along major transportation corridors
- Creating significant areas of mixed-use development and walkable communities
- Targeting growth around existing and planned transit stations
- Preserving existing open space and stable residential areas

When planned and implemented correctly, all of these principles are achieved by transit-oriented development. The CD+A team’s objective was to establish a vision that is rooted in the community's aspirations yet realistically plots a course for a phased transformation of the proposed station area site into a vibrant, economically and environmentally sustainable hub.

1 http://www.compassblueprint.org/about
that provides citizens with expanded transportation, housing, employment, and lifestyle choices.

**Station Area Planning Process**

The CD+A team began the study with analysis of existing conditions within the Firestone and Atlantic station area, South Gate, and the region. Focus areas included existing land use and transportation conditions, land use policy, public open space and urban form. Team member EPS developed a detailed market conditions assessment. Together, these background materials established a baseline from which the team developed materials to host a half-day public design charrette.

Charrette participants worked with facilitators from CD+A, EPS and ELP to develop conceptual land use and transportation scenarios around the future rail station, selecting their preferred station location and choosing development types and transportation and public improvements to be built on the site. The CD+A team synthesized this public input and from it developed two alternative scenarios, with a conceptual land use program for each. The “Atlantic” option featured a rail station location adjacent to Atlantic Avenue, while the “Central” option featured a station at a midpoint between Firestone and Atlantic along the rail line.

The city’s Planning Commission reviewed the two alternative concepts and selected the Atlantic scenario for further refinement into a preferred alternative scenario.

**Preferred Alternative Scenario**

Building on the direction from the Planning Commission, the CD+A team devised a preferred alternative scenario that features three phases of development. The preferred alternative scenario is aligned with the policy goals of the General Plan and the desires of community members; it is also anticipated to be economically feasible within reasonably anticipated market conditions over a roughly 35-year time horizon.

Phase I of the preferred alternative scenario features multi-family residential development along the north-eastern corner of Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue across from the azalea retail center (see Figure 1). At a higher density than seen anywhere at this scale in South Gate, Phase I development increases the diversity of the city’s housing supply, potentially helping to retain more of the young adults in the 10-29 age cohort, which has decreased over the last decade. Providing dense housing in proximity to the azalea shopping center on the northwest corner of Firestone and Atlantic, near the industrial jobs center to the east of the station area, and in proximity to major local and regional bus and bike routes, represents a significant step toward achieving the goals of the SCAG 2012-2016 RTP/SCS.

Phase II of the preferred alternative scenario anticipates operation of the proposed passenger rail line and with it, development of a public plaza adjacent to the rail platforms linking the station area with the azalea retail center and the Phase I multi-family housing (see Figure 2). Two new streets are proposed, including an extension of Wilcox Avenue from the border with Cudahy to Firestone Boulevard, and a new east-west street linking Atlantic Avenue with the extension of Wilcox. Between this new east-west street and the rail line, Phase II envisions development of a daycare/community center and a multi-family residential building at roughly double the density of that anticipated as part of Phase I. A daycare/community facility was widely desired by participants in the public workshop, and provides significant livability benefits for working parents and potentially senior community members that wish
to remain active without driving. Such a facility could include space for community meetings and events. As the rail line is operational during Phase II, the feasibility of higher density residential development grows and with it, the expansion of more sustainable housing and transportation choices. North of the new street, a surface parking lot provides park-and-ride capacity for rail patrons. The parking facility is a central part of the strategy for assembling land for transit-oriented development in the station area, which is discussed in greater detail in this report and in the complete market feasibility report included as an appendix.

Figure 1: Preferred Alternative Scenario (Phase I)
Phase III of the preferred alternative scenario envisions a conversion of the surface parking lot into a mixed-use transit-oriented development that complements the earlier phases of residential and community use with office, a valuable employment use (see Figure 3). Three, 3-story office buildings frame a courtyard adjacent to the rail station platforms. The office parking requirements are reduced to less than half of current municipal standards, based on the presence of the rail station. Parking is provided in a 3-level structure to meet both the office needs and achieve the same park-and-ride capacity established in Phase II. Finally, a row of townhomes are included as a higher end residential option, helping to further diversify the range of TOD housing and providing an attractive, pedestrian friendly streetscape on the new street across from the day care/community center and Phase II multi-family.
Next Steps

This report concludes with a discussion of next steps and recommends pursuing a specific planning process for the station area to more fully explore policy amendments and financing strategies to advance the vision toward implementation.

Key Insights

- This study, which was rooted in a comprehensive outreach effort, determined that a rail station adjacent to Atlantic Avenue is the community-preferred location within the Firestone and Atlantic station area.

- This study examines one of many possible land use and transportation scenarios based on the General Plan’s vision for the area. Assumptions about future market conditions and other factors are laid out in this report and the appendices, which describe the route to successful implementation of the preferred scenario. However, there are significant issues to overcome. Chief among these:

  - Complex financing and phasing strategies, as well as flexibility to respond to changing market conditions, will be required for development (both private transit-oriented development of residential, community, and office uses, and public station-related development of the platforms, plaza and parking facilities);

  - Assembly of the parcels required for the redevelopment concepts shown will be challenging because of the large number and diverse ownership of those parcels, particularly for Phase I development;
The feasibility of the preferred alternative will depend on the long-term market values of later phases to offset the losses of Phase I as proposed in the preferred scenario;

The complexity, high cost, and lack of full funding for the proposed rapid transit line creates uncertainty about the transit service’s timeline, and thus the development of the preferred scenario.

The Next Steps section of this report provides guidance about how the vision established in the preferred scenario can be refined and moved toward implementation. Key steps include:

- The preparation of ridership and parking demand estimates in the proposed station area, including coordination with the Alternatives Assessment study of station areas along the proposed rail corridor.
- Preparation of a specific plan that refines the preferred scenario presented in this report. The specific plan should result in:
  - Policy amendments that are adopted by the City of South Gate to facilitate implementation of the project;
  - Design guidelines that provide direction for the development of pedestrian- and transit-oriented buildings and public and private spaces; and
  - An implementation strategy to guide coordination of public and private investments and financing.
  - A Program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to comply with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
Background

**Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch**

Providing rail transit service along the Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch corridor (see Figure 4) is a long-term goal in the region, promoted by the Eco-Rapid Transit Authority (ERTA), formerly known as the Orange Line Development Authority. Communities along the corridor, which stretches from Downtown Los Angeles to Santa Ana, are home to 4.5 million residents and 2.2 million jobs. Future growth along the corridor is forecasted at 550,000 new residents and 86,000 new jobs by 2035, resulting in an estimated increase of 2.6 million trips per day. In a corridor for which more than 90 percent of trips are made by car, and with few connections to regional transit systems, the area's freeways and expressways are expected to operate at or beyond capacity in peak periods today and in the future. Providing a robust, regional transit option to serve this corridor is an important step towards maintaining and growing competitive businesses and livable communities.

ERTA and the City of South Gate have identified a potential location for a Firestone and Atlantic station between Patata Street and Firestone Boulevard along the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way.

**South Gate Station Area**

South Gate is a member of the Gateway Cities Council of Governments (GCCOG), located in southeast Los Angeles County. It is bordered by the cities of Huntington Park, Cudahy, Bell Gardens, Downey, Paramount, Lynwood, and a portion of unincorporated Los Angeles County. The I-710 freeway and the Los Angeles River pass through South Gate near its eastern edge, and the I-105 freeway runs to its south. South Gate’s Firestone and Atlantic station area is located in the northeast part of the city, adjacent to Cudahy and the I-710 freeway (see Figure 5). Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue are major arterials that bisect the city at this location, and these are the primary vehicular access routes to the station area.
Project Area

This study has considered the city within its regional and local context, including physical, cultural and economic connections to other parts of Los Angeles County, neighboring cities, and local destinations within South Gate. Initial analysis and outreach focused on the “Gateway District” area as defined by the City of South Gate’s General Plan 2035, at the center of which lies the proposed rail station location. This area is roughly bounded by the Los Angeles River to the east, the city boundary with Cudahy to the north, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) easement to the south, and an irregular boundary to the west consisting of the area between Patata Street and Firestone Boulevard east of Kauffman Avenue, and the parcels that front onto Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue between Kauffman and Southern Avenue (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Gateway District Boundaries (Source: City of South Gate General Plan 2035)

Current Land Use Policy

General Plan

The Vision in South Gate’s General Plan 2035 states in part that the City “will harness the forces of growth and change to improve the quality of life for each and every resident and business. . . . become an attractive and desirable place to live, work, shop, gather and play. . . . preserve and enhance [the city’s] residential areas, create affordable housing, and provide transportation choices that fit the needs of all of South Gate’s residents.” The General Plan also includes a number of guiding principles, including accommodating growth in a way that benefits existing residents and improves quality of life; greening the city with trees, landscaping and open space; enhancing multi-modal mobility by creating a transportation system that includes safe and attractive streets to promote walking, bicycling and transit use; and creating a healthy environment by promoting energy conservation and healthy lifestyles.

The General Plan’s vision for the Gateway District foresees the predominantly industrial and underutilized area transformed into a mixed-use transit-oriented development featuring retail, entertainment and medium to high-density residential uses. Referring to Figure 6, the specific uses envisioned for the district are grouped by Sub-area. Sub-area 1 would feature major retail, open space, and medium density residential; Sub-area 2 would feature the rail station, with high density residential and/or office, transitioning to light industrial/flex and research and development (R&D) uses; Sub-area 3 would feature higher-intensity employment such as
industrial/flex and Office/R&D; Sub-area 4 would feature higher density mixed uses, with ground floor retail below upper story office and residential uses.

**Zoning and Existing Land Use**

The zoning classifications on record within the Project Area boundary are all some type of manufacturing use. The majority of the area, including all of the largest parcels, is classified as M-3 Heavy Manufacturing. The cluster of smaller parcels around the intersection of Firestone and Atlantic are a mix of M-2 Light Manufacturing and C-M Commercial Manufacturing. East and west of the Project Area, and south of the Project Area west of Atlantic Avenue, M-3 is the predominant zoning classification. Existing land use largely reflects this zoning (see Figure 7).

![Figure 7: Existing Land Use (Source: City of South Gate, 2012; SCAG, 2012)](image)

*Industrial use at Atlantic Ave and Patata St.*
Other notable uses located among the largely industrial area include three residential parcels on Lotta Avenue and a publicly owned parcel where Neville Avenue meets the Union Pacific Railroad near the center of the Project Area. A retail shopping center is currently under construction at the west end of the Project Area. This development, called “azalea,” is being built on a formerly vacant site and will feature a large retail anchor tenant and several supporting retail and restaurant uses. There is an existing industrial use, a pipeline testing facility, which is not expected to change in the near future, located between the azalea development site and the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way.

Existing land uses in the surrounding station area also largely reflect the underlying zoning. Industrial uses are present north and west of the Project Area within the City of South Gate, as well as in neighboring Cudahy, north of Patata. A new school, Aspire Firestone Academy, is located just outside the Project Area along Firestone Boulevard. Single-family and multi-family housing surround the school. A mix of industrial, residential and civic uses are located to the south of the Project Area, including a fire station at Southern and Vossler Avenues. Further to the east of Atlantic Avenue, a mix of industrial and commercial uses surround a residential neighborhood that includes single- and multi-family housing. To the west of Atlantic Avenue, a mix of primarily institutional and residential uses, including Tweedy Elementary School, are situated along the eastern edge of South Gate Park.

**Public Open Spaces and Plazas**

South Gate Park covers nearly 100 acres and is one of the largest parks in the region. The park features an auditorium, senior recreation center, Goals Soccer Center, swim stadium, 9-hole golf course, girls' club house offering classes for both girls and boys, and sports center, as well as ball fields, basketball and tennis courts, playgrounds, and non-programmed areas for recreation and picnicking. South Gate Park is an important local and regional destination in close proximity to the Project Area.

A portion of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP) right-of-way is leased to the City and features a walking path and provides open space along Southern Avenue extending from Atlantic Avenue to the western border of the city and into Florence and Los Angeles County beyond. At the southern border of the Project Area, the LADWP
right-of-way is leased to a plant nursery and public access is restricted. There is also a small triangle of open space with a shaded plaza and seating at the intersection of Southern and Atlantic Avenues.

There are no other public open spaces within or around the Project Area. However, some businesses have provided landscaping and small open spaces adjacent to public rights-of-way; and as part of the azalea development, small plazas may be created near the intersection of Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue.

City Context

Other notable corridors and activity centers are located throughout the City of South Gate (see Figure 8). Tweedy Mile is a commercial corridor along Tweedy Boulevard, a walkable street that runs from the city’s western boundary to South Gate Park. Other districts include the South Gate College District, where the City has been building support to expand higher education opportunities and construct new facilities to build on the existing Adult Learning Center. The city’s Civic Center District is located along California Avenue between Firestone Boulevard and Ardmore Avenue. East of the Los Angeles River and I-710, El Paso/South Gate Towne Center is an existing shopping center located off Firestone Boulevard and Garfield Avenue, and to the south off Garfield Avenue, South Gate Triangle is another center for shipping and packaging companies.

Figure 8: City of South Gate Context Map (Source: City of South Gate, 2012; SCAG, 2012; CD+A, 2012)
Urban Form

Planners often refer to “the Four D’s” as the key ingredients that help create a transit-oriented environment. These are Diversity, Destinations, Density, and Design. The Firestone and Atlantic station area benefits from all of them, to varying degrees. There are a number of retail, commercial, and industrial businesses, recreational areas, and fairly compact residential neighborhoods all within the vicinity of the station area. This means there is a good mix of establishments to serve shoppers, provide jobs for employees, and house local residents (diversity and destinations). These destinations are also located in close proximity to each other so it is possible to walk, bike or take transit to reach them (density).

Design and Walkability

Design is more complicated in some ways than diversity, destinations, and density. Design it refers to details about how streets and buildings can encourage walking, bicycling and taking transit. A transit-oriented station area requires diversity, destinations and density, but it also needs a walkable environment so transit riders can get to and from their destinations on foot. Urban form is a term that describes how streets and buildings contribute or detract from the quality and experience of being on foot in public space; as such, urban form has an important role in influencing whether pedestrians, and to some extent bicyclists, feel safe and comfortable occupying and traveling through a city’s public realm. This in turn affects a community’s walkability. Understanding a community’s urban form can help to identify improvements that will encourage people to walk, use transit, and bicycle for transportation, making their transportation choices both healthier and more environmentally friendly. Identifying opportunities for creating a more pedestrian-friendly and transit-oriented urban form was a key component of developing development alternatives for the Firestone and Atlantic station area.

In short, walking is encouraged by buildings that engage pedestrians with windows and entrances rather than parking lots, by sidewalks and crossings that provide safe and comfortable passage, and by short blocks that allow pedestrians to take direct routes between residences, businesses, schools, and other destinations. These characteristics were common when communities featured a greater mix of uses in close proximity to residential neighborhoods. Overtime, non-residential uses became clustered by type into shopping centers, services areas, and employment zones. Thus many modern cities, including South Gate, feature walkable residential areas, but lack good pedestrian connections to many other destinations, which have been designed to accommodate cars instead of pedestrians.

Commensurate with the large amount of industrial land use in the South Gate Project Area, the urban form is predominantly auto-oriented and unfriendly to pedestrians. The industrial parcels surrounding the proposed Firestone and Atlantic station are very large and most
require controlled or otherwise limited entrances, contributing to a disconnected street network composed of fewer, longer blocks surrounded by streets that lack or provide poor-quality sidewalks. The buildings on these industrial lots are mostly set back with parking or service areas typically facing the few roadways that provide access, such as Firestone Place, Rayo Avenue, and Patata Street (see Figure 9).

The smaller lots farther to the west that feature a mix of commercial uses are somewhat more pedestrian-supportive. Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue feature continuous sidewalks, and short blocks between Kauffman and Lotta Avenue along Firestone Boulevard allow access to and from the neighborhoods and businesses to the south. Additionally, there are a number of businesses providing retail goods or services from buildings located adjacent to the sidewalk, with windows and entrances facing Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue within the Project Area. However, the majority of businesses on these two major corridors feature buildings that either are set back from the street with parking lots and drive aisles out front, or feature buildings with few windows or entrances, including many mechanic, auto

Figure 9: Aerial showing existing land use and azalea development and Firestone and Atlantic streetscape improvements (Source: City of South Gate, 2012; SCAG, 2012; Primestor, 2012; CD+A, 2012)
body, and other auto-oriented commercial establishments. Many of these auto-oriented businesses suffer from the opposite problem described for the nearby industrial uses: instead of providing too little access to the site, each of these businesses provides its own parking and curb cuts. This results in sidewalks that are constantly interrupted by vehicle access points, which creates a hazardous walking environment.

The azalea retail center site plan shows generous sidewalks along Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue and features buildings that are primarily located along portions of these sidewalks, opening up into small public plazas at various points, to create a comfortable, engaging pedestrian realm, particularly at the southeast corner of the project.

Plans are underway for improvements to Firestone Boulevard from Kaufmann to Atlantic Avenue, and on Atlantic Avenue from Patata Street to Firestone Boulevard. These improvements include installing medians and sidewalks with landscaping and street trees on both streets, restriping the lanes and adding turn lanes to provide access to the site where the azalea development is being built, and improving crossing conditions with pedestrian refuges (waiting areas within the medians) at the intersection of Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue. As part of the sidewalk improvements, offset bus pullouts will provide improved pedestrian conditions around two bus stops along the border of the proposed retail development.

**Bicycle Network**

While block size and street connectivity play a role in the quality of the bicycle network by providing greater or lesser access through a city, other features also influence whether people feel comfortable bicycling. This includes the presence of designated routes and infrastructure for bicyclists to help direct them to streets where they can easily travel between neighborhoods or to key destinations. Caltrans acknowledges the following three designations of bikeways:

- **Class I** bikeways feature a separated pathway that is designated for non-motorized travel. This may be exclusive to bicycles, or shared between bicycles, pedestrians, and other non-motorized users.
- **Class II** bikeways are striped bike lanes in the roadway, typically located between the right-most lane and the parking lane.
- **Class III** bikeways are routes that require cyclists to share the road with other vehicles. Typically a Class III route will have posted signs with the route number, and often “sharrows” are painted in the roadway to indicate that bicycles and other vehicles share the lane.
The City of South Gate has 5.5 miles of Class I bikeways, including the multi-use paths along the Los Angeles River and Rio Hondo and the multi-use path along the LADWP right-of-way. South Gate’s other bicycle facility is a 0.8 mile Class II bikeway that connects the LADWP and Los Angeles River pathways via a bike lane on Southern Avenue. While these facilities provide important access across the city along their limited alignments, they do not provide access to the many other important destinations throughout South Gate. As a result, cyclists are forced to ride on sidewalks, side streets, and in traffic.

South Gate’s May 2012 Bicycle Transportation Plan outlines proposed bikeways throughout the city (see Figure 10). Proposed improvements within the Project Area include the following:

- Class I bike paths on the Union Pacific Railroad right-of-way diagonally through the Project Area (along the same alignment as the proposed rail transit), and along Patata Street, continuing along the Southern Pacific Railroad right-of-way
- Class II bike lanes with a tinted roadway color to provide higher visibility along Firestone Boulevard
- Class III bike route with a specialized sharrow marking on Atlantic Avenue

Figure 10: South Gate Existing and Proposed Bikeways (Source: South Gate Bicycle Transportation Plan, May 2012)
In conjunction with providing secure bicycle parking at the station and potentially allowing bicycle access on the train, these proposed bikeways will greatly improve the ability for South Gate residents and people from other nearby cities to access the Project Area and the proposed Firestone and Atlantic Rail Station by bike.

**Transit Network**

Transit in the City of South Gate includes a mix of local and regional routes, primarily by bus (see Figure 8). The city is internally connected by a bus circulator called the GATE (Get Around Town Express), which runs a clockwise loop between South Gate Park, along Tweedy Mile and up to the city’s northwest, returning via the Civic Center and back to South Gate Park on Southern Avenue. Metro bus lines travel along major corridors throughout South Gate, connecting the city internally and with destinations beyond. There are also Metro light rail stations located outside of the city, including three Blue Line stations to the west, which provide access to Downtown Los Angeles and Long Beach, and two Green Line station to the south, providing access to Norwalk and Redondo Beach. The proposed ERTA rail transit line that will serve the future Firestone and Atlantic Station is intended to connect with a new Green Line transfer station, as well as providing an additional stop, both near the southern boundary of South Gate.
Market Conditions

The evolution and performance of the manufacturing sector in South Gate is the largest factor influencing near-term opportunities for revitalization of the area surrounding the proposed rail station. The following summary is taken from the market assessment written by CD+A team member EPS, which is available in its entirety as a separate document.

Market conditions for the area surrounding the rail station in the years to come will be a product of many contributing factors: these include the ongoing changes in the industrial economy, demographic shifts, adjacent planned development, opportunities to broaden the city’s mix of housing types and address pent-up housing demand, and opportunities arising from the introduction of passenger rail service.

A Changing Industrial Economy

The impact of the long-term structural decline in American manufacturing has been felt strongly in South Gate and in the Gateway Cities area as a whole. From 2002 to 2010, South Gate manufacturing employment fell from 39 percent to 22 percent of jobs. The Firestone/Atlantic study area, one of the City’s key industrial centers, was hit even harder, with a 45 percent decline in manufacturing jobs contributing to 30 percent overall job loss in the study area. This trend has left areas of blight and environmental degradation, contributed to a decline in land values and rents, and created impediments to real estate investment. Although the manufacturing economy appears to be rebounding nationally, the implications of this rebound on the form and structure of development in the project area remain unclear. While the City has excellent locational and transportation assets (which will improve with the proposed Orange Line/West Santa Ana Line light rail station), increasing production costs (e.g., land and labor) are likely to be an impediment to significant growth in industrial uses within the study area over the long term.

The Firestone and Atlantic study area can build on its historical role as a jobs center by reinforcing preferred existing employment categories and adding new ones. Despite the decline in manufacturing, the study area represents a strong job center for the City of South Gate. Seven of the top ten employers in the City, representing 14 percent of total South Gate jobs, are located in or near the Atlantic/Firestone area. Proximity to the 710 Freeway, a broad area of large contiguous parcels, the azalea retail development, and the future transit station will create conditions to support a transition to a preferred mix of job types.

Demographic Shifts

There is a correlation between the departure of younger City residents (resulting in a recent decline in City population) with the lack of jobs. South Gate’s population has declined by 2 percent since 2000, compared with a 1 percent growth figure in the larger trade area. Much of this decline is attributable to a slowed birth rate and declines in the 10-29 age cohort. During this period, the job picture lagged relative to the County and the unemployment rate shot up to 15 percent during the recent recession. A rebound in local employment will be critical for revitalization opportunities in the Project Area.

Planned Development

The azalea retail center, which is expected to open in 2013, will influence but not transform real estate market opportunities in the study area. The shopping center should improve South Gate’s poor per-capita retail spending performance, reverse some retail leakage, and mildly
(at best) boost the immediate surrounding land values. However, for the retail center to induce complementary uses to help transform the study area into a mixed-use transit-oriented district, it should look for ways to formally integrate with the surrounding area such as encouraging pedestrian access from across Firestone and Atlantic Boulevards and providing strong pedestrian infrastructure within the center.

**Housing Demand**

The study area represents an opportunity to address pent-up housing demand and add housing diversity, both near term and long term. South Gate has both a housing shortage and a lack of housing diversity to support its population’s needs. While the population grew 10 percent from 1990 to the present, its housing stock grew 4 percent. The City’s housing supply is dated, a legacy of the City’s residential boom period between 1940 and 1970, when much of the land surrounding factory locations was developed into small-lot, single-family worker housing. Consequently, most of the housing stock is over 40 years old, with 91 percent of all units constructed before 1970.

The City is fully built-out, so locations such as the study area represent a strong opportunity to convert marginal uses to address housing needs. And while environmental remediation costs could present an obstacle, strong market trends favoring multi-family investment may provide sufficient basis for new near-term development.

**Complementary Development to Rail Service**

The proposed Orange Line/West Santa Ana rail line will eventually induce complementary development, but much of this activity may be delayed until the line is under construction. The complexity, high cost, and lack of full funding for the proposed rail line creates uncertainty about its timeline. Furthermore, several business cycles may occur between the present time and 2027, when the rail station is projected to open. Consequently, near-term focus for area development should encourage uses that conform to the General Plan vision, that take advantage of market opportunity, and that do not create a physical impediment to future transit-oriented development. These near-term uses may include multi-family residential and complementary neighborhood retail, for which there is likely to be growing market support. Alternately, a catalytic tenant, such as for an office, civic, or institutional use, could help accelerate the transition to transit-oriented development. Eventually, as the rail project progresses, the market may respond to accommodate riskier uses envisioned by the General Plan such as high-density vertical mixed-use and office development.
Community Outreach

The South Gate Rail Station Concept Plan Community Workshop was held on Saturday July 21st, 2012 at the South Gate Park Senior Building Main Hall. About forty community members (residents, business owners, and staff and elected officials from South Gate, as well as residents and representatives from nearby Cudahy and Bell) attended the meeting to hear about the proposed station and provide input as to how they would like the area immediately around the station to develop.

The workshop was led by CD+A with support from Economic & Planning Systems (EPS) and Estolano LeSar Perez Advisors (ELP). CD+A gave a presentation to introduce the community to the proposed rail station, as well as the Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch corridor in which the rail line is to be built. Community members learned that the rail will connect Los Angeles to Santa Ana, helping to provide an alternative means of transportation between these cities, and those along the line.

The team explained that the City of South Gate’s station would provide an opportunity for new development and improvements to make walking, bicycling and taking transit safer, more convenient, and more enjoyable. The team introduced the concept of transit-oriented development and showed a series of visuals displaying successful transit-oriented developments. Examples included creating public plazas, orienting doors and windows towards the street, and bike lanes.

CD+A prepared four “base plans” showing configuration options for participants to consider, each with a different station location along the rail line: adjacent to Atlantic Avenue, adjacent to Firestone Boulevard, and centered between Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue both at grade or elevated above grade (see Figure 11). Community members were divided into small breakout groups and discussed the pros and cons of each station location. All of the base plans included two new streets. The first was an extension of Wilcox Avenue across Patata Street and the parallel freight rail corridor to connect with Firestone Place and Firestone Boulevard. The second was a New Street connecting Atlantic Avenue with the extension of Wilcox Avenue.

Using images on small game pieces, community members were led through a hands-on process to discuss and decide on the types of development and other improvements they desired to see on the site, surrounding the rail station location they had selected. One table was led only in Spanish.
Figure 11: Workshop "base plans" showing station location choices and related streets, pedestrian/bike paths, and parcels

After the breakout group exercise, one participant from each table reported back to the entire group. Several common themes emerged. Strongest among these was a desire for medium density residential development along Firestone and Atlantic south of the rail line. A majority of participants chose an at-grade station location, and half of the groups supported a station adjacent to Atlantic Avenue. Participants also supported the idea of ground-floor retail along Atlantic across from the azalea shopping center, and to a lesser extent along Firestone Boulevard. For the areas north of the rail line, participants supported a civic use such as a daycare or community center, and higher-density residential development, including live-work units. Community members also chose this area for employment-based development such as mixed-use buildings featuring office above ground floor retail, as well as research and development and light industrial/flex uses. It was anticipated that these uses could be served by a potential truck-only off-ramp from the southbound I-710 expressway onto Patata Street. Many participants felt that shared parking for the new development and for rail patrons should be accommodated on the site, and advocated for a parking structure within walking distance to the proposed station, but on the eastern or northeastern portion of the site.

A few uses suggested by participants in only some of the groups include a national hotel franchise and a police sub-station.
Community members were supportive of extending Wilcox Avenue south of the Cudahy border as part of the base plan, and advocated for an assortment of other improvements to both existing and future streets and public open spaces. Chiefly, participants were eager to see improved sidewalks and street crossings, bike lanes, and street trees on existing streets. They wanted a public plaza or paseo connected to the rail platforms, and advocated that such an area provide space for café or restaurant seating in front of appropriate ground floor uses, provide more convenient bus stop and passenger drop-off and pick up, provide space for food trucks or other temporary uses such as farmer’s market stalls, and feature trees and landscaping. Participants also supported creating additional bike and/or pedestrian connections to the rail station and through the site, including a multi-use pathway parallel to the rail line, which is the alignment of a proposed bike path in the City of South Gate’s Bicycle Transportation Plan (see Figure 10).

The community member’s visions for the area formed an important basis from which CD+A, Fehr & Peers and EPS launched into the development of more detailed land use and transportation alternatives.
Alternatives

Based on the team’s study of existing conditions, and input from the public workshop, CD+A led the development of alternatives for the station area, with assistance from Fehr & Peers and EPS. Taking into account the regional and local context of the station, the public outreach process and the alternatives development process focused primarily on the area directly around the station, approximately congruent with the General Plan’s boundary for Sub-area 2 of the Gateway District (see Figure 6).

This focus was driven by several factors. Sub-area 2 is the location where the General Plan directs the highest densities, and where the impacts of the rail station would most significantly alter the existing conditions. Indeed, major changes in land uses and modifications to the transportation network would be necessary in order to locate a rail station between Atlantic and Firestone. For these reasons, the CD+A team chose to develop relatively detailed concepts for aspirational yet realistic scenarios within this target area. Doing so allowed the team to test the feasibility of the community-favored rail station locations and determine what public improvements would be necessary to complement the community-preferred development concepts.

Additionally, the CD+A team did not anticipate as great a range of future changes to be likely in the Gateway District’s other Sub-areas. Sub-area 1 is the site of the azalea shopping center, which falls in line with the General Plan’s vision for that area; the long-standing existing industrial uses in Sub-area 3 were deemed less likely (and less desirable) to change in the near future; and Sub-area 4 currently bears the format proscribed in the General Plan, residential and office uses over ground floor retail; it was determined that this area would likely be subject to infill and redevelopment in line with this existing format as redevelopment occurs in sub-areas 1 and 2.

CD+A consolidated the four concepts generated by workshop participants into two distinct alternative scenarios. The “Atlantic” scenario features an at-grade rail station located adjacent to the Atlantic Avenue border of the site (see Figure 12 for illustrative plan and development program). The “Central” scenario features an at-grade rail station located in the middle of the site (see Figure 13). for illustrative plan and development program). Both scenarios maintain the core development themes that emerged from the workshops. Namely, residential uses are located south of the rail line fronting onto Firestone and Atlantic, while office and light industrial/flex and R&D, as well as parking and a civic use, are located north of the rail line. A proposed truck-only off-ramp from the I-710 freeway at Patata Street would provide a new means of access to the industrial uses.
Atlantic Scenario

The Atlantic scenario features the community-desired hotel use in a prominent location on the corner of Firestone and Atlantic, surrounded by multi-family housing. Entrance and egress for hotel patron drop-off would occur on this corner, with parking provided in a lot behind the hotel. Live-work style residential uses occupy the portion of the multi-family housing that faces the station plaza, helping to activate that public open space. North of the rail line, but south of New Street, a daycare/community center use would be centrally located on the site, with a potential ground floor retail use, such as a café. Adjacent to this, at the eastern edge of the site, a parking structure would provide shared parking for rail station patrons and the other land uses north of the rail line.

North of New Street, office uses would anchor the northwestern corner of the site, directly across from the rail station platforms, while light industrial/flex and R&D uses would be located in the northeastern portion of the site.

The Atlantic scenario features 192 multi-family residential and 6 live/work units, with an average residential density of 40 dwelling units/acre; 164 hotels rooms; 12,600 square feet for a daycare/community center, 47,800 square feet of office, and 116,200 square feet of light industrial/flex R&D. These uses would provide sufficient on-site parking. The residential parking ratio is 1.3 spaces/unit, which leverages the transit-oriented nature of the development to reduce the area devoted to parking. The total number of parking spaces in the shared parking garage could be up to 800. See Table 1.

Both scenarios feature a multi-use bicycle and pedestrian pathway parallel to the rail line, connecting Atlantic Avenue with Firestone Boulevard.
Station Area Development Alternative: "Atlantic" Scenario

Program:
- Multifamily Units ............................................ 192
- Live/Work Units .................................................. 6
- Hotel Rooms ......................................................... 164
- Office ............................................................. 47,800 sq ft
- Light Industrial/Flex ........................................... 116,200 sq ft
- Daycare/Community ............................................ 12,600 sq ft

Note: On-site parking is provided for residential, hotel, office and LI/Flex uses.

- Residential parking ratio (average) ......................... 1.3 spaces/unit
- Shared Surface Parking ......................... approx 200
- Shared Parking in Potential Garage (total spaces) ........ up to 800

Average Residential Density ............ 40 du/acre

Source: City of South Gate, 2012; SCAG, 2012; Primestor, 2012
Produced by Community Design + Architecture in association with Economic & Planning Systems, Fehr & Peers, and Estolano LeSar Perez Advisors

Figure 12: Station Area Development Alternative: "Atlantic" Scenario
Central Scenario

The Central scenario locates residential uses in a similar format, facing Firestone and Atlantic. In place of the hotel, this alternative features a greater amount of residential development, and includes more live/work format units, which would face two primary public open spaces south of the rail line, to help activate those areas: a primary paseo or linear plaza links the corner of Firestone and Atlantic to the centrally-located rail station platforms and provides a direct pedestrian and bicycle access route; another plaza area along Atlantic Avenue provides space for drop-off at the northern end of the rail station platform.

North of the rail line, a public plaza would be located adjacent to the rail station platforms, with a live/work building lining its eastern edge. R&D/flex uses would be located adjacent to the live/work building. North of New Street, office buildings and the daycare/community center use would anchor the northwestern corner of the site, and light industrial/flex uses would anchor the northeastern corner, served by a proposed truck-only off-ramp from I-710. A shared parking structure would be located between these uses, providing parking for rail patrons. A retail ground floor use, such as a café, could be located within one of the office buildings, in close proximity to the rail station.

The Central scenario features 240 multi-family residential and 31 live/work units, with an average residential density of 41 dwelling units/acre; 26,900 square feet for a significantly larger daycare/community center, 48,800 square feet of office, comparable to the Atlantic scenario, and 86,400 square feet of light industrial/flex and R&D, somewhat less than the Atlantic scenario and divided across two separate sites. The office and daycare/community center uses would use parking provided in the parking garage, which would provide a total of up to 1,520 spaces. Other uses would provide sufficient parking on-site. The residential parking ratio for all the residential and live/work units averages to 1.1 spaces/unit, which leverages the transit-oriented nature of the development to allow a similar reduction in space devoted to parking. See Table 1.
Figure 13: Station Area Development Alternative: "Central" Scenario

Program:

- Multifamily Units ........................................... 240
- Live/Work Units ............................................. 31
- Work/Live .................................................. 19,100 sq ft
- Office ....................................................... 48,800 sq ft
- Light Industrial/R&D/Flex .............................. 86,400 sq ft
- Daycare/Community ...................................... 26,900 sq ft

Note: On-site parking is provided for Residential, Work/Live, and Li/Flex uses. Daycare/Community and Office are parked in the shared lot/garage.

- Residential parking ratio (average) ....................... 1.1 spaces/unit
- Shared Surface Parking ................................. approx 380
- Shared Parking in Potential Garage (total spaces) .......... up to 1520

Average Residential Density .................. 41 du/acre
Table 1: Alternative Scenarios Program Comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Use</th>
<th>Atlantic Scenario</th>
<th>Central Scenario</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residential</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-family Units</td>
<td>192 Units</td>
<td>240 Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Live/Work Units</td>
<td>6 Units</td>
<td>31 Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>198 Units</td>
<td>271 Units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Commercial/Civic</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>47,800 sq.ft</td>
<td>48,800 sq.ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daycare/Community</td>
<td>12,600 sq.ft</td>
<td>26,900 sq.ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>60,400 sq.ft</td>
<td>75,700 sq.ft</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Industrial</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Light Industrial/Flex/R&amp;D</td>
<td>116,200 sq.ft</td>
<td>86,400 sq.ft</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>116,200 sq.ft</td>
<td>86,400 sq.ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Hospitality</strong></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hotel</td>
<td>164 rooms</td>
<td>0 rooms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>164 rooms</td>
<td>0 rooms</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Parking and Density   |                   |                  |
| Residential Parking Ratio (avg) | 1.3 spaces/unit | 1.1 spaces/unit |
| Shared Surface Parking | 200 spaces       | 380 spaces      |
| Shared Parking in Potential Garage | 800 spaces     | 1,520 spaces   |
| Average Residential Density | 40 du/acre     | 41 du/acre     |

**Parking Strategies**

The programs developed for these alternatives depend on reduced parking ratios. While there is a perception of high car-ownership rates in South Gate, the observed scarcity of on-street parking in many South Gate residential neighborhoods may relate more to overcrowding and household composition (e.g. multi-generational households or houses shared by several unrelated adults) than to high individual rates of vehicle ownership.

There are many positive impacts to reducing the amount of parking provided as part of the new development envisioned in these alternatives. Parking spaces take up land, reducing development density. Because parking is expensive to build, reduced parking requirements improve the market feasibility of higher density development. This benefits the community by providing a scarce housing format with smaller, less expensive residences in proximity to transit and needed goods and services.

Providing higher-density housing with reduced parking allows young adults, couples, seniors and others who do not need or want a single-family home to choose a lifestyle that is less dependent on personal vehicle ownership, and which offers the benefit of avoiding the associated expense of vehicle ownership. In addition, social benefits of higher density housing with reduced parking include increased pedestrian activity and interaction of people on the street and in public spaces, and environmental and health benefits include increased
physical activity, reduced crime due to more active street life, and reduced pollution from vehicle emissions. There can also be financial benefits, such as increased tax revenue from new development.

Parking Reduction Case Studies

Both Pasadena and Santa Monica were early adopters of comprehensive parking management policies that reduce parking requirements of new development while optimizing the use of existing parking infrastructure.

In Pasadena, several parking management policies were established in the decade prior to the opening of the Gold Line transit service in 2003. The City recognized that its historic downtown, built during the days of the streetcar, was sufficiently dense to be supported by the amount of existing parking, but that the pattern of use of that parking was discouraging the retail success and pedestrian activity necessary for revitalization. To address this issue, the City installed parking meters in Old Pasadena to discourage employees from parking all day on the street in front of businesses and make spaces readily available to customers. To gain local business support, the City spent a portion of parking revenues on public street improvements, including street furniture, trees, historic lighting fixtures, and sidewalk cleaning. Merchants’ fears of losing customers were proven false, as sales tax revenues quadrupled during the 1990s.

Two policies were also established to reduce parking requirements and establish parking maximums associated with new developments in transit-accessible and historic areas. A Parking Credit Program allows owners of historic buildings to pay a small annual fee ($127 per year per space as of 2013) in lieu of satisfying minimum parking requirements in cases of adaptive reuse. In neighborhoods within a quarter mile of a light rail station, the City has reduced parking requirements and established maximum parking allowances for all new development. Each small unit (550 square feet or less) in residential projects with 49 or more dwelling units requires one space and allows a maximum of 1.25 spaces; larger units require 1.5 spaces with a maximum of 1.75. For non-residential developments, off-street parking requirements have been reduced by 10%. This requirement is also the maximum parking allowed.

In Santa Monica, years before expansion of the Expo light rail line was planned, the City created a Park Once district, a shared parking strategy that encourages pedestrian activity between nearby businesses and residences. This strategy allows business to thrive with far less parking than required by conventional measures. Funded by levies on new development, shared public parking structures meet the parking demand with only 2.1 spaces per 1,000 square feet of building space and allow for reduced parking requirements. In conjunction with this policy, the City established an electric shuttle bus—the Tide Shuttle—to circulate between major attractions and parking garages.

An update to Santa Monica’s zoning ordinance is in progress as of February 2013. Amendments under consideration include:

- Reductions in residential and commercial parking requirements in transit-oriented and mixed use areas as well as slight reductions in low-intensity neighborhoods to bring requirements in line with ITE recommendations
- Maximum parking limits in transit-oriented, mixed use and low-intensity neighborhoods.
- Per space parking in-lieu fees
- Elimination of parking requirements for buildings with a total gross floor area of 5,000 square feet or less undergo a change of use
Planning Commission Discussion

On October 16th, 2012, the alternative development scenarios were presented to the City of South Gate Planning Commission for discussion. The commissioners voiced a preference for the Atlantic scenario due to the greater visibility of the station, and requested that a version of that be studied in greater detail in which the light industrial/flex and R&D uses were replaced with more office uses and the hotel was moved to a less prominent location on the site. Based on the results of that hearing and the comments provided by the commissioners, the CD+A team developed a preferred alternative for the station area along with a phasing strategy.
Preferred Alternative

Using the Atlantic scenario as a base, the CD+A team refined the site plan and development program to develop a preferred alternative for the station area. The preferred alternative builds on the concepts developed during the alternatives process and includes additional layers of detailed study around building configurations, public and private parking strategies, public open space, and transportation improvements, as well as a phasing plan for all of the included elements.

In accommodating the planning commissioners’ requests for refinement of the Atlantic scenario, and resolving the resultant issues that emerged, the team relied in part on the input received during the public workshop and on elements from the Central scenario that could be incorporated. In this way, the team ensured that the community’s preferences would continue to be met by the preferred alternative. As an example of this effort, CD+A team members determined that the community-desired police sub-station could potentially be housed within a ground floor commercial space alongside other retail uses on the station area site, or located in a ground floor space within Sub-area 4 on Firestone or Atlantic (see Figure 6).

The hotel use proved more difficult to relocate. The team experimented with relocation further east on Firestone Boulevard, as well as at the intersection of New Street and Wilcox Avenue, but both locations presented significant obstacles. Along Firestone Boulevard, the potential hotel site was very constricted because of the rail line’s southeastern trajectory, which causes the parcel to taper dramatically. As such, the required field of parking could not be adequately accommodated. The New Street and Wilcox Avenue location, while of better size and proportion to accommodate a hotel use, was ultimately determined by EPS to be infeasible from a marketing standpoint, as the site has very limited visibility from the major thoroughfares, Atlantic Avenue and Firestone Boulevard. EPS suggested that one of the existing underutilized motel sites along Atlantic Avenue would be a more realistic location, where a national hotel chain could acquire and reflag a site with the necessary visibility and appropriate acreage and proportions.

The final preferred alternative scenario features three phases of development. Figure 14 shows existing and planned development. This consists of the azalea shopping center, the city’s planned improvements to Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue, and the boundaries of parcels that are affected by the proposed development plan. Figure 15 through Figure 17 show illustrative plans of each phase. Table 2 provides a summary of the programmatic elements by phase, along with totals for the complete plan.

Additional details about the market feasibility of each plan element, the assumptions made in determining the type and scale of the various development products, the timing of phasing, and financing of development are provided in the subsequent section on market feasibility.

The construction of infrastructural elements, including rail station platforms, rail crossings, streets and sidewalks, and public plazas and landscaping, are listed with estimated construction costs in an appendix.

This land use and transportation plan achieves an appropriate level of detail and refinement for a conceptual preferred scenario. However, a specific planning process would be the most appropriate undertaking to study traffic operation, ridership estimates, parking strategies, and
The following is a discussion of the architectural and urban design features and transportation network that compose the plan, by phase.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Land Use</th>
<th>Phase I</th>
<th>Phase II</th>
<th>Phase III</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Residential</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-family (Density: 28 DU/acre)</td>
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<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-family in Mixed Use Bldg (Density: 29 DU/acre)</td>
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<td>Multi-family (Density: 56 DU/acre)</td>
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<td>Townhomes (Density: 15 DU/acre)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parking Structure</td>
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<td>1,350</td>
<td>stalls</td>
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</table>
Figure 14: Existing and Planned Development
Figure 15: Preferred Alternative Scenario – Phase I

Program

Multi Family - 28 du/ac ........................................ 140 du
Mixed Use - 29 du/ac
  Multi Family ............................................... 105 du
  Retail .......................................................... 4,300 sq ft

Source: City of South Gate, 2012; SCAG, 2012; Primestor, 2012
Produced by Community Design + Architecture
in association with Economic & Planning Systems,
Fehr & Peers, and Estolano LeSar Perez Advisors

February 2013
Figure 16: Preferred Alternative Scenario – Phase II

Railroads

Rail Station Study
Preferred Alternative Scenario

PHASE II

- Railroads
- Signal
- Bus stop
- Multi Family: 3-story with tuck-under pkg
- Ground Floor Retail
- Rail Station (platforms)
- Multi Family: 4-story with parking podium
- Day Care/Community Center: 1-story

Program (cumulative)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Multi Family - 28 du/ac</th>
<th>140 du</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Use - 29 du/ac</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi Family</td>
<td>105 du</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>4,300 sq ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi Family - 56 du/ac</td>
<td>118 du</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daycare/Community Center</td>
<td>12,800 sq ft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parking Lot</td>
<td>650 stalls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

February 2013

Source: City of South Gate, 2012; SCAG, 2012; Primestor, 2012

Produced by Community Design + Architecture in association with Economic & Planning Systems, Fehr & Peers, and Estolano LeSar Perez Advisors
Figure 17: Preferred Alternative Scenario – Phase III

Rail Station Study
Prefered Alternative Scenario

PHASE III

Railroads  ✅ Signal  ✅ Bus stop

- Multi Family: 3-story with tuck-under pkg
- Ground Floor Retail
- Rail Station (platforms)
- Multi Family: 4-story with parking podium
- Day Care/Community Center: 1-story
- Townhomes: 3-story
- Office: 3-story
- Parking Structure: 3-story

Program (cumulative)

- Multi Family: 28 du/ac .................... 140 du
- Mixed Use: 29 du/ac ........................ 105 du
- Retail ........................................ 4,300 sq ft

- Multi Family: 56 du/ac .................... 118 du
- Daycare/Community Center ............. 12,800 sq ft
- Townhomes: 15 du/ac ..................... 17 du
- Office ........................................ 313,800 sq ft
- Parking Structure ......................... 1,350 stalls

Source: City of South Gate, 2012; SCAG, 2012; PRimestor, 2012
Produced by Community Design + Architecture in association with Economic & Planning Systems, Fehr & Peers, and Estolano LeSar Perez Advisors

February 2013
Phase I

Phase I of the preferred alternative scenario is envisioned to occur before the rail line becomes operational (see Figure 15). It features four 3-story multi-family buildings along Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue. The western-most buildings feature two small commercial/retail spaces at the ground floor, but are otherwise of the same format. The buildings feature tuck-under garage parking accessed from the parking lot on the interior of the site. This accommodates some of the resident parking, with the remainder of resident and visitor parking accommodated by the parking lot.

Landscaped islands on the interior of the site break up the parking lot and provide visual relief. Between the multi-family housing and the rail line, a landscaped multi-use pathway provides a pedestrian and bicycle connection through the site, doubling as a fire lane. Bollards at the northern and southern terminuses, as well as at the connection points with the parking lot, would restrict vehicular access. New 12-foot wide sidewalks would be constructed along Atlantic Avenue and Firestone Boulevard, with street trees located at approximately 30-foot intervals. This dimension is deeper than the existing sidewalks and would be achieved by setting back from the existing parcel boundaries.

Phase I includes a total of 245 units at a residential density of approximately 29 units per acre; 459 parking spaces are provided in the tuck-under garages and the parking lot, for a resultant parking ratio of 1.9 stalls per dwelling unit. This ratio is slightly lower than the City of South Gate’s current multi-family standard of 2.2 stalls/dwelling unit. The CD+A team determined that the slightly lower ratio was reasonable for this format of housing due to the development’s central location and proximity to major bus routes and bike routes. Furthermore, once the rail becomes operational, it is expected that demand for parking would decrease, and some spaces in the lot could be dedicated to car sharing services.

Phase II

Phase II of the preferred alternative scenario occurs as the rail line becomes operational (see Figure 16). The first improvements are infrastructural, consisting of construction of the rail station platforms and plaza, and construction of both New Street and Wilcox Avenue Extension. Both streets feature one travel lane in each direction, with on-street parking provided. Sidewalk widths are 10 feet, with street trees at approximately 30-foot intervals. All pedestrian crossings feature high-visibility striping and bulb outs to shorten the crossing distance and increase pedestrian visibility.

A signalized intersection and high visibility crossings provide a safe pedestrian connection across Atlantic Avenue between azalea and the new station plaza, and at the intersection of Wilcox Avenue and Firestone Boulevard. Rail crossing gate arms and signals are located where the rail crosses streets and sidewalks on either boundary of the site. Wherever the operating transit agency installs gates, the latest technology should be employed to allow the city to create a quiet zone around crossings.

The plaza is the primary open space on the site, totaling 0.8 acres (see Figure 18). The plaza links the rail station with the Phase I residential development and provides access to the multi-use trail between the development and the rail line, as well as a designated location for passenger drop-off along Atlantic Avenue. The preliminary plaza design concept illustrated here includes a primary raised seating element that parallels the rail platforms, forming an
internal paseo lined with palms and aligned with the multi-use path. Two smaller raised planters provide informal seating and anchor the corners of the plaza. At the plaza’s center, a raised planter bed features additional vegetation and is ringed with shade trees. This space is envisioned to host food trucks, farmer’s market stalls, and other temporary events. Secure bike parking and bike lockers are provided at the southern end of the platforms. One location is proposed where the multi-use pathway enters the plaza, the other along New Road adjacent to the daycare/community center outdoor area.

At the southern boundary of the plaza, café seating is provided in front of the ground floor retail space in the Phase-I mixed-use building. Rail crossings are provided at either end of the platforms. The plaza design shown here is illustrative; if such a plaza is created, community input will be needed as part of future planning and design processes to identify desired plaza design elements, materials and themes, as well as public art.

In concert with the construction of the rail station in Phase II, a 650-stall surface parking lot is provided for rail patrons on the parcel north of New Street. The size of this lot is on par with the lower-volume park-and-ride stations operated by METRO. This station area is anticipated to offer both park-and-ride capacity for rail patrons departing from South Gate, and also act as a destination station for passengers arriving from other locations along the rail corridor. As noted earlier, ridership estimates and parking demand should be studied in greater detail as part of ERTA’s overall corridor planning process and any future specific planning process for the Firestone/Atlantic station area.

New private development envisioned in Phase II includes a 12,800-square foot daycare/community center, a key use that workshop participants strongly favored. Located centrally between the rail line and New Street, this facility benefits from close proximity to the transit station. An enclosed outdoor play yard, off-street parking for staff and visitors, and a drop-off location for patrons, are located behind the facility, accessed via New Street. Community meeting rooms could be included as part of this facility.

Adjacent to the daycare/community center is a new multi-family residential building. This building features a one-level parking podium, with three levels of residential units above, for a total height of four stories. This building includes 118 dwelling units, for a residential density of 56 dwelling units per acre. The parking podium provides 162 parking stalls, for a parking ratio of 1.4 stalls per dwelling unit. This building format, with a high residential density and a low parking ratio, is typical for transit-oriented development. With the rail line in operation, building residents will have increased transportation options and a reduced demand for vehicle use. As with the Phase I multi-family buildings, some parking capacity could be designated for car sharing, to allow residents to maintain mobility options without requiring as many vehicles per unit. Secure bicycle parking for residents should also be provided in the podium.

**Phase III**

Phase III of the preferred alternative scenario occurs as market conditions evolve in the wake of the rail line’s beginning operation (see Figure 17 through Figure 19). In this phase, the Phase II surface parking lot north of New Street is redeveloped into a mixed-use transit-oriented development consisting of office uses, a shared parking structure, and townhomes.
Anchoring the northwestern corner of the site is 313,800 square feet of office space, a use favored by many of the public workshop participants and one strongly advocated by the Planning Commission. The office is designed in a campus format featuring three, three-story buildings that frame an internal courtyard. One entrance to the courtyard is aligned with the New Street pedestrian crossing at the northern end of the rail platforms. The other entrance faces a small surface parking lot dedicated to the office buildings.

To the east of this lot, a new three-story parking structure provides four levels of parking, for a total of 1,350 stalls. A portion of this shared structure serves the office space, providing 630 dedicated spaces, for a parking ratio of 2 stalls per 1000 square feet of office space. This ratio is well below the city’s current requirement of 5 stalls/1000 square feet, which reflects anticipated changes in market conditions and transportation behavior at the future date that such a development would take place. Additional detail about such assumptions is provided in the following market feasibility section. The shared parking structure also provides replacement park-and-ride capacity matching that of the original Phase II lot, a total of 650 stalls. The structure’s remaining 70 stalls are available for overflow and other uses.

Townhomes front onto New Street, facing the daycare/community center and multi-family residences across the street. The townhomes feature tuck-under garage parking, accessed by a rear alley that provides visitor parking and buffers the residences from the parking structure. Two blocks of townhomes provide a total of 17 units, for a residential density of 15 dwelling units per acre. The parking ratio is over 3 stalls per dwelling unit, which takes into consideration that the units would be priced at the higher end of the market. Due to the relatively small area occupied by the townhomes and surface parking, there is no significant impact to the site plan or transit-oriented nature of the larger development.
Figure 18: Plaza View – showing proposed rail station platforms and adjacent plaza concept as seen from Atlantic Avenue looking southeast (Phase III development depicted)
Figure 19: Street View – showing proposed daycare/community center, townhomes, office, multi-family, and rail station as seen from New Street looking west (Phase III development depicted)
Market Feasibility Assessment

The following development feasibility assessment, prepared by CD+A team member Economic & Planning Systems (EPS), evaluates the preferred alternative scenario for the Firestone and Atlantic Station Area, designed to harness opportunities presented by the proposed Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch, planned for initial operation in 2025.

In addition to evaluating development feasibility, this section of the final report addresses other factors critical to a successful transit-oriented development at this location, including phasing, land acquisition, financing, and property tax generation. The analysis builds from previous work completed by the CD+A team, including a market study, public workshop, conceptual design development, and feedback from city officials.

As part of this study effort, EPS has developed a detailed financial model of the proposed Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch Firestone/Atlantic station land use program as a basis for assessing overall development feasibility and the implications of various assumptions related to market trends and other project components. A summary of the proposed development program is provided in Table 3 and the key findings are presented below.

Table 3: Conceptual Development Program (Private Uses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase and Use</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Parcel Area (AC)</th>
<th>Density</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed Use</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multifamily</td>
<td>3-level stacked flats w/ ground retail and tuck-under parking</td>
<td>140 DU</td>
<td>4.92</td>
<td>28 DU/AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>4,300 Sq.Ft.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multifamily</td>
<td>3-level stacked flats w/ tuck-under parking</td>
<td>105 DU</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>29 DU/AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daycare</td>
<td>1-level Type 5 Construction</td>
<td>12,800 Sq.Ft.</td>
<td>1.18</td>
<td>0.25 FAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multifamily</td>
<td>3-level stacked flats on parking podium</td>
<td>118 DU</td>
<td>2.09</td>
<td>56 DU/AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PHASE 3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td>3-level Class B with elevator core</td>
<td>313,800 Sq.Ft.</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>1.60 FAR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Townhomes</td>
<td>3-level for-sale with tuck-under parking</td>
<td>17 DU</td>
<td>1.12</td>
<td>15 DU/AC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL ALL PHASES</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residential</td>
<td></td>
<td>380 DU</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,300 Sq.Ft.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daycare</td>
<td></td>
<td>12,800 Sq.Ft.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office</td>
<td></td>
<td>313,800 Sq.Ft.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Feasibility and Assumptions

The pro forma analysis indicates that the proposed conceptual program is feasible given maturing market conditions that will be supported by the project’s adjacency to the azalea retail center opening in 2014 and opening of the Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch Firestone/Atlantic station in 2025 – 2027.

Assuming current land and construction costs and a gradual real appreciation in market rents, the proposed conceptual program is likely to be financially feasible from the perspective of a private developer(s), based on typical investor return thresholds for projects of this nature. The financial analysis assumes rental pricing will grow to reflect increased market demand that materializes as the site evolves into a transit-oriented development providing new and unique options for living and working in the City of South Gate. Specifically, the analysis assumes real market appreciation of about 28 percent over the 13-year period between 2012 and 2025, or about 1.9 percent annually.

The development feasibility analysis is based on a set of “residual land value” calculations for the various real estate product types being considered in the project area at three distinct phases of development, as summarized in Table 4.2 Specifically, this financial analysis compares the net value associated with new high-density office and residential development with the likely land acquisition costs, including “buy-out” of existing uses. Although the development program appears infeasible in early phases, long-term market values suggest that development in later phases can off-set these early losses. Of course, “late-blooming” projects of this nature require creative phasing, financing, and land acquisition strategies, as described further below.

As documented further in the complete market feasibility report provided in an appendix, the long-term vision for a high-density transit-oriented development program in this location is premised on a number of inter-related factors. First, the proposed uses will be located next to the azalea retail development, which is scheduled to open in 2014. The 400,000 square-foot center represents a vast upgrade in look and feel for the area and a “tipping-point” event in the transition from an industrial orientation. Furthermore, azalea is expected to become a destination with retail establishments arrayed along Atlantic Avenue providing an attractive façade and pedestrian activity that could complement uses proposed for the development site across the street.

Second, the Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch, proposed for opening by 2025-2027, will create additional value and potential for rent premiums on the site. As Los Angeles residents become more comfortable using rail transit, and as the rail transit network continues to

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2 Residual land value is the difference between the capitalized value of the proposed development less total vertical development costs.

3 The feasibility “gaps” of -9% and -2% of costs shown in Phases 1 and 2 are considered by some developers to be within the margin of error for a concept-level design and thus a justifiable investment risk.
expand, developers will increasingly be able to command rents that capture the value offered by transit-adjacent residential and office uses.

Table 4: Feasibility Summary by Phase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>All Phases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vertical Building Costs</td>
<td>58,141,743</td>
<td>30,571,110</td>
<td>125,848,195</td>
<td>214,561,048</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Residual Land Value</td>
<td>$8,259,471</td>
<td>$4,444,311</td>
<td>$7,266,413</td>
<td>$19,970,195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RLV as % of Costs</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Acquisition</td>
<td>13,264,195</td>
<td>4,991,000</td>
<td>8,599,500</td>
<td>26,854,695</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Credit (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>(6,884,500)</td>
<td>(6,884,500)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net Feasibility Surplus or (Gap)</td>
<td>($5,004,724)</td>
<td>($546,689)</td>
<td>$5,551,413</td>
<td>$0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasibility Gap as % of total costs</td>
<td>-9%</td>
<td>-2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Costs include a developer return-on-cost allowance
(2) Transit Authority swaps land for replacement parking constructed by developer
(3) A feasible project is reflected by a "gap" value of 0 or greater, although developers in some cases may consider a gap of up to negative 10% as within an acceptable margin of error to warrant going forward with a project

Finally, there is currently little competition in South Gate for the proposed residential and office uses, which will be more contemporary, more urban, and more highly amenitized than available South Gate alternatives. Such uses may also allow the city to provide modern residential and office options to working-age people in the 18-35 range, an age cohort that has declined significantly in the city due to out-migration over the last ten years.

Program Feasibility

The size, land-use mix, and phasing of the conceptual program has been strategically designed to address community needs and take advantage of near-term demand for higher-density residential uses that will contribute to a strong sense of place, complement the South Gate rail station, and ultimately set the stage for other high-density product types, such as mid-rise office.

The program proposes 380 new dwelling units, effectively doubling the number of new residences developed in the city since the mid-1990s. With a strong emphasis on multi-family units in a variety of configurations, the conceptual program would expand the variety of housing in the city, which predominantly features small-lot one-story single-family homes. High-density development (between 28 and 56 dwelling units per acre and office FAR of 1.6) clusters all uses within a short walk of the proposed rail station, thereby increasing transit utilization, promoting pedestrian activity, and adding vibrancy to the area.

The location of proposed uses and the phasing plan puts the nearer-term opportunities for multi-family next to azalea. Office uses, which typically require a more mature built environment to be feasible, are proposed for development in subsequent phases. This sequence allows azalea to serve as a near-term catalyst for the residential uses. Over the
longer term, this initial increase in density, combined with a light rail station, can serve as a catalyst for the office. The phasing also permits flexibility with regard to market timing, as there is likely to be more near-term market support for Phases I and II, which focus on multi-family development and establishment of the transit facility. When market conditions permit it, Phase III proposes an intensification of uses by converting surface parking into office or other new uses and structured parking.

**Land Assembly**

Assembling and consolidating land for phased development is a challenge due to ownership fragmentation, which can be addressed, in part, by leveraging the Transit Authority’s land acquisition needs and enhancing the long-term “value capture” potential associated with light rail station adjacency.

Patterns of existing property ownership may present a challenge to land assembly. The renewal area includes 31 unique parcels, and land ownership is fragmented, with 18 unique private owners reflecting a variety of ownership characteristics, from independent owners to trusts with multiple interests to operating companies. Land use and disposition decisions under these circumstances tend to optimize the interest of the individual owners rather than the district as a whole. Moreover, assembling a parcel large enough for any of the proposed Phases will require the cooperation of several players with possibly divergent short-or long-term goals.

Nearly all of the parcels in the development area host operating uses. Even if struggling, these often provide a secure, low-cost, and low-risk income stream to existing owners, which can represent a significant financial hurdle to alternative investment. The land buy-out model used in the feasibility analysis considers existing uses and generates a range of values from $23 per land square foot for vacant or surface-parked land to $61 for a service station use, averaging approximately $35 per square foot for all buy-out parcels. Other economic motives or circumstances may discourage owners from selling, including anticipated appreciation of property values. While the Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch is in the earliest planning stages, its eventual construction seems probable, and many custodial owners will likely hold out to maximize land value, which could delay the development schedule and raise costs.

As shown in Table 5, land and ownership fragmentation is most pronounced in the land area contained within Phase I of the proposed development. Of the 16 unique owners controlling 29 parcels in Phase I, twelve parcels representing 10 percent of the total land area are held by one owner, and 16 of the parcels representing 14 percent of the land area are controlled by three owners. Consequently, it is impossible to take down large portions of land without negotiating with multiple owners, which could lead to difficult, protracted, and costly deals. Phases II and III, on the other hand, may present fewer obstacles to land assembly with only two unique owners controlling 68 percent of the total land area.

In the absence of land assembly tools once provided by redevelopment, an opportunity for timely and cost-effective consolidation of development parcels may lie with the Transit Authority chartered to oversee construction for the Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch. In this scenario, the Transit Authority acquires parcels necessary for the station area, access roads, and surface parking field, which correspond to land uses proposed for Phases II and III. If and when the market supports Phase III development, the Transit Authority can sell the land back to developers. Alternatively, as assumed in the feasibility analysis model, the
Transit Authority can contribute land to Phase III developer(s) in exchange for replacement parking (e.g. “air rights”). It may be possible by this mechanism to lock in pre-appreciation land costs for the developer, thus enhancing development feasibility.

**Table 5: Land Ownership Summary**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unique Owners</th>
<th>Unique Parcels</th>
<th>Land Area (ac)</th>
<th>Land Area Share</th>
<th>Existing Vertical Uses (Sq.Ft.)</th>
<th>Existing Vertical Uses Share</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Parcel Owner 1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>83,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Parcel Owner 2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>3,139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-Parcel Owner 3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>12,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-Parcel Owners</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>87,631</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publicly Owned</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 Subtotal</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>186,623</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases 2 and 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single-Parcel Owners</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>108,680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Phases Total</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22.3</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>295,303</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: County Assessor, CD+A, Economic & Planning Systems, Inc.

**Financing**

The cost of the public improvements illustrated in this plan, including new streets, sidewalks, trails, crosswalks and other pedestrian improvements, as well as the transit station and plaza, are estimated at approximately $17 million in today’s dollars. The estimated order of magnitude construction costs are provided in the appendix.

Estimated property tax benefits from the proposed program are significant and may be used to support infrastructure build-out or to supplement and accelerate vertical development. As summarized in Table 6, net property tax benefits generated by the conceptual development plan are significant. The proposed program generates an estimated annual assessed value of $235,000,000 in today’s dollars, which is nearly 15 times current assessed value. This potentially translates into $2.25 million in net new annual property tax revenues, of which $135,000 (1.026% of assessed value multiplied by a 6% factor) is retained by the general fund. If bonded, this cash flow could hypothetically provide up to $1.6 million (in current dollars) in additional financing to support project development.
Table 6: Net New Property Tax

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>Phase 2</th>
<th>Phase 3</th>
<th>All Phases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Current Assessed Value</strong></td>
<td>$7,337,608</td>
<td>$7,993,617</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>$15,331,225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>New Assessed Value At Buildout</strong></td>
<td>$66,401,215</td>
<td>$35,015,421</td>
<td>$133,114,607</td>
<td>$234,531,243</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net New AV</td>
<td>$59,063,607</td>
<td>$27,021,804</td>
<td>$133,114,607</td>
<td>$219,200,018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated New Annual Taxes (1.026% of A/V)</td>
<td>$605,993</td>
<td>$277,244</td>
<td>$1,365,756</td>
<td>$2,248,992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Portion to General Fund (6%)</strong></td>
<td>$36,360</td>
<td>$16,635</td>
<td>$81,945</td>
<td>$134,940</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Memo: Hypothetical 30-year bond value at 7.5% all-in coupon</em></td>
<td>$429,420</td>
<td>$196,461</td>
<td>$967,806</td>
<td>$1,593,688</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(1) Phases 3 uses the same land area as Phase 2, but intensifies the use by converting surface parking into vertical development. Consequently, all current assessed value is replaced by Phase 2.

Source: Economic & Planning Systems, Inc.
Next Steps

In undertaking this SCAG-funded study, the City of South Gate has taken a leadership role in defining the future of the Firestone and Atlantic Station area. The study has yielded an existing conditions report, market assessment, hands-on public workshop, land use alternatives development process, and preferred alternative scenario with feasibility assessment and public facilities implementation cost estimates. While there is considerable work ahead, this study's work products establish a strong foundation of up-to-date analysis and development concepts that the City of South Gate can build on to create a station area specific plan and take an important step toward making the vision a reality.

Coordination with Alternatives Analysis Process

A concurrent Alternatives Analysis planning effort was undertaken to study and make recommendations for station locations throughout the proposed Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch rail corridor. The City of South Gate has been proactive in developing initial concepts for a rail station at Firestone Boulevard and Atlantic Avenue, and this report established that a station location adjacent to Atlantic Avenue is a community-preferred alternative, which was selected by the Planning Commission for development into a preferred alternative scenario with a conceptual land use program and transportation network. The vision established for South Gate’s Firestone and Atlantic station area should be coordinated with the Alternatives Analysis study, providing a source of input into that report’s recommendations for station location and character. As well, the recommendations of the completed Alternatives Analysis study, including the anticipated station design, amount of station parking and intermodal transit facilities, should be utilized by the City of South Gate as further study and refinement to the Firestone and Atlantic station area takes place as part of a specific planning process.

Preparation of a Specific Plan

A specific plan is a tool that implements a community’s general plan, serving to translate the policies of the general plan into specific proposals for coordinated public improvements and private development. A specific planning process requires meaningful public outreach to ensure the plan accurately reflects the community’s preferences.

Specific Plan Content

In General Law cities, including South Gate, a specific plan is required by California state law to specify the distribution, location, and extent of the proposed uses and open spaces within the area covered by the plan. Specific plans are required to identify proposed major components of infrastructure needed to support planned land uses. This is an important distinction between specific plans and area or community plans. The identification of major infrastructural elements is critical to establishing a path for implementation of proposed uses. A program of implementation measures is required to describe the regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures required to choreograph infrastructure and development. Often, a matrix of responsible parties and a timeline are included to as part of the implementation section.

Lastly, the specific plan must include a description of its relationship to the general plan. This statement examines the specific plan and the general plan, comparing goals, objectives, and policies.
Specific Plan Process

The specific planning process is outlined in general terms in this section (see Figure 20). This process should be tailored to the City’s unique administrative structure and be coordinated with the City’s work to date on establishing a vision for this station area, as well as other ongoing planning for the rail line.

The first step in the process of creating a specific plan is to establish a work program. The program sets forth the responsibilities of staff, agency representatives, stakeholders, and consultants. It establishes the scope of work and outreach program, budget and schedule, and funding for creation of the plan. At least an approximate work program will be necessary to apply for grant funding and to solicit requests for qualifications or proposals. A critical element of the work program is establishing a public outreach strategy. For any plan, soliciting community input at an early stage and providing opportunities for public review of draft concepts, objectives, policies and implementation measures are invaluable methods for crafting a sustainable, community-supported vision.

The second step is the study of current context and ongoing planning efforts. Depending on the duration between the conclusion of this study and the initiation of a specific plan, the City may rely in part on the background research and study of station area and surrounding context conducted for this study. As summarized in Figure 20, the study of current context should include identification of existing and planned land uses, environmental conditions, the constraints of current and planned infrastructure and utilities/public facilities, and any other planning and policy issues specific to the planning area.

The third step is establishing the content and mechanisms for the long term direction of the general plan’s implementation. This amounts to identifying the opportunities (locations and community preferences) for constraints (market and infrastructure feasibility studies) to help define what development is desirable and possible. It is also important to determine what improvements and investments would be required to develop beyond the means of existing constraints. Using the parameters of the opportunities and constraints, alternative conceptual plans are developed. Again, to an extent, the alternatives concepts and feasibility study developed as part of this plan may provide the basis for a more accelerated course of action.

The final step involves selecting a preferred alternative and formulating associated objectives, policies, and implementation measures. This typically includes amendments and additions to municipal codes and development requirements. The process of developing alternatives, testing feasibility, and selecting a preferred alternative may be iterative, with revisions taking place throughout the process, particularly if decision makers choose to select and synthesize multiple alternatives into a preferred alternative.

Specific plans may be adopted either by resolution (in which case they are implemented through separate land use policy amendments) or by ordinance (in which case the new policies carry the force of law). In either case, public hearings on the specific plan and associated environmental document(s) are required as part of adoption.
In taking the vision established by this study forward, a specific planning process could use this study and the concepts created herein as a source for information on background, existing conditions, and community preferences for station area development. The specific plan could consist of an expansion and refinement of the preferred alternative scenario concept, in line with the elements of South Gate’s existing General Plan that the City desires to reinforce. Creating a walkable, transit-oriented, mixed-use district is chief among these. Other General Plan elements that likely merit further study include encouraging affordable housing, reducing single-vehicle occupancy, and managing transportation demands through shared parking, non-motorized transportation, and transit-supportive policies.

**Design Guidelines**

As part of a specific plan’s development standards, architectural and site design guidelines are useful tools to help define the character of the station area envisioned in this study. Many municipalities are developing visual design guidelines or even form-based codes that merge development requirements with direction about the form, finishes, siting and character of buildings and public spaces, to help encourage more uniform districts with strong identities. This can help establish station areas as attractive, unique places within a city.

**Site and Building Design**

Flexible and clear design guidelines are vital to creating transit-oriented development. In particular, flexibility is critical to foster variety and authenticity, and not overly constrain designers. Guidelines that are richly illustrated with sketches, diagrams, and photographs are better able to convey the wide range of design elements and decisions that transform the vision for an area into reality.
Guidelines typically include such topics as site design and access; building form, massing, and orientation to the street; building façade articulation, materials and architectural detailing; building roof design and treatments; parking layout and treatments; fences and walls; landscaping and lighting. Guidelines should include elements common to all commercial, mixed-use, and residential developments, as well as detailed guidelines for different types of uses. Guidelines should also prioritize the importance of access and visitability for all users.

**Public Space Design**

As with private development, it is important to provide guidance for the design of public spaces, such as the proposed plaza adjacent to the transit station platforms. Public spaces play many roles in transit-oriented development. Transit patrons pass through the space to make connections; visitors pass time before or after a trip; and nearby employees and residents can use the space for respite and recreation. Public spaces can also perform passive roles, providing shade to reduce urban heat island effects, or using Low-Impact Development (LID) stormwater management strategies to filter run-off into landscaped rain gardens (also known as “green streets”). As envisioned in the preferred alternative scenario proposed by this plan, public spaces can also provide space for temporary events, such as farmers markets, craft fairs, or food trucks. Design guidelines for public spaces should provide direction about how to coordinate these many roles to create coherent, safe, interesting, and enjoyable places. In addition to programming for the various user groups and purposes, guidance should cover such elements as paving materials, landscaping, lighting, and furniture.

**Street Design**

Street network frameworks and streetscape design guidelines are two additional elements that can be incorporated into a specific planning process. By categorizing streets not only by traffic volumes, but by non-motorized transportation goals as well as the desired character of certain districts through which the streets travel, street network frameworks help to prioritize improvements in ways that support transit-oriented districts by directing transit, pedestrian, and bicycle improvements to specific streets, without unduly impairing automotive and freight traffic.

Street design guidelines provide direction about best practices for implementing the improvements that support a safer, more enjoyable pedestrian realm, and transit and bicycle experience. Combined with a thorough network framework, design guidelines can establish a roadmap to district-wide street and streetscape improvements that can be implemented as development unfolds. Design elements include paving materials, lighting, street furniture, landscaping as well as “green streets” LID stormwater management strategies.

**Implementation Strategy**

An implementation strategy is an important specific plan element. Developing the strategy provides an opportunity to investigate in further detail the process by which financing for public improvements and private development can be realized, and identifying key actors and partners for each specific action. A key component of such a strategy is determining the extent to which strategic investments in public improvements can help spur private investment in real estate development.

A critical component of the preferred scenario presented in the plan is the role played by ERTA or a future transit agency in acquiring property adjacent to the proposed rail station for park-and-ride facilities that become sites for transit-oriented development. Case studies and
additional research into examples of similar land assembly processes will be a critical part of developing a successful implementation strategy.

In order to effectively address and respond to the complex issues and relationships that will affect the market and financial performance of the Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch Firestone/Atlantic station conceptual land use program, the City of South Gate and other strategic partners will need to work cooperatively to develop a strategic yet flexible implementation program focused on long-term project feasibility.

This study's market analysis suggests that the conceptual plan can be developed in a financially feasible manner given a variety of assumptions related to market pricing, land assembly, property acquisition and “buy-outs,” parking availability, and other factors. However, there exists a high level of uncertainty in terms of how these factors will unfold over time and their impact on project feasibility. On the revenue side, for example, rents relative to costs may appreciate at a slower rate, due to market softness, worse-than-expected performance of azalea, delayed development of the Orange Line/West Santa Ana Branch, the emergence of strong competition from transit-oriented developments at other stations along the line, and other factors. On the cost side, as noted above, fragmented and custodial ownership may lead to delayed assembly and higher-cost land. Finally, there will be public infrastructure costs associated with station development, access roads, and traffic management improvements.

The City in collaboration with other stakeholders (e.g. the Transit Authority, local property owners, developers, etc.) can manage some of these issues through actions that directly and indirectly lower land costs, off-set development costs, and redeploy captured value to support development. As noted earlier, the proposed development could generate net new property tax income to fund various initiatives, such as offsite infrastructure development. Streetscape improvements and pedestrian infrastructure that enhances connections between azalea and the development site may strengthen the developer’s case for higher rents. Strict code enforcement and control of permitting and licensing processes can limit the ability of custodial land owners to operate non-conforming uses, which could lower land values and increase willingness to sell.

Changes to the development program, primarily lowering density, may also increase development feasibility absent adequate real appreciation for higher density products. The current program achieves higher density through extensive use of structured (stand-alone or podium) parking. However, structured parking adds considerable costs and must be off-set by commensurately high rents. A program that relies on all-surface parking will have a lower cost burden to overcome and thus will require lower rents to be financially feasible.

Historically, South Gate and many other California cities used the powers of redevelopment agencies to assemble, clear and market property and to generate revenues for public improvements in specific areas through the use of tools such as Tax-Increment Financing or TIF. The azalea project in South Gate is one such example. However, the policy landscape surrounding redevelopment has changed dramatically in recent years, creating uncertainty about the tools that local governments can bring to bear in encouraging desired development patterns. Following a series of court challenges and legislative measures culminating in a California Supreme Court ruling in December 2011, all California redevelopment agencies, including South Gate's, were dissolved by February 1, 2012.
In the coming years, the policy landscape will likely continue to evolve. Legislators may endeavor to enact or expand existing programs that allow cities and counties to devote funds to redevelopment projects. This potential legislation could include the enactment of programs allowing cities to use tax increment financing based on project areas of a limited size, the expansion of infrastructure financing districts and/or additional authorizations for public-private partnerships in order to spur development. The legislature may enact, and the Governor may sign, supplemental legislation to clarify or alter the way in which the law eliminating redevelopment agencies is implemented, including procedural changes and clarifications as implementation issues arise.

**Policy Amendments**

The specific planning process will conclude with policy amendments to the City’s General Plan and municipal zoning code that will position the station area for implementation of the vision that this plan has established. Amendments to the General Plan will refine and clarify the land use designations and density allowances to fall in line with a vision based on current and expected market realities. Zoning amendments that align the municipal code with an updated General Plan can establish permitted and conditionally permitted uses, densities, height, bulk and setbacks, as well as providing additional design standards, altering parking requirements and refining use definitions to streamline implementation of transit-oriented development by-right.

**Environmental Review**

The specific planning process must comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Typically, specific plans involve changes to allowable land uses and intensities that require the lead agency (in this case, the City of South Gate) to prepare and circulate a program-level Environmental Impact Report (EIR), either concurrently with the specific plan or following the preparation of a public review draft.

The purpose of an EIR is to provide State and local agencies and the general public with detailed information on the potentially significant environmental effects which a proposed project is likely to have and to list ways which the significant environmental effects may be minimized and indicate alternatives to the project. For impacts found to be significant, mitigation and monitoring measures are identified. The EIR can help to streamline implementation of the adopted specific plan’s proposed development concepts, by avoiding the need for additional environmental review of projects that are in line with those concepts.
Appendix

South Gate Light Rail Station Projected Costs

The following cost estimates represent order of magnitude assessments of demolition, removal, and construction of public and rail station-related improvements, based on the preferred alternative land use and transportation scenario described in this report. The dollar values represent 2013 rates and do not correspond to probable future values at the time various expenditures could be expected to occur. While these figures provide order of magnitude estimates for the type of improvements anticipated as part of the plan, further study will be necessary as part development of a more detailed implementation and financing strategy, in concert with development of a future specific plan for the station area.

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<td>Parking Lot area (square feet)</td>
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