

County Considers Transportation Boarding School in South L.A.

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Officials announced plans Monday for a transportation boarding school on a dusty, trash-strewn lot in South Los Angeles that has sat vacant for more than two decades.

The school would offer a vocational and college-preparatory curriculum tailored to train students for jobs in the transportation industry. Officials say some could find work with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority or local contractors after graduation. Others could go on to college to study engineering, architecture or urban planning.

“Our vision is to put a one-of-a-kind asset here on the corner of Vermont and Manchester that will fundamentally alter the ecosystem of this community — and do so in a culturally sensitive and context-specific manner,” said Los Angeles County Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas, a Metro director.

“There will be housing, retail, and a workforce training center, but the real engine of long-term economic opportunity will be a state-of-the-art boarding academy that will prepare young people for transportation-related jobs.”

Though the proposal is in its infancy, it has sparked resistance from some South Los Angeles residents who say the neighborhood needs more sit-down restaurants, grocery stores and retail space — not a boarding school.

The 4.2-acre site at Vermont and Manchester avenues, where the school would be built, has been vacant since the 1992 Los Angeles riots, when a swap meet was torched and burned to the ground. Since then, the land has been caught in a tug-of-war between politicians and residents who disagree on what should be built there to address blight, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Plans for the MTA transportation school were announced during an event at the site attended by Ridley-Thomas, Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti, Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson and Metropolitan Transportation Authority CEO Phil Washington.

Los Angeles County won ownership of the lot through eminent domain in April. The boarding school is a key piece of the county's development plan, along with apartments, a job training center, a plaza for transit riders on Vermont, and 50,000 square feet of retail space, including a grocery store.

However, the proposal does not include the sit-down restaurants, coffee shops and retail spaces that area's residents need, said Elisa McGhee, who lives in Vermont Vista, a mile and a half south of the site.

"This is not the best thing for our community," McGhee told The Times. "Building this school will not attract the retail that's needed here."

McGhee also questioned why Metro and the county would build a new school in South Los Angeles, when struggling high schools nearby would welcome the funding and support.

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