

Westlake
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LeskoskyLos Angeles City Councilmember
José Huizar

BRINGING BACK BROADWAY™

An artist's rendering of a revitalized Broadway downtown.

■ **Bringing Back Broadway is an initiative to revive Broadway downtown to a glimmer of its theatre-and-streetcar glimmer from decades past.**



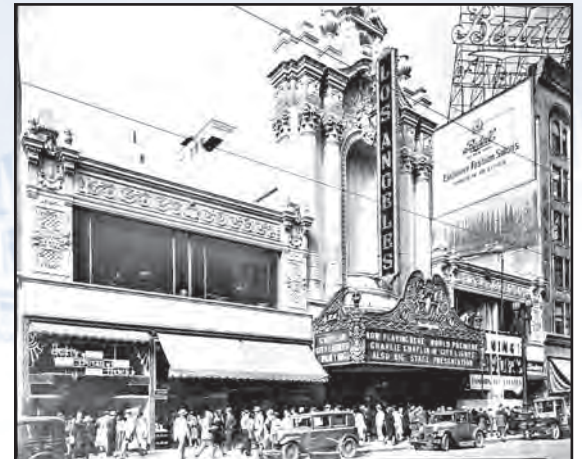
Councilmember
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Photos by Councilman Huizar's office; and from theatre historian Marc Wanamaker's personal collection.

Bring Back Broadway, announced a few years ago before the recession took hold, is a ten-year project that began in January 2008. It began with Councilmember Jose Huizar, with support from Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, an imposing slate of City leaders, downtown residents, civic and business organizations and property owners of the largest historic theater district west of the Mississippi. These local groups share an interest and vision of *Bringing Back Broadway*.

This historic corridor, in the center of downtown, is said to be the birthplace of vaudeville and cinematic entertainment. Within a nine-block area, there are 12 magnificent theaters, interspersed between architectural jewels. This area represents the apex of early 20th century engineering and architecture. From a pragmatic point of view, this area was a popular destination for Los Angelenos and tourists using the City's former, classic streetcar system. The Broadway corridor is part of an important National Register Historic District.

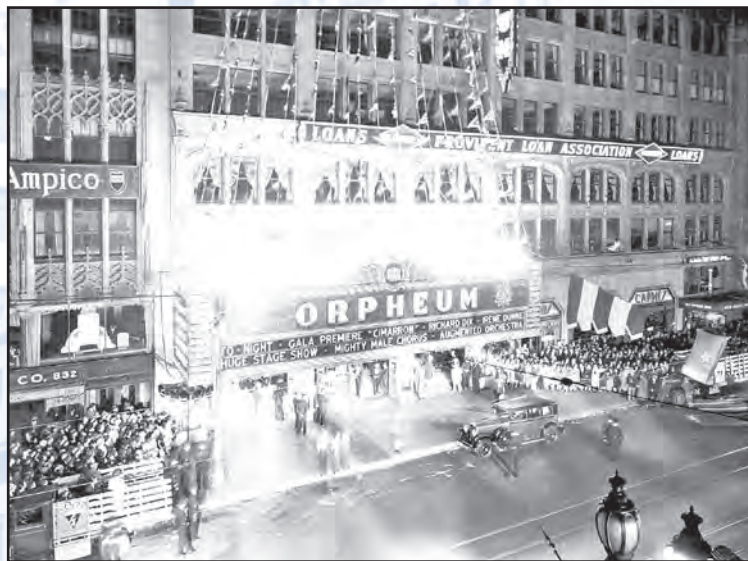
At this time in the 21st century, the site is not quite the same as it was. Today, Broadway is highly active with Latino shoppers and others during the day. But progressively there are more and more ground floor



The only other theater to open in downtown Los Angeles before the Great Depression was the French "Versailles"-style Los Angeles Theatre, which opened with the premiere of Charles Chaplin's *City Lights* in 1931.

vacancies of retail stores and shoppers who are being motivated to go elsewhere for their needs, variety of goods, services and family activities. The glorious theaters from yesterday are no more than museum facades of the past. There is more than one million square feet of commercial space vacant in the upper stories of Broadway's buildings.

The following are the *Initiative Proposals* to be focused on within the ten year period: revitalize the historic Broadway district between Second Street and Olympic Boulevard; activate inactive theaters; re-activate more than a million square feet of vacant commercial space; assist retailers *and* prevent further retail vacancies; increase parking and transit options to serve Broadway; encourage cultural, entertainment and retail uses that will support the area for generations to come; create a sense of place and history through urban planning, design and lighting guidelines and streetscapes and make the dream of riding a streetcar to this Broadway district by 2014.



The Orpheum, which opened in 1926, was the Los Angeles showcase for the Orpheum Vaudeville circuit and a favorite venue for performers Will Rogers, Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and Jack Benny.

History Comes Alive!

Tales From the City Archives



by Hynda Rudd,
City Archivist (Retired),
and Club Member



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This vibrant link between the past and present Broadway corridor will ensure that Broadway, between Second Street and Olympic Boulevard, will move through a normal period of growth for such a huge metropolitan area.

Streetscape Update

On Nov. 24, a final public meeting was held to review and provide input on the final concepts for the design of Broadway's public right-of-way areas. These also include new elements on the sidewalk and streets to improve the environment and historic character of the corridor, and better serve pedestrians and transit riders including: Street Configuration and Station Design; Planting, Materials and Furnishings; Wayfinding Signage and Identity Elements.

History of the Project

The Los Angeles Broadway theater district must be remembered as the heart and soul to generations of movie goers *before* the "Golden Age of Hollywood" appeared. It was glamorous and exciting. This Theater District featured the largest concentration of movie palaces and theaters on one street in this country. In the 1920s and 1930s, entertainment was always king of Broadway. But the first half of the 20th century, Broadway enjoyed success as a business and retail destination. It was considered the commercial capital in the nation. Broadway's elegant high-rise buildings only comparable to the great city of New York.

The Broadway district boasts block after block of stunning Beaux Arts, Art Deco and revival-style buildings, which endow the district with historic integrity not found in many major metropolitan downtowns.

When the theaters were built, Vaudeville stages were the rage. Famous acts in this district included the Marx Brothers, Bob Hope, Houdini, Bing Crosby, Jack Benny, Will Rogers, Charlie Chaplin, Eddy Cantor, Lena Horne, George Burns and Gracie Allen, Duke Ellington, Judy Garland and W.C. Fields.

Behind the deceptively simple theater exteriors, Broadway's theater interiors were ornate and spectacular, with sweeping marble staircases leading to ornate balconies and plush seats. Above on the soaring ceilings were decorated with star-sprinkled ornamentation. The walls were covered with gilded rococo designs and flamboyant architectural styles.

When the cinemas became vogue, the theaters were mostly converted to grand movie palaces, where many functioned as such for many years before closing their doors.

The first Broadway department store was at Third Street and Broadway. Other flagship stores for Bullocks, the May Company and the Fifth Street Store, among others, filled other spaces along the Broadway corridor.

Beautiful examples of then-modern engineering, coupled with dedicated craftsmanship and architecture, created high-rises all along Broadway, which reached to heights of 12 stories and more. These buildings were filled with offices and manufacturing operations and workers.

The Streetcar

The historic streetcar in Los Angeles dates back from the early 20th century until 1961. For most of its life, it was the most popular mode of transportation down the



The Los Angeles Theatre, as seen today.

Broadway corridor. It was known as Henry E. Huntington's baby, the Pacific Electric, which developed into the largest system of its kind in the world by the 1920s. Residents and visitors alike were able to travel and visit areas and neighborhoods miles from the city center for the first time. But by 1961, the public wanted more freedom and availability of travel when the freeway system became the priority for Los Angelenos. This became the end of the Los Angeles streetcar system.

Reviving the streetcar in Los Angeles is an idea that has widespread City and community support. The *Bringing Back Broadway* has given the momentum to make this project into a reality. One important aspect of the Broadway project is that it has a component, the Streetcar, Parking & Transportation Committee, which with the active CRA and Metro efforts relating to the streetcar, along with the Red Car Advisory Group which was formed with the Central City Association.

Together, the Trustees are working with the nonprofit LA Streetcar, Inc. to design, plan and build a downtown



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streetcar system that will allow residents, workers and visitors to ride a streetcar downtown by 2014.

Modern streetcars are environmentally safe, clean and quiet. There are no steps to climb -- just step off the curb, and right on the streetcar.

Streetcars have great impacts on economic development when they are implemented in the right place in the right way. This has been acceptable in some of our western city sisters, e.g., Seattle, San Diego, Portland and Tacoma.

Reviving the streetcar represents an approximate \$100 million local, state and potentially federal project. Councilmember Jose Huizar and his Trustees know that their desire is to have the streetcar run down Broadway and connect to points of interest downtown, but the exact route it uses is yet to be determined.

Latest Streetcar News: On Dec. 10, an initiative to revive a streetcar along Broadway received \$250,000 in Congressional funding to move the streetcar project into its environmental phase of analysis. This funding was secured by Congresswoman Lucille Roybal-Allard.

According to Huizar: "A downtown streetcar will create jobs, help people circulate between destinations, connect transit options and spur economic development while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I applaud Congressman Roybal-Allard for believing in our goal of riding a streetcar downtown by 2014. We're very fortunate to have a strong streetcar advocate in Washington D.C."

I'll write more of these articles in the future. This is a very important modern historical event for the City. Congratulations to all of us, and especially to you, Councilmember Huizar, for the progress that has been made so far.



Broadway in its heyday.

