

THE RIGHT MIX

Finding the “right mix” combines talents from art and science. Whether the challenge is the right mix of ingredients for dinner or the right audio mix in the latest hit record of the day, the selection and allocation of inputs to create a worthy output exemplifies creativity.

With approval in concept to expanded use of Sacramento’s downtown rail yards, the next creative land use challenge hinges upon synthesis of art and science into the development of an intermodal transportation facility that mixes the past with opportunities for the future while satisfying all concerned.

What, then, is the “the right mix” for those creative elements of adaptation, reuse, and preservation for the downtown station? Many other cities, like the ones selected below, can offer insights and results regarding this issue. On the local level, an environmental impact report, to be prepared over the coming months will mix community opinion into the options for the rail yard site.

The ultimate configuration of the downtown rail station remains controversial. Exactly, how will it fit into the constellation of transportation services? Will it be the principal station of an ancillary aspect of a larger transportation complex? Will it serve commuters or travelers or both? Will it serve, in its own right as a regional destination?

Fundamentally, the vintage 1920’s art deco 75,000-square foot building with related freight structure was designed to serve around one million passengers. Planners predict that the passenger load demand on aging Sacramento facility can be expected to be four times greater than earlier usage. Further, the station must function in a totally different transportation environment during Century 21, a transportation environment that includes and shows preference for freeway and airline networks.

Sacramento is not the first community to deal with, adapt, or reuse a downtown rail station. The decline of passenger rail patronage during the last century left a wealth of vacant underutilized and well-located train stations. From the lowly rehabilitation of a small town rail depot to the renovation of the flagship station such as the Washington DC, the rehabilitation of stations offers strategies for renewal. Many of the rehabs involved the renovation of a small station to a railroading use, adaptation to an alternative commercial use, or a combination of both. Even Sacramento already benefited from the successful reuse of a train station, i.e. the renovation of the 19th street station into a very popular family restaurant. Admittedly, the renovation of the downtown rail station is very different, if only on scale and regional importance.

The “right mix” for Sacramento should be a composite of the successes and lessons learned in other rehabs. While depot renovations have occurred in many US cities, the cities of Chicago, Washington DC, Kansas City, St. Louis, Cincinnati, and Tacoma have renovated, adapted, or reused their downtown rail stations to more effectively serve their communities and are offered as case studies for Central Valley transportation redevelopment.

Not all of example cities preserved the railroading passenger function. But all relied on some vestige of the “good old days”. The determinant seemed to rest on populations served and growth rates. In growing regions, transportation economics rest on the side of station rehabs for use as transportation links. With continued congestion on both the freeways and the flyways with no lessening in sight, contemplation of the railroad alternative is more attractive. In a congested world, the country’s rail lines still offer direct access to premier downtown real estate. After all, the rails and depots were there first.

The right mix in Sacramento could combine the elements of function, technology, style, and foresight to establish the intermodal center into a regional asset and source of pride and accomplishment.

Functionality, the key element to success, rests on the station's capacity to move people and freight efficiently. In a rational world of time-sensitive commuters and travelers, the intermodal station must be convenient and efficient and cheaper time-wise than alternatives. In the 21st century, the purposeful age of the Sacramento intermodal complex, the complex must save time.

The element of function also includes a locational characteristic. History located rail stations in central places. The site itself can offer a functional attractor, a characteristic that suggests the property can be retooled for worthy destination uses above and beyond the simple transportation aspects of the infrastructure.

The "right mix" will include enough people-moving technology to accommodate the present traveling public and the ability to adapt to new technologies for time constrained future traveling public. In the 21st century fiber rails may be just as important as steel rails, so inclusion of the fiber alternative into the steel rail rehabilitations could enable Sacramento to accommodate more efficient modes public gathering or conferencing. An exciting addition is the longer term probability of high-speed rail in Sacramento which offers a different mix to the costs of travel.

The "right mix" must also include some style, which would include preserving and/or enhancing the historic grandeur of the existing building. Historic preservation represents a style, an attitude, a respect for a better time and an attractive marketing strategy. Style works in comparable rehabilitations even if function changes. The Sacramento site offers 37 acres of real history.

The "right mix" must also include some foresight. Foresight understands that the decisions made in the implementation of the rail yard plan, represent decisions that will last for decades. Errors in judgment, forecasts, or planning will not go away. Instead, bad decisions will linger and gradually erode the integrity of the entire project.

Table 1 presents characteristics of selected rail station redevelopments. Comparable rail developments were selected from a nationwide list. All can be considered in terms of those elements required for the "right mix" of Sacramento Depot alternatives. And all offer insight into those characteristics that could be important to a downtown station rehabilitation.

Table 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF SELECTED RAIL STATION REDEVELOPMENTS

	Trade Area Pop. (mil)	Regional Growth Rate	Size of Site So. Ft.	Square Footage Per Capita	Functional as Transport	Venue for Entertainment	Spawn Economic Development	Ability to Grow with Region	Cost to (millions)
Chicago CMSA	8,008,000	8%	86,528	92.55	Amtrak, commuter, and metro lines.	Yes	No increase from	Region	
Washington DC PMSA	4,740,000	12%	500,000	9.48	Amtrak, commuter, and metro lines, and coaches.	Yes	Yes	Yes, region already	\$160
St. Louis MSA	2,569,000	3%	754,167	3.41	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	\$150
Cincinnati CMSA	1,961,000	8%	250,000	7.84	Amtrak	Yes			\$44
Sacramento-Yolo CMSA	1,741,000	16%	75,000	23.21	Amtrak	NA	Yes	Yes	?
Tacoma PMSA	688,807	17%	380,000	1.81	No	No	No	No	\$57

Chicago Union Station (www.unionstationchicago.com) is the last of Chicago's great turn-of-the-century train depots serving a metropolitan population of over 8 million persons. In 1991, the station was renovated to accommodate expanded commuter rail networks. The recent renovation enables the Metra commuters to enter the station and board their suburban trains in a few minutes without mingling with the slower-moving Amtrak passengers. Union Station is also the departure and arrival point for about 40 Amtrak trains a day, connecting Chicago to more than 500 destinations in the U.S. and Canada. The station, located in Chicago's financial core, serves 50,000 daily Metra commuters from the north, west, and southwest suburbs, and functions as the busiest train station in Chicago.

The station includes:

- A café
- Retail shopping
- A soundproof children's play room
- Eight stories of office space
- A Great Hall (has been used as a movie set for "The Untouchables" and "My Best Friend's Wedding.")

The grand style of Chicago's Union Station reminds the passerby of the Jazz Age, as its linkage with the Metra train systems demonstrates the facilities adaptation to change. Related businesses, health clubs and office buildings make the structure a functional part of the urban landscape in Chicago.

Given high land values the structure cannot expand however, improvements are in process for the upgrade of existing track lines.

Washington DC Union Station (www.unionstationdc.com) is considered "the gateway to the nation's capital" by serving 18,000 to 19,000 passengers and almost 800 trains per day. Each year the facility attracts attracting 23.4 million visitors. The regional population served equaled 4.7 million.

In 1981, Congress enacted the Union Station Redevelopment Act of 1981, which required a plan to develop a commercially viable, self-sufficient structure. A public-private partnership was formed to restore the building and create a mixed-use transportation center. The developer secured \$160 million from private sources to restore the facility to its original Beaux-Arts style of architecture, and maintains a lease agreement with the Department of Transportation.

The project is very successful and can be considered a growth node confirming the functional characteristics of its location. Presently, CNN, the FCC, federal judicial building, and headquarters for a prominent law firm are sited near the station.

Similar to the Sacramento station, Union Station sits on the edge of an area once known as "Swampoodle," located on the slough of Timber Creek. The total area occupied by the Station and the terminal zone was originally about 200 acres and included 75 miles of tracks.

The Washington Station has style and heritage. In the early 1900s, the Presidential Suite was added to Union Station (now B. Smith's Restaurant). Many presidents and foreign dignitaries used the room. In 1989, President George Bush hosted an Inaugural Ball in the Grand Hall.

The station also hosts world-class exhibitions and international cultural events. The station now includes:

- Over 130 retail shops
- Many restaurants
- State-of-the-art nine-screen American Multi-Cinema complex theaters
- Amtrak's headquarters and executive offices
- Presidential Suite
- Grand Hall

Technologically the station is home to the speed trains operating between New York and Washington. Similar to Sacramento, the station is on one end of a major metropolitan corridor.

St. Louis Union Station (www.slfpc.com/UnionStation.html) is a National Historic Landmark and has changed its function, becoming a destination. It was renovated in 1985 and although it no longer functions as a railroad terminal, it hosted about 6.5 million visitors last year. The station includes the Hyatt Regency Hotel and a large retail center, which is part of a larger entertainment and cultural Mecca. In the vicinity of the station are Aloe Plaza and the Carl Milles' Fountain, the St. Louis Zoo, the Science Center, and the Missouri Botanical Gardens. The historical area is located north of the Gateway Arch and includes Laclede's Landing, a nine-block industrial area that once housed companies producing coffee, leather goods, mattresses, tobacco, whiskey, candy, and machinery for the barges. At night, horse drawn carriages and live music add to the downtown atmosphere. The station is within walking distance of Busch Stadium. Locating near the station is desirable for many businesses. Within one mile are A.G. Edwards, Ralston Purina, and Ameren UE.

The station includes:

- A Hyatt Regency Hotel
- Retail shops
- Many restaurants and cafes
- Live entertainment
- A Grand Hall
- A lake with boats
- A MetroLink stop

Additional activities are featured throughout the year including historic and refurbished train displays, children's entertainment, sports events, and exhibits.

On the basis of service population the St. Louis station exists on a par with Sacramento. This rehab acknowledged changes in the function of the passenger business and essentially retooled the station to an entertainment use, capitalizing on the station's location.

Kansas City Union Station (www.kcstar.com/unionstation) is the second largest standing train station in the United States (behind Grand Central Station). Beginning March 2002, Amtrak will resume service to the station. Restoration started in 1997 with the goal of returning it to its original 1917 splendor. The architects took special care to repair original moldings and ceilings, and replicated

the exact colors and textures of floors, ceilings, and roof tiles. The renovation was funded by federal grants, private donations, and a five-county bi-state tax that generated \$118 million.

The station now includes:

- A science museum (attached onto the original station)
- Several theaters
- Many restaurants.

The Kansas City station ranks high in terms of history and style. The building is grand. But the restoration moved away from the previous function as an operating train station. In the '20's the station boasted traffic of 217 trains per day. Now service has dwindled. Traffic demands on the station are less than design requirements. Although the building remains a masterpiece of style, on a functional basis the economics aren't favorable. Kansas City's population is too spread out into edge cities, and the freeways are not congested enough to make the station function as a commuter terminal.

Cincinnati Union Terminal (www.cincymuseum.org) is primarily the Cincinnati Museum Center, and is located along only one Amtrak route. The Cincinnati MSA population is 1.9 million persons, only slightly greater than the Sacramento CMSA's population of 1.7 million persons. Stylistically, the terminal is one of America's greatest art-deco stations. Restoration was completed in November 1990 at a cost of over \$44 million. Of this amount, the county issued \$33 million in bonds, the State of Ohio provided \$3 million, and the City of Cincinnati provided \$3 million.

The station now houses:

- A train depot
- The Cincinnati Museum of Natural History,
- The Cincinnati Historical Society Museum and Library
- The Robert D. Lindner Family OMNIMAX[®] Theater
- Dining facilities
- Rental areas for business meetings and social functions
- Two auditoriums
- Gift shops

Again, the rehabilitation of the station changed the function of the property to more of a destination, capitalizing on the location of building. Utilizing the style of the structure and the public's regard for the historical significance and elegance of the building, converted a less functional transportation use into a locationally functional destination use.

Tacoma Union Station (www.tptourisdm.org/press/unionst.htm) is a 1911 landmark designed by the architects who created New York's Grand Central Station and no longer functions as a railroad terminal. After a \$57 million interior and exterior renovation, the station is used primarily as a federal courthouse. In addition to a courthouse, it houses a public exhibit of sculptured glass art by Dale Chihuly.

The examples offered suggest that the Sacramento train station presents a unique opportunity for the realignment of a rail facility, steeped in the history of railroading with all the style of a Kansas City Station. The functionality of the Chicago train station with its efficient linkage with the Metra (local commuter train system) and the famed Chicago Loop. Chicago's transportation network functions as a rail network rather than a freeway loop, as was the case for the Kansas City and Cincinnati renovations.

The comparison of Sacramento potential system to the realignment in Washington DC is very attractive. Both are government towns, both exist along well traveled and increasingly congested urban corridors. Both are metropolitan areas in the midst of strong growth that can be expected to continue.

Three of the stations considered above revamped their stations into destination properties. In this case the Sacramento opportunity scores highly. The downtown rail yards could easily be a destination point for travelers other than commuters. This would require the utilization of the existing building as an entertainment/fine dining and cultural facility. This strategy worked in Kansas City and apparently works even better in Cincinnati. These cities are slightly larger than Sacramento but are not located along a major growing corridor. Growth rates in these cities that converted to a strictly museum or destination use were single digits as compared to Sacramento's rate which was 15 percent for the population comparison period.

The city of Tacoma also retooled their station into an alternative destination use. Namely a Federal Courthouse. Sacramento's comparison to the Tacoma experience is not coincident since the new Federal Courthouse was recently completed next to the current downtown station. The Tacoma model offers a development alternative has already been accomplished in Sacramento.

Each of the above stations depicts a successful renovation to fit the area's needs. Sacramento can take advantage of the proximity of the Downtown Mall, the business district, and Old Sacramento and should be integrated into the grand scheme of downtown cohesiveness. (The proximity to Old Sacramento would make the station a choice for Dixieland Jazz Jubilee venues, in addition to year-round entertainment.) Although the Capitol is about 9 blocks away, it could easily be accessible using a downtown shuttle service, much like the downtown trolley.

To maintain its functionality as a transportation hub, the existing station should embrace technological advancements, such as high-speed rail and fiber rails in the form of conferencing or gathering spaces.

Style could be maintained by using the existing train station as a grand entrance hall to the transportation hub and marketplace of culture and commerce.

Each of the above models used foresight and demand planning when choosing a function for their stations. Kansas City maintained the railroad lines to anticipate the resurgence of rail transportation which will be slow in coming. Chicago renovated to more easily accommodate the special and different needs of the daily commuter versus the extended trip interstate passenger to enable growth to occur with ease.

The "right mix" in Sacramento will take its railroad functionality from Washington DC and Chicago; its locational functionality from Cincinnati and St. Louis; its style from Kansas City and Washington DC; its technology from Washington DC and its foresight from Chicago. Sacramento's mix of inter modal transportation services could easily become the national model for the resurgence of the railroad in Century 21.

For an individual view of alternatives consider:

www.amtrak.com

www.360360.com

www.railsusa.com/stations.shtml

www.trainweb.com

