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NEWS RELEASE

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Councilmember José Huizar Embraces New Ideas for Broadway Streetcar

Los Angeles delegation meets with leaders of Portland Streetcar system to better understand how a modern streetcar transportation system could work in downtown Los Angeles

LOS ANGELES (April 23, 2008) – Councilmember José Huizar this past Thursday led a 23-member delegation that included representatives from the City of Los Angeles, the Community Redevelopment Agency, downtown L.A. business owners, community leaders, and property owners to tour the streetcar system in Portland, Ore. The delegation studied the streetcar system's effect on Portland's economic development and transportation circulation in its urban core.

Councilmember Huizar and the delegation came away with new ideas and suggestions for making a similar system work along Broadway in downtown Los Angeles. The delegation heard from Portland city officials, transportation experts, participating developers, and business owners who explained how the streetcar system in Portland was developed as well as the factors such as design and accessibility that make it popular with riders. Presenters also addressed issues related to safety, environmental sustainability, traffic flow, maintenance, public-private funding and marketing.

"This experience has reconfirmed my commitment to bringing a modern streetcar system to downtown Los Angeles," said Councilmember Huizar. "The streetcar has always been a central focus of my Bringing Back Broadway initiative, but now more than ever, I am laser focused on making this happen."

Former Portland Director of Transportation Vic Rhodes, who was instrumental in implementing the Portland Streetcar Inc. system, addressed some of the concerns that were brought up by public and private entities when Portland was considering its first streetcar line.

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Rhodes mentioned that fears of pedestrian safety, reduced traffic flow and increased vehicular accidents were quickly assuaged by the system's performance, and in fact, the streetcar has assisted in reducing traffic because people choose to use streetcars instead of automobiles. Rhodes also described the mechanism of the public-private partnership that made the Portland system a reality and that allows it to function on a contractual basis with the city's transit agency.

"A public-private partnership of this kind is exactly what downtown L.A. needs," said Huizar. "It gives the city and the residents a vested interest in ensuring the streetcar system is functional, well-maintained and provides the access that people want and need."

Michael Powell, owner of Powell's Books and president of Portland Streetcar Inc., said the streetcar has proven itself through increased property values and the number of successful local businesses along the streetcar line.

Portland Development Commissioner Bruce Allen gave the delegation a tour of the Pearl District, formerly a blighted, underdeveloped industrial area that now provides significant open space, affordable and market-rate housing, and mixed-use with creative retail along the streetcar line. Allen said it is important to encourage businesses to identify their names with the stations nearby, and to build awareness and ridership.

The Portland streetcar is creatively marketed and supported. There are no ads on the streetcars, but each car and station stop is sponsored by a business served by that car. The strategies seem to be working. The Portland system is already at capacity and the city is looking at ways to add another three-mile, \$150 million-line that would extend further beyond the city's center, and double the current capacity.

Maintaining the streetcars is a critical aspect of the overall operation. Rick Gustafson, executive director of Portland Streetcar Inc., gave the delegation a tour of the maintenance facility tucked under a viaduct towards the northwest portion of the streetcar line. The facility cleans and maintains every streetcar in the system daily. Gustafson spoke about the technical aspects of running a streetcar line, including the need for varying speeds for the streetcar, which operates on dedicated rails within the line of traffic like any other vehicle.

Bringing Back Broadway is a public-private partnership between Councilmember Huizar's office, the Mayor's office, city departments, and Broadway property owners, and is overseen by a board of trustees. For the initial phase of the initiative, Councilmember Huizar has identified more than \$16.5 million in city, state and federal resources to fund streetscape design, property for a new parking facility, and to initiate the revival of the streetcar.

To learn more about Bringing Back Broadway, visit www.BringingBackBroadway.com.

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