GIVE THEM SHELTER

For pioneering affordable-housing advocate Rosanne Haggerty, good design is hardly an extravagance. In fact, it pays for itself. by Anna Holtzman

"Something very profound seems to happen to people when they live in a building that's historic and beautiful," says Rosanne Haggerty, founder and president of Common Ground Community, a New York City-based nonprofit housing and community development organization. Haggerty's work attests to the power of good design—not only in historic structures, but in forward-looking contemporary architecture as well—to uplift and inspire residents. Started in 1990 with the restoration and transformation of the dilapidated Times Square Hotel into living units for low-income and formerly homeless individuals, Common Ground now serves over 1,300 residents in sites throughout the city, and has become a leading proponent of affordable housing that integrates shelter with social services and high-quality design.

Not only does design improve tenants' quality of life, asserts Haggerty, but it pays: Part of the funding for projects like the Times Square Hotel, for which Common Ground secured historic landmark status, comes from federal historic-preservation tax credits. Other funding comes from low-income tax credits, rent—all tenants pay rent, either with government vouchers, or on a sliding scale according to income—and a combination of low-interest loans and city, state, and private grants. In this way, the net cost of running what housing advocates call “supportive housing”—in effect, a humane and thoughtful reinvention of the single-room-occupancy (SRO) hotel with on-site services such as healthcare and job counseling—is less than that of running a typical shelter or rehabilitation facility. And unlike state and local housing agencies, whose flexibility is inhibited by the many regulations that come with mostly federal funding, groups like Common Ground, by combining funds from various sources, retain the ability to experiment with innovative models of housing.

Haggerty is now applying her decade-plus of experience with Common Ground to an ambitious new project, a model called "first-step housing" that will serve individuals who are not ready for permanent living arrangements. It will be the nonprofit's answer to the now dwindling number of notorious "lodging houses," or flop-houses, that once lined Manhattan's Bowery, where men could sleep on partitioned-off cots for only a few dollars per night. Years of studying compact dwelling units—research that took Haggerty from the streets of New York City to the capsule hotels of Japan—culminated last year in the First Step Housing international design competition (see "A Step Up for Small Spaces," page 31) cosponsored by Common Ground and The Architectural League of New York and led by architect Michael Bell, who runs the housing studio at Columbia University's architecture school.

The competition mandate was to re-envision an interior configuration for the Andrews—one of the few still-operating lodging houses on the Bowery, which Common Ground purchased in 2002—that would be "comfortable, efficient, dignified, and inexpensive," says Haggerty. A total of 180 submissions from around the world were reviewed, and five winners were chosen by a technical jury—including city planners, code inspectors, and cost estimators, as well as a tenant from the Andrews and the current building supervisor—and by a design jury made up of Haggerty, Bell, Common Ground's staff architect Nadine Maleh, and architects Toshiko Mori, Steven Holl, Julie Eizenberg, and Andrew Freer of Auburn University's Rural Studio.

Major design challenges, says Bell, were the project cost and the unusually narrow footprint of the building (20 feet wide by 150 feet long). In addition, fire codes mandate that the partitions for the sleeping units be treated as furniture and not extend to the ceiling. Prevailing themes among the entries, Bell reports, were mass production and prefabrication to lower costs and afford easy replicability for other sites. To maximize space and natural light in the building's narrow corridors, some of the competition-stage designs employed translucent partitions and sliding doors, though tenant feedback on the winning entries included concerns for privacy and having a lockable swinging door. Currently, the premiated designs are undergoing further development, and by the end of September, Common Ground will decide which ones can move forward into prototypes. Fabrication and installation will begin in 2005, when work on the shell of the Andrews, by Richard Vitto of New York City's Oaklander Coogan and Vitto Architects, is complete.
FROM THE GROUND UP

Forging ahead into other realms of design, Common Ground is developing its first ground-up construction, a 200-unit building in downtown Brooklyn designed by firm partners Susan Rodriguez and Timothy Hartung of Polshek Partnership. The project is a joint venture between Common Ground and the Actors' Fund of America, for whom Common Ground already manages a low-income residence for entertainment professionals in Manhattan. Like the Times Square Hotel, the Brooklyn building will house a fifty-fifty mix of formerly homeless people and low-income tenants, many of whom, in this case, are employed in the arts and entertainment industries.

The land for the project, part of a parcel being developed by Hamlin Ventures and Time Equities, was given to Common Ground by the developers because, as a city-designated urban-renewal site, a portion of the property had to be dedicated to low-income housing. The rest of the site will contain market-rate residential and commercial buildings. Common Ground chose Polshek Partnership in part because of the firm’s previous experience on projects like The Ed Sullivan Theater in Manhattan that also faced this site’s peculiar challenge: close proximity to a subway tunnel. In some areas, the structure will sit only 5 inches above the train passage. Four 23-foot trusses, which are exposed at the first two stories, suspend the building over the tunnel and visually “set the presence of the building apart from traditional low-income projects” Hartung believes. “Part of Common Ground’s mission [with this project],” he adds, is to establish “pride of place.” Incorporating sustainable initiatives is another goal of the project; the architects are following LEED guidelines (and may apply for the certification, if funding allows) and are pursuing the use of green roofs, daylighting—the front of the building is mainly glass—and recycled materials. Construction starts next year, and completion is planned for 2007.

Beyond communicating its ideology through architectural expression locally, Common Ground is spreading its innovative thinking about homelessness to cities across the United States and around the world. In addition to partnering with local organizations on projects in London; Newbury, New York; and Hartford and Willimantic, Connecticut, the nonprofit runs a “replication” program that educates housing organizations in countries as far away as Australia and Japan. With the First Step Housing competition, Haggerty hopes to also inspire other humane approaches to temporary shelter. With her imaginative and pragmatic approach to affordable housing, she stands a very good chance.

A STEP UP FOR SMALL SPACES

Common Ground’s First Step Housing competition challenged designers to re-envision the interior configuration for a men’s lodging house on Manhattan’s Bowery. Out of 180 international entries, five winning proposals were selected for further development. In “Ordering of Things” (above left), a design by Katherine Chang and Aaron Gabriel of New York City, residents define their spaces by the way they display their objects on shelves lining the units. Partitions are translucent so that natural light may travel into the building’s narrow corridors. “Nesting” (above right), by Harvard Design School students David Gwinn, Basil Lee, and Tom McMahon, features modular and highly customizable units that fold up completely when not in use to create common spaces. New York City–based Daniela Fabricius’s “Cocoon” (below left) employs wood panels in a simple, elegant design to create the sense of a private cabin. A third New York City team, Lifeform, submitted “Kit of Parts” (below right), in which swinging storage shelves can be used to customize dwellings units. “Soft House” (below center), by Forsythe + MacAllen Design of Vancouver, is the most unusual proposal, with partitions made of a honeycomb paper structure that expands and contracts, like an accordion, to modify the shape and size of units. This entry earned a special fifth prize (originally there were to be four winners) for its innovative approach, with the understanding that it would have to be developed to address issues such as durability and fire safety.
When Samuel Mockbee was posthumously awarded the 2004 AIA Gold Medal earlier this year, the architectural establishment’s highest honor finally found its social conscience—and maybe the profession did too. Much has happened in the eleven years since Mockbee and D.K. Ruth cofounded the Rural Studio, a design-build program at Auburn University that has dramatically raised the profile of hands-on, community-based architecture. Indeed, there is a new generation of practitioners—some are graduates of Rural Studio or like-minded programs, others are simply passionate about an architecture of social engagement—whose members develop projects and programs for clients rarely served by design professionals.

Whether or not the proliferation of such practices constitutes a movement or even a category of design is up for debate. There are strong arguments on both sides, but two recently published books suggest that, by whatever name, critical mass has been achieved. Good Deeds, Good Design: Community Service Through Architecture (Princeton Architectural Press, 2003) is a collection of first-person narratives by architects and educators, among others, that relay the stories behind individual housing and community projects and processes. Edited by Bryan Bell, founder of Designs Corps, a Raleigh, North Carolina, nonprofit that specializes in housing for migrant farmworkers and provides fellowships and other resources to young architects and students, the book crisscrosses the country, from the Community Housing Resource Center (CHRC), which provides home repair and new construction in Atlanta, to Red Feather Development Group, a nonprofit in Bozeman, Montana, that applies a participatory design-build process to the housing crisis in Native America.

Where Good Deeds covers a broad range of issues, Building One House, published in January by Red Feather and written by its community-design director, Nathaniel Curum, has a single mission: to show how to construct straw-bale dwellings through a combination of professional services and on-site training of volunteers. Both of these books capture the strong-willed efforts of a different breed of architect. They are the twenty-first-century Jacob Rises of the design world, improving how the other half lives.

A DESIGN MOVEMENT
Most extraordinary about this group is the high level of design talent they possess. None seems willing to enshrine their clients in t buddy wrappers of nostalgic domesticity. Theses are architects of our time working in contemporary idioms—some more dynamic than others, but all seeking an authenticity of time, place, and culture. Low budgets are not an excuse for uninspired design, but are a liberating challenge to make the most with the least.

Their work is not done in a vacuum, but is both supported and...
complemented by related agendas. In 2000, the Enterprise Foundation, which assists local organizations in rebuilding communities, established a program of three-year fellowships that allows recent graduates—Corum was among the five fellows selected in 2003—to work for a public-service organization that could not otherwise afford on-staff architectural expertise. In a design-school first, the Designmatters program of the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, has been granted nongovernmental-organization (NGO) status by the United Nations, enabling the school’s students and faculty to participate in humanitarian initiatives around the globe. And last month in another first, Design Corps’ fourth Structures for Inclusion conference, which offers process-oriented case studies geared to its constituency, was held in conjunction with the Association for Community Design’s annual conference on the work of community design centers, bringing seasoned professionals together with their younger counterparts. There seems to be something in the air.

DOCTORS AND LAWYERS DO IT

“There is a moment,” believes M. Scott Ball, executive director of CHRC, but he contends that it operates without definition. “There should be a field within architecture, a public-interest architecture,” he argues, “which could be easily modeled on other professions—just as the nonprofit sector is the public-interest sector of the business community.”

And if there is a movement, Ball might embody its essence. The Yale-trained architect has carved out an unconventional career that meshes public advocacy, fundraising, and political engagement. Besides administering his nonprofit’s programs, Ball serves as: an appointee to Atlanta mayor Shirley Franklin’s Inclusionary Zoning Task Force; a founding member of the Georgia Fair Lending Coalition; an executive committee member of the Atlanta AIA Young Architects Forum; and a board member of the Atlanta Regional Health Forum.

Law, you have public-interest lawyers—the same with public health. It is unthinkable that people would go without legal representation or a doctor,” he notes. But architecture “has nothing like the young designer, who goes simply by Tate professionally. “It is an opportunity to address social and political arenas through design.”

He has most recently taken this philosophy to Common Ground Community, a nonprofit in New York City, where he has coordinated a competition for prototypical single-room-occupancy units (see “Give Them Shelter,” page 30). “The profession has become so involved with form,” Tate argues, “it has forgotten about these other things.” He calls for a more comprehensive approach to design, one in which context, materials research, form, collaboration, client participation, and sustainability are all given equal weight. “The focus of my work is extending the depth and reach of what architecture does. How it’s made and who it is made for.”

DESIGN ON A MISSION

The same could be said for Jae Cha, another graduate of Yale’s architecture school, who works with faith-based organizations that typically do missionary work in Central or South America. “This isn’t the thing I thought I was going to do with my life,” explains the Washington, D.C.-based owner of a firm called Light. “I thought I would take the regular path—go to New York City, work for a big firm—but I needed to do something that was meaningful. Architecture is so hard. That [traditional route] wasn’t enough.”

For her efforts, Cha has won awards and fellowships honoring the spare modern forms she creates to harness inexpensive local
Materials, respond to harsh tropical climates, and be easily built by untrained community members. Since incorporating her firm as a nonprofit in 2000, she has won three awards in the emerging-architecture program cosponsored by Architectural Review and the hardware manufacturer online for churches in Costa Rica and Bolivia and for a community center-church in Honduras.

Despite the potential for such professional recognition, Cha knows that her career choice isn’t for everybody: “Architects in other parts of the world have been doing this kind of work for a long time,” she notes. “Here, though, it’s not looked upon so glamorously.”

SPREADING THE WORD

For Red Feather’s Nathaniel Corum, who is among those who see “a movement afoot,” the less glamorous corners of the world have a magnetic pull. After completing a graduate architecture degree at the University of Texas at Austin, where he studied with sustainability guru Pliny Fisk at his Center for Maximum Potential Building Systems, Corum took a Fulbright fellowship to North Africa, where he researched traditional construction technologies and explored ways to preserve the fabric of ancient cities while improving conditions for the urban poor.

In 2003 came his current position at Red Feather, where he has led two “builds.” The 10-year-old nonprofit invests

Theses architects are working in contemporary idioms—all seeking an authenticity of time, place, and culture.

its efforts in refining and adapting the age-old technique of straw-bale construction to help reduce the number of Native Americans who are homeless or living in substandard conditions, which is estimated to be 300,000. Through sweat equity and with volunteers who camp on site for a month, those who participate, he notes, “become ambassadors of design and the participatory process.”

In July, Red Feather takes on its largest project: an environmental research center for the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians in Belcourt, North Dakota. With a construction grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the center will not only serve academic purposes, but the build will also provide training for the design and construction of new housing on a reservation where 200 homes have been condemned due to mold infestation. While his main goal is to help tribes become self-sufficient, an added plus for Corum is that the builds also “allow native kids to see architecture as a profession,” one that can have a role in the future of their communities.

Corum, Ball, Tate, Cha and their many like-minded peers are not the first to advance architecture’s social pro-

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A SORT OF HOMECOMING
Trendy but troublesome, community-based planning is now the norm. If it can make it in the Bronx, can it make it anywhere? by C.C. Sullivan / photographs by Floto + Warner

The trendiest notion in American urbanism these days is community-based planning, or CBP, the use of grassroots social groups to shape redevelopment projects. From Houston to Minneapolis and Seattle to Baltimore, municipalities are touting programs that give local folks control of urban turnarounds. "There's a dramatic upswing in collaborative or participatory neighborhood planning," believes Kenneth Michael Reardon, chair of Cornell's planning department in Ithaca, New York, and an expert on the subject. "But the actual practice is extremely uneven." Reardon isn't alone in this concern: Many urbanists and local leaders question the effectiveness of CBP initiatives in their areas (see "Newark's Boom," page 17), citing minimal citizen involvement, aloof and misdirected consultants, and poorly coordinated nonprofit groups, among other difficulties.

Yet, CBP has worked wonders in the least likely places. One unusually public effort, begun 10 years ago in New York City's South Bronx—a place written off in the 1970s as a no-man's-land of riots, fires, and landlord abandonment—has spawned a redevelopment initiative called Melrose Commons that is seen today as a resounding success. Planned for 1,700 residences, the 35-block zone with a newly bustling commercial strip may soon top off at 3,000 units, according to Ted Weinstein, former planning director for the Bronx. More important, the district's mix of amenities, open spaces, and architectural features traces straight back to directives from a core of vocal, mostly Hispanic residents in scores of weekly community meetings.

Those meetings began in 1994 out of raw fear. "The city intended to take this neighborhood: to buy out the vacant lots and burnt-out buildings with eminent domain" to build low-density, mostly market-rate housing, says Magnus Magnusson, an architect involved in early organizing who has since designed new structures there. "The residents were shocked. And they said, 'We will stay.'" Their Spanish rallying cry became the identity of a soon-to-be pivotal community group: Nos Quedamos.

Not only was its formation unexpected, but so was the group's suddenly powerful role in shaping the area's renewal. "It was an election year—and the right place at the right time," recalls Yolanda Garcia, executive director of Nos Quedamos. "We had all the elected officials—all the way to congress—backing this up." With Garcia's leadership, the community of 6,000 residents blocked the original 1992 Bronx Center plan, a renewal scheme supported by federal agencies (and the local AIA chapter) that would have effectively razed the area. And a decade later, the residents' tale is hailed as a triumph of CBP.
A LONG HISTORY
To comprehend how CBP can succeed in the South Bronx but self-destruct elsewhere, it helps to look at related urban-design movements. The concept dates back to settlement uses of the late 1800s in London and Chicago, where community-controlled planning became part of social efforts on behalf of burgeoning immigrant populations. By the 1960s, “advocacy planning” was popular, but the idea faded by the 1980s as governments ceded control to private developers.

More recently, CBP has yielded a distinct approach, relying more on local organizing than on top-down governmental patronage. Paving the way for such self-reliance has been the “reinventing” of government to focus more on “consumer needs,” says Reardon, coupled with federal spending cuts pushing social responsibilities down to states and municipalities and, ultimately, to loose networks of nonprofit groups.

Also contributing to the rise of CBP has been the surfacing of proactive, strident community leaders like Nos Quedamos’s Garcia. “If you live in a neighborhood, how do you get your voice heard?” asks Petr Stand, an architect who worked with Magnusson on the design guidelines for Melrose Commons.

A ROLE FOR ARCHITECTS?
“It’s important to put urban design controls into an urban-renewal plan to control the project’s visual aspect,” Stand adds. For that reason alone, he is confident that architects play a critical role in successful CBP, and his opinion is shared by designers from around the United States. Less convinced are many not-for-profit agencies and experts who’ve seen challenges in projects that weren’t as lucky as Melrose Commons.

The professional-expert model does not work, because of lack of contact with the community and subsequent misdiagnosis,” argues Reardon, who thinks recent, high-profile failures “could extinguish institutional and political interest in this approach.”

Having grown up in the Bronx, however, perhaps Stand ran less risk. “It was no different than meeting with a private client and getting to know his program,” he counters. “You have to break through the cultural and language barriers, and it’s important to get city planners and housing officials out into the neighborhoods. But change is accomplishable only if there’s political will behind it and a master plan that allows for evolution.”

CBP demands “organized citizen power” on a regional and national level in addition to long-term commitment, Reardon adds, to gain momentum and get over entrenched pessimism. “It took more than 10 years in East St. Louis” for his well-documented renewal effort to take hold, he points out. “Professionals need to pick a place, do a sort of homecoming, and plan to be there for a while.”
The reprography business has transformed itself from a paper-based industry of tinkerers to a digital industry of network engineers.

"Business, page 50"

Disney's contractor estimates that tunnel-form construction is only cost-effective for projects of at least 2,000 rooms.

"Technology, page 52"

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**Metro Crusader**

Martha Welborne convinced transit-hostile Los Angeles to adopt a new high-speed bus system.

Bradford McKee traces her route to success.

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**Mass Transit** At first, Martha Welborne didn't mean to change the pace of transit in Los Angeles. She was just talking casually at a barbecue when the idea came up.

In the summer of 1988, Welborne was at a weekend hosted by her friend Jamie Bennett. At the time, Bennett was preparing to go to Curitiba, Brazil, to attend a board meeting of the W. Alton Jones Foundation, an environmental philanthropy in Virginia where Bennett is a director. It happened that Welborne, an architect and planner, knew a bit about Curitiba, a city of 1.9 million. She mentioned that she'd met the city's former mayor, Jaime Lerner (now governor of Parana state). She had also studied the innovative transit system that Lerner, an architect, helped establish there. It's a network of rapid buses that behave like trains, and Welborne suggested offhand, it might transplant well to gridlocked Los Angeles.

Curitiba's transit system combines the best features of rail and bus. Five major express lines, all color-coded and served by numerous neigh-

Los Angeles' new Metro Rapid buses are already packed with residents and tourists alike, and the city has passed a measure to expand service.
submit a proposal for a grant to study the idea of putting a Curitiba-like bus system on the boulevards of Los Angeles.

At that time, both Welborne and the city’s transit system were at a crossroads. She had previously worked as a principal at Sasaki Associates in Watertown, Massachusetts, and in 1996 was growing restless managing the shrinking L.A. office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. L.A.’s Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA), meanwhile, had a couple of problems of its own. It was in hock for up to $7 billion for 60 miles of ill-managed subway construction, even as local politicians fought over whose districts would get the last few miles of track. And in October 1996, a federal civil-rights lawsuit by the local Bus Riders Union brought a court order for the MTA to improve its bus service to minority passengers throughout the city.

One-third of all passengers were previously home-to-work motorists who are now leaving their cars at home.

“I thought, well, the city does need to know about this idea,” says Welborne. The rapid-bus concept, she emphasizes, was hardly new at the time. The MTA, like many regional transit authorities, knew of the idea’s success in North American cities like Pittsburgh and Ottawa. But nobody was out building political support for the idea among the mayor and L.A. County’s board of supervisors. So she decided to apply to the Jones Foundation for a grant.

When she began the project, strangers may have underestimated Welborne’s tenacity. To some of the people who would later become her close colleagues—particularly at the MTA—Welborne seemed to come from nowhere with a radical if not crackpot idea. It was technically viable but politically unlikely. In preparing her grant proposal, she asked planning faculty and students at the University of California, Los Angeles for help. “Half of them thought I was a housewife,” she remembers.

But by May 1997, she had won a $75,000 grant, quit SOM, and boarded a plane to Curitiba with a well-placed delegation of seven transit officials she’d assembled—among them, Gordon Linton, then head of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA); and James de la Loza, executive officer for regional transportation planning at the MTA, who would later work closely with Welborne for the agency.

Curitiba’s bus system, wired finely into the city, sold itself to Welborne’s group. “It was a very important trip,” she says. “We were so excited when we left.” De la Loza sketched possible L.A. bus routes in a note pad on the flight home.

After the trip, the MTA began studying rapid buses for its own system. “We wanted to see if there was any additional technology we could use to improve the general concept,” de la Loza explains. “We needed a bus focused on speed. With speed comes efficiency and greater customer satisfaction.”

Welborne began wooing Richard Riordan, then mayor of Los Angeles.
Angela. (The L.A. mayor sits on the 13-member MTA board and also appoints three other members.) Welborne practically moved in with MTA staff to promote the specific features that make Curitiba’s system superb—chiefly, the dedicated rights-of-way, the propayment of fares, the wide side doors on buses, fewer stops, and more frequent service.

“I kept plugging away for the dedicated lanes,” Welborne says. But accommodating them on major streets is “the toughest nut to crack,” she adds. They displace two outer lanes from the street, usually parking lanes, which motorists and business owners will fight to retain. In planning sessions she lost that debate. Now Welborne concedes that MTA staff were right to move forward without dedicated lanes. “Every increment counts,” she says.

Welborne returned to Curitiba in January 1999 with 24 people, including Riordan, and two of the five L.A. County supervisors who sit on the MTA board. The group met Jaime Lerner, who explained the development of Curitiba’s system since its first north-south line opened with two terminals in 1974. “The secret is simplicity,” Lerner told his guests. “We were never afraid to propose simple solutions.”

Riordan proved susceptible to Curitiba’s message and to Lerner’s charisma. “[Lerner] started drawing on this board, and everybody’s jaw just dropped,” Welborne says. “Then our mayor started drawing. It was really cool. It was instrumental in getting the whole movement going.”

Welborne also kept pressing the idea on FTA head Linton, and the rapid bus system’s potential began to dawn on him. Many cities face a long wait for federal money for commuter- or light-rail systems, because congressional funding does not keep up with demand (see page 48). As a result, transportation officials across the country are searching urgently for ways to move millions of people less expensively. After travelling to Brazil with Welborne, Linton helped organize a consortium that now counts 17 metropolitan transit agencies interested in rapid buses.

The cost of building rapid-bus systems comes in well below that of building rail routes. By one estimate that Welborne cites, a subway costs $300 million per mile to build. Light-rail costs $75 million per mile. But a full-service busway like that found in Curitiba costs $20 million.
Rapid buses are not always cheaper than rail service to install, however, contends William Millar, president of the American Public Transportation Association, in Washington, D.C. Millar, formerly general manager of the Port Authority of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, notes that the last busway completed in Pittsburgh (part of a hugely successful 16.1-mile bus system that relies on dedicated lanes) cost $326.8 million for 6 miles—but the conditions were unusually difficult. “Some systems require very large civil structures to make them work,” Millar says.

Of course they may, replies Welborne, but the point is that, generally, per dollar, a city can build more rapid-bus capacity than any other type of system. Rapid-bus lines can be built more flexibly than light-rail and can move nearly as many people if pushed to their full scale.

The MTA opened two demonstration lines on June 24, 2000. Under the logo “Metro Rapid,” one line runs along Wilshire Boulevard from Whittier Boulevard in Montebello to Ocean Boulevard in Santa Monica; the other travels along Ventura Boulevard from Universal City to Warner Center.

Without a dedicated lane, the Metro Rapid pilot buses seem much like conventional express service, except that their floors are lower and they make infrequent stops every mile or so. The buses cruise along fairly quickly, with timed traffic signals keeping lights green along each route. At peak rush hour on Wilshire continued on page 111

![Existing and Proposed Metro Rapid routes](image)

Rapid-bus service in Los Angeles as proposed to the MTA (above), includes two phases of Metro Rapid bus service (the first phase involves lines along Wilshire and Ventura Boulevards) alongside other existing and future metro transit services.
Metro Crusader
continued from page 48

Boulevard, a bus arrives at each Metro Rapid stop every two and a half minutes. Travel speeds are 25 percent faster than conventional service.

The new lines fulfill nearly all of MTA's expectations. Ridership on the rapid routes is up 25 to 35 percent over that of conventional lines. "We've seen an increase in traditional riders, but also significant gains in discretionary riders," says de la Loza. A telling statistic suggests that one-third of all passengers on the Wilshire Metro Rapid run were previously home-to-work motorists who are now leaving their cars at home.

The performance on the pilot routes has persuaded the MTA to make them permanent and to begin expanding the system by as much as 22 additional routes, de la Loza says. In June, MTA's board voted to spend $212 million developing a peak-hour dedicated curbside lane for the 13-mile Wilshire line.

The lanes, however, can be dedicated only if each affected municipality agrees to them—Los Angeles is behind the idea, but the project will be less effective if Beverly Hills and Santa Monica don't cooperate. The rapid-bus caucus already faces opposition on several fronts. Some opponents are rail junkies—Welborne calls them "guys who like trains"—who want steel-wheel transit or nothing. Other opponents fear anything but the status quo.

Wally Marks, a real estate manager and president of the Miracle Mile Civic Coalition, a business improvement group along the museum strip of Wilshire Boulevard, deems the Metro Rapid pilot buses "very positive." But his group objects to dedicated lanes down Wilshire. "We don't want to make [Wilshire] a mini-transit freeway," says Marks. "That's not how we build communities—going right through something without stopping to smell the flowers." For now, Marks can live with lanes dedicated only during peak hours. "But as long as it's a kernel of an idea for 24-hour service, we don't support anything," he says. "Which is too bad, because we all need better transportation around here."

"Inevitably, Wilshire is going to be the hardest street to do, and unfortunately, [MTA] chose to do it first," observes Welborne, who now works as managing director of the Grand Avenue Committee in downtown L.A. "Transit systems are designed by politics," she adds, "not by planning."

Politics is all Welborne will take credit for in the rapid-bus rollout, for the technology is not new and its deployment surely isn't either. "The only thing I did," she says, "was take everybody to Brazil and get the politicians to see that it would work."