

## 6. CALIFORNIA FINDINGS

We applied the apportioning methodology to the 28 California Urbanized Areas identified by the Census Bureau before 1990.

In the table that follows, the first and second columns of figures show how much rural land was consumed and converted into urban land during the period studied.

[Cities with data in the 1980-1990 column were designated Urbanized Areas for the first time in 1980. The fact that there are two different lengths of study does not alter the comparisons of percentages in the two right-hand columns. And where the Census Bureau combined Urbanized Areas during the period of the study, data were adjusted so that comparisons are accurate.]

Read the table like this, using the first line of the table as an example:

6. The total Antioch-Pittsburgh Urbanized Area sprawled out during the 10-year period covered by Census figures and consumed 35.5 square miles of rural land, converting it into urban land.
7. 67% of that 35.5-square-mile Overall Sprawl was related to the population growth in the Urbanized Area.
8. 33% of that 35.5-square-mile Overall Sprawl was related to Per Capita Sprawl (growth in per capita land consumption).

The actual percentages of population growth and of Per Capita Sprawl are not included in this table. [Find them in Tables 1a and 1b.]

### 6.1. Population growth related to 100% of sprawl in most cities

The results of the comparisons are dramatic. Far from being an insignificant factor in California's mass sprawl, population growth is related to the overwhelming majority of that sprawl.

The unadjusted analysis showed the population growth share of sprawl to be 100% in 22 of the 28 Urbanized Areas. What this means is that in those cases, between 1970-90 or 1980-90, there was no increase in per capita land consumption in the Urbanized Area as a whole. [In Table 2, we adjusted three of the 22 to lower proportions for reasons explained in Appendix E, so that after adjustment, 19 Urbanized Areas display 100% shares of sprawl related to population growth.]

**Table 2**

Urbanized Area	Sprawl in Square Miles 1970-1990	Sprawl in Square Miles 1980-1990	% of Total Sprawl related to POPULATION GROWTH was	% of Total Sprawl related to GROWTH IN PER CAPITA LAND CONSUMPTION was
Antioch-Pittsburg		35.5	67%	33%
Bakersfield	41.1		99%	1%
Chico		7.6	100%	0%
Fairfield		8.7	100%	0%
Fresno	53.6		100%	0%
Hemet-San Jacinto		15.6	100%	0%
Lancaster-Palmdale		37.9	100%	0%
Los Angeles <sup>1</sup>	393.8		100%	0%
Modesto	17.8		100%	0%
Napa		2.0	70% <sup>6</sup>	30%
Oxnard – Ventura	45.6		100%	0%
Palm Springs		26.7	100%	0%
Redding		16.5	100%	0%
Riverside – San Bernardino	150.4		100%	0%
Sacramento <sup>2</sup>	89.7		100%	0%
Salinas	19.7		80%	20%
San Diego <sup>3</sup>	309.5		100%	0%
San Francisco-Oakland <sup>4</sup>	193.1		78%	22%
San Jose <sup>5</sup>	61.2		100%	0%
Santa Barbara	11.7		78% <sup>6</sup>	22%
Santa Cruz		24.7	74%	26%
Santa Maria		2.3	100%	0%
Santa Rosa	29.0		100%	0%
Seaside-Monterey	23.4		52%	48%
Simi Valley	22.1		100%	0%
Stockton	27.0		84% <sup>6</sup>	16%
Visalia		2.6	100%	0%
Yuba City		1.7	100%	0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,670.5</b>		<b>95%</b>	<b>5%</b>

Data sources: 1970 Census of Population, Volume 1 – Characteristics of the Population, Part 1 – United States Summary, Table 20 – Population and Land Area of Urbanized Areas, 1970 and 1960 (issued June, 1973); 1980 Census of Population, Number of Inhabitants, United States Summary, Table 34 – Population, Land Area, and Population Density of Urbanized Areas: 1980; 1990 Census of Population and Housing, Summary Population and Housing Characteristics, United States, Table 8 – Land Area and Population Density: 1990.

<sup>1</sup> Includes Anaheim, Burbank, Long Beach, Pasadena, Pomona, and Santa Ana.

<sup>2</sup> Roseville added to Urbanized Area in 1990.

<sup>3</sup> Escondido added to Urbanized Area in 1990.

<sup>4</sup> Includes Vallejo; Berkeley and Livermore added to Urbanized Area in 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Palo Alto added to Urbanized Area in 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Adjusted down from 100%; see explanation in Appendix B.

Vast amounts of some of the most scenic, fertile and biologically diverse land in the country were urbanized in those 19 areas. Nonetheless, that population growth is related to 100% of sprawl for so many California cities is a sign of some success in meeting Smart Growth “densification” goals, in that it means every one of those 19 Urbanized Areas succeeded in stopping increases in the per capita consumption of land. In most cases, the per capita consumption of land not only stopped growing but was reduced. Thus, an increase in per capita land use did not account for any sprawl.

Those 19 areas are stark reminders of the limitation of current anti-sprawl and Smart Growth efforts. Their tools for fighting sprawl are woefully inadequate because they do not address population growth. Although they met their goal of stopping Per Capita Sprawl, Overall Sprawl has been rampant in most of those cities. For example, Simi Valley encroached on another 22 square miles of rural land between 1970 and 1990. The losses were 45 square miles in Oxnard-Ventura, 53 in Fresno, 61 in San Jose, and 89 in Sacramento. Palm Springs paved over nearly 27 square miles in the 1980s alone.

For some smaller Urbanized Areas, the Overall Sprawl in actual square miles may look relatively insignificant compared to that of the large cities. But the percentage sprawl in most of those was quite large, usually running well over 25 percent.

Whether the sprawl was 19 miles (as in Salinas), or 41 miles (as in Bakersfield), or 150 miles (as in Riverside-San Bernardino), some of the finest agricultural land in the world was lost forever under the asphalt and concrete of the expanding cities.

Those 19 Urbanized Areas provide conclusive evidence that simply stopping the growth in per capita land consumption will not stop sprawl.

## **6.2. Los Angeles suggests limits of ‘the denser the better’ approach**

To stop sprawl in the face of continuing population growth, a city would have to force major increases in density on its residents. But no city has shown anywhere near the political will to regiment and restrict its inhabitants sufficiently to accommodate population growth without sprawl.

One of the chief examples of failure is the de facto champion of “densification” – Los Angeles. The designation of Los Angeles as a kind of Smart-Growth model may seem incongruous to many because of its reputation as the “sultan of sprawl” and “suburbs in search of a city.” For many Americans, Los Angeles is a sprawling model of what they don’t want their city to become. But, indeed, the Los Angeles Urbanized Area earned quantitative Smart Growth honors between 1970 and 1990.

One of the chief ideas behind Smart Growth initiatives is that denser is better. Nearly all Smart Growth policies are based on the concept that a city’s population can continue to grow indefinitely without creating a lot of sprawl. That can happen in only one way: by confining more and more people into existing urbanized areas. You know that Smart Growth efforts are reaching one of their major goals when you see density increasing. The city that packs the most people into each square mile gets the prize.

Under those measures, the champion model of Smart Growth in the entire nation since 1970 was none other than Los Angeles.

**Smart Growth Honor No. 1:** Unlike most American Urbanized Areas (but similar to most in California), Los Angeles stopped all *individual sprawl*. That is, the land per resident did not expand. In fact, the urban land per resident shrank by 8%. That means the density increased. From 5,313 residents per square mile in 1970, Los Angeles squeezed in another 500 people per square mile by 1990. Moreover, Smart Growth was achieving its goal throughout the Urbanized Area; density increased in both the core city and in the suburbs.

**Smart Growth Honor No. 2:** By 1990, land consumption per L.A. resident had dropped to 0.11 acre. That made Los Angeles the most densely populated Urbanized Area in America. No other urban area - not even New York - provided so little land per resident.<sup>1</sup> This is a model that Smart Growth planners apparently would wish for all Americans, certainly if the U.S. population continues to grow.

The fact that Los Angeles on paper deserves Smart Growth accolades raises two important questions: (1) Has the increased density improved the quality of life of those who live there? (2) Has the increased density stopped sprawl?

The first question is a complex one that is outside the scope of this study. Certainly, though, there are indicators that the increased density is related to several major causes of social stress and frustration in Los Angeles, such as overcrowded schools and traffic snarls. Retrofitting a city to accommodate high-density living is very difficult and

expensive at best and probably impossible in reality. An example would be the massive problems and expense associated with recent attempts to build a subway to serve even a tiny fraction of Los Angeles. Often, increased density results in a more congested quality of life. And congestion is a result no one is seeking.

The second question is easy to answer; Census Bureau calculations show that increasing the density in Los Angeles did not stop sprawl. Between 1970 and 1990, urban Los Angeles sprawled across an extra 394 square miles (252,160 acres). This was *in addition to* the 1,572 square miles it already occupied in 1970. Only five other Urbanized Areas in the entire country sprawled more than Los Angeles during this time period. That's hardly a model of success in combating the sprawl problem.

What accounted for this sprawl? Population growth, pure and simple. Between 1970 and 1990, the L.A. Urbanized Area grew by 3.1 million residents – largely because of the federal program of increased immigration levels and the inadequacy of federal efforts to curb illegal immigration. All those additional people had to live, work, play, commute, and be educated somewhere. Although they and the existing residents were willing and able to crowd more closely together than in the past, they did not choose to live together all in the existing urban area. That would have increased the density another 37% over what already were the densest living conditions that Americans in any Urbanized Area were willing to accept.

The unwillingness to further crowd themselves into an ever-denser Los Angeles may have been related to the non-linear nature of congestion once density reaches a certain level. For example, once freeways are near their capacities, increasing the number of cars on the road by, say, 37% can increase waiting times, traffic jams, etc., by much more than 37%.

For whatever reasons that residents refused to increase their density enough to accommodate 3.1 million additional residents, the result was the loss of another 394 square miles of orchards, farmland, natural habitat and other open and rural spaces.

Thus, just as Los Angeles is one model for meeting the Smart Growth goal of high-density living, it also is a model of how Smart Growth initiatives are likely to fail to stop sprawl under current federal policies that generate population growth.

Other models of increasing density but continuing major sprawl were Riverside-San Bernardino, which converted another 150 square miles of rural land into urbanized land, and San Diego, which consumed 309 additional square miles.

Only five California Urbanized Areas exhibited the overall American tendency to increase the urban land required for each resident. Per Capita Sprawl was related to 20% of Overall Sprawl in Salinas, 22% in San Francisco-Oakland, 26% in Santa Cruz, 33% in Antioch-Pittsburg, and 48% in Seaside-Monterey.