

So Cal ASLA 2014 Quality of Life Design Awards - VI Student Work Category

Project Title: **BLURRING THE INFRASTRUCTURAL REALM** Location: Wilshire + Fairfax, Los Angeles

Project Type: **Transportation Facilities/Urban Park/Urban Design** Purpose: **Landscape Infrastructure**

Los Angeles, a city whose evolution and iconic nature is inextricably linked to infrastructure, is transforming. Today we witness a renaissance, the build out of a mass public transportation system by 2030, nearly 100 years after the first freeway parkway was built. A city, once solely dominated by the car, is attempting to prevent its' own strangulation; returning to growth from within rather than continuing to sprawl. We see the return of a viable multiple means of transportation: high speed rail, subway, light rail, rapid buses, bike ways, and pedestrianized streets. With this third wave of transportation infrastructure, how does the implementation of a vast network of subway stations affect the future growth of Los Angeles? Is it also possible to concurrently deploy a landscape infrastructure that is emergent, resilient, and successional to this arid land; that creates ecological corridors, responds and treats environmental systems at large, and provides a vast green way system which unites city nodes and offers various experiences to a cross section of various cultures? How do we imagine this infrastructure transforming the nature of the city and its' public realm, and how is the landscape a participatory agent in this transformation? This design proposal imagines the potential of the highly transformative nature of the Purple Subway Line at multiple scales: the regional scale as a vast public green space network; the urban scale as regenerative activity nodes; and at the local streetscape scale as a green parkway and urban neighborhood park. Underlying this exploration is the examination of the relationship between landscape, infrastructure, and the spatial bounds and limits of the public realm.

REGIONAL SCALE :The Purple Subway Line westward extension will offer the great possibility of spanning the east west transect of the city, from river to ocean through many diverse neighborhoods. Coupled with a vast bikeway/ greenway system running north south from the subway stations and on major arterial roads, one can imagine a more pedestrianized green network, an alternate means of living in the mobile city. These green parkways become ecological corridors linking the various green patches and fragments found throughout the city as well as creating a continuous matrix to manage storm water issues through bioswales and rain gardens.

URBAN CITY SCALE The location of stations brings high density development to those areas. As more people use public transit, these stations become activity nodes which bring pedestrian life back to the streets; making the street and the stations an important part of the public realm. These stations begin to transform monoculture clusters to multi-modal activity nodes with landscape emanating from these intersections.

LOCAL SCALE At the local street and neighborhood scale, how does landscape actually manifest and participate in the creation of the public realm? This design proposal literally piggybacks landscape on infrastructure and expands the boundaries of the public realm by engaging the various underutilized building fronts, setbacks, and blank walls to create an extroverted public square which engages city edges. The form of the station creates an iconic landscape object which is spatially framed by the surrounding context, expanding it beyond property lines. The centerpiece of the station is the sloped green roof and landform constructed from the reuse of excavated earth from subway tunneling. The roof landform becomes a high point, a place for observation and reflection, that mediates between the hardscape of the urban street and an intimate softscaped forest. The berm form acts as a sound buffer and barrier from the main boulevard traffic noise as well as giving the landscape elevation for gravity fed irrigation. The center of the roof is a sun lawn surrounded by a native meadow. The surface of the roof landform is dimpled with skylights and a series of undulating mounds that form temporal rain water basins which extend the plant season and visual interest. Rain water, not completely absorbed or captured, flows down the topographic form irrigating other vegetated areas and ultimately is collected and filtered in rain gardens at the base. The sides of the landform are made of gabion walls which filter storm water and become terraces for informal gatherings, a series of meandering ramps for a stroll under the expansive canopy of oak trees, or as tiered plaza steps to observe and engage street life. The west side becomes a natural gathering place for public performances by repurposing the blank exterior museum wall and shaded environment as a backdrop for public events. The south side of the landform scales down to an intimate quiet neighborhood urban park forested with oak trees and dappled light, creating an enjoyable shaded place during summer months. The surrounding meandering pavement pattern and placement of seating planters induce happenstance occurrences which culminate at the tiered plaza steps. The bike and pedestrian paths cross and intersect to encourage public life exchange while providing places to sit and congregate. These paths continue to meander, weave, and connect three urban blocks engaging existing building stoops and landscaped setbacks as part of this public realm. The streets between blocks become shared streets where pedestrians and vehicles occupy the same paved surface. Public space can expand and contract for festivals and street events. The boundaries between the public and private realms blur to weave a dynamic urban space that engages city edges and urban life.

PROCESS Employing public surveys, field interviews, and field work, the project began with an investigation and analysis of the existing pedestrian conditions using the twelve quality criteria for pedestrian landscapes developed by Jan Gehl which served to inform the design.