

**From:** Xu, Yun

**To:** Bonnie Shrewsbury & Barry Waite

**Topic:** Examining the Accessibility of Active Los Angeles Civic Art Projects from a GIS Perspective

**Date Submitted (revised version):** Dec 4, 2012

▪ **Background:**

In December 2004, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors passed a Civic Art Policy mandating that 1% of eligible costs for new county capital projects and renovations over \$500,000 should be used to create public artworks. Hence, from 2005, 1% of design and construction costs on those County projects have been allocated to a Civic Art Special Fund. The Civic Art Program, overseen by the Civic Art Committee of the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, has implemented over 40 civic art projects for a variety of county facilities including libraries, courts, fire stations, parks, jails, and health clinics. Projects range in size from \$30,000 to \$300,000+ and are managed by a skilled staff dedicated to facilitating innovative projects and providing access to high-quality artistic experiences for the residents of Los Angeles County.

The policy is structured to allow for integrated permanent public art enhancements, temporary or portable visual art commissions, restoration of historic artworks, and the creation of cultural spaces or programming. The program has also undertaken the first-ever comprehensive inventory of county-owned artwork in order to define Los Angeles County's civic art collection. The county's collection is comprised of works that have been created both before and after the 2005 launch of the new Civic Art Program. The inventory process identifies artworks, creates initial condition assessments, and adds descriptions to this website. To date, the county's collection includes over 90 artworks, 6 of which have been fully restored.

In its more than 150 years history, Los Angeles County has accumulated an extensive array of art works, but has never cataloged these objects. The county's civic art collection is not like a museum's; its artworks are spread throughout the county's over 4,700 square miles, in its hundreds of buildings and sites, and in its dozens of departments. Los Angeles County civic artworks range from traditional sculptures to mural art. Given how scattered and occasionally hidden the county's collection of civic artworks is, it is important to create a permanent and fixed location where information about them can be found. The Commission has started to manage a survey of the civic artworks the county already possesses or the projects that are in progress by assessing the conditions of these works and providing

the public with information about them. Gathering information about the county's collection helps fulfill its goal of enriching lives by making the public aware of artworks in their midst and enhancing their enjoyment of them.

- **Problem Statement:**

Civic artworks offer a window into the county's history. A crucial benefit of the collection documentation is that it provides an easy-to-find place for anyone, county staff, art researchers, and residents, who want to learn more about county civic artworks. However, the assessment and inventory are done only at the level of bookkeeping and photo taking of those county-owned artworks. This public art management problem is not just with the Civic Art program, but applies to many public artworks in the county regardless of the ownership. Throughout my research for the information on public art pieces, details are always lost in terms of their geographical locations. There is no record of public artwork list with specific or standardized addresses attached to the art descriptions regardless of their nature of being "public" and having definite locations. Another problem with the Civic Art program is that no assessment on visibility and accessibility are conducted even if one of the program goals is to allow a larger body of the community to get exposure to county's civic artworks.

Therefore, with the limited availability of data and the intention to assess civic art projects' accessibility to the general public, this report on examining the active ongoing projects of the county's civic art program is conducted from a GIS perspective.

- **Methodology:**

There are currently 24 active civic art projects affiliated to the program. The goal is to locate those projects and assess their visibility and accessibility to the public.

- **Data collection:**

Data are needed in three categories: census tract data on county and city levels, artwork addresses, and variable data that used to assess public accessibility.

For census tract data including Los Angeles County line shapefiles and attribute data can be downloaded from U.S. Census Bureau. For artworks locations, their description can be found online at Los Angeles County Arts Commission's website, including the artists, project overviews as well as their approximate

address. For example, for one of the ongoing artworks “Firestone Boulevard Streetscape”, no specific address information can be found but only “Firestone and Hopper, Los Angeles, CA 90002”. Only when you look more into the project description can you find the more detailed location as “a median fence to be installed along Firestone Boulevard, between Hooper and Compton Avenue”. Given the nature of public artworks, an exact address could be hard to define, but if recorded using GIS application, be it at a specific location point or spread through some distance, the artwork’s geographical data can always be reflected onto a map. For accessibility variables, this report focuses the artworks accessibility to the community through public transits (bus lines or primary roads), the characteristics of nearby area and the population density in the proximity. On public transit accessibility, county streets and transportation data can be found on the county’s GIS webpage. Street features are categorized and public transit methods are identified in those data files. Those data also specify the area characteristics by mapping out the Central Business District (CBD)/ non-CBD areas as well as the county landmarks both on area level and point level. The total population spreadsheet is also found on U.S. Census Bureau website, which is used later to study the population density near civic artworks as one criteria to examine exposure and accessibility. Data are in the format of tabular table/ spreadsheet, census tract shapefiles and street feature lines.

- **Data processing:**

Major GIS skills applied in this project include geocoding to locate civic artworks with 2 miles buffering, integrating multiple layers to explore the location of those art projects in relation to nearby communities, and joining population tabular table to census tract data for visualizing the interaction of population and the location of those active civic art projects as one method of examining accessibility and public exposure.

- **Findings:**

After matching addresses of active civic art projects onto census tract, as shown on the map below, it’s easy to visualize the location of ongoing artworks. Most civic artworks are in the area of southern Los Angeles County where a higher density of incorporated cities is identified.

- Public Transit (Map #2 & #3)

Map #1



In terms of public transit access to those civic artworks, bus lines including express lines are added onto the map along with rapid bus services, as shown in Map #2; almost all of the civic artworks located in the southern and south eastern part of Los Angeles County are accessible via relative convenient public transportation system as service lines are located within 2 miles range from the artwork spots and daily transit riders have this possibility to see those civic artworks during their commute, while those to the north of the City of Los Angeles receive less or even no public transportation. Map #3 shows the transportation accessibility via primary

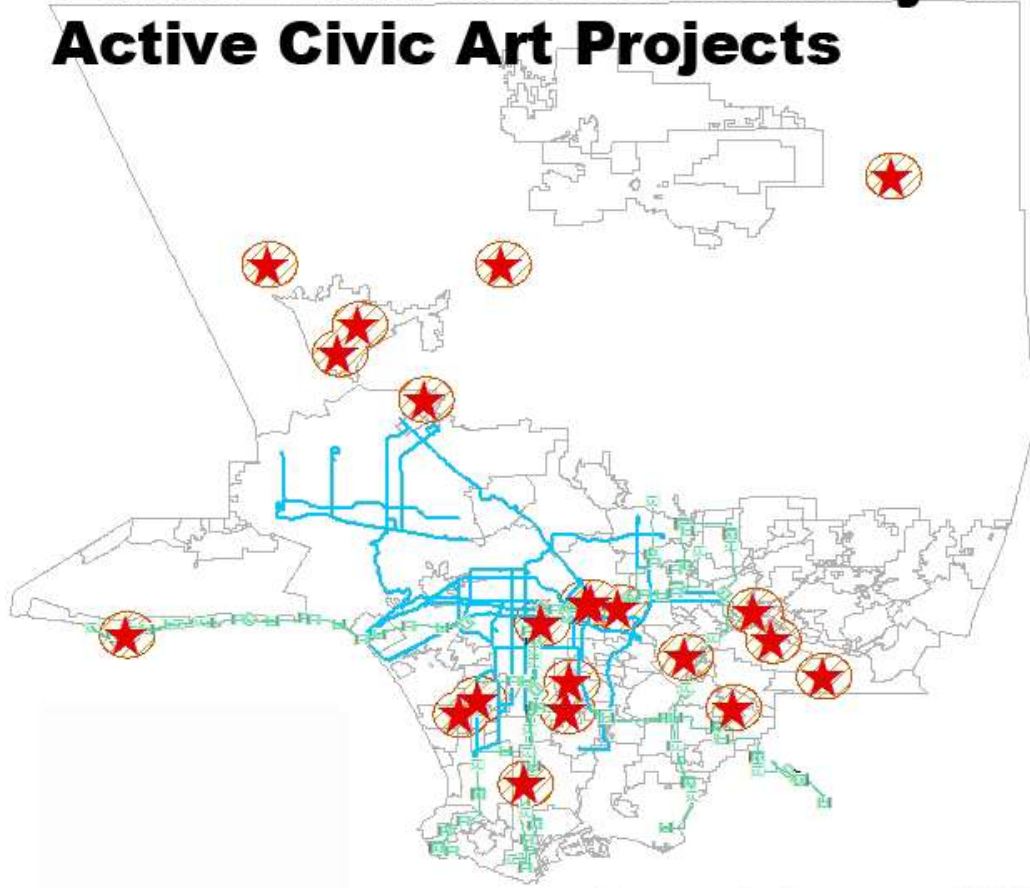
roads. As the southern part has more complex and advanced road network, the civic artwork projects located there are also receiving higher accessibility from that perspective.

- Nearby Area Characteristics (Map #4)

As shown from Map #4, the blue lines indicate local central business districts and the pink lines indicate non-CBD areas. Light orange areas and green dots reflect Los Angeles County landmarks, each representing cultural or natural attractions with measures in geographical continuity. Most of the civic artworks are located in non-CBD areas and are somehow away from natural sceneries with the exception of the one in Malibu. Although landmark points are detected nearby civic artwork spots, but there is no evident geographical relations showed between civic artworks and major landmarks, which indicates that the site selection of active civic artworks didn't integrate with the sought-after attractions and might lose some visibility and chances of getting more exposure among the visitors and residents.

Map #2

# Public Transit Accessibility to Active Civic Art Projects



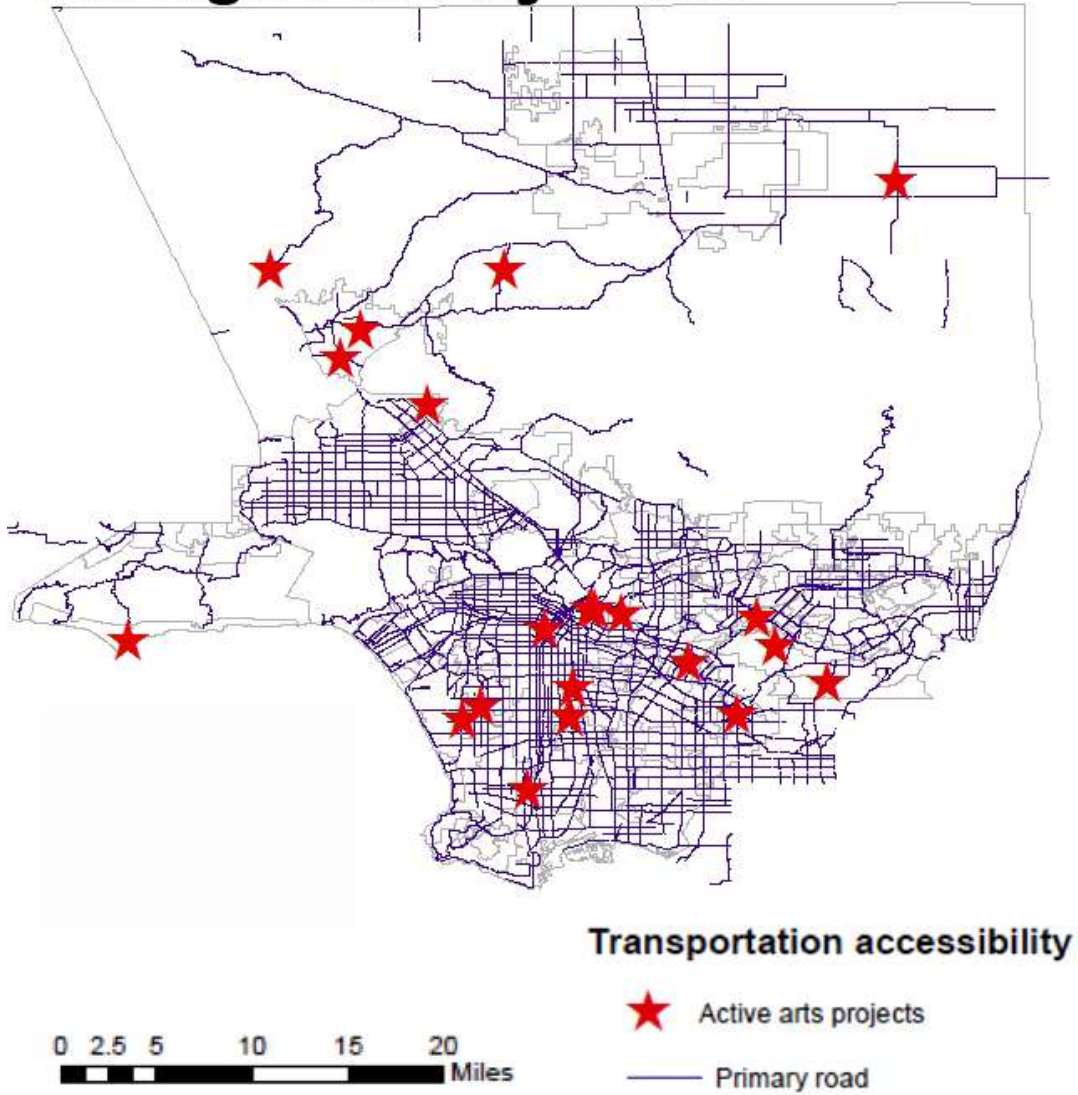
## Transportation accessibility

- ★ Active arts projects
- Bus lines & Express
- Lim&Express0612
- ▨ 2 miles buffer

0 2.5 5 10 15 20 Miles

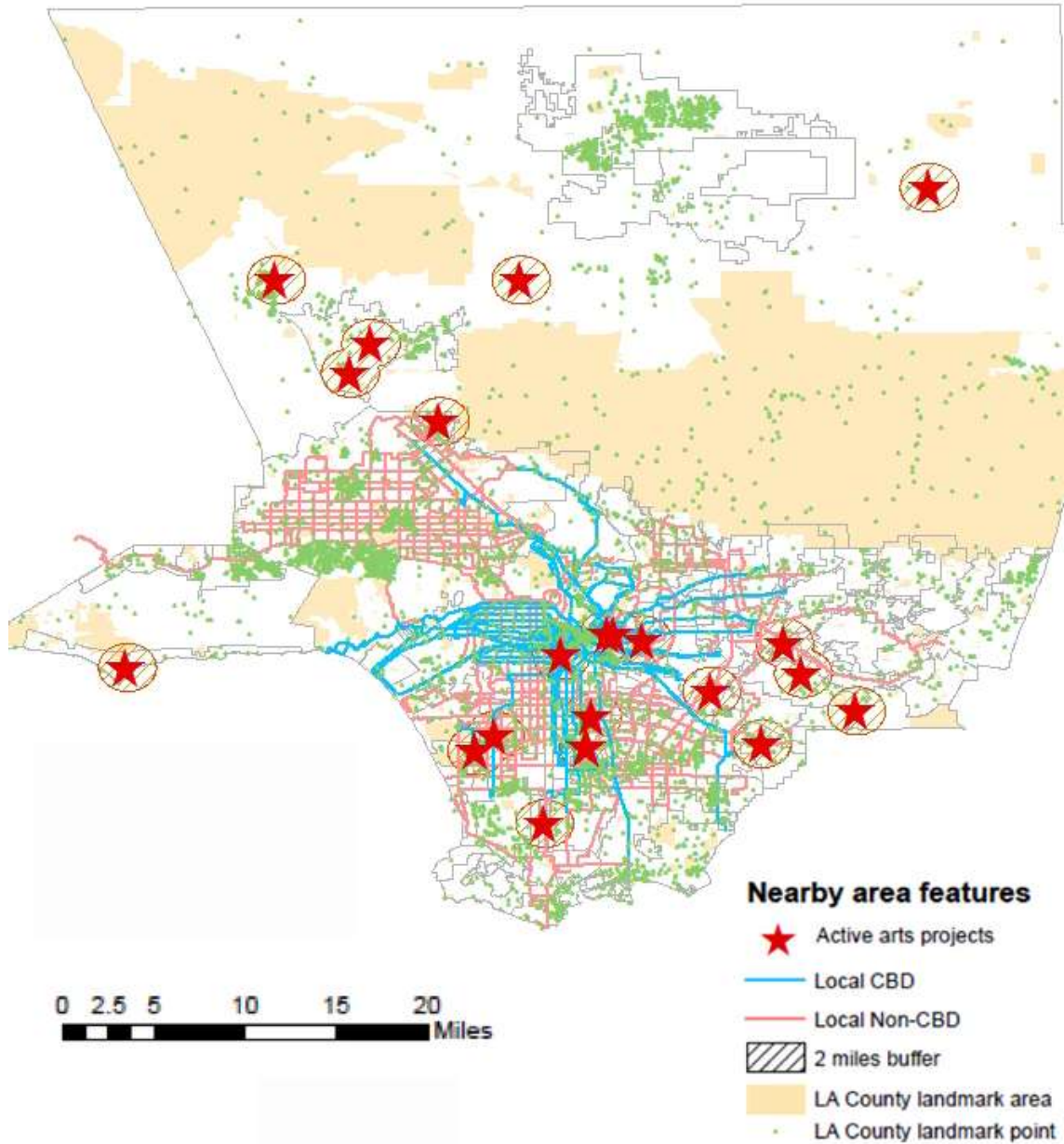
Map #3

# Civic Art Projects Accessibility through Primary Roads



Map #4

## Nearby Area Characteristics



- Nearby Area Population (Map #5)

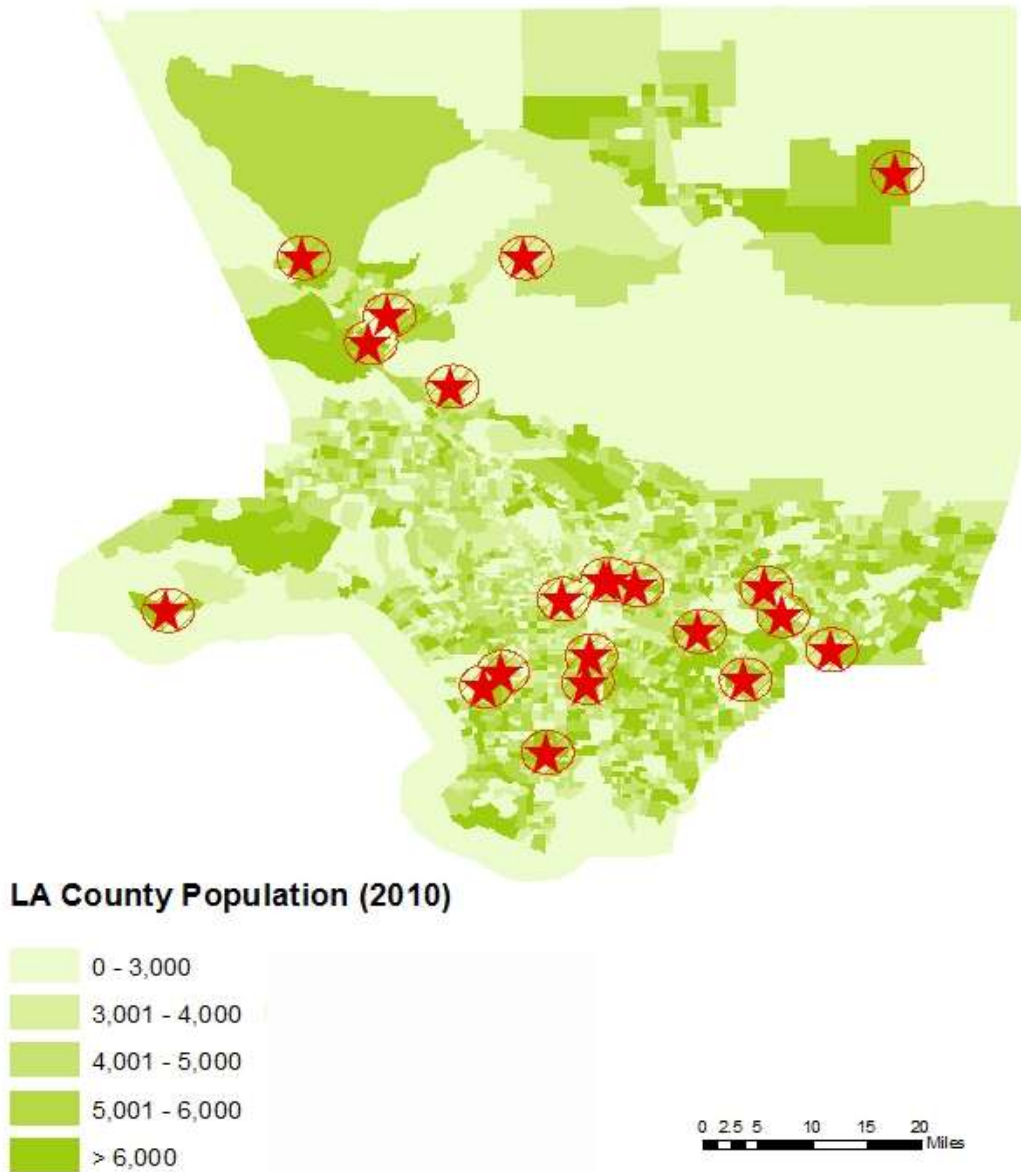
There is a relatively clear pattern of population in the proximity of the civic artwork locations. Regardless of the population differentiation in different areas, almost all of those active art projects



find home in darker green communities that enjoy a higher density of residents, which will help promote civic art in the community and have the potential to receive a larger grassroots audience.

Map #5

## Nearby Area Population





- **Conclusion:**

From the above-mentioned aspects examined, ongoing civic art projects near the City of Los Angeles (southern part of Los Angeles County) received higher accessibility and visibility potentials than projects in the other areas as they enjoy better public transportation system in the nearby areas, are more likely to be seen by daily transit rider and CBD employers. A good example that the county's art commission can learn from is the Metro's display of public art. Art creates a sense of place and engages transit riders. Metro's Art Department has commissioned more than 300 artists to incorporate art into a wide array of transportation projects throughout Los Angeles County. Located amid Metro's different train lines, public artworks are showcased to daily transit riders, and hence received far more exposure than art pieces hidden in less accessible places. Since one of the goals of the county's Art Commission is to enlarge the audience for public art, it is recommended that easy public accessibility be included in site selection, which helps to promote frequent visits and enhance visibility of those artworks.

In terms of population, all projects are somehow on the same level due to relatively populous site selection. There is a higher possibility that public art receives due attention if it is located in a relatively populated area. Also for the aesthetics of the community, finding public art home in a crowded neighborhood cultivates a sense of artistic belonging. It is not to say that less populous areas don't deserve public artworks, but the county's art commission could probably find other ways to bring civic art into the community with smaller population, for example in the forms of multimedia, art tours, or seasonal art exhibits.

There is no location pattern regarding vicinity to major LA County landmarks or attractions. Future project or site selection of civic artworks can also take into consideration of leveraging nearby major landmark to receive higher visibility potentials from residents and visitors. When talking of places of public art clusters, the first spot that pops into people's mind may be downtown Los Angeles. It is true that downtown LA, especially near Bunker Hills and the Financial District, boasts a large amount of public artworks; but probably the fact that they are part of the renowned CBD area also contributes to the fame. Leveraging existing reputation might give new civic artwork more attention. The art commission could also include proximity to frequently visited landmarks or sightseeing attractions as a criterion for new artwork site selection.

- **Limitation:**

Due to data limitation, only the current civic artwork projects are examined. Till now, the Los Angeles Arts Commission has inventoried a civic art collection of nearly 90 works, but their addresses are not specified and even if they are, the format isn't standardized and need extensive data entry work to correct the unmatched addresses. The difficulty in locating the exact the address of civic artworks limits the extension of this report and further research. Also there is no data on the detailed fund amount in accordance to each project; otherwise, a more in-depth research concerning the efficiency of fund using with the help of GIS tools can be explored and would give some insights onto future project selection and civic art community involvement.