

Assessment of Alternative Transit Center Locations

Introduction:

Few citizens of Venice take transit. Nevertheless, transit services are important to many coming to Venice: workers, beachgoers, and other visitors. One problem with taking a bus to Venice as a visitor is that it is often not clear where you alight from the bus. It would help if there were some form of transit center where bus routes come together and where one knows s/he has arrived. With the 2026 World Cup and the 2028 Olympic Games around the corner, it is timely to address this problem.

What would a transit center look like? It could be as simple as a series of bus shelters along a sidewalk or (preferably) more attractive and user-friendly. Ideally it would have designated bus stops for each route and digital bus arrival information. There would be some place for a bus at the end of its route to “layover” (let the driver take a break). Weather protection and sun shading must be provided as would seating. If the transit center is off the street and within a property far more room will be needed for bus turning movements than if street space is used for these movements.

Where should a transit center be located? Three locations have been mentioned: the west end of Venice Boulevard within its median, the Windward Circle-Windward Avenue area, and the MTA's retired bus garage site. Figure 1 shows the three alternatives on a map of the existing bus services. Figure 2 shows the three sites using Google Earth aerial perspective.

How should a location be selected? A viable alternative would have to meet certain criteria. The ones this assessment will use are the following:

1. It should have space available for several bus stops and for the turning movements buses require.
2. It should be along existing transit routes.
3. It should be near Ocean Front Walk and the beach, the assumed destination of most visitors, and give some sense of where they are.
4. It should enhance its location and possibly catalyze further improvements.
5. It should have community and political support.

Transit Service Within Venice:

Venice is served by three transit agencies and six bus routes as shown in Figure 1. They are:

Santa Monica Transit:

Route 1: Windward Circle up Main Street to Santa Monica Blvd.. to Westwood,
Route 3: Santa Monica downtown to LAX People Mover via Lincoln Boulevard,
Route 18: Marina del Rey to Abbot Kinney to Montana Ave. to Wetwood.

Culver City Transit:

Route 1: Windward Circle to Washington Blvd. to Fairfax Ave..

Figure 1: Transit Center Alternatives and Present Bus Routes



Figure 3
Transit Connections

Figure 2: Alternative Transit Center Sites

MTA Bus Garage Site



Windward Site



Lot 731 Site



MTA:

Route 33: Santa Monica downtown thru Venice to Venice Blvd. to Union Station,
Route 108: Venice Peninsula thru Marina del Rey to Pico Rivera via Slauson Ave.

Assessment of the Three Potential Transit Center Locations:

A. West End of Venice Boulevard Within the Median

This location, City parking lot #731 has been the proposed site of the Dell Housing and Parking facility for over eight years. The project has been and remains been controversial. The project is presently in litigation. LADOT, the agency apparently with the authority to decide how City parking lots are used, recommended not pursuing the housing element on the site, but moving it to City parking lot #701 near the Venice Library.¹ Parking lot #731 would become a mobility hub including “car share, bike share, micro-mobility, shuttle service, transit store, etc.”.

However, it is unclear how bus transit access would benefit the parking lot or the mobility center. Those driving to Lot 731 by car would not need to transfer to a regional bus, nor would those arriving by bicycle, scooter, etc.²

1. Is space for the transit center available? Not on the site because bus turning movements within the site would eliminate too many parking spaces. Because bus doors are on the right side, half the bus stops would be on the sidewalks opposite Lot 731. There is limited sidewalk space around the site for bus-related furniture.
2. Is the Lot 731 site along a bus route? Yes, Culver City Transit Route #1.
3. Is the Lot 731 site near Ocean Front Walk and the beach? Yes, many beachgoers already use Lot 731 especially during the summer months. It is 500 feet away from Ocean Front Walk. It should be noted, however, that the sidewalks to Ocean Front Walk west of Pacifica Avenue are narrow with little likelihood of ever being widened.
4. Would the transit center enhance the site and area? Again, those arriving at the mobility center other than by bus, would not have a reason to transfer to a regional bus as they would have arrived at their destination. Therefore, it is doubtful that a bus center would enhance the site and might well hurt the site by removing parking spaces.
5. Would a transit center here be supported? It is unclear when the controversy about the future use Lot 731 will be resolved. Even if it is resolved soon, there will still be advocates on both sides that might well oppose the mobility center or a transit center. With time running out before the 2028 Olympic Games, this site cannot be assured.

¹ Proposed Redevelopment Of Municipal Parking Lot No. 731 In Venice For Affordable Housing, Staff Report to Board of Transportation Commissioners, December 10th, 2024.

² If Lot #731 is used as a commuter parking lot during the week for an express bus to downtown Los Angeles, then the use of a transfer to bus would make sense. But that option is highly unlikely with demand for beach parking spaces being what they are.

B. Windward Circle-Windward Avenue (Windward):

Windward Circle and Windward Avenue was the center of Venice 100 years ago. In some ways it still is.. The "VENICE" sign that hangs over Windward Avenue is recognized worldwide. Together Windward Circle and Windward Avenue east of Pacific Avenue cover a huge area of roadway most of which is inefficiently used.

1. Is space for the transit center available? Yes, as three bus routes already serve this location. However, the stops are scattered and it is not clear what bus route stops where. Therefore, to make this a transit center Windward Avenue might have to be abandoned and become partially a pedestrian space.
2. Is the Windward site along a bus route? Yes. Three transit routes serve this area already with two of them terminating there.
3. Is the Windward site near Ocean Front Walk and the beach? It would be about 800 feet away from Ocean Front Walk. However, the walk to Ocean Front Walk would be more interesting than the same walk from the two other sites. The hanging VENICE sign provides clear direction as does the view of the beach beyond. The pedestrian-only phase of the red light signal at Pacific Avenue provides a safe crossing of Pacific Avenue.
4. Would the transit center enhance the site and area? It could. Were Windward Avenue to be closed off, the roadway could become a pedestrian plaza or park along with the transit center. It may even prompt the pedestrianization of Windward Avenue west of Pacific Avenue.
5. Would a transit center here be supported? Maybe, especially if it results in the pedestrianization of Windward Avenue a long-time objective of many.

The MTA Bus Garage Site:

What eventually goes on this site is still unknown beyond a recognition that it should include a lot of housing units. There is clearly room for a transit center on the site. However, housing units and bus transit in close proximity is not an ideal marriage even with electric buses. But it could be made acceptable with careful design. The question is when.

1. Is space for the transit center available? Yes, on-site. Otherwise the bus stops would be along the (presently) uninviting west sidewalk of Main Street or a slightly better sidewalk experience on the east side.
2. Is the MTA Garage site along a bus route? Yes. two transit routes serve Main Street. However, the northbound stops are on the east side of Main Street.
3. Is the MTA Garage site near Ocean Front Walk and the beach? Yes, 650 feet away. At present, it is not clear how to get from this site to the beach. Having crossed Pacific Avenue, there are 3-4 possible streets/alleys to take.
4. Would the transit center enhance the site and area? Unlikely, because bus transit and multi-unit housing in the same location inherently raise concerns.

5. Would a transit center here be supported? At this point in time, the future plans for the site is uncertain and there is no clear timeframe for these decisions. Therefore, it is not possible to determine whether a transit center would or would not be supported.

Summary:

The table below summarizes the assessment. The Lot #731 Site and the MTA Garage Site each have their own problems of near-term availability. It is also uncertain whether an on-site bus center would be the best use of the space required for these two alternatives.

Criterion	Lot #731 Location	Windward Location	MTA Garage Location
1. Is space for the transit center available?	Probably not on-site	Yes, in street	Yes, on-site
2. Is the location along a bus route?	1	3	2
3. Is the location near Ocean Front Walk and the beach?	500' to Ocean Front Walk	800' to Ocean Front Walk	650' to Ocean Front Walk
4. Would the transit center enhance the site and area?	Unlikely	Likely	Unlikely
5. Would a transit center be supported?	Unknown	Unknown, but maybe	Unknown

Conclusion:

The best location for a Venice transit center is at the Windward Circle-Windward Avenue location. It has the opportunity to make use of roadway space for bus turning movements and bus stop locations. It could be a catalyst to add more pedestrian space in the area. It also has the best chance of being implemented before the 2028 Olympic Games given the uncertainties of the other two locations.