

# Entrepot

Cities, Culture, Politics and Life

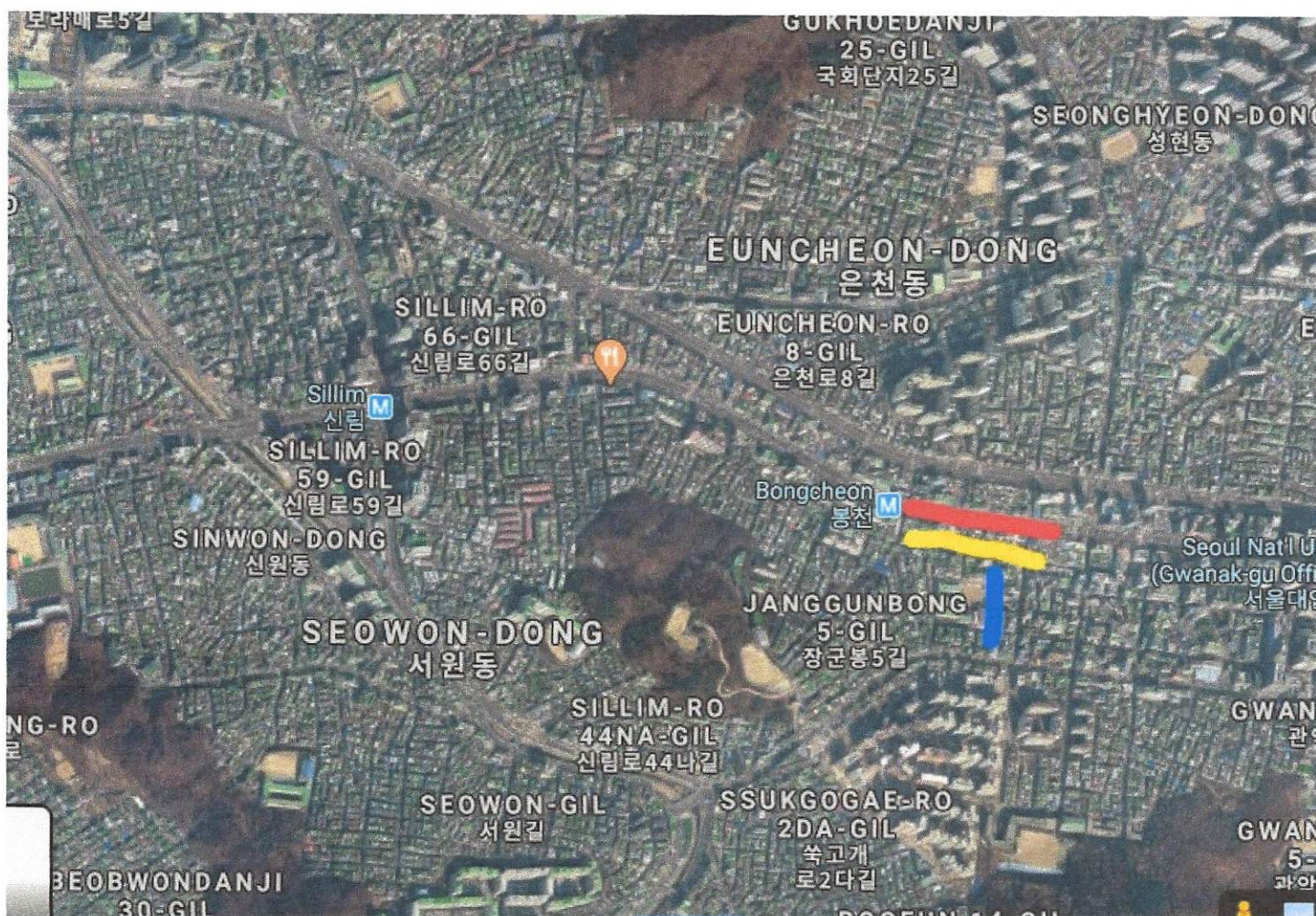


## How can LA Urbanize like East Asia? Densify Residential Streets!

Last week, I wrote about how Seoul, and similarly-formed East Asian cities, provide a model for LA developing into a transit-friendly metropolis without densifying around a core. This model would prove more compatible with LA's existing urban form and produce more equitable outcomes. LA's Downtown-focused redevelopment model encourages gentrification and limits new development to the point where it fails to make a dent in regional home prices (if not causing home prices to rise in areas being redeveloped-as the new housing in these areas becomes more desirable to the urban bourgeoisie).

What steps can LA achieve to urbanize its vast expanse like Seoul (or Tokyo or Taipei for that matter?). Over the next few days, I will attempt to answer this question through a series of articles. Today's examines the effect of residential neighborhoods' built environments on travel behavior.

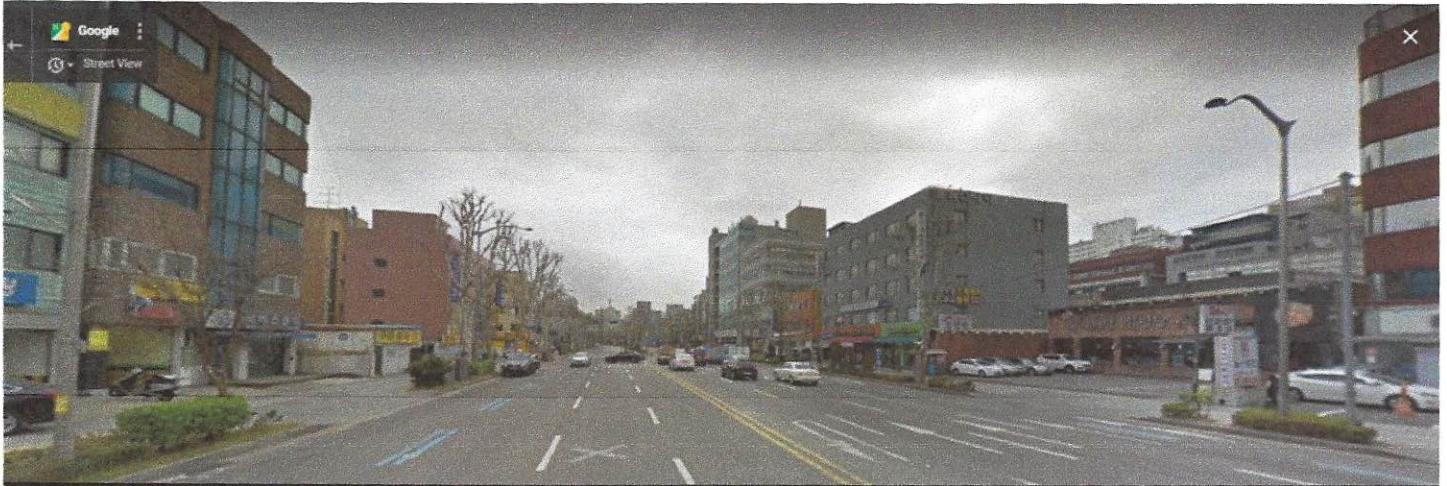
As in American cities, most neighborhoods in Seoul have a pretty clear street hierarchy. Take the Bongcheon-Dong neighborhood in the southern part of the city, for instance.



Street hierarchy in Seoul's Sillim-Dong area. Red= arterial street (generally, the streets that cut through the landscape like rivers and canyons); Yellow=neighborhood commercial; Blue= residential.

The residential streets (example in blue) are little wider than alleyways, with cars and pedestrians sharing the single lane. These empty out onto 1-2 lane

neighborhood-serving commercial streets, with small shops or farmer's markets stalls to serve the community (example in yellow). Finally, six-to-eight-lane arterials (red) ring the edge of the neighborhood. Like Sepulveda and Wilshire Boulevards, these behemoths carry torrents of motorized vehicle (auto and bus) traffic.



*Seoul-Arterial Street Example*



*Seoul-Neighborhood Commercial Street Example*



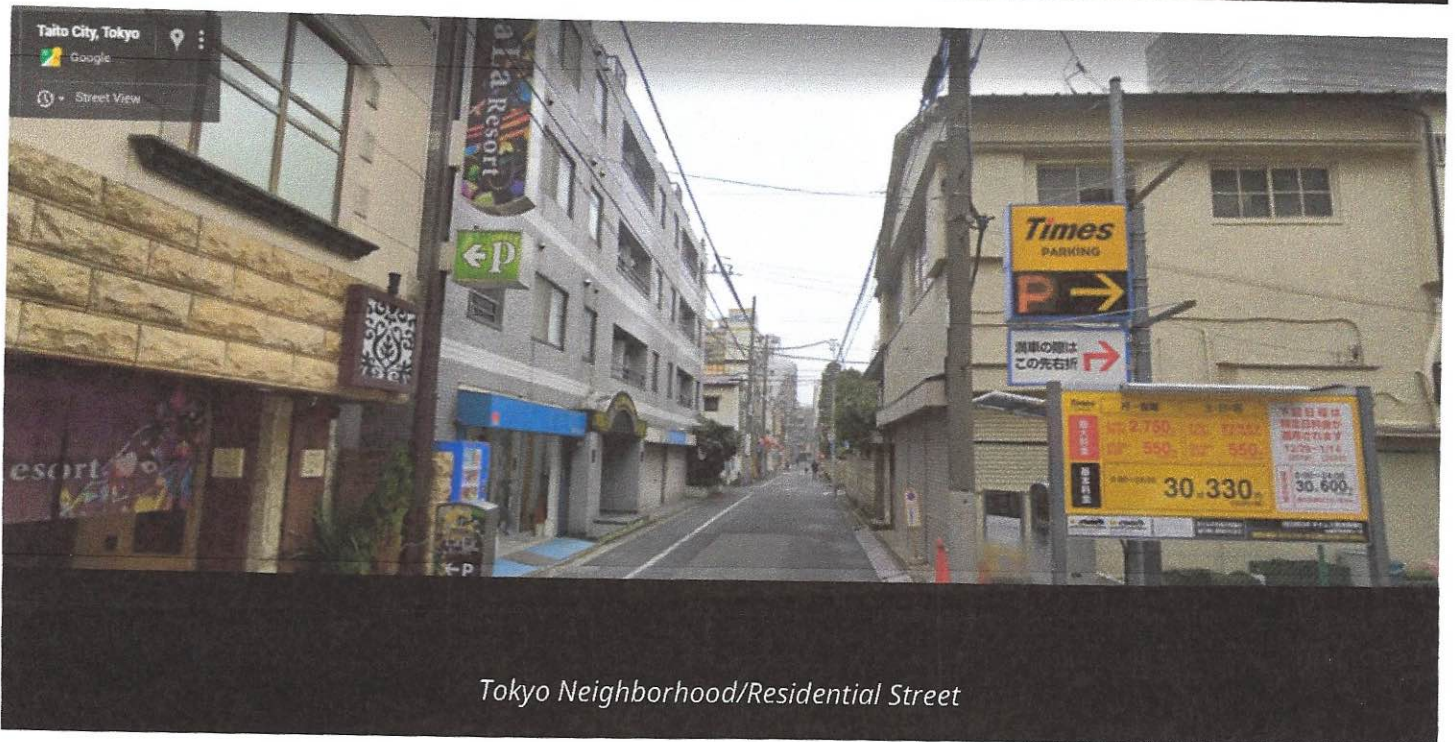


*Seoul-Residential Street Example*

Tokyo has a similar hierarchy .



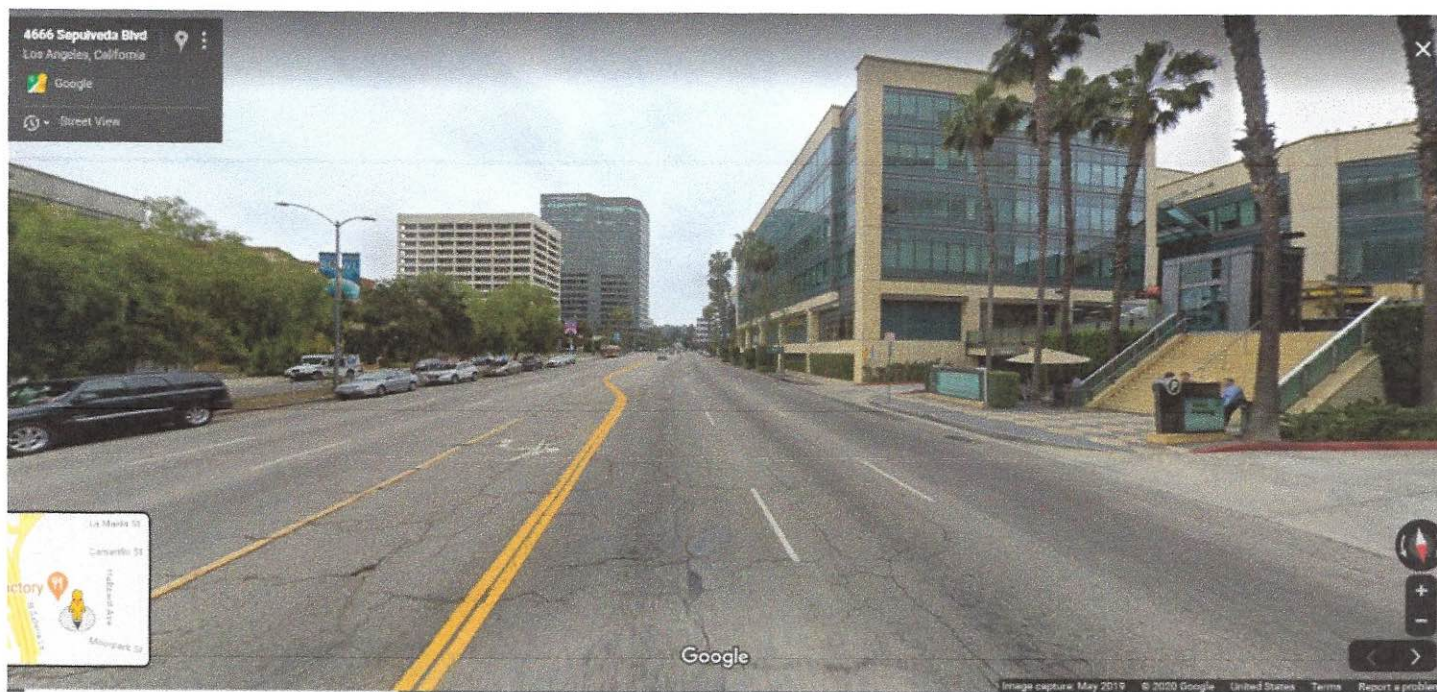
*Tokyo Arterial Street*



*Tokyo Neighborhood/Residential Street*

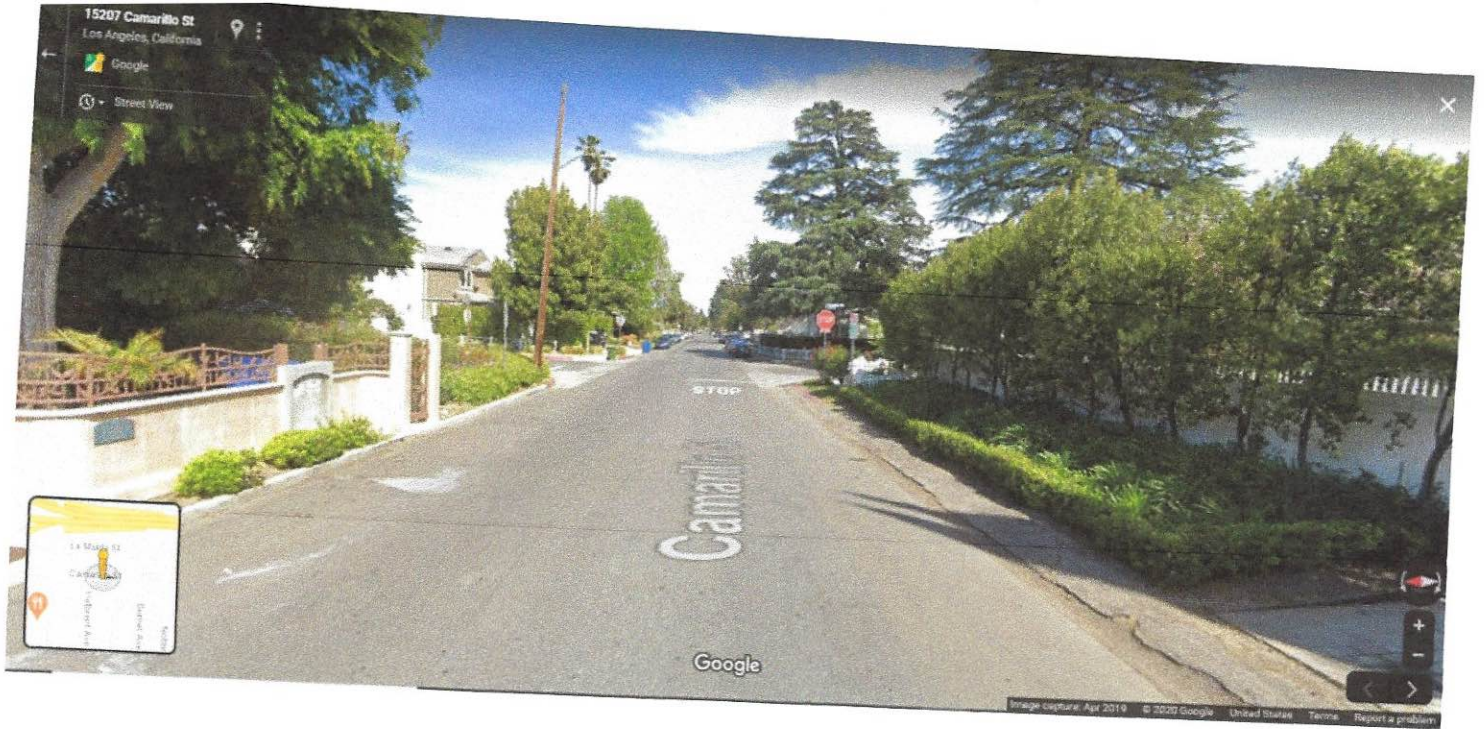
The arterial streets have taller buildings and more transit service than those in Los Angeles, but their street width is actually more hostile to pedestrians. Nevertheless, the Sillim bus stop, along one of Bongcheon-Dong's (Seoul's) main arterials, has among the highest **number of boardings** in South Korea. This confirms my long-found suspicion that the built environment surrounding residential streets influences travel behavior as strongly as that surrounding com-

mercial arterials.



*Sepulveda Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley is no wider than an arterial street in Seoul.*

Think about it. Residential streets provide the first-last mile connection between one's home and any destination they are trying to access. The presence (or absence) of retail and grocery stores around the corner determines whether a person will drive to a big box store to obtain necessities (most often accommodated through trip-chaining on a work commute).



*Camarillo Street, just east of Sepulveda Boulevard.*

So far, most complete streets work in LA has focused on arterials. For instance, the Mayor's Office's [LA Great Streets program](#) focuses on major thoroughfares like Venice Boulevard, Robertson Boulevard, and Reseda Boulevard. The city of Los Angeles's [Mobility Plan 2035](#) downgraded arterial street standards but left local and collector street standards largely untouched.

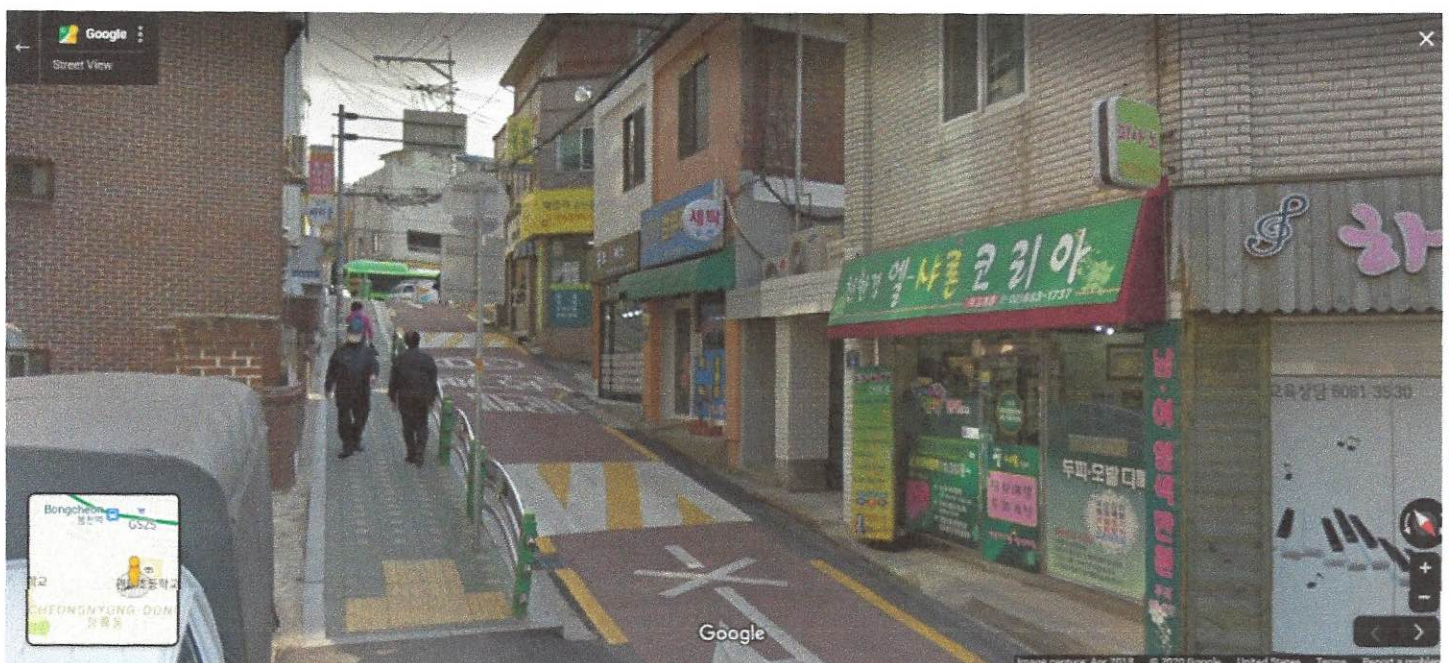
To be fair, "narrowing" residential streets to Seoul- or Tokyo-style standards would require significant investment (even without political opposition), and the Mobility Plan downgrading intended to avert *proposed* widening rather than reduce street dimensions. Permitting developers to build into the right-of-way (a reverse form of "setback") is a possible option, but one prone to a lengthy timeframe and haphazard implementation.

However, improved traffic-calming infrastructure, like bulb-outs and curb extensions, would make residential streets considerably less menacing. Opening up residential streets to cars and bikes would permit even more radical transformation.

Most importantly, loosening height and land use restrictions in residential neighborhoods will facilitate the clustering of homes and small businesses needed to support a car-free lifestyle. These changes are politically contentious in California, but not **impossible** to achieve.

To summarize, the following policies would help urbanize LA's residential suburbs, *a la Seoul*:

- **Densification** (no more Hancock Parks or San Marinos)
- **Relax zoning** in residential neighborhoods (side streets in Palms need more corner-stores and bars)
- **Open up residential streets** to bicyclists and pedestrians. Implement traffic calming measures and signage to compel drivers to respectfully share the road. Mayor Garcetti's post-COVID 19 "**Slow Streets**" initiative could be a start.
- **End parking minimums** (which attract cars into a neighborhood and reduce developments' buildable area).
- **Densify arterial streets** as well. Use their copious capacity to provide BRT or Rail Transit service.





This entry was posted in Cities, Transportation and tagged East Asia, Housing, Land Use, Los Angeles, Seoul, Tokyo, Transportation on May 18, 2020 [<https://entrepot.blog/2020/05/18/how-can-la-urbanize-like-east-asia-densify-residential-streets/>].

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