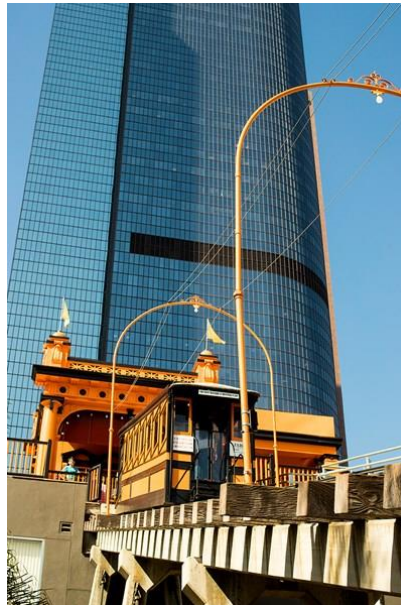


Through a Pioneering P3, Angels Flight Takes Off Once Again



Photos by John Livzey, 2020

It's only 298 feet long. Dubbed the “shortest railway in the world,” it first ran more than 116 years ago. And if you ask Angelenos to name three things that are quintessentially Los Angeles, Angels Flight will almost certainly be one of them. For a while, though, it looked like that might no longer be the case. It had fallen into disrepair and there had been accidents. It was shuttered. But thanks to an historic and innovative public-private partnership (P3)—the first transit P3 project in Los Angeles—Angels Flight is back and running again for new generations to fall in love with it.

“Our interest in the project started because Angels Flight was such an iconic feature and historic asset,” explains ACS Infrastructure CEO Nuria Haltiwanger. ACS Infrastructure served as lead developer, partnering with Sener Engineering. Together they formed the P3 team that modernized the safety systems, restored the historic elements, and will operate and maintain the iconic railway for the next 30 years. “ACS Group [ACS Infrastructure’s parent company] has a history of contributing to the restoration and rehabilitation of historical assets, traditionally through its foundation in Spain that has worked on a number of projects, such as on Medieval churches. We wanted to find worthy projects of significant cultural and historic value here in the United States, where we could do something similar. Angels Flight met many of the criteria we look for with the historic preservation of assets. And, like many, we just fell in love with Angels Flight and what it symbolized for the history of the city and the Bunker Hill area.”



There is much to love. A small gauge funicular railway, Angels Flight connects the downtown Los Angeles Bunker Hill neighborhood to the city’s core and the Grand Central Market on an incredibly steep, 33% grade track. Originally built in 1901, it was closed in 1969, when its site was cleared for development. The current Angels Flight opened one half block south of the original location in 1996. But it was shut down again in 2001, after a fatality. Reopened in 2011, it shuttered again in 2013 and stayed that way until this P3 project came together to once again bring it back to life. Though originally marketed as a tourist novelty, Angels Flight is actually a strategic transit connection that has traditional peak ridership times. Its two cars—*Sinai* and *Olivet*—traverse the rails in opposite directions via a shared cable. Like the Brooklyn Bridge or the Santa Monica Freeway, Angels Flight has become iconic, essential urban infrastructure. In no small way, Angels Flight is part of the fabric of Los Angeles.



“I’m honored to be a part of such an impactful project,” explains ACS Infrastructure vice president of Finance & Accounting Jessica Hurwitch. “I work with our asset-management team once our bid projects come to life. Our senior vice president of Business Development, Steve DeWitt, thought Angels Flight was a perfect opportunity for us to get more involved and make a difference in Los Angeles. And it’s done exactly that. We feel very connected to the city and to the community. You couldn’t help but feel connected. People would show up while we were performing the restoration work and reminisce about riding it. They would stare at it and the memories would just pour out. And the whole ride is only a minute long! But it has this magical aura around it. It’s a part of history and many people feel very attached to it. It’s also part of Downtown LA’s revival.”

“Downtown Los Angeles is growing and thriving. And now, both locals and visitors line up to use it. It’s in the heart of downtown and it gets you to and from the Grand Central Market and Bunker Hill. So, it’s an integral part of downtown, the city, and beyond. It has a long history of appearing in many movies, literature, and art

work as well. Recently, it appeared in *La La Land* and they did a perfect job of showing the magical aura of Angels Flight. It’s wonderful to be a part of that. This is a smaller project for us, but that doesn’t matter. That’s not the point. We treat it the same as any project ACS takes on. To us, it’s a very special transit system where we have to address all safety, seismic, and historic restoration/preservation concerns. We make sure to cover every little detail to make sure that it’s safe and running and looking beautiful.”

That’s exactly what ACS did. And on August 31st, Labor Day Weekend, Angels Flight officially reopened to the public. Then on October 27th, in conjunction with the celebration of the Grand Central Market’s 100th birthday, the project team hosted a grand reopening event for everyone to join the party. And it was quite the party. Featuring numerous dignitaries and politicians—including Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti—the ceremony also provided unique entertainment in the form of the *Education Through Music Los Angeles* (ETM-LA) orchestra. And ETM-LA is as near and dear to some as Angels Flight itself.

“ETM-LA is trying to bring back music in the schools and once again make it part of the core curriculum. And one of the schools ETM-LA works with, Casteler Elementary, is about a mile from Angels Flight. That’s the same school I went to visit when I started working with ETM-LA,” explains Nossaman partner and WTS-LA special advisor to the president Nancy Smith. “I’ve been on the ETM-LA board for seven years. I joined it after someone who read an article on me in the *Los Angeles Business Journal* about what lawyers do when they’re not practicing law called me and said I should be involved. I play the violin and they were learning to play the violin. So, it was a perfect match.”



A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, ETM-LA is the West Coast arm of ETM, founded in New York City to restore music in schools there. Relying on fundraising and parent support, ETM-LA is presently in 25 Los Angeles schools, and plans to expand to 50 schools and to double the number of students served from 12,000 to more than 24,000 over the next decade. For Smith, ETM-LA’s participation in the Angels Flight ceremony brought everything together.



“My firm, Nossaman, has been actively involved in P3 transportation projects for almost 30 years--since 1989. We were the law firm that represented the non-profit Angels Flight Foundation in negotiating the P3 deal with the ACS team. And we are a corporate sponsor to WTS-LA, which is actively engaged in transportation issues as well as STEM and STEAM programs (STEAM adds art to STEM) through its Adopt-A-School and scholarship programs. Finally, we provide pro bono services to ETM-LA, which is essentially a P3. Public schools are engaging a non-profit to help bring music back into schools, just like Angels Flight brought a non-profit entity to

rehab and operate it. So, the combination of Angels Flight, ETM-LA, WTS-LA, Nossaman, and P3s was just a fantastic way to bring everything together for me.” Ms. Smith encourages individuals interested in supporting education to consider donating to both WTS-LA and ETM-LA. This year, WTS-LA oversaw the distribution of more than \$71,000 in scholarships to high school and college students and is already starting to work on outreach for next year’s scholarships. She urges everyone to support ETM-LA for its great work in LA-area schools and also for a somewhat selfish reason, “Music grounds me. It keeps me from going crazy sometimes as a lawyer, and I think it provides the same benefit for schoolchildren.”

ACS Infrastructure CEO Haltiwanger agrees. She, too, credits the ETM-LA orchestra for its virtuosity, but also its presence at the Angels Flight opening.

“It was really fantastic to see the kids from ETM-LA play. They are the next generation that will fall in love with Angels Flight. So, I thought it was really important and valuable to have them there. It’s just great to see how excited people are about Angels Flight. There’s also an apartment complex for seniors near it and it was very special to hear their stories from originally riding it. I feel like we’re bringing it alive for old and new generations and connecting them both.”

It’s the shortest railway in the world, only 298 feet. But its impact is much, much greater than that. Iconic, unique, and something that is quintessentially Los Angeles, Angels Flight once again serves a critical purpose to the identity of Los Angeles. And thanks to an innovative and historic public-private partnership, Angels Flight rides again.



Pictured above (left to right): Ryan Rowles, Program Director, Education Through Music-Los Angeles (ETM-LA), Nancy Smith, Advisor to the President, WTS-LA; Secretary, ETM-LA; Partner, Nossaman LLP, Nuria Haltiwanger, CEO, ACS Infrastructure Development, Inc. and ACS Infrastructure Canada Inc., Victoria Lanier, Executive Director, Education Through Music-Los Angeles, Jessica Hurwitch, Vice President of Finance & Accounting, ACS Infrastructure Development, Inc., Yukiko Kojima, Board Member, ETM-LA; Partner, Nossaman LLP., Booker White, Board Chair, ETM-LA; Supervisor of Music Preparation and Director of Music Library, Walt Disney Pictures and Television