

# Mayor Shares Vision for L.A.

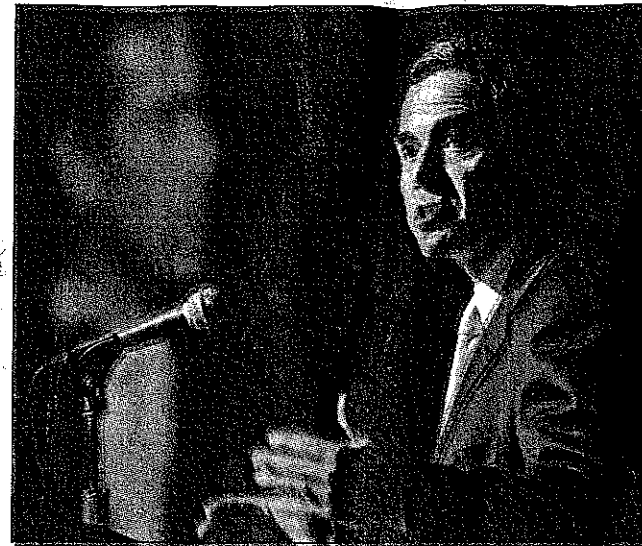
Villaraigosa's ideal city would be a prosperous 'global capital' with affordable housing, good schools — and residents riding trains.

By RICHARD FAUSSET  
Times Staff Writer

Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa gave the yearly "state of the San Fernando Valley" speech Thursday, but he delivered something much broader: a discourse on the ideal Los Angeles of the future.

It was the latest version of a stock speech Villaraigosa has been giving for weeks at rubber-chicken galas and civic symposia all over town. In it, the mayor attempts to place his early moves in a strategic context, paint himself as a maverick reformer and justify some liberal policies as business-friendly.

But mostly, it is a vision for the unwieldy metropolis Villaraigosa has been chosen to govern, a new narrative for a city wondering how its next chapter will read.



GINA FERRAZZI Los Angeles Times

**PLANS:** L.A. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa delivered a "state of the Valley" address Thursday that incorporated his larger goals.

In earlier versions of the speech, Villaraigosa has said Los Angeles should realize its potential as a "great global city on a hill." That image has roots in the Book of Matthew and Jesus' advice to his disciples that they should set a good example. But

over the years it has been famously borrowed by John Winthrop, the 17th century governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, and former President Ronald Reagan.

Like Reagan, Villaraigosa [See Mayor, Page B8]

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## Villaraigosa Shares His Utopian Vision for Los Angeles' Future

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seems to appreciate the power of positive thinking: One of his strategies appears to be talking Los Angeles into a good mood. But like Winthrop, Villaraigosa wants his people to know that the world will be watching — and judging — the grand social experiment before them.

To the new mayor, a glorious future is not a given.

As a result, Thursday's speech was threaded, like most of his recent speeches, with a subtle reminder that L.A.'s civic and business leaders need to face the city's challenges.

One remark to the Valley Industry and Commerce Assn. was typical. Lamenting the lack of affordable housing in the city, the

mayor of five months blurted out: "We'd better figure it out, everybody."

If all goes well, however, Villaraigosa's Tomorrowland will have some readily definable characteristics:

### ■ Los Angeles will connect the world.

Villaraigosa, a history major at UCLA, wants Los Angeles to become "the Venice of the 21st century" — a reference to the powerhouse city-state that dominated European trade in the 15th century.

"We need to imagine a future in which Los Angeles is ... the global capital linking the manufacturing economies of the east with the emerging markets of the

south," Villaraigosa said Thursday.

Though blessed geographically, Los Angeles needs to move aggressively to modernize its port, airport and infrastructure to allow better movement of goods, Villaraigosa has said. It was in that context Thursday that he touted his nominee to head the port of Los Angeles, Geraldine Knatz, currently an executive at the better-performing Long Beach port.

He also praised last week's agreement to shelve the expansion plans for Los Angeles International Airport, plans that prompted lawsuits from local communities. The cities have agreed to drop their suits, giving the city a chance to start over with its modernization effort.

### ■ Los Angeles will turn diversity into dollars.

Diversity, he told Valley leaders, "is going to make us rich and prosperous, make no mistake about it."

The racial differences that threatened to tear L.A. apart are to Villaraigosa a blessing: a city where 120 languages are spoken by ethnic groups whose ties to their home countries can mature into new avenues of trade. He noted that the Valley, once con-

sidered lily white, is now the most racially diverse area in Los Angeles — and one of its most economically vibrant.

In previous speeches, the mayor has even been exhorting monolingual Angelenos to learn at least one other language — "like they do in Europe."

### ■ L.A. will be the "greenest and cleanest big city in America."

Much like his embrace of diversity, Villaraigosa's environmental goals are pitched in terms of commerce, not political correctness. His goal to plant a million trees and spruce up the L.A. River will make the city more attractive to tourists, he has said.

The mayor has put prominent environmentalists on his port commission and Department of Water and Power board, but he doesn't dwell on the cost of potential new regulations. Instead, he said, if the city holds itself to high ecological standards, it will stimulate new green industries and jobs.

### ■ L.A. will thrive on its embrace of new technology and new industry.

The successful cities of the future won't be built on smoke-stack industries, Villaraigosa says, but with businesses that run largely on brain power. With major research universities next door to Hollywood, L.A. should be "the place where technology and entertainment converge." Villaraigosa has said he hopes to invest city pension funds in new technology — from digital media

to biotech — and find a way to lighten the tax burdens for start-up companies. And he wants to lure them to long-suffering areas like South L.A. with a tax subsidy program.

This strategy, he said Thursday, will replace the region's "good middle-class jobs" that were once dominated by the likes of aerospace and auto manufacturers.

### ■ L.A. will become denser and taller.

Villaraigosa has argued that housing construction along public transit lines will help solve the housing crunch and get cars off the streets. He notes that 46 high-rises are going up in L.A. over the next four years. The mayor would like to see what Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown has called "elegant density" — developments that mix commercial and residential units, and include open space.

Villaraigosa has proposed putting a \$1-billion affordable housing bond before voters, and he notes that fewer than 15% of today's Angelenos can afford a median-priced home.

On Thursday, he told Valley leaders to brace for a city that may never look the same. "This old concept that all of us are going to live in a three-bedroom home, you know with 2,500 square feet, with a big frontyard and a big backyard — well that's an old concept," he said. "You've been to Chicago, you've been to New York, you've been to San Francisco. ... Not everybody in the world lives like that. And they live a good life."

### ■ The Angelenos of the future will ride the train.

"We are not going to build more freeways in the city of Los Angeles," Villaraigosa said in a recent speech.

In Villaraigosa's future city, railways will take residents from South-Central to North Hollywood and from Boyle Heights to LAX. In the meantime, he has been choosing to ride public transportation himself every once in a while in an attempt to lure his fellow residents to do the same.

"You can use public transit," he said Thursday. "You can get where you want to go. We've got to start to articulate that vision for the city, or this isn't going to be a city where any of us want to live."

### ■ L.A. won't achieve city-on-a-hill status with a broken educational system.

Perhaps Villaraigosa's boldest move has been his promise to take over the troubled Los Angeles Unified School District, following the lead of mayors in New York and Chicago.

To the mayor, Los Angeles simply cannot compete if its main educational system is rife with dropouts and graduates who "can barely fill out a job application."

In other big cities, mayoral takeovers haven't been a panacea. But in those cities, he said Thursday, "you see a dynamic system where you see new things, where they're innovating and thinking outside the box. And that's what we have to do here."