

## RENEWing LA Through CicLAvia

*By Joel Epstein*

A lot has already been written about CicLAvia but we are just getting started. It is only the beginning because this transformational health-promoting event is demonstrating to Angelenos and the rest of the world how this bloated, increasingly overweight and sprawling city isn't just for cars and doesn't have to be. The visionary nature and success of CicLAvia is why the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health's RENEW LA County initiative was a major partner of CicLAvia's third incarnation on Sunday in downtown LA, South Los Angeles, MacArthur Park and East Hollywood.

RENEW is about improving nutrition, increasing physical activity and reducing obesity in LA County. CicLAvia is about turning the city's usually congested streets into public space where Angelenos can bike, skate, walk, dance and play. CicLAvia reimagines the city, turning the asphalt jungle into a giant park for just long enough to help us realize that it can and must be like this more often.

The partnership between RENEW and CicLAvia is a natural fit -- two critical parts of the solution to LA's epidemic of obesity and diabetes. Ending obesity and diabetes will only happen when we have learned to live healthy with adequate exercise and a proper diet of food that wasn't engineered in a lab to make us feel like the garbage we've eaten isn't destroying our bodies and minds.

This CicLAvia, RENEW brought along some friends -- civic leaders from Lynnwood, La Puente, Huntington Park, San Fernando, South Gate and Pomona -- so that they could experience the joys of LA's oversized model of Parking Day and consider the CicLAvia vision for their own communities.

When I asked founding CicLAvia Board Member Jonathan Parfrey and CicLAvia spokesperson Ashley Rodgers what is CicLAvia, they said:

"It's a community event for everyone. A chance to get out and walk, bike and skate. LA is the most park poor city in the U.S. and today we created a 10 mile long linear park. It's about children and families, a community event for everyone who wants exercise and wants to rediscover their city from a different vantage point."

Thanks RENEW and CicLAvia and all of the riders, runners, walkers and skaters who made Sunday an unforgettable taste of a healthy and happy LA like it should be more often. Not bad for a truly grassroots event that rose almost organically from the minds and out of the hard work of a group of committed bike, health and public space advocates.

Expanding programs like CicLAvia in places like South Gate and Huntington Park where over a quarter of the child population is obese is critical to stemming the epidemic. It is why the LA County Public Health Department's Dr. Paul Simon called the event "a phenomenal opportunity

to expand our efforts around obesity prevention." Spreading the CicLAvia seeds to the other cities of LA County won't happen overnight but over time it will happen. And I for one can't wait to enjoy the rides Lynnwood, La Puente, Huntington Park, San Fernando, South Gate, Pomona and cities yet unknown create in the months and years to come.

*Posted: 10/13/11 06:20 PM ET*

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