

A Comparative Look at the Freeway Systems In Southern California and Jiangxi Province

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The freeway system is extremely important to the residents in Southern California. The Pasadena Freeway was built in the late 1930s, and is still one of the major freeways in use as of today. In Southern California, majority of people cannot afford not to own a car, because there is no effective subway or mass transportation system to cover a large area. Most people have to use a car to get to work, play and go shopping. This is in contrast to the situation in New York City, in which it is very expensive to own a car and there are not enough parking spaces. The parking fees charged are easily more than that of the gasoline expenses. In Southern California people are seriously handicapped and limited in daily activities without using an automobile. It has been estimated that every three residents own two cars in S. California. Southern California may be described as the capital of automobiles and freeways. There are over four million cars using about the 600 miles of freeways daily. Many people check the traffic forecast and the road condition more than the weather forecast. Many Chinese American engineers have made significant contributions to the building and designing of the local freeway system. There were over fifty ethnic Chinese engineers, which amounted to more than 1/5 of the technical staff, participated in the construction of the most expensive Freeway 105 at the rate of about 100 million dollar per mile. It is expected that in the near future tourist visa will be issued to Chinese from mainland. Subsequently many visitors will choose driving as a major transportation while visiting Southern California. The Jiangxi Association currently provides the needed information for the visitors or newcomers from China to the system of freeways in Southern California.

China has enjoyed a high growth rate in the past 20 years. People who have visited China in the recent years are amazed by the new constructions in every metropolitan city. The most dramatic change is the construction of the freeways. City officers have recognized that without an efficient roadway system, all development plans and further growth will not be able to be materialized. At present, the length of freeways in China ranks only second to USA. In our native province, Jiangxi, a “three columns and four rows” freeway network with a total of 1400 km has been completed as of today. This provides many direct links to Shanghai, Fujian, Hunan and Guangdong. The ultimate improvement in regional transportation will surely support the rapid development of the natural resources and tourism. Since China became a member of WTO, the price of automobiles has dropped rapidly, but it is still not easily affordable to most families. Unlike USA, most youths do not begin to learn driving by the age of 16. Very few university students own cars or even know how to drive. Traffic jams and/or traffic accidents are much less in comparison to Southern California. Some of the priorities for an effective use of the freeway systems in China include the promotion of driver education in schools to develop good driving

habits among students in the early age. Sufficient car insurance coverage is also essential to cover the rising cost of repairs, replacements and personal injuries. Prevention of those organized car insurance fraud ring, which is highly notorious in USA, is also urgently needed.

It is very unlikely that any city in China will capture the title of the “Capital of Freeways and Automobiles” from Los Angeles in the near future. However, people in Los Angeles also have suffered from the air pollution due to car exhaust and the lost in time due to traffic jam. Many local freeways have gradually become “handicapped way”, meaning that they are jammed most of the time. The adoption of Diamond or Carpool lanes to encourage sharing of driving does not solve all the problems during the peak hours. It is also very important to foresee the future way of transportation, when the gasoline supply is exhausted from this world. In fact, when we traveled in the remote area of Yunan this summer (2004), some gasoline stations was idle due to shortage of gasoline. When gasoline was available, it was in ration. Some of the freeways are practically empty when gasoline has a severe shortage.