The Value Proposition of Place

What activity centers do and how to sustain it



Image credit: HannaTor / Shutterstock

Tracy Hadden Loh, Brookings Institution

November 17, 2026

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What is an activity center?

Source: Hadden Loh, Tracy, DW Rowlands, Adie Tomer, Joseph W. Kane, and Jennifer S. Vey, "Mapping America's activity centers: The building blocks of prosperous, equitable, and sustainable regions," 20 October 2022, The Brookings Institution.


Hollywood
Glendale
Koreatown
Pasadena
Beverly Hills
Downtown LA
N
0
1.25
2.5
5 Miles
County of Los Angeles, Bur
Esri, HERE, Garmin, USGS, EPA, NPS

Central Business District



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Agora High Street Market

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Forum Stage



Image credit: Raphael Rivest / Shutterstock

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Nexus
Station
Transfer
PUPPY
HUB
OF
HOPE
ATTENTION ALL HUB OF HOPE GUESTS: THE HUB OF HOPE IS STILL OPEN. PLEASE USE OUR DILWORTH PLAZA ENTRANCE. PLEASE CROSS THE STREET TO CITY HALL. TAKE THE STEPS LOCATED BY THE DILWORTH CAFE AND THE SECURITY BOOTH. WHEN YOU REACH THE BOTTOM OF THE STEPS YOU WILL SEE A SIGN POINTING THE WAY TO THE HUB. IF YOU HAVE ANY MORE QUESTIONS, PLEASE CALL OUR FRONT DESK AT 215-309-5225 EXT:4601.
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Doomed?

How Much More Can the U.S. Travel Industry Take?

Politics and border hassles have chased away foreign visitors, costing businesses billions. Some fear next year's World Cup won't be enough to bring tourists back.

The Los Angeles investment market sees a rampant decrease in sales volume across multiple product types

Selling experiences, not things: Services overtake physical goods in downtown retail

Homelessness Holds Steady Across Three L.A. Neighborhoods as Rough Sleeping Reaches a Four-Year High

Deep cuts to bus and rail services loom across big cities, small towns

Fearing a financial 'death spiral,' transit providers say they need more support.

Traffic deaths are on the rise.

Commercial Insurance: The Hard Market Is Ending, And Underwriting Discipline Comes Next

Office vacancy rates dip, but landlords continue to grapple with hybrid work



The Doom Loop

Something causes reduced demand for a place

Urban revenues fall:
- Commercial property values
- Sales/hospitality tax volumes
- Transit fare collections etc

There is less money available to provide services

Places/cities/regions cut services to match fiscal reality

Reduced service quantity/quality reduces overall place, city, regional quality



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The Real Doom Loop

Change is constant. The economy, demographics, climate – what we need from place evolves, sometimes quickly.

Places need to adapt. This requires flexibility, information, basis capacity and most of all – capital flow.

Policies create unequal access to information, capacity, and dollars.

Some places are resilient and nimble – others suffer.

Places in pain are at a competitive disadvantage at meeting the needs of residents, employers, etc.



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Breaking the cycle

"What does the city of the future look like, and who decides? Much of the rhetoric of the current moment is focused on assigning blame for shortcomings. Instead, we need to encourage what has worked to support great neighborhoods and downtowns and make those things accessible to more people — finding common ground, earning trust and establishing new ways to work together to build something that lasts."

— Tracy in the in the LA Times, 2023



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The four dimensions of place

1. **Economic:** Place productivity is regional productivity

2. **Physical:** The center for infrastructure and land value

3. **Civic:** The neighborhood where neighborhoods come together

4. **Social:** Where strangers are welcome

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Productive activity centers buoy productive regions

Stronger activity centers are associated with higher productivity

US metro areas of > 500,000 residents*



* Excluding New York, Washington, Boston, San Francisco, San Jose (CA), Honolulu, and Bridgeport (CT).

Source: Brookings analysis of EMSI and Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics data

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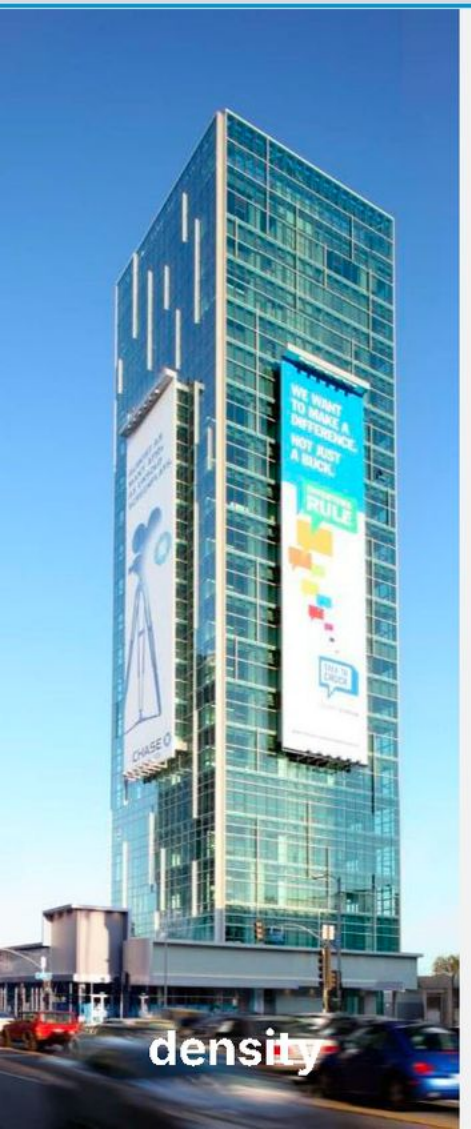
Through the power of proximity



density

accessibility

Through the power of proximity

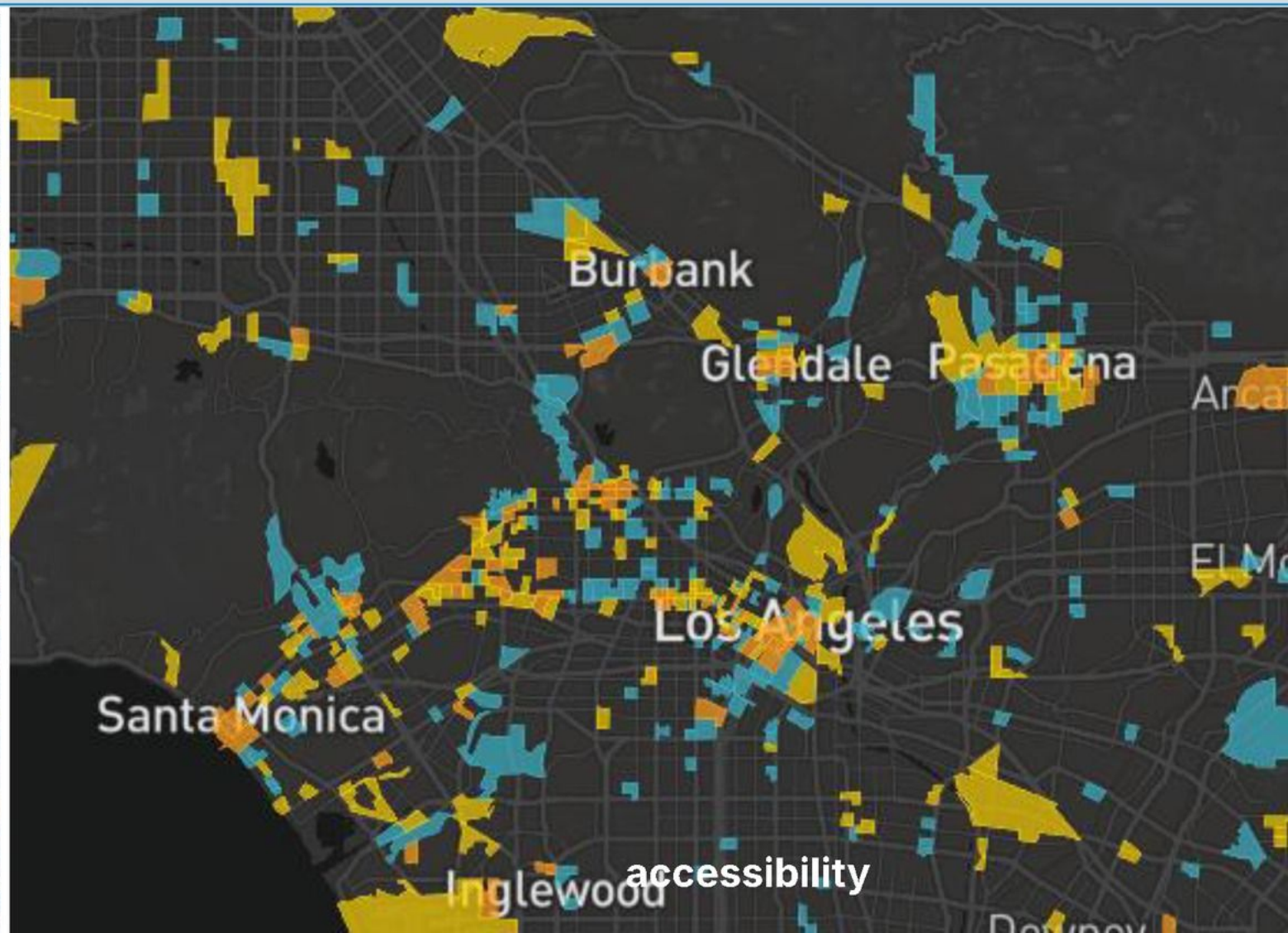




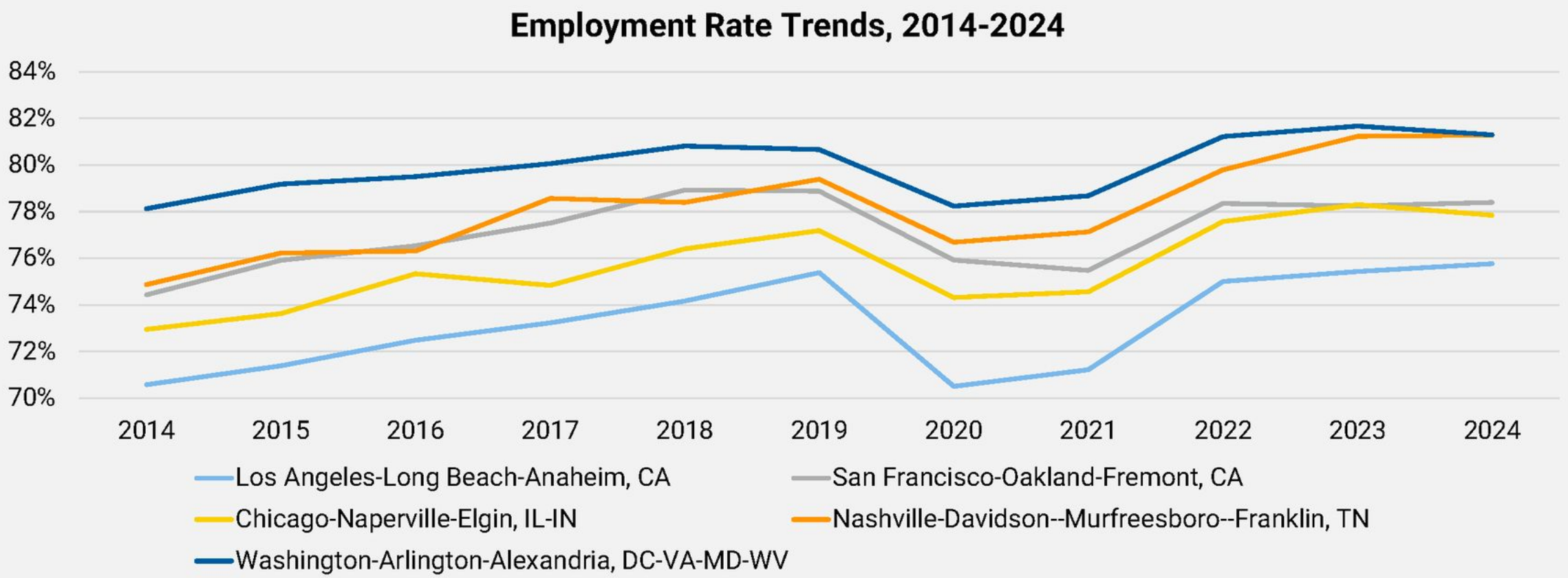
Through the power of proximity







But while LA is super productive, not enough people are working



Source: Brookings, "Metro Monitor," 2026

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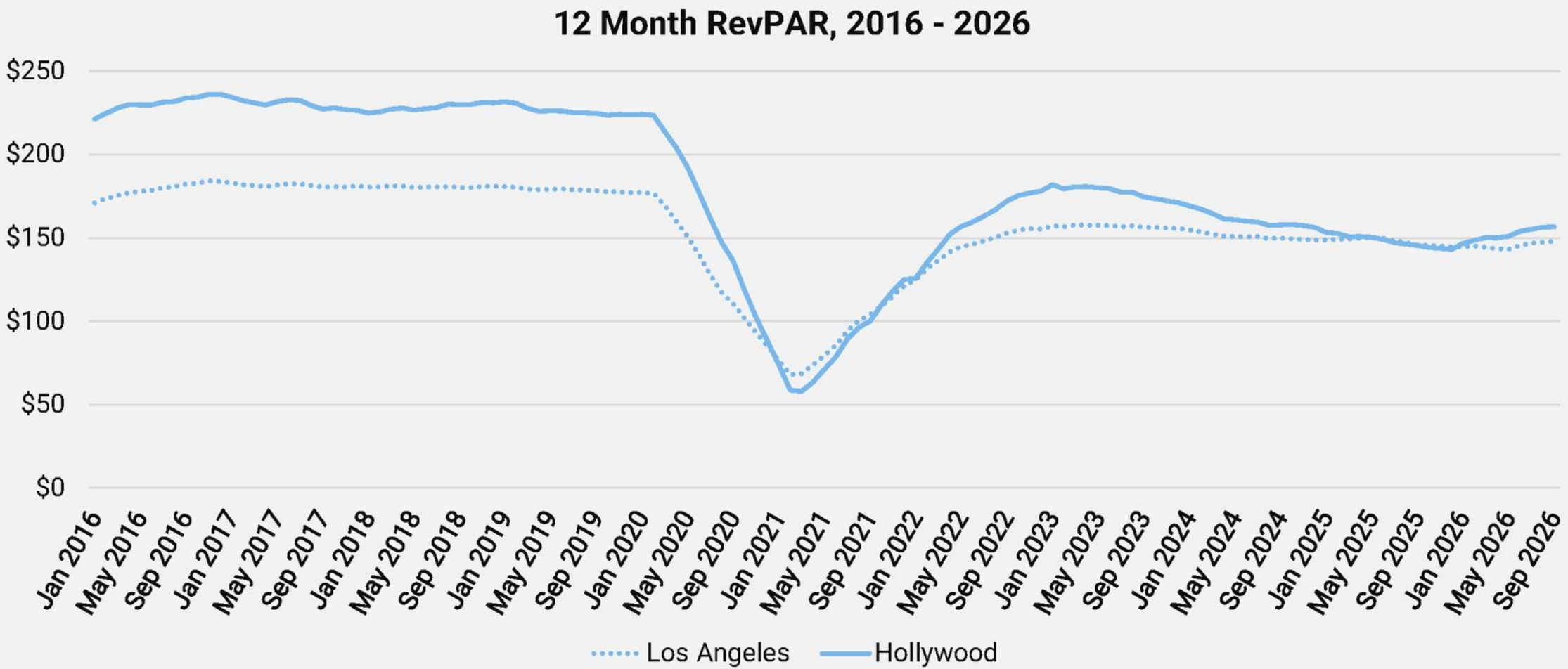
Hollywood hospitality recovery – barely better than region + incomplete



Note: *All values are inflation-adjusted to September 2026 dollars*
Source: CoStar

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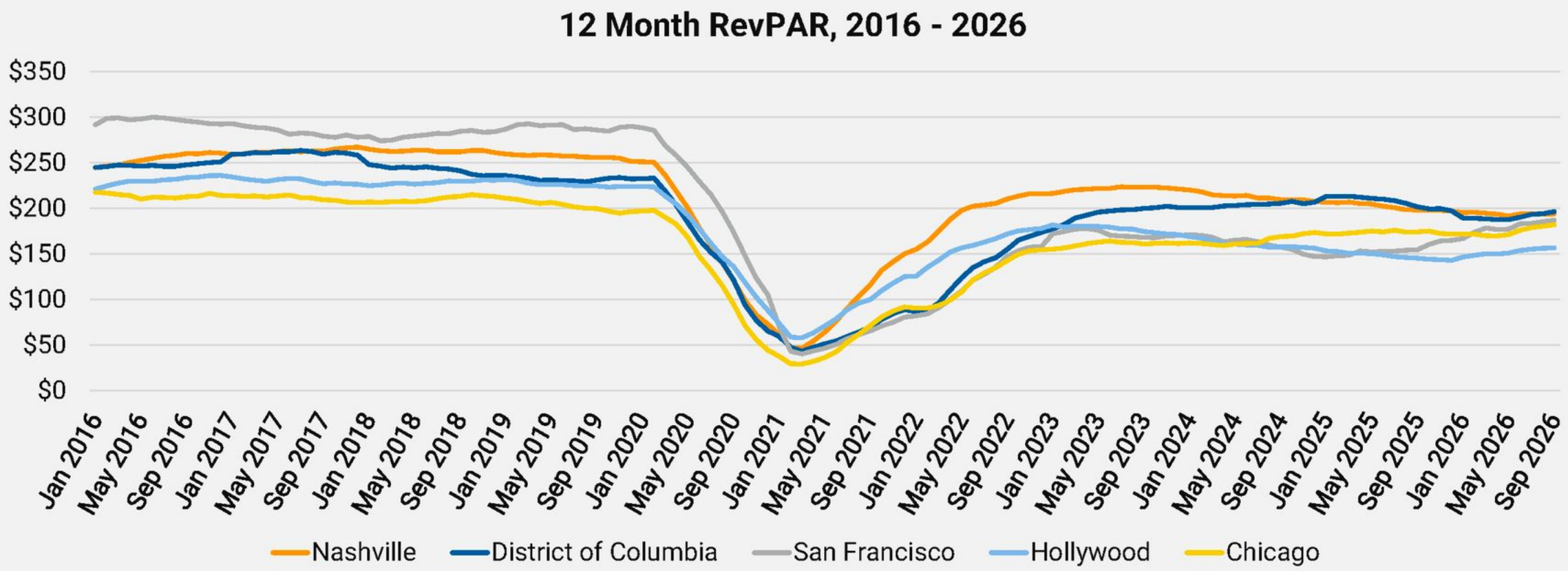
And underperforming relative to peers



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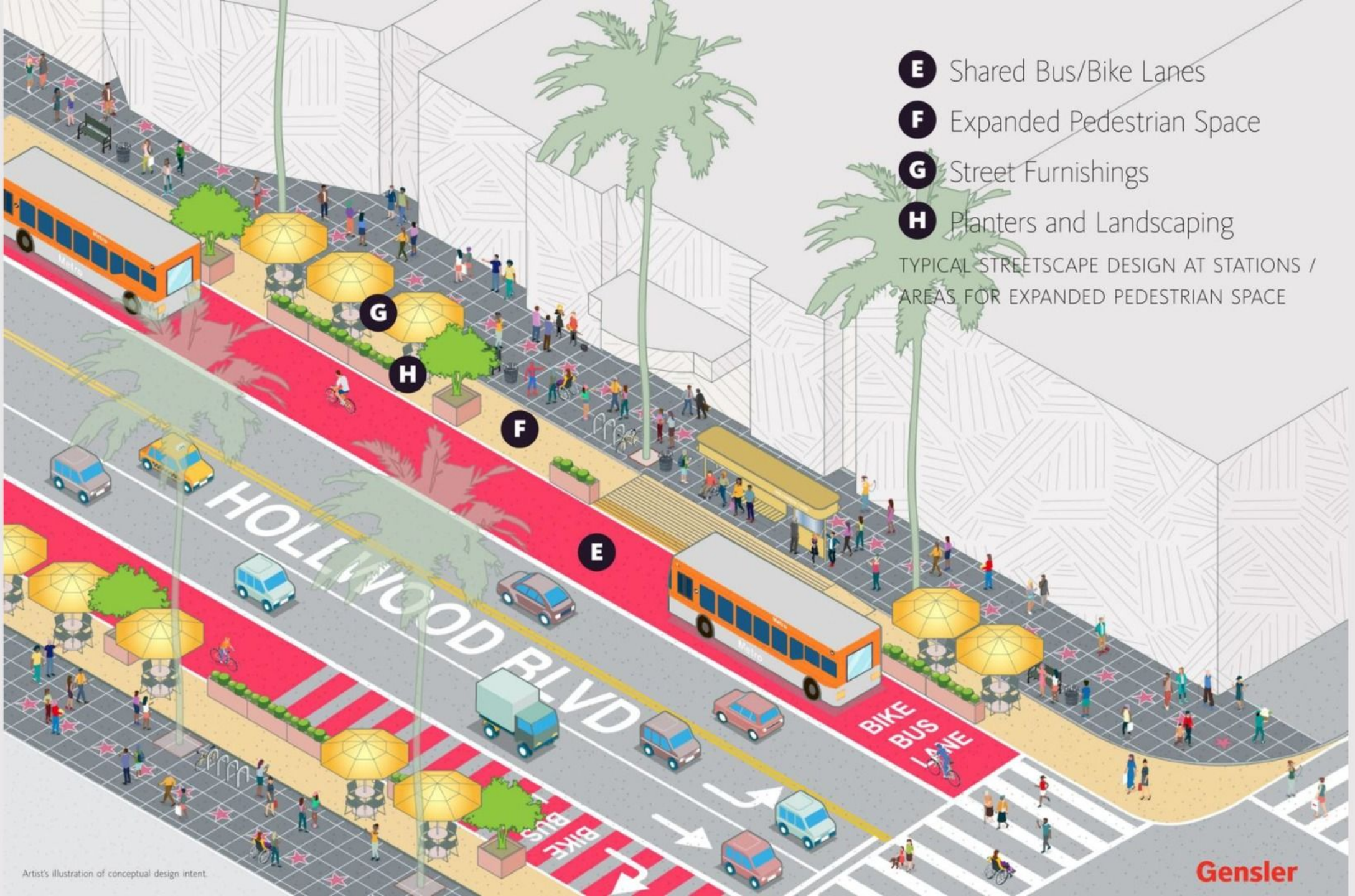
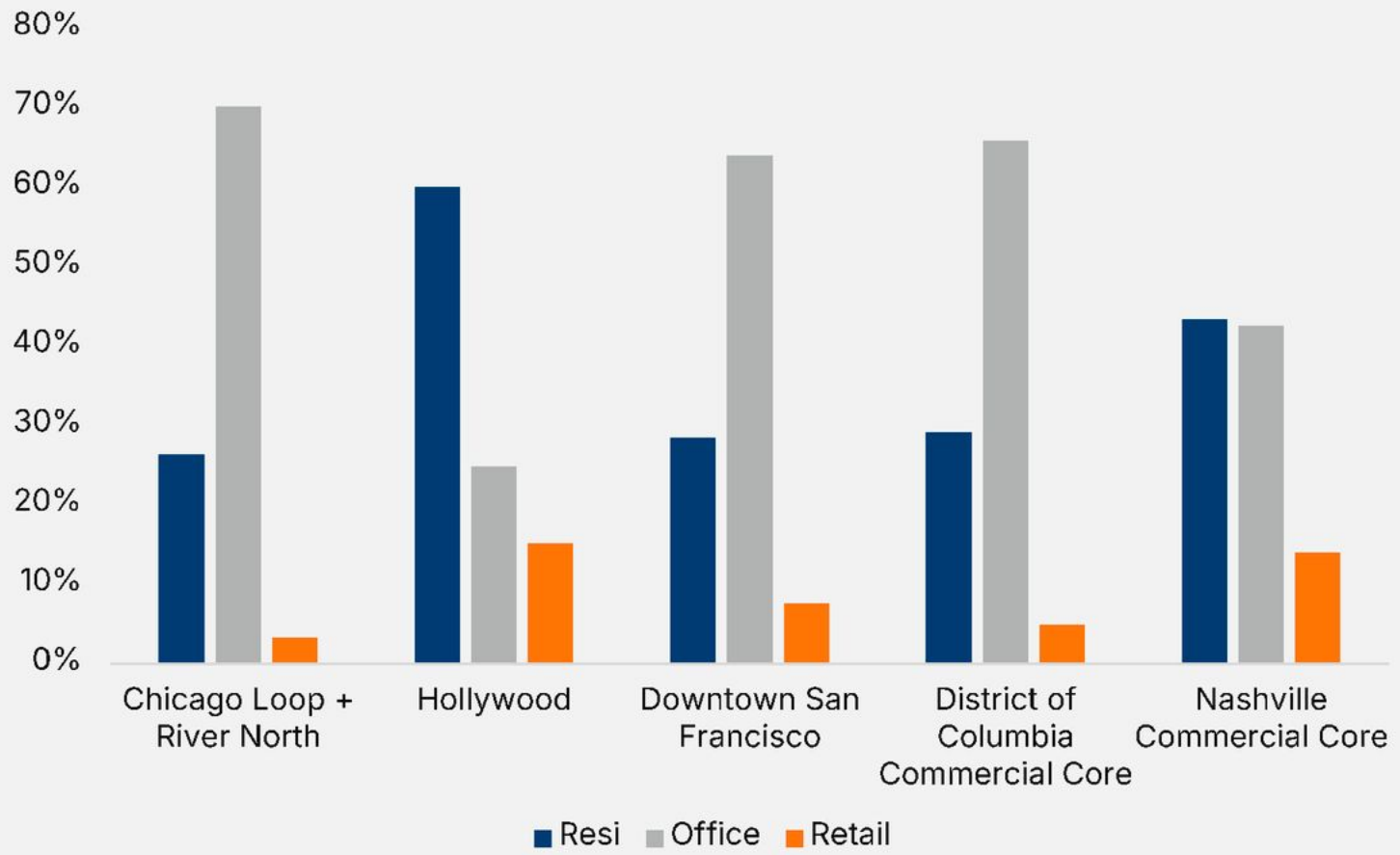

E Shared Bus/Bike Lanes
F Expanded Pedestrian Space
G Street Furnishings
H Planters and Landscaping
TYPICAL STREETSCAPE DESIGN AT STATIONS / AREAS FOR EXPANDED PEDESTRIAN SPACE
HOLLYWOOD BLVD
BIKE BUS LANE
Artist's illustration of conceptual design intent.
Gensler

What's your asset mix?



Source: CoStar

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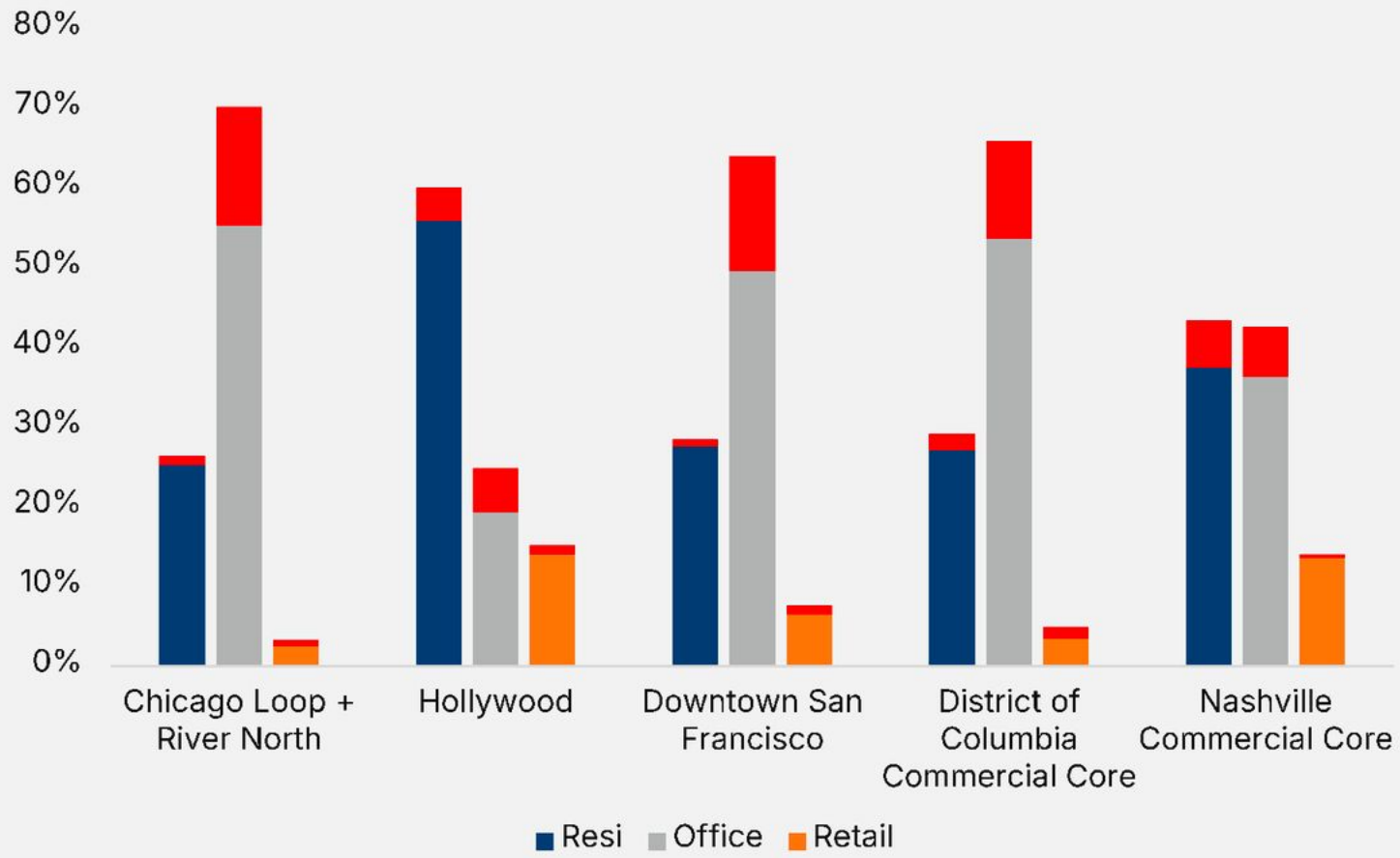
Where are your liabilities?



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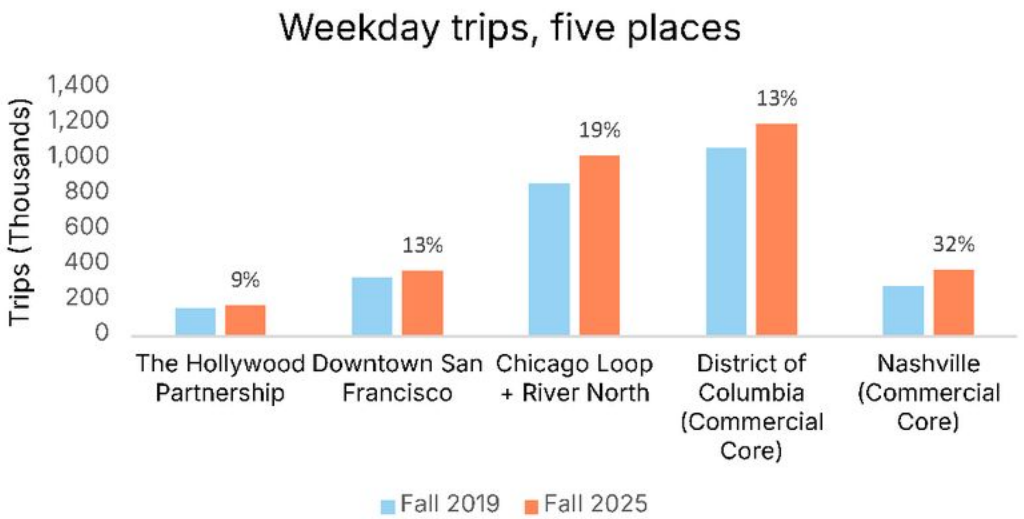
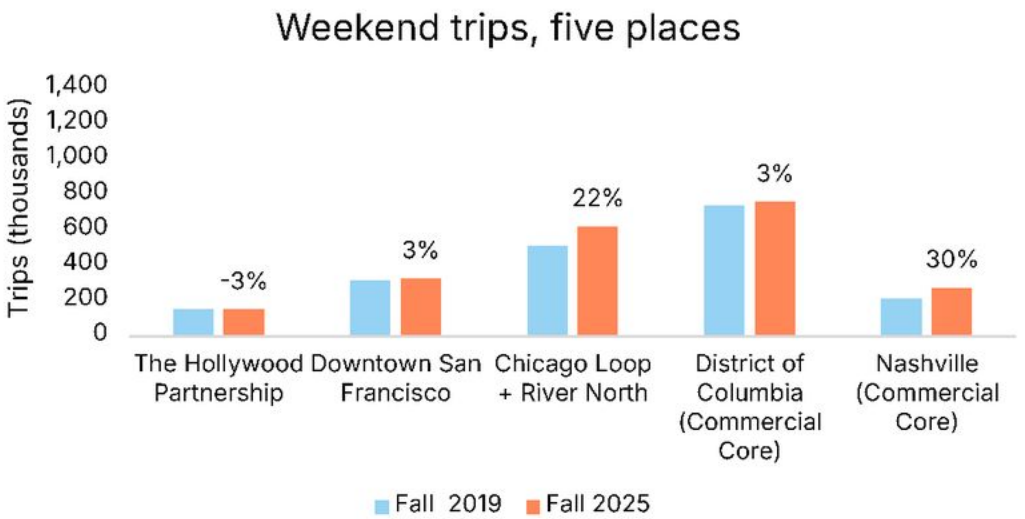
Hollywood's visitation trend does not follow the nation





Source: Replica

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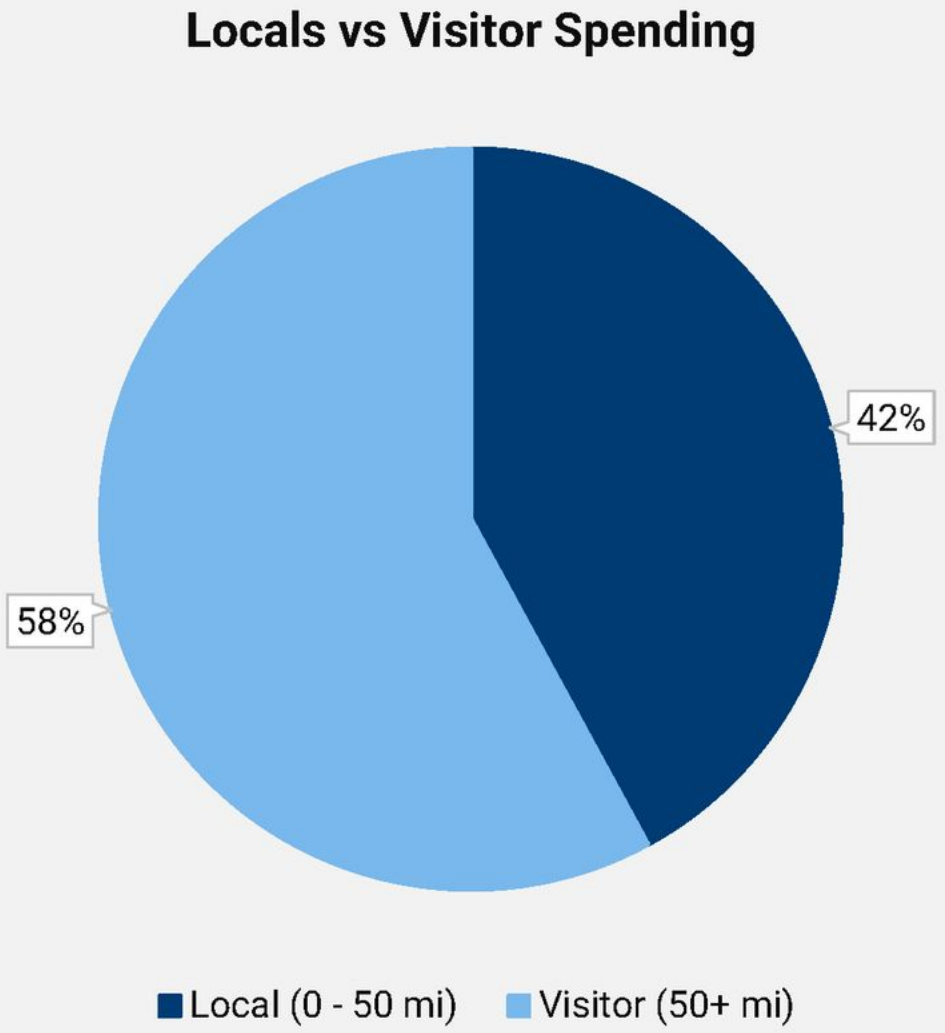
Spending insights suggest there's a lot more to Hollywood than hotels



Source: Datafy

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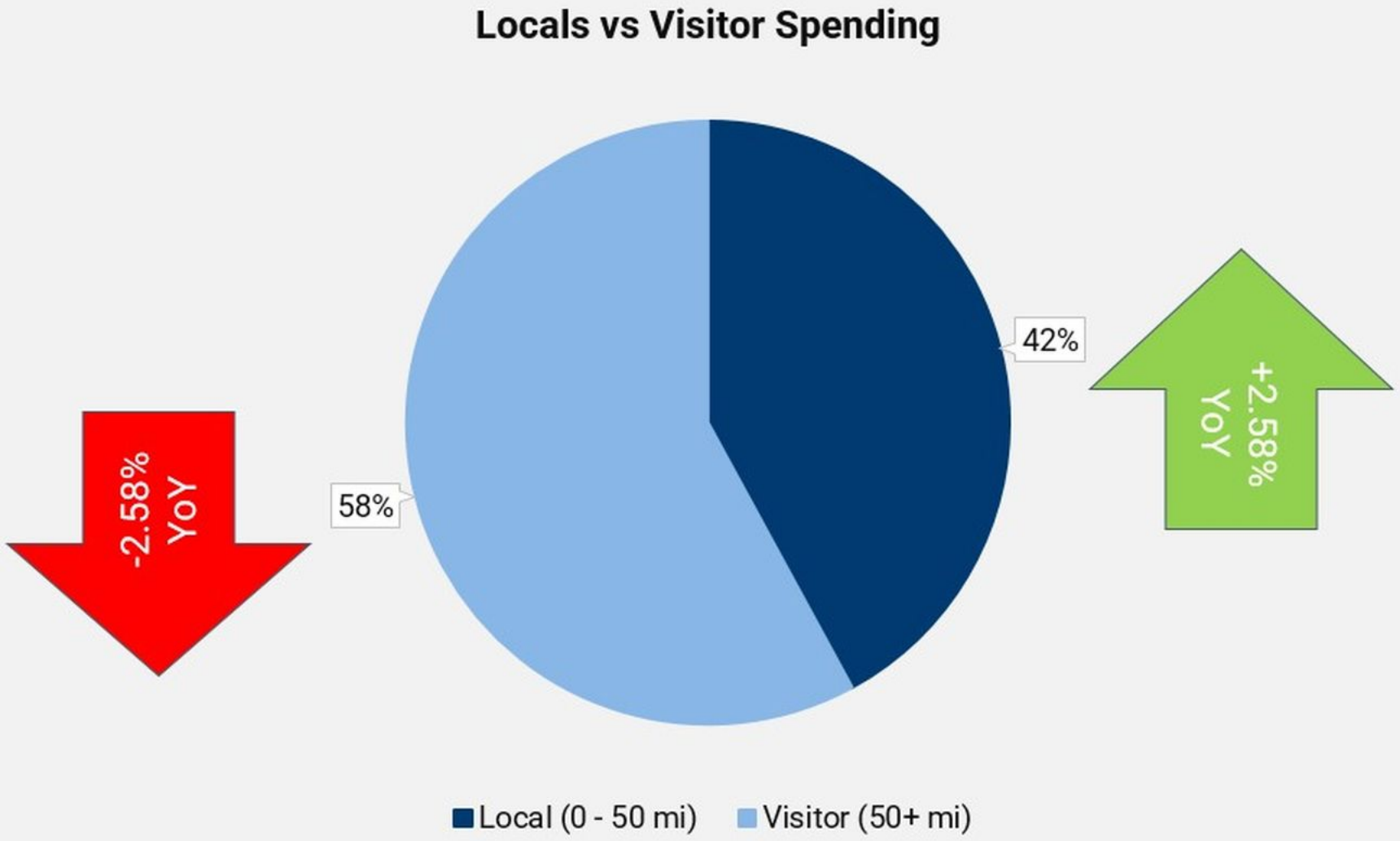

Source: Datafy

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Who is Hollywood for?



Image credit: Kilmer Media ? Shutterstock

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Perceptions and realities around safety

"With the **decrease in foot traffic** and the actual increase in individuals experiencing homelessness, the two issues together have impacted the perception of safety…Not only are you one of the only 10 people on the street, and now two people are experiencing a **mental health crisis**."

RICHMOND

"We've moved the conversation from 'I'm scared of getting Covid and giving it to my loved ones' to **'I'm generally not feeling okay going back to the office because I'm seeing all of this crime**."

NEW YORK CITY

"Safety, security, substance use, and mental health—just the experience in public areas—are the number-one issues preventing return-to-office." -- Seattle

SEATTLE

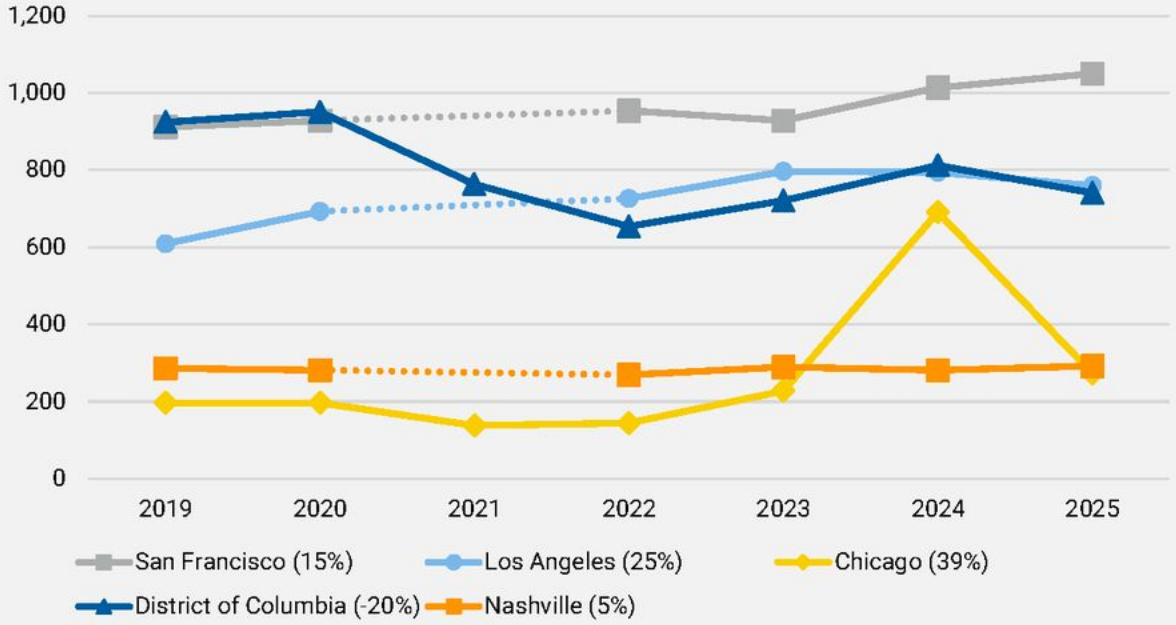
"**Center City is experiencing disputes from the neighborhoods that have come to Center City**, and there have been shootings, even right outside City Hall."

PHILADELPHIA

Sources: Brookings, "The geography of crime in four U.S. cities: Perceptions and reality", 2023; "Small and midsized downtown recovery: Overcoming obstacles and uplifting innovative solutions in four regions", 2025.

Homelessness: progress is possible but the target is moving

Total homelessness per 100k in select continuums of care
and percent change, 2019-2025



Note: *In 2021, PIT counts for Los Angeles City and County, Nashville/Davidson County, and San Francisco CoCs exclude unsheltered homeless individuals.*
Note: *Chicago's 2024 count was taken near the peak of the city's asylum-seeker shelter population and includes 13,891 new arrivals, about 74% of the total.*
Source: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Point in Time Counts

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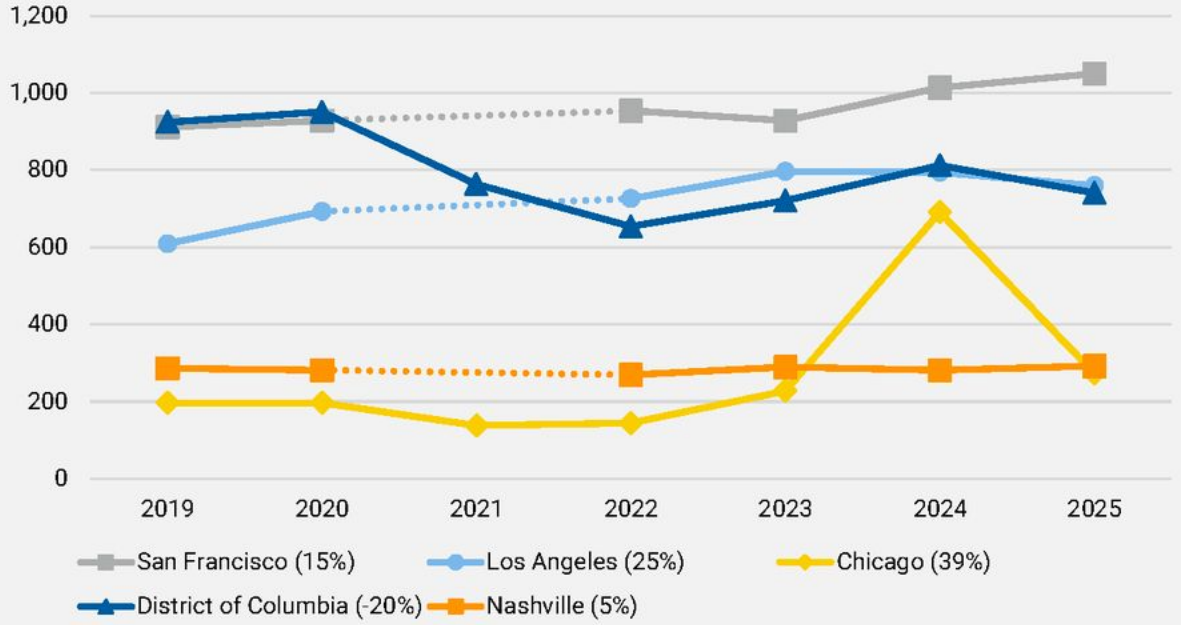
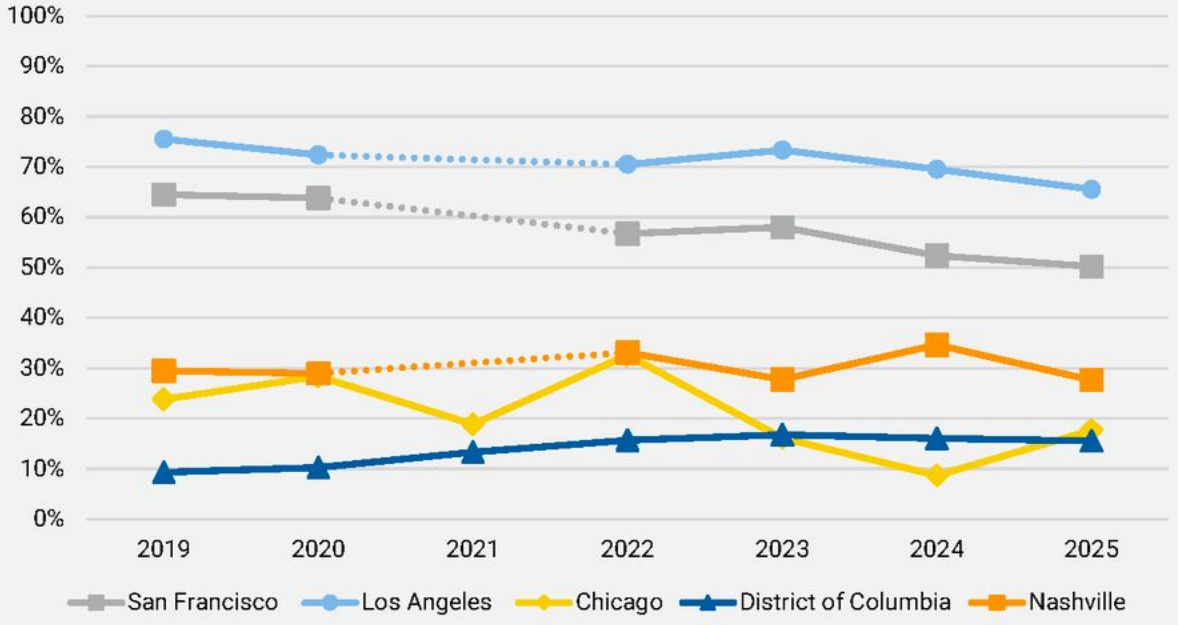


Share of unsheltered homelessness in select continuums of care
2019-2025



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Places should **lean into their uniqueness**, rather than paving over it.



Image credit: Walter Cicchetti / Shutterstock



Image credit: HannaTor / Shutterstock

Place value is closely tied to the **diversity, quantity, and quality of assets**.

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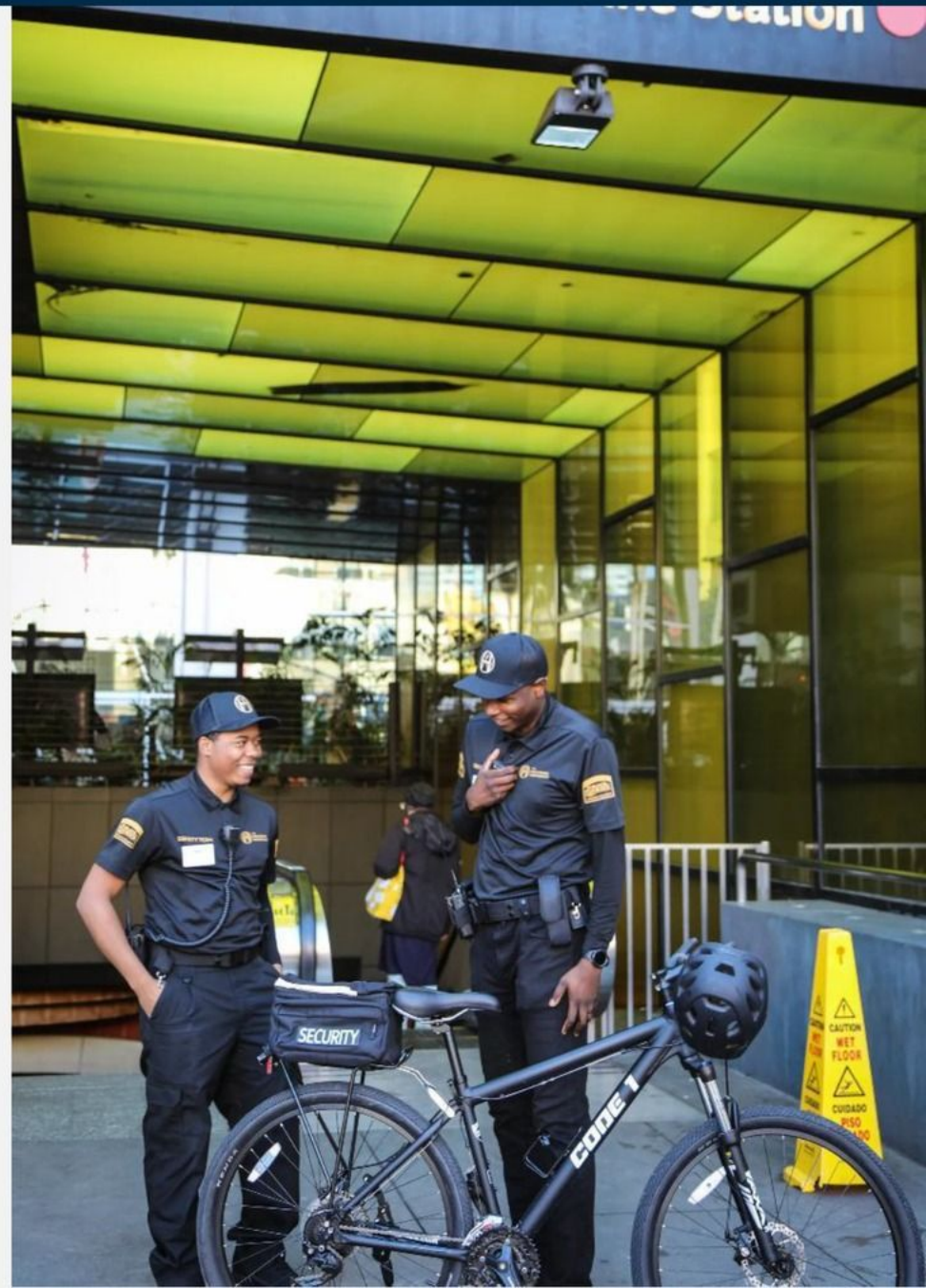
Even outside downtowns you will find **big-city problems**, but this is also where it's easier to cultivate **cross-sector solutions** that are highly effective.




Small and midsized downtown recovery: Overcoming obstacles and uplifting innovative solutions in four regions


How to break the doom loop: Actionable insights from the Brookings Future of Downtowns learning exchange
HUB OF HOPE
RETAIL SPACE AVAILABLE
THE LOOP


Downtown Needs to Change to Survive
The Atlantic

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What activity centers do and how to sustain it



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