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Editorial

Cruise control at the Port of Los Angeles

Controversial ship berths shouldn't hold up other parts of a plan to upgrade the San Pedro waterfront.

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Harbor commissioners on Tuesday are slated to consider the largest redevelopment project in Port of Los Angeles history, a \$1.2-billion makeover of the San Pedro waterfront that, it is hoped, will turn the sagging [Ports O' Call Village](#) mall into a thriving retail and conference center, upgrade facilities for cruise lines and provide the community with waterfront promenades and acres of new recreational space. So what's not to like? Love Boats on the beach.

As part of [the project](#), port officials are backing a controversial development at the port's southern edge, in the Outer Harbor. To accommodate a new generation of huge cruise ships, they want to build two berths and terminals, one of them at the entrance of the West Channel marina and about 700 yards across the water from San Pedro's [only public beach](#). That has many residents in an uproar, has raised doubts with the Chamber of Commerce and has attracted scrutiny from the community's representative on the L.A. City Council, Janice Hahn.

The existing cruise ship berths closer to downtown San Pedro can accommodate three standard-sized ships but only one of the new supersized Voyager-class vessels at a time. There is currently only one such ship -- Royal Caribbean's [Mariner of the Seas](#) -- that calls here. But port officials hope the cruise business will grow in the future and want to attract more. Further, the giant vessels can't turn around in the main channel, so when exiting they must chug backward down the 1.5-mile-long stretch. That's an inconvenience for cruise operators and might encourage them to abandon L.A. for San Diego.

A cruise ship dock would mar the recreational experience at Inner Cabrillo Beach. We might be able to accept that if there were a compelling commercial reason to build it. One of the alternatives proposed for the project was to lengthen the existing inner-harbor docks, which would allow room for two Voyager-sized ships -- yet that idea was rejected by port officials because it would be expensive and wouldn't solve the turnaround problem. We think that option deserves another look.

Moreover, the cruise business has fallen off in the recession, and cruise lines seldom send their biggest ships to L.A. because the Mexican Riviera is a much less popular destination than the Caribbean or Mediterranean. The new berths may never be needed.

Hahn, who wants the cruise activity to remain closer to downtown so local restaurants and other businesses can benefit from passenger traffic, has a good suggestion for the Harbor Commission: Look to LAX. When a master plan for upgrading Los Angeles International Airport became bogged down by community opposition, city leaders broke the project into phases, giving the green light to developments on which there was broad agreement while tabling others. The rest of the waterfront upgrade is smartly conceived, badly needed and long overdue; the port should proceed with those parts of the plan, focusing on downtown first. If market conditions justify the Outer Harbor

project, it can be revisited later.

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