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“traffic”

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Chengdu Moves
Photos by Dan Sandoval
With little prelude last February, Chengdu city planners announced a project that would change the face—and the feeling—of the city forever. Within a few months of the announcement, construction had begun on this massive project—an elevated layer looming large over the Second Ring Road—and Chengdu residents bid farewell to what they had known as the human-scale roadway encircling the city.

Local media reports had announced a projected construction-completion date of June 2013, and they weren’t far off their mark—the first BRT buses are scheduled to be put into operation on May 30.

The special features of Chengdu’s BRT will include the elevated roadway, toll-gate stations, and station design that integrates the city’s image (for instance, the Jinsha golden sunbird appears as a motif at some stations). The vehicles themselves will also be customized to the system; they will be larger than ordinary city buses, articulated (or “bendy”), with multiple, wide doors and lower floors for faster loading times.

In the meanwhile, the routes of your favorite Second Ring Road buses will change to better integrate with the system. Lines 51 and 52, which formerly circled the Second Ring Road, will stop running altogether.

The BRT vehicles will circulate around the two innermost lanes of the roadway, one for each direction. The other component of the construction project, of course, are the other two lanes on the elevated roadway, which are reserved for the exclusive use of cars. Trucks, buses, pedestrians, bikes, scooters, and motorbikes are all expressly forbidden from these lanes. Automobile drivers must stay in these lanes, though, and away from the BRT lanes, or they risk being fined RMB100 and having three points deducted from their record.

Bus Rapid Transit

Bus rapid transit systems—also known as “busways” in English and as 公共快速巴士系统(gōnggòng kuàisù bāshì) in Chinese—date back to the 1970s when the first one opened in Curitiba, Brazil. Having won favor among transportation planners for their low cost, high degree of flexibility, and other similar benefits when compared to light rail systems, BRT systems have opened up in numerous cities around the world, each displaying its own characteristics. Although city leaders and the public frequently seem to prefer the more established allure of a subway system, the “BRT is a comparable, more cost-effective and equally elegant solution,” according to the New York-based Institute for Transportation and Development Policy, which, incidentally, ranks Guangzhou’s BRT, along with that of Bogota, Colombia, as the gold standard of BRT systems, a model for all others (including those in Europe and the U.S.) to emulate.

Cities across China have been in a sustained transit-project frenzy for years, and alongside the light-rail and bike-sharing projects that are underway in seemingly every major city, quite a few BRTs have cropped up as well. In addition to the aforementioned gold-standard system in Guangzhou, cities including Hefei, Lanzhou, Urumqi, Xiamen, Zhengzhou, Hangzhou, Jinan, Beijing, Changping, and Kunming, as well as smaller cities all boast BRT systems either in operation or under construction. Chengdu’s elevated-roadway system is modeled after Xiamen’s three-line system, which opened in 2008 and is considered China’s first elevated BRT system.
How to Ride
Tickets will need to be purchased before passing through the station gates. Individual rides cost RMB2, which is good for up to two hours and three transfers. For transit pass holders, the same discounts apply to the BRT (50 percent discount for the monthly option and 30 percent discount with the electronic wallet option).

Operating Times and Frequency
The BRT system will operate between the hours of 6 a.m. and 11 p.m. Vehicles will arrive at intervals of 90 seconds during peak hours, four to six minutes during non-peak hours, and will also be located at the adjacent intercity long-distance bus station and Metro Line 1. Heading east, you can arrive at the Lotus Market, the infamous wholesale market of Chengdu, which itself is under renovation, and offers shoppers everything under the clouds, from textiles and home goods to clothes and shoes, decorations to kitchenware, toys and craft supplies. To the south lies the new Wanda Square (万达广场).

Vehicles will arrive at intervals of three minutes during peak hours and will also be located at the adjacent intercity long-distance bus station and Metro Line 1. Head west to enter more of the massive northern markets, this time the home appliance, tools, and construction materials wholesalers. In 2015, the transfer station to Metro Line 5 will also be located here. Go south to visit more markets, including those selling (yes, even more) textiles, clothes, ceramics, and other materials.

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A Veteran Commuter

reflections on three decades of city living

By Tian Juan

Photo by Michal Pachniewski

was born and grew up in the same area of Chengdu. My primary school and middle/high school were 1.5 kilometers away from my house, so I almost spent 12 years “commuting” between school and home. As a veteran commuter in this city, I observed the changes of how people going here and there.

During my first years of primary school, my father took me to school by bike. Private cars were rarely seen on the streets in those days. After school, parents and grandparents crowded around the gate, having arrived either on foot or by bike. Those who lived nearby walked home hand in hand with their family. And I, sitting on the back of my father’s bike, counted the storefronts. This was how I started to know the city. On the days when my parents and I overslept, my father would rush to send me to school by bike. Private cars were rarely seen on the streets in those days. During my first years of primary school, my mother took me to school by bike. My mother is still surprised that I can finish my business trip in Chengqing and return home in the same day. It used to take a whole night from the basin to the hill. However, my father told me, “There are more cars. There are wider roads. But these things make it more difficult to go here and there in the city.” It takes me one hour to go from my home to the city south around the Second Ring Road by bus or by car when there is a serious traffic jam—ideally equivalent to the time from Chengdu to Manyang. It seems as if the so-called development of the transportation network makes moving harder instead of easier. I should acknowledge that there have been improvements. But the problems following development usually seem to be more outstanding.

It was also in the 1990s that the city witnessed the prelude to modern-day massive and constant infrastructure construction. The Second Ring Road, the biggest municipal project in the city’s history, was completed at the end of 1993. And that was just the start. Later, Chengdu locals welcomed the Third Ring Road, then the outer ring road, Tianfu Dadao, and many others as the city expanded. The growing veins of the city have changed how people go here and there too. Cars dominate the roads. Scooters have replaced the bikes, and the bikes have been relegated to a vehicle for leisure and sport. When the metro finally started to run at the end of 2010, people began to move not only above ground but also underground. Chengdu’s transformation over the past 20 years never fails to impress people. The developments are hard to get used to. When my mother is still surprised that I can finish my business trip in Chengqing and return home in the same day. It used to take a whole night from the basin to the hill. However, my father told me, “There are more cars. There are wider roads. But these things make it more difficult to go here and there in the city.” It takes me one hour to go from my home to the city south around the Second Ring Road by bus or by car when there is a serious traffic jam—ideally equivalent to the time from Chengdu to Manyang. It seems as if the so-called development of the transportation network makes moving harder instead of easier. I should acknowledge that there have been improvements. But the problems following development usually seem to be more outstanding.

The day in April when I wrote this, construction was completed. It will be put into operation soon. How this big, ugly, and daylight-blocking concrete jungle? What about this whole freeway-speed traffic flying by their eighth-story windows at all hours of the day and night. It’s only going to make the city more noisy and more traffic. It’ll only create more traffic, not less. Thank you for all of that. I live in a concrete jungle. What about this whole freeway-speed traffic flying by their eighth-story windows at all hours of the day and night. It’s only going to make the city more noisy and more traffic. It’ll only create more traffic, not less. Thank you for all of that. I live in a concrete jungle. What about this whole freeway-speed traffic flying by their eighth-story windows at all hours of the day and night. It’s only going to make the city more noisy and more traffic.

How has the city construction affected your life in Chengdu? I am quite an indoor person. I live and work within the first ring road. I walk in a building across street from where I live, and my local circles seldom summon me away or outdoors. I thought the construction has nothing to do with me. Till the blocks of flying insects rushing through the window, and the polluted air sent me to the hospital respiratory department. Early this week, I have had a meeting with people flying from Paris, Ireland, Hong Kong, and Beijing. I was kind of shocked how much they complained about air quality and traffic in Chengdu. They stayed just for one day, and they were already had “enough”—queueing in the busy traffic, bad air, sounding car horn. They don’t think it’s a city the panda bear would like to live.

I hack more, there’s more dust in my house, and I actually go out of way to take the metro if at all possible, because it isn’t worth waiting 20 or more minutes just to get through the intersection at Wannianchang to get home. I think of Mumbai and wander just how long it’d take Chengdu to get to that point.

Yes, a thousand times yes. Stuck in traffic everywhere because of the closed ring road even on my e-bike, dirty air filling up my lungs.

Things get a little bit more annoying. The noise level raised, so everything and everyone is louder. People tolerate and add more noise. There’s more pollution and more traffic, it affected me negatively because people I know live farther from each other and don’t want to leave their area of the city, so I don’t see them as often—only on special occasions. Meeting people now, professionally and just friends, is more difficult. You plan your life around spending less time in traffic, so you do less out of the home. I used to love taking taxis and now I hate it, for example.

It’s destroyed all my favorite running routes near my apartment, and now I sit around like a couch potato instead of venturing outside because even going out for a stroll is more of a stress-inducing headache than relaxing. Actually, I thought the roaring before the construction. This is just unimaginable. Unbelievable, really. Every time I feel there, I actually cannot believe the conditions that we’re trying to live in.

How do you think the opening of the BRT and elevated Second Ring Road next month will affect your life? The preview is very fascinating. Let alone the side effect, the construction will blom the city economy, and provide convenience for city life. Apart from that, I don’t have more expectations for now.

Hopefully, it’ll mean that it will once again take less than an hour to get into town from where we live outside the second ring. What I’m afraid it means, though, is simply different traffic, not less traffic, ays. While Chengdu obviously needs better transportation infrastructure, I think that adding vast shadows to great swathes of an already shadowy city is a mistake. It affects the feel of a place. Do we really want more spacious concrete jungle? What about this whole “garden city” propaganda that came out last year?

Hopefully a less tired fiancé as she works in the west and we live in the east.

I live near the Second Ring Road, so I expect the noise level to raise, and there’ll be more traffic in my neighborhood. The problem is, although I’m near the Second Ring Road, the closed station will be almost a kilometer away because I’m between two stations. Maybe I’ll take it sometimes, but I hope more that I can ride my bike under the layers to protect from the elements, but I’m not sure how it will work. Maybe also it will change my traffic habits—instead of going through the city I’ll go around it. It also makes me feel a little more like I’m living in Tokyo or Chongqing where life happens on several layers, and you have to start thinking on a 3D grid instead of 2D.
**While gearing up to celebrate our six-year anniversary, we decided to clean out our inbox.**

**Guess what we found? [Leia's e-mails]? Quite a few strange e-mails that we’ve received over the years. Held in our GMail archives for years, with various (and not always flattering) labels, these e-mails are just a selection of the most outrageous, funniest, and plain old confusing correspondence we’ve received. Now we’re sharing them with you. (All names have been removed to protect the “innocent.”)

**#flattery**

*Hey listen, I just wanna say that I think you guys are doing a good job. I really think that if something in Chengdu sucks, or is badly translated, then say it like it is. We have enough bad! Chengdu people are easy-going and relaxed* “rufff” *pieces in this city (many from your two rivals). That doesn’t mean I dwell on the negative things here, but I appreciate reading about how something really is. I don’t know who the writer is who reported on (event) last night, but he/she is really enjoyable to read and writes well.*

**#pearlclutching**

*Hello, I just read the September edition of “Chengdu City Life” magazine. [...] It was the quality of the first 90% of the content that made stumbling across “How to maintain a long-distance relationship” (p.33) that much more shocking and disappointing. It is evident from the “Editor’s note” and the fact that the author wasn’t willing to put her real name on the page that you conceived that this article would be extremely offensive. Your premonition was accurate. Honestly my entire impression of your magazine went from “excellent” to “lumminy” in less than 10 seconds. As a Christian, I can say that the content of that article reflects the face of some of my deepest held beliefs. People are not numbers. We’ve been made in the image of God and been given the gift of sex to exist safely and healthily in the context of the committed, selfless, and loving relationship of marriage.*

**#statusupdate**

*Dear friend, long time no see. How are you doing? I hope everything get along with your well. Now I live in Chengdu,China. even though it was hit by the earthquake,we'll recover from it.Don't worry.I am here live happily with my friends and boyfirend. wish you are as happy as me:) Merry Christmas and happy new year.*

**#sowwe**

*Hey listen, I just wanna say that I think you guys are doing a good job. I really think that if something in Chengdu sucks, or is badly translated, then say it like it is. We have enough bad! Chengdu people are easy-going and relaxed” rufff “pieces in this city (many from your two rivals). That doesn’t mean I dwell on the negative things here, but I appreciate reading about how something really is. I don’t know who the writer is who reported on (event) last night, but he/she is really enjoyable to read and writes well.*

**#RAGE**

*Hey, Since when do you “row” a dragonboat? For 5 years, I paddled competitively in a recreational Dragonboat club. To key word being “paddled” if you want to “row” you might do it in a scull or skiff, but I doubt you could do it in a Dragonboat without paddling. Also I am the only one who can row this thing that you must paddle!! It’s all about teamwork if you aren’t paddling with your teammates, you are paddling against them.*

**#Hey, we’re just a magazine**

*I am looking for a little local smoke. (I am from humboldt county), and I was wondering how to look that up on the chinese internet, forums, etc. is there some kind of code word, or could you all point me in the right direction?* Your reply is greatly appreciated.*

**#Miya**

*I am wondering how do bands go about getting on your bill for next year. As i would love to play the Chinese band … check out our myspace Kind Regards* 

**#sowwe**

*I want to buy nice nickels, shoes, cake decorating items, paper baking cups. Can u help me find shops in Chengdu for these products.*

**#okay**

*I know that you probably don’t get too many emails like this but I have been looking for an English speakingke English speaking school or tutor and out of the two hundred and forty seven websites I have looked on and the four magazines I have looked through I have found absolutely nothing. If you could find a breakingdance studio that is in cheng du then that would be very useful and also don’t tell me about the hiphop studios you already have on your website because I contacted them and oh! guess what?! they are in NANN.*

**#suggest@chenduo**

*I see your magazine is peguing well during my trip to Chengdu. I prefer to use a local source, such as yourself, rather than the Lonely Planet because the places in the “bibbe” have now become over priced. Some suggestions: The company makes no money with the tour but you have their eyes covered but it is much better than your competitor who was with an ash tray on his head. I almost didn’t pick up either. You need to put a photo of something relating to Chengdu of interest to tourists. If your heading Restaurants should have disclaimer like “Almost Western?" or “Nasty By Western" You may want to add where to purchase some of the bags another site, I was wondering if a Zapp Bag Company? If not, would it be possible to order some of the bags another way? I appreciate your assistance. Xie xie.*

**#sowwe**

*Hello My name is xxxxx and I just saw a news story about Xiao Hua Yu and the Lucky Bay Company. I am searching for a website for the company, so if you are a foreigner your a traitor. I am an American, and I just saw a news story about Xiao Hua Yu and the Lucky Bay Company. If not, would it be possible to order some of the bags another way? I appreciate your assistance. Xie xie.*

**#suggest@chenduo**

*Hello I just read your September edition of “Chengdu City Life” magazine. [...] Perhaps it was the quality of the first 90% of the content that made stumbling across “How to maintain a long-distance relationship” (p.33) that much more shocking and disappointing. It is evident from the “Editor’s note” and the fact that the author wasn’t willing to put her real name on the page that you conceived that this article would be extremely offensive. Your premonition was accurate. Honestly my entire impression of your magazine went from “excellent” to “lumminy” in less than 10 seconds. As a Christian, I can say that the content of that article reflects the face of some of my deepest held beliefs. People are not numbers. We’ve been made in the image of God and been given the gift of sex to exist safely and healthily in the context of the committed, selfless, and loving relationship of marriage.*

**#Hif**

*Hi my name is xxx and I am moving to Chengdoo in 12 days (spring break, wahooo)! there was just a few things in the magazine that I know that people LOVE but were not there [...]. Oh kno, I think that alot of chinese teenagers are really interested in animations and would like to be able to draw like that but when they go to your magazine. OH NO! nothing is here... (gives up my dream of becoming an artist also i am really into breaking dancing, and about 3 days ago, my friend told me that there were people practicing all over my city but there were no schools... BRAHGAH I think that in cheng du there might be schools but don’t know where to find them, let alone one with an english speaking tutor) if you could add any information about schools for this that would be great for me. As i am only 13 but still, this could help alot of people.*

**#Hi My Name is xxx and i crossdress. as a woman I am not happy with my male body so would like a seaxehance please send me details pictures and costs Regards**

**#dear sir/madam i hope you have a plan to travel to your beautiful country at agust 2011. please make a itinerary for us with schedule as below**

1. 28 agt 2011, we arrived at Chengdu airport. International, I hope you have a service to pick us up to a hotel.
2. 29 agt full day tour for Chengdu exp. visit the Panda, some of the Monastery/Village. 31 agt morning we visit to jiuzhaiguo and stay in there for a while 2 day so 2 day we visited full day tour to visit jiuzhaiguo another 02 sep we leave jiuzhaiguo to xian, please help me to calculate the best price you give to us for : 1. full day tour from chengdu pick up airport 2. minivan to jiuzhaiguo and full day tour at xian 3. meals (breakfast, lunch and dinner) 4. ticket for the entries tour places. my group is 7 adult and 1 kid (2year). i hope you give me the best price as soon as possible. thanks*
South of the grasslands of central Xinjiang, southern Xinjiang opens up to arid deserts and amazing mountainous landscapes. Coming from the north, you will have to drive through the mostly unchanging landscape of the Taklamakan Desert to get to the southern cities. Make a stop to walk among (and on, and leap off of) the sand dunes and, if you’re lucky, spot a herd of wild camels making their way across the warm sands. At the southern end of the desert lies a place nicknamed Xinjiang’s Grand Canyon. Walking through these enormous red rock canyons is like taking a step into a Martian landscape. The scale and scope of these canyons is remarkable, although one must be cautious due to flash floods during rainy weather.

As you leave behind the sand dunes, the first major settlement is the town of Hotan, home to a fairly traditional Uyghur population and a bustling street-food scene at night that offers a variety of Middle Eastern-style foods, from chicken and lamb kabobs to Xinjiang rice, as well as different desserts. The town is also known for a large market that sells local and Pakistani goods and caters far more to locals’ day-to-day needs than to tourists.

Heading farther west, you eventually arrive in Kashgar, the well-known one-time major hub along the Silk Road and the westernmost city in China. The city is quickly becoming visually indistinguishable from most other Chinese cities as more tall buildings in typical contemporary architectural styles appear, and the ongoing demolition of the old areas underscores this fact. Nonetheless, walking around the old city is still a day well spent. With its unique architecture, language, and culture, Kashgar is distinct from China, and a visit is like leaving China without needing a stamp in your passport. The old town area is rather large and lies not far from one of the largest bazaars in the world, where goods like Turkish tea, locally grown raisins, and an assortment of souvenirs can be purchased. Unlike the market in Hotan, this is a tourist market, so buyer beware! Kashgar also holds a famous livestock market that usually occurs every Sunday.

Heading west from Kashgar you drive along the Karakoram highway (permit required) for breathtaking natural views of massive mountains and vast lakes. Ancient glaciers along the road seem just a stone’s throw away, and the fresh frigid air forms a stark contrast to the warm, dry air of Kashgar. As you enjoy a lunch beside one of these crystal clear lakes, you can’t help but think that it is the perfect way to finish off a Xinjiang adventure.

Photos provided by PureQuest Adventures. For more adventure ideas, please visit www.purequest.com.
12 people or so. And that was one of eight tent companies in Lushan. Somewhere on the road between Ya’an and Lushan they have 60,000 tents, so there should be enough tents and enough medics on the road to help.

What is SQR doing at the moment? While we’re waiting [to get in to assess the situation], we’re preparing hygiene packs like we did for 5.12. We take a plastic basin and fill it with detergents, hand wipes, soaps, toothbrushes and toothpaste, Band-Aids, plus things that are useful in a camping environment—strings, scissors, waterproof tape, disposable ponchos, candles, lighters. We can make any number of those—depending on what you put, they in probably cost less than RMB200 a pack. People can donate items or cash for those, but it’s important to us that it is illegal in China to distribute used clothes—even if they are clean.

What were the gaps in relief efforts following the Wenchuan quake? Those things like hygiene products were a very obvious gap. The Red Cross fed everyone and provided water, but those things like hygiene and basic sanitation were not really taken care of. Any kind of rehabilitation—mental rehabilitation, building communities and temporary shelters was an important factor to get people into a more organized and positive life and to see if we could improve their own quality of life and look at the most disadvantaged, the disabled, and the dissociated with a poverty-stricken background.

What major projects were you able to complete? We set up a community center in the old earthquake area and a school, which runs by itself and doesn’t need too much day-to-day care, we’re just on the board to advise. In the community center we run development projects and grassroots NGO incubation and cultivation projects.

Since 2008, SQR ran through three stages. The first year after the Wenchuan quake was helping with emergency relief. Then in years two and three we dealt with people in temporary tents, and see if we could improve their lives with physical and mental rehabilitation, sanitation, and education projects. And when people moved back into permanent dwellings in the fourth and fifth years, we did grassroots incubation—training people with disabilities and giving them microfinance so they could set up their own businesses.

The S.12 network was quite active in training people in civil society development and NGO auditing. There are 200 NGOs around Lushan that are working on what their projects are doing now, I’m not sure, but they will probably get involved in this. It probably needs the Red Cross or some like the last time, but the scale is obviously a lot smaller.

How long did it take to build houses and reinstall infrastructure? Last time, the lucky ones were back in their houses 18 months to two years after, and the unlucky ones three years. But now there are still people not in houses. After three years they took down temporary shelters regardless if they had homes to go to or not. Because there were enough homes in the area, people who didn’t have homes could at least rent rooms in somebody else’s house. Back then Sichuan kind of benefited from the government’s stimulus package. In Lushan, obviously, the infrastructural damages are not on the same scale. You can drive 10 to 15 minutes from Lushan, and there is no damage whatsoever, but then you get into the area that’s obviously stricken, but it’s not as widespread as last time.

Does it even make sense to rebuild in a quake area if there’ll just be more quakes? Last century there were several quakes in the area, and next century there will be quakes in the area. The fault line runs right down to Yunnan and up to Qinghai. So it’s extremely likely there will be a bigger quake in the next 20 years. What do people do? In Beichuan they decided that building in that landscape was a bad idea initially and moved 25km down the river. But that option doesn’t really present itself here because most of the people affected are farmers. If you’re a 50-year-old farmer with nothing but an acre of land or two, what are you options? I don’t know what [the authorities are] going to do in terms of the bigger picture.

I guess you can take some confidence out of the fact that the schools built after 2008—the Lushan Middle School, for example—1,600 kids. But in 20 seconds without one scratch [the incidence of school buildings collapsing in the 2008 quake was unusually and disproportionately high]. So there is truth that buildings kill people, not earthquakes. If they are rebuilding properly there don’t have to be future fatalities.

We were able to call the people at a library we donated to a temporary school in Baoping. They remembered us from before and told us that the rebuilt school stayed up along with all the other schools. In 2008 Baoping wasn’t the worst hit part—I imagine that there were houses that came down twice [once in 2008 and again in 2013].

Who is behind SQR currently? If you’d asked me that on Friday, I’d have said no one. There are a few people, Catherine Platt, “Found in Translation” columnist and active member of the Chengdu expat community. It’s still the same team, we who are still working on it every week.

How do you ensure transparency? We’ve got a committee. Last time the treasurers in the chambers of commerce supervised all incoming and outgoing money. For the moment, I don’t have that problem, because there is no money yet. But once there is it, I will do something similar. When we work with multiple organizations, like the chambers of commerce and Chengdu International Women’s Club, the Rotary Club, they all have their own internal sort of reporting systems, and they have their treasurers, so there are checks and balances in that alone.

We also appoint someone who’s not involved with any those to supervise the finances. As much as possible, we try to link the donor with a specific project. For example, if a significant donor would come, we would ask them to buy the tents and pay the factory directly. That way we don’t touch the cash at all. We also tried to document what all the different NGOs and relief groups were doing and what their contacts are so that we can better coordinate them and match donors to projects. Sometimes other NGOs come in and we help them and do logistics and provide them with a driver and translator and access. It worked last time, and that’s why I guess people are offering to help us this time.

On that note, how can concerned citizens help? Is the best way just donating money? We could have Chengdu-based volunteers later. But it won’t be getting on a truck and going up for 48 hours [like some volunteers did last time]. It could be fundraising, updating web sites. Quite a few people who were living here in 2008 are now scattered around the world and are starting fundraising initiatives.

The events at the Baoxing [the barbecue and concert as well as the Des Bishop comedy night] are raising a bit of money and initial awareness, and then people and start to get together and discuss options—different groups are doing different things. In terms of funding we recommend people coordinating projects to wait a bit, see what the state is doing to, do the Red Cross is going to do, and what the other NGOs are going to do. And we’ll see what pass and fill those gaps. But that won’t become apparent before a couple of weeks, and we move on from that point.

For more information on Sichuan Quake Relief’s work, status updates, and donations information, visit http://sichuan-quake-relief.org

Photo provided by Peter Goff
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