Transit-Oriented Development

Background

Definition

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) refers to development of housing, commercial space, services, and job opportunities close to public transportation. Such development is intended to reduce dependency on automobiles, to increase ridership, and to better link residences to jobs and services.

Planning for TOD usually occurs at the station area or district level. Such neighborhoods are often called transit communities or transit-oriented communities, and comprise the area within a half-mile radius of, or approximate ten-minute walking distance from, high-capacity transit stations such as light rail, bus rapid transit, streetcar, and other major transit hubs. Communities throughout the region are increasingly focusing on TOD both as a way to accommodate growth in transit communities and to achieve a range of economic, health, social, and environmental benefits.

The Growing Transit Communities Strategy advances a comprehensive definition of "equitable transit communities":

> Equitable transit communities are mixed-use, transit-served neighborhoods that provide housing and transportation choices and greater social and economic opportunity for current and future residents. Although generally defined by a half-mile walking distance around high-capacity transit stations, they exist within the context of larger neighborhoods with existing residents and businesses.

> These communities promote local community and economic development by providing housing types at a range of densities and affordability levels, commercial and retail spaces, community services, and other amenities that are integrated into safe, walkable neighborhoods.

> Successful equitable transit communities are created through inclusive planning and decision-making processes, resulting in development outcomes that accommodate future residential and employment growth, increase opportunity and mobility for existing communities, and enhance public health for socially and economically diverse populations.

The region's transit ridership grew by over 7% from 2010 to 2013.

TOD is not a single tool, but rather is a planning framework that integrates multiple tools—including in the areas of housing, transportation, and community development—focused in a geographic area near key transit infrastructure. These other tools include those described by several other

Planning for Whole Communities Toolkit resource guides, including: Affordable Housing, Community Engagement Tools, Complete Streets, Greenhouse Gas Reduction Strategies, Parking Management, Opportunity Mapping, Pedestrian Oriented Design, Safe Routes to School, Sustainable Parks and Open Space, and Transportation Demand Management. TOD provides an important geographic focus for these and other tools and investments. Done well, TOD creates a level of activity, investment, and connectivity that enhances sustainable outcomes in all of these areas.

Health, equity and sustainability considerations
There are many health, equity, and sustainability benefits associated with transit-oriented development. These include the potential to:

- Promote active living by encouraging walking and biking
- Improve public health by cutting air pollution associated with automobiles
- Lower household transportation-related expenses
- Reduce taxpayer-burden associated with municipal infrastructure costs
- Help meet the growing demand for "walkable communities"
- Conserve farms and natural ecosystems, and protect water quality, by curbing land consumption
- Cut energy use and greenhouse gas emissions associated with both transportation and the built environment

Promoting equitable community development in transit communities can enhance all of the above benefits by ensuring access to a full range of households, regardless of income or demographic group. As transit-oriented communities change and grow over time, it is important to provide housing that is affordable at a range of incomes and community facilities that meet the needs of existing and future residents. This requires special attention to communities that currently lack access to transportation choices, quality schools, and other social and physical neighborhood resources that allow community members to thrive and succeed.

Program and Policy Examples

Program examples
The Growing Transit Communities Strategy recommends a "playbook" of 24 strategies to support equitable development in transit communities. The strategies address three main regional goals: to attract more of the region's residential and employment growth near high capacity transit, to provide housing choices affordable to a full range of incomes, and to increase access to opportunity for existing and future transit community members. Because no two transit communities are alike, the Strategy also includes a typology of implementation approaches that link specific actions to different community contexts.

While all 24 strategies are ingredients for successful TOD and are detailed in the complete Growing Transit Communities Strategy, five strategies that enhance transit communities' ability to attract growth are highlighted below.

Foundation Strategies

1. Establish a regional program to support thriving and equitable transit communities
2. Build partnerships and promote collaboration
3. Engage effectively with community stakeholders
4. Build capacity for community engagement
5. Evaluate and monitor impacts and outcomes

Attract Growth

6. Conduct station area planning
7. Use land efficiently in transit communities
8. Locate, design and provide access to transit stations to support TOD
9. Adopt innovative parking tools
10. Invest in infrastructure and public realm improvements

Housing Choices

11. Assess current and future housing needs in transit communities
12. Minimize displacement through preservation and replacement
13. Direct housing resources to support transit-dependent populations
14. Implement a TOD property acquisition fund
15. Expand value capture financing as a tool for infrastructure and affordable housing
16. Make surplus public lands available for affordable housing
17. Leverage market value through incentives
18. Implement regional fair housing assessment

Access to Opportunity

19. Assess community needs
20. Invest in environmental and public health
21. Invest in economic vitality and opportunity
22. Invest in equitable mobility options
23. Invest in equitable access to high quality education
24. Invest in public safety in transit communities

The five Attract Growth strategies include:

Strategy 6: Conduct station area planning. Station area planning is the process whereby local jurisdictions engage broad community interests to produce a unique vision for a transit community and a blueprint for regulations and investments that successfully attract residential and employment growth consistent with that vision. Each high capacity transit station area should have a dedicated plan, or policies within an existing plan, addressing a comprehensive range of topic areas.

Examples:

The Tacoma South Downtown Subarea Plan (2013) is a district-level example of neighborhood planning that integrates anticipated housing and employment growth with access to a regional transit center and several local streetcar stations.

Numerous local jurisdictions have developed station area plans in advance of Sound Transit's Link light rail service.

> The City of Seattle undertook station area planning from 1998-2001 in advance of the construction of Link light rail in the Rainier Valley.

> Station area planning efforts for SeaTac's future Angle Lake Station and Shoreline's future 185th Street and 145th Street Stations are underway in 2014.

Strategy 7: Use land efficiently in transit communities. Transit communities contain a limited amount of land to accommodate housing, workplaces, retail and services, open space and other public amenities. Attracting growth to transit communities starts with policies and regulations that use that resource wisely and allow sufficient compact development to meet growth and ridership goals along with public and private actions to support those investments.

Examples:

The City of Seattle has lidded reservoirs, such as Cal Anderson near the future Capitol Hill Link Station and Jefferson Park near the Beacon Hill Link Station, to create needed park and open space near transit communities.

The Master Plan for the Capstone/Group Health site near the future Overlake Village Link Station in Redmond allows for an enormous increase in residential and employment density while also improving pedestrian amenities and stormwater management.

Strategy 8: Locate, design, and provide access to transit stations to support TOD. Decisions about the siting and design of transit facilities can have a significant impact on the potential for building transit communities within a given corridor. Current and future community members are best served and ridership potential is best supported where transit systems are designed to foster long-term TOD potential and connectivity to surrounding neighborhoods and communities.

Examples:

Proactive subarea planning in the Bel-Red Corridor helped make the case for an East Link light rail alignment that would maximize the TOD potential of the district.

Community Transit selected Highway 99/Evergreen Way for its first Swift BRT route in large part because of the existing densities, size, mix of development, regional location, access, street design, transit-dependent populations, and planned growth in the corridor. Recognizing the strong linkage between land use, transit and the role counties and cities play in transit market development, Community Transit worked with local jurisdictions to identify thirteen Transit Emphasis Corridors in its Long Range Transit Plan (2011).

Sound Transit developed a System Access Policy (2013) to "maximize pedestrian, bike and transit access and provide parking capacity within available resources."

Strategy 9: Adopt innovative parking tools. Frequent and reliable transit service within walking distance of housing and commercial uses reduces the amount of parking needed as part of new development. Requirements for parking that are inflexible and exceed demand can drive up development costs and resulting prices and rents, and may render new development unfeasible. A range of innovative parking tools are available for use in transit communities that are effective in supporting TOD while meeting the limited parking needs of a transit-rich environment.

> *Examples:*
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> [King County's Right Sized Parking](#) effort found that parking in multifamily buildings exceeded actual usage. The program includes a web-based tool to help policymakers, developers and community members determine the expected parking needs in a project.

Strategy 10: Invest in infrastructure and public realm improvements. Local governments and private developers have identified insufficient infrastructure and community amenities as major barriers to new residential and commercial development in transit communities. For example, data indicate that many current and potential station areas within the light rail corridors lack the street networks, sidewalks, parks, and other public facilities desired for livable transit communities. A regional strategy to provide sufficient infrastructure and enhance the public realm includes creating new funding tools and targeting existing funds for maximum benefit. Provision of this infrastructure is an opportunity to achieve multiple environmental and health benefits.

> *Examples:*
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> The rebuilt [Bremerton Ferry Terminal](#) and concurrent public realm improvements along the waterfront helped spur revitalization and new economic development in downtown Bremerton.
>
> Jurisdictions along Highway 99/Pacific Highway South in south King County have made a series of corridor improvements that have expanded multimodal mobility and improved speed and reliability of the [RapidRide A Line](#).
>
> The Tacoma South Downtown subarea planning included a [Programmatic EIS](#) that creates the framework for infrastructure improvements as the district grows over time.

Performance evaluation/success stories
The success of TOD and transit communities in supporting thriving and equitable transit communities is realized over the long-term. There is the need to evaluate tools as they are implemented and monitor outcomes as they are realized in order to modify the strategies to strengthen success over time. Evaluation and monitoring efforts should focus not only on attracting residential and employment growth near transit, but also on key social and equity outcomes, including availability or affordable housing choices and equitable access to opportunity. As a complement to the monitoring efforts, public agencies should evaluate the equity impacts of policies and investments before they are implemented in transit communities.

Implementation

Considerations for local implementation

The following high-level checklist captures actions that a local jurisdiction might undertake to promote TOD near transit investments:

- Develop local vision and policy framework for development near transit
- Identify and map transit communities
- Evaluate existing physical conditions and community characteristics to identify needs
- Develop station area plans
- Implement plan strategies and actions
- Monitor and evaluate outcomes

Resources

Center for Transit Oriented Development's Station Area Planning Manual (2007)

Puget Sound Regional Council's Growing Transit Communities Publications (2011-2013)

Tacoma-Pierce County Health Department's Healthy Community Planning Toolbox—Policy Intervention Tools: Transportation and Physical Activity, Land Use and Physical Activity, Housing and Physical Activity (2013)