Summary of Final Report, BC-137-38
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BUILDING TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT IN ESTABLISHED COMMUNITIES

PROBLEM STATEMENT

There is a growing concern in the United States about traffic congestion, long commutes, air pollution, green house gas emissions, foreign and domestic oil prices and availability, farmland and open space depletion, and various other problems that have been attributed partly to the nation's favored suburban development style of the last 50 years. The majority of American communities, developed after 1950, have been designed for service by the private automobile rather than public transportation. This sustained emphasis on design, public policy, and investment favoring private auto travel has made it difficult for transit to serve these communities. While new communities increasingly are considering features to improve transit access, this project focuses more upon how older, established communities have begun to take steps to retrofit their land development to encourage the use of alternative modes of transportation.

OBJECTIVES

While more empirical evidence is needed to verify cause and effect, transit oriented development (TOD) patterns and major investments in transit are seen as ways to combat or alleviate the problems noted above. This project provides a synthesis of the steps that established car oriented communities have taken to transform into more transit oriented communities. This synthesis was developed through a literature review of professional and research journals, searches of Internet resources and the Transportation Research Information Services (TRIS), a review of studies conducted by other research agencies, and direct contact with transit agencies and municipal transportation and land use planning departments through telephone conversations and email correspondence.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Researchers found that the transportation planning literature does not address how the implementation of TOD can be made to appeal to the individual homebuyer and the commercial property buyer. It is up to the professionals who support the use of TOD to more proactively and carefully consider the perspective of these groups in order to better accomplish TOD. This report also found that good transit oriented design alone is not enough to make TOD work. It must be supported by some combination of other tools as described in this report, including the following:

- Developing financing methods
- Offering financial incentives to land developers
- Coordinating stakeholders
- Careful tailoring of land development regulations
- Crafting transit supportive design guidelines
- Providing effective access by alternative transportation modes
- Managing parking

- Predesignating transit corridors and incorporating transit service into future development
- Adapting transit services to suburban areas
- Providing home loan incentives to homebuyers
- Addressing and overcoming community resistance through public education

This study also has found that TOD approaches can differ significantly from place to place, depending upon circumstances such as differences in land development regulations, zoning ordinances, market forces, development opportunities, available transit services, and the regional economy. Researchers also found that some physical design features of TOD may be critical, depending on the particular goals of the development. For that reason, it is important that goals of the TOD be defined early in its development. While the acceptance and adoption of TOD in established communities is an incremental process that may take decades to come to fruition, new technologies such as hybrid electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cells add some degree of optimism for the future of transit to better serve suburbia as it exists today.

Society has derived certain positive benefits from suburban life, which have lessened the capacity of traditional transit systems to serve the public. This project identifies the perceived problems of suburban development that are created for individuals as well as society as a whole. Private automobile transportation is available and affordable to most, but not all. Those not served by automobile transportation are sorely disadvantaged. The solution must include efforts in both directions: in order to enable transit to better serve the public, transit agencies need to be able to maximize their ability to extend effective services to suburbia, and people need to be attracted back to urban life through the creation of transit-oriented development.

Based upon this synthesis of conceptual information about TOD as well as the experience and insights offered by municipal planners, transit professionals, and other practitioners, several observations and conclusions can be drawn:

1) The acceptance and adoption of TOD in established communities is an incremental process that may take decades to come to fruition.
2) Developing transit oriented communities will have a greater chance of success when a combination of tools are used together, including regulations such as zoning and parking ordinances, along with incentives such as tax exemptions, an expedited permit review process, density bonuses, or a reduction or waiver of certain development fees.
3) For TOD projects to be successful, they must strive to capture most of the traditional suburban amenities that are so valued by suburbanites, such as the perception of quietness, spaciousness, light, privacy, safety, and security, while capitalizing on its unique strengths not shared with suburbia. These strengths include more stimulating commercial opportunities within walking distance and a cohesive sense of community.
4) TOD has the capacity to break ground in our culture. While suburbia offers socio-economic homogeneity, TOD offers the opportunity to arrange cultural and socio-economic diversity that is appealing. For example, TOD can be designed to increase livability for children, the elderly, and persons with disabilities. Development policies in TOD to intersperse affordable housing with middle-income and affluent housing can soften the demarcation between “us” and “them” and alleviate the desire to find socio-economic sanctuary in suburbia. Social programs, education, and services that elevate low-income persons from poverty and revitalize urban neighborhoods have the potential to slow suburbanization.

5) For TOD to be successful and for residents to truly rely less on automobiles, residents must be able to make most routine personal trips by foot. There will have to be a sufficient variety of retail establishments to meet resident needs, within walking distance from home or by uncomplicated transit trips. This suggests finding a workable balance between providing sufficient development density while preserving other elements of suburban appeal.
6) TOD retrofitting has the best current chance of success in areas with initially amenable markets, such as high concentrations of single adults, "empty nesters," childless couples, and immigrants.
7) TOD approaches can differ significantly from place to place depending upon factors and circumstances such as land development regulations, zoning ordinances, market factors, development opportunities, available public transportation services, resources, and the regional economy. For example, Atlanta's Lindbergh City Center covers 47 acres, is based around a rail station, and includes major housing, retail, and office space. King County's Village at Overlook Station, on the other hand, covers five acres, is built over a bus station, and includes rental housing units, a park and ride, and a child care facility.
8) New technologies add some degree of optimism for the future of transit to better serve suburbia as it exists today.

BENEFITS

Few ideas have captured the attention of transit planners like Transit Oriented Development. There is much discussion about the concept in the literature and among professionals. This project provides a needed synthesis of that discussion, and it documents issues about which discussion has been based on untested assumptions and which require further investigation.

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