6 Sacramento Light Rail

OVERVIEW: TRANSIT SYSTEM CHARACTERISTICS

The Sacramento Light Rail System has been in operation since the Fall of 1987 and links downtown with suburban residential neighborhoods to the south and northeast. Average daily ridership in 1997 was 27,384.

There are currently 18.3 miles of track in operation and 30 stations. In addition, 2.3 miles and one more station are in construction, and are planned to be in operation in September 1998; another 6.2 miles are in the final design stages and are estimated to be in operation in 2004 and 5 miles are planned to be operating by 2005.

Overall, the Sacramento Light Rail System has experienced little in the way of transit-oriented development outside Downtown. Within the Capitol Area, the City of Sacramento and the State of California have both developed new policies recently to beginning focusing development around stations. This case study will focus on plans for downtown development, as well as two joint development projects that were initiated by the Light Rail, the first at 29th Street Station and the second at Power Inn/College Greens Station.

STATION AREA PLANNING FRAMEWORK

So far, market forces have had biggest influence on development along the Sacramento Light Rail System. There has been comprehensive land use planning at the County-scale with a focus on transit-oriented development, but little specific rail station area planning outside Downtown.

Planning for joint, development, however, has been successful in isolated circumstances. Both the 29th Street Station and the Power Inn/College Greens Station have been the sites of joint development projects. These projects are not outside of the sphere of land use planning (development at Power Inn Station will require General Plan and zoning changes if approved), but the initiative and project details are driven more by developers than local land use policies.

29TH STREET STATION

Farmer's Market Plaza is a joint development project located at the edge of downtown at 30th and R streets. It is adjacent to the 29th Street station. The project consists of office uses, with supporting retail, and will be constructed in four phases, with a total commercial area of 500,000 square feet. The first three phases have been completed, and the fourth phase is currently undergoing environmental review. Land use data for the fourth phase are listed below:

- Gross area: 90,000 square feet
- Building height: 104 feet
- FAR: 4.4
- Parking ratio: 1: 601 sq.ft. (with the first 20,000 sq.ft. exempt from requirement)

This project has been successful in generating alternative mode use, with 44 percent of those employed at the plaza utilizing public transit.

POWER INN/COLLEGE GREENS STATIONS

Joint development negotiations are currently underway for a 12-acre parcel at the Power Inn Station. The parcel is currently a park-and-ride lot, and is planned by the developer to be integrated into a development encompassing the 215 acres surrounding the parcel. The site is flanked by the Power Inn station to the northwest and the College Greens station to the northeast. The proposed project includes 3.4 million square feet of office space, 165,000 square feet of retail and industrial uses, an internal shuttle providing service to the light rail stations, a network of pedestrian and bicycle trails, and the 145-acre Granite Regional Park (site of a former gravel mine). A 60,000 square foot office building is the first portion to be constructed. The 12-acre Regional Transit District property is proposed to include a retail center, passenger drop-off and pick-up area, and 300 park-and-ride spaces.

In Sacramento, transit-oriented development adjacent to the Power Inn/College Greens RT stations is planned for a 215-acre site. Internal Shuttles will provide local access to the RT stations

STATION AREA DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

Although no comprehensive study of the light rail system's land use or rent impacts have been conducted, there is little anecdotal evidence of change in land use or property value. According to the Regional Transit representative, the Sacramento Light Rail System has not significantly impacted development. Local planners offered the following observations.

- *Downtown*. While extensive development around rail stations exists in downtown, its connection to the light rail line has been weak. Rather, office development in downtown is spurred by other factors, such the State's need for office space for public employees, as vacant land and local market demand for offices around the Capitol. The new Capitol Area Plan offers significant increases in floor area ratios, up to 7:1, for development within one-quarter mile of light rail station stops.
- *29th Street Station*. Farmer's Market Plaza introduced 500,000 square feet of commercial and retail space adjacent to the station. However, according to the developer, the location of the project near transit has not led to any change in rent beyond what would normally be expected in the area.

FACTORS INFLUENCING STATION AREA DEVELOPMENT

Several types of land use and zoning provisions have helped shape transit-oriented development in the Sacramento region. Relatively little in the way of direct financial subsidies or incentives have been utilized.

TOD POLICY FOR STATE OFFICE BUILDINGS

The policy with the greatest impact is a State law requiring State office buildings to be located within a quarter-mile of average or above average transit service. While this increased the amount of offices built around rail stations, it has not increased transit usage to a great degree. Joint development projects are negotiated on an ad hoc basis.

GENERAL AND AREA PLANS

The Sacramento General Plan contains policies supporting light rail. A section within the Circulation Element is devoted to transit and states that the City will make land use policy decisions supportive of light rail. In addition, General Plan supports mixed use and residential development in proximity to light stations.

- The *Residential Land Use Element* directs the City to "identify areas where increased densities, land use changes, or mixed uses would help support existing services, transportation facilities, transit, and light rail." Then, land use designations in the General Plan area to be changed in accordance with service capacities.
- The *Commerce and Industry Land Use Element* states that in any area designated for commercial, office, or industrial development, mixed uses may be allowed if the project is located within the Central City or is adjacent to a high-activity node along a

light rail transit line or freeway corridor.

These measures in the General Plan demonstrate that the City of Sacramento has established broad policies for infill development and mixed uses which are intended to promote TOD, particularly in the downtown area.[13]

In addition to the City plans, the State of California's 1997 Capitol Area Plan requires that new development respond to transit accessibility in the location, intensity, and design of development. In particular, proposed office development intensities range from an FAR of 3:1 on the east side to an FAR of 7:1 on the west side of the Capitol Area, in order to reflect existing densities and proximity to light rail transit.[14]

Outside of downtown Sacramento, no land use policy changes have been made thus far in order to reflect an orientation to transit.

ZONING

The City's Zoning Ordinance includes the Central Business District Special Planning District, which encompasses 67 blocks within the Central City, just north of the Capitol Area. This area is intended for the most intensive retail, commercial, and office development in the City, and has no height limit. Although the regulations are not specifically oriented to the 12th Street light rail line, the regulations contain urban design, architectural design, and streetscape design provisions that create the attractive pedestrian environments that help promote transit. In particular, the ordinance contains provisions for outdoor sidewalk cafes and ground floor retail.[15]

In addition to the CBD Special Planning District, the ordinance contains the R Street Corridor Special Planning District, which runs east-west along the southern portion of the Capitol Area. This area has provisions specifically oriented to the R Street portion of the light rail line. This provisions do not create a special zone, but instead, modifies the provision of existing zones in the area. The district prohibits any auto-oriented uses in the corridor, such as service stations or drive-up services. Moreover, in addition to special development and design regulations, provisions include maximum off-street parking requirements and allows parking to be reduced to one space per 1,000 gross square feet of building area for projects that provide TSM trip reduction measures.[16]

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[13] City of Sacramento, General Plan. (January 1988), 2-14, 4-12.

[14] State of California, 1997 Capitol Area Plan (July 1997), 31

[15] City of Sacramento, Zoning Ordinance (April 1990) Section 2.98.

[16] City of Sacramento, Zoning Ordinance (April 1990) Section 2.99.

Transportation System Management

Transportation System Management (TSM) regulations are also part of the Zoning Ordinance, which applies to the property owner of developments producing more than 100 employees. It requires a 35 percent transit/carpool use goal during peak hours. A Transportation Management Plan may include the following provisions:

- Membership in a Transportation Management Association
- Preferential Employee Carpool/Vanpool Parking Spaces
- Parking Fees
- Transit Passenger Shelter
- Bus/Light Rail Transit Station Subsidy
- Transit Operating Subsidy
- Transit Pass Subsidy
- Buspool/Shuttle Bus Program
- Vanpool Program
- Showers and Lockers
- Land Dedication for Transit Facilities
- Subsidy for Transportation Systems Management Capital Improvements[17]

Reduced parking requirements are possible around light rail stations, as long as one or more of the above measures are incorporated into the project. However, despite the appropriateness of these measures for TOD, developers have generally not taken advantage of parking reduction opportunities in the zoning ordinance. Developers prefer to provide ample parking. Provisions for greater intensity (FAR, building height) are allowed up to 1/2 mile radius of the stations.[18] This suggests that the reduced parking incentives in the zoning ordinance were not great enough to attract transit-oriented development. Overall, the Zoning Ordinance implements the intentions of the General Plan for TOD, but the City has not create enough incentives to truly make TOD happen.

PERMIT AND ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW PROCESS

The City does not offer an expedited permit review process for TOD or joint development projects. For the Power Inn project, a full program Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was required for the project which created a minimum one-year review process; in addition, each use permit required for the project was subject to individual environmental review. The environmental review process was helpful because it identified transportation impacts that would

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[17] City of Sacramento, *Zoning Ordinance* (April 1990) Section 6.

[18] Facsimile Transmission from Maureen Daly, Sacramento Regional Transit District, 5/6/98.

otherwise have been overlooked. However, it slowed down the overall development approval process.

JOINT DEVELOPMENT

Joint development has not been used to a great extent in the Sacramento region, although the Regional Transit District has negotiated some ground leases and other cost-sharing arrangements at several stations. The Power Inn development highlighted in this case study used an RTD ground lease. At 16th Street, private developers contributed to station construction costs next to their 400,000 square foot office and commercial development.[19] Overall, joint development has not been a powerful factor in shaping station-area development.

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS

In the Sacramento region, implementation tools for TOD have focused on zoning provisions. Rezoning, some expedited permit reviews, and special parking provisions have been used extensively. Despite the appropriateness of some of these provisions, they have not been effective in attracting widespread interest in development around station areas.

29TH STREET STATION

Parking and zoning adjustments for the project include a 25 percent reduction in the parking requirement and height limit increases. The project utilized parking management strategies such as preferred spaces for carpools and charged fees for use of the parking lot.

There is no shared parking arrangement, because users of 29th Street station and Farmer's Market require parking during the same time of day. Improvements to the bus facility associated with the rail station are part of the fourth phase of the project, including a bus turnaround and upgrade to the rail/bus interface mechanism. Farmer's Market Plaza was financed entirely by the developer; there was no public investment in the project.

Table 6-1.

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS FOR TOD AT SACRAMENTO LIGHT RAIL STATIONS

	29th Street Station	*Power Inn/ College Greens Station*
Station Area Market Development Strategies	No.	No.
Non-rail Infrastructure Investments	None	Pedestrian/bicycle trails.
Shared Parking/Parking Manage-	Reduced parking requirement	Parking spaces decreased from

[19] Robert Cevero, Peter Hall, and John Landis, Transit Joint Development in the United States. (Berkeley: Institute of Urban and Regional Development, 1992) 43-49, V-60: V-61.

ment	(25% reduction); preferential carpool parking; fee is charged for use of parking lot.	PUD required 1 per 275-375 sq. ft. to 1 per 400 sq. ft.; commercial parking is shared with regional park.
Expedited Permits and Reviews	Reviews: Negative Declara-tion completed for project.	Permits: same as other development. Reviews: project EIR, environmental review for each use permit.
Rezoning	Greater square footage and height allowance.	General Plan amendment: converted part of parks and open space land to commer-cial and office. Rezoning: changed industrial zone to PUD allowing mix of uses.
Land Assembly	Done by developer.	Done by developer .
Direct Public Investments in Projects	None.	None.
Local Transit Service Design	Improvements to bus facility and rail/bus interface; timed transfer.	Internal shuttle service to stations.

POWER INN/COLLEGE GREENS STATIONS

Both a General Plan amendment and rezoning are required for the Power Inn project. The General Plan amendment removes 114.4 acres from the approximately 260 acres of land designated Parks, Recreation, and Open Space to the following:

- Regional Commercial and Office (97.3 acres)
- Community/Neighborhood Commercial and Offices (15 acres)
- Heavy Commercial or Warehouse (1.7 acres)
- Approximately 146 acres would remain in the Parks, Recreation and Open Space designation.

The existing Industrial zone will be rezoned to those accommodating office, retail, and park uses. The property will be within a Planned Unit Development (PUD) and will follow specific guidelines. Architectural guidelines, PUD guidelines, and a transportation management plan are all part of the implementation program. The PUD guidelines incorporate provisions for the review of building architecture, landscaping, lighting, signage, parking, and the transportation management plan. The internal shuttle service is part of the transportation management plan.

The City and developer entered into a Development Agreement in 1994 whereby the City agreed to the 4 million square foot development in return for land, infrastructure, and park improvement payments.

Regional Transit and the developer have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding for the long term lease of the property and are currently negotiating details. Environmental review and planning approvals for the project are underway. The project is up for approval in June 1998.

SUMMARY ASSESSMENT; IMPLICATIONS FOR SEATTLE

Although Sacramento has in place a solid policy framework, the City has been unable to develop a cohesive program of joint and transit-supportive development. With the exception of a few notable projects in which a primary goal was to encourage transit use, most transit-supportive developments were the result of market conditions and existing zoning regulations rather than a conscious effort on the part of the developer or the City to create TODs.

- *Private Developers*. One factor that has helped Sacramento's transit planning effort is that some developers have had a strong interest in projects that focus on transit use. Many of the factors that make both Farmer's Market Plaza and the proposed Granite Regional Park good examples of transit-oriented development (TOD) are the result of proposals made by the developer in concert with City policies, rather than merely as a reaction to those policies.
- *Limits of Zoning*. Despite that the City of Sacramento made changes to both its General Plan and Zoning Ordinance in order to implement TODs, these changes have not been enough to stimulate development to any great degree. Zoning helps allow for development, but it will not attract development alone. PUD zoning may be useful for allowing innovative designs near transit stations, but only if transit-oriented guidelines can be incorporated into the PUD provisions for areas near transit stations. PUD procedures can allow direct, detailed City review of development proposals.
- *Need for Joint Development and Direct Public Investment*. Missing in Sacramento's transit-related planning effort is a formal joint development program. Also lacking are elements that support the City's policy structure, such as public sector assistance (for example, with land assembly and infrastructure investment). Outside of tax-increment funds, the Redevelopment Agency does not have policies linking light rail with redevelopment projects. This is a major drawback, since redevelopment agencies are often a key player in joint and transit-supportive development.

Thus, the primary lesson learned from Sacramento's experience is that a strong TOD program depends on not only a solid policy base, but proactive support and aggressive promotion by City agencies as well.

REFERENCES; ADDITIONAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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