

Summary

The BART system, built in the San Francisco Bay Area in the 1960s, was the first regional rail system to be built in the U.S. in more than 50 years. Since then, urban rail systems have been completed in ten cities on the West Coast and in Vancouver, Canada. These cities have had varying levels of success in attracting transit-oriented development (TOD). Seattle can learn from these experiences, so it does not repeat mistakes others made and takes advantage of opportunities presented.

To understand more about what tools work best, this paper presents detailed case studies of representative transit-oriented development projects throughout North America. Lessons from these case studies and the implications for Seattle are discussed. These lessons will help evaluate what actions makes most sense for the city and its neighborhoods.

The twelve cases of transit-oriented development were selected because they represent comparable light rail station types and/or physical settings or because certain types of implementation tools were used to make transit-oriented development happen. In looking for comparable examples of transit-oriented development in North American cities, specific station area characteristics were evaluated: whether the station is underground, at-grade or elevated, how many people use the station, surrounding urban form and land use, and what other transportation connections is provided. The cases selected provide valuable insights that will help the City ensure that station area plans meet the City's goals and avoid the mistakes that have limited transit-oriented development elsewhere.

CASE STUDIES

This analysis of TOD case studies looks at a variety of transit operators, cities, and station types throughout North America. Although the case studies make reference to many exemplary station-area projects within the transit corridors served, the following stations are reviewed in the most detail:

Atlanta MARTA

- Lindbergh Center, North Line
- Peachtree Corridor

Denver RTD

- Five Points Stations
- I-25 & Broadway

Los Angeles Metro

- Downtown Long Beach

- Hollywood/Highland
- Slauson

Portland MAX

- Lloyd District
- Goose Hollow Area (Westside Line)

Sacramento Light Rail

- 29th Street
- Power Inn/College Greens

San Diego Trolley

- American Plaza
- Rio Vista West
- La Mesa Stations



Around the Pleasant Hill BART station transit-oriented development has been guided by a specific plan calling for a mix of office buildings and apartments with pedestrian connections to the station.

San Francisco BART

- Montgomery
- Hayward
- Fruitvale
- 16th Street/Mission
- Pleasant Hill

San Francisco MUNI

- Third Street Light Rail Project

San Jose Light Rail

- Almaden
- Ohlone-Chynoweth
- Tasman East

Vancouver BC Sky Train

- Burnaby Metrotown

Washington D.C. Metro

- Bethesda
- Silver Spring
- Grosvenor
- West Hyattsville

FINDINGS

The analysis of the case studies leads to the following main findings:

- *Station Area Planning.* All types of station areas benefit, but the greatest results come when station area planning is carried out through comprehensive plans that utilize a combination of zoning, public improvements, development financing packages, and effective marketing programs, as in Portland, San Jose, and the Hayward and Fruitvale BART station areas. Comprehensive plans for various station areas in the Washington D.C. area, such as Bethesda, directed development toward the station area as part of a county-wide effort to plan for efficient land use/transportation connection. However, all comprehensive plans must be flexible enough to respond to changes in the real estate market. Where station development plans are overly restrictive and do not relate to market conditions, as in some other Washington D.C. communities, transit-oriented development does not occur.
- *Relation to Neighborhood Planning.* Station-area planning works best when it directly responds to the needs of the surrounding community. This approach not only builds community support, but it leads to a plan that integrates the station area and TOD project physically with the surrounding community. By way of example, the Fruitvale BART Transit Village project has been spearheaded by a community-based organization, the Spanish Speaking Unity Council, and in San Francisco, the Muni 3rd Street



Montgomery County started planning around the Bethesda Metrorail station before construction began. New zoning and strong parking management has helped make this station area a success.

Light Rail Project has included substantial community involvement to ensure that economic development and housing affordability goals could be met. Similarly, the City of Los Angeles is shifting its focus from planning for station prototypes to developing neighborhood plans for station areas. Even in the Washington D.C. area, where WMATA has established an excellent joint development program, local jurisdictions have spearheaded station area plans and have integrated WMATA joint development projects with surrounding development.

- *Pedestrian-Friendly Infrastructure.* Pedestrian amenities, links with shopping centers as at the El Cerrito and Fruitvale BART stations and some San Diego stations, and other improvements, as in Downtown Portland, San Diego, San Francisco and Vancouver, coupled with zoning that requires rain protection and other amenities, enhance the pedestrian environment. Direct pedestrian connections between new office development and rail stations, as in San Diego and San Francisco, improve transit access, because they allow people to go directly to the trains without going outside. Pedestrian amenities also can improve security around stations because more people mean more “eyes on the street”.



In downtown Sacramento, the State government has encouraged transit use with a strong transportation demand management program and parking limitations.

- *Parking Management and Shared Parking.* Parking “lids” in Downtown Portland and reduced parking requirements in Sacramento have helped make transit-oriented development viable. Portland actually allows less parking in areas near the MAX light rail stations, and there are no minimum parking requirements. In Sacramento, the State government – the largest employer – wanted to encourage transit use, so it severely limited parking and had aggressive transportation demand management programs. Shared parking structures also have been built, but developers may be reluctant to participate. Surface parking lots around stations can provide opportunities for future development, as the land becomes marketable for higher uses. However, once established, station-area parking may become difficult to eliminate. For instance, BART’s requirement for 1:1 replacement parking has hampered joint development prospects by increasing development costs. Finally, in the San Francisco 3rd Street Light Rail Project, MUNI was able to work with local residents and businesses to develop parking recommendations that increased on-street parking and shared parking opportunities, preserved short-term parking through metering and increased awareness of parking options with improved signage.
- *Zoning.* Overlay districts, use controls, building standards and requirements for pedestrian amenities help tailor zoning to station areas in Portland, Sacramento, San Francisco and San Diego. Upzoning, in particular, coupled with reduced parking requirements, helps attract transit-oriented development. In Vancouver, six regional town centers were established in existing town centers or redevelopment areas to provide compact residential development, commercial centers, community services, and public amenities. Portland not only zoned for higher densities and transit-oriented development, but created interim development standards to prevent undesirable land uses before station area plans were developed. However, while zoning provides enough incentives for TOD in areas with limited land, intensive existing development, and a strong local economy, it may be insufficient for other areas. In West Hyattsville, Maryland, for example, TOD overlay zones did not attract investment, because the zone itself established rigid, inflexible requirements and did not create sufficient economic incentives for the type of development desired. Prince George’s County established no additional financial or other assistance to encourage new construction, but the County currently is re-thinking the zoning requirements with the objective of making them more flexible and responsive to the marketplace.
- *Expedited Development Review.* “Fast-track” permit approvals have helped development around the Washington DC Metro stations. For instance, around the Metro station in Bethesda, Maryland, an optional zoning standard put projects with high-quality construction and public amenities such as open space, public art, and other pedestrian-friendly design factors on a fast-track for permit approval. In the San Francisco Bay Area, “umbrella” environmental review has shortened the review time around some BART stations where projects conform to station area plans. In San Jose, “specific plans” and planned unit development provisions were used in some station areas to streamline the review process.

- throw page – Portland TOD Zoning Insert

- *Successful Demonstration Projects.* Several cities have created political support for TOD and joint development projects after the success of a demonstration project. In Washington D.C., WMATA's early experimental success with small-scale joint development projects lead to the creation of a full joint development program that actively seeks projects at new and existing stations. In San Francisco, MUNI focused streetscape enhancement dollars in the nine-block Bayview Hunters Point commercial core area of the Third Street Light Rail Corridor, intending the project to catalyze other public and private investments. The transit agency wanted the streetscape improvements to provide a tool for proactively involving children and the community, to be a visible sign of change, and to emphasize the community pride in the public realm.



High density mixed use development in Vancouver has benefited in some areas from redevelopment agency assistance.

- *Public Assistance.* Redevelopment agencies have helped transit-oriented development in Oakland, Sacramento, San Diego, San Francisco, and Portland, both with land assembly and financing. However, legal constraints may limit the scope of assistance that can be offered. In general, public investments can build confidence in the process and spur additional investments in station areas. Community facilities, such as day care and street beautification, also help. In Vancouver, redevelopment agencies and the BC Transit Capital Projects Division made infrastructure investments in station areas in order to encourage additional development. The public sector also must be willing to support TOD with economic development policies.

- *Local Transit Service.* Improved bus connections with both local and express service lines and “timed-transfer” arrangements, as in Portland, Vancouver, Tacoma, San Francisco and San Diego, help improve access to local businesses and employment centers as well as support the regional rail transit, commuter rail and express bus systems. The City of Vancouver and BC Transit rerouted bus service to feed passengers onto Sky Train light rail routes, but at the expense of bus service in some areas. Local bus service should be coordinated with light rail, not replaced with light rail.
- *Joint Development.* Although several transit agencies have experimented with joint development projects, WMATA has been one of the more successful. At Bethesda, WMATA prepared land use provisions, conducted initial environmental review, and provided system interface and development rights to private developers. WMATA typically conducts market studies for station area development and invests only in marketable projects. The agency also works with local jurisdictions, making recommendations on area master plans for conducive zoning and infrastructure improvements. These initiatives have made station-linked joint development attractive for the private sector in the San Francisco Bay Area. BART and the Santra Clara Valley Transportation have had successful joint development projects. They both have a joint development department that is actively marketing sites in order to get structure parking built and generate revenues to help offset system operating costs. BART has worked with local governments on station area plans for joint development but has had mixed success in implementing them. Few other transit agencies have created such enticing development packages.



RECOMMENDATIONS

To ensure successful implementation, some of the case studies underscored some specific recommendations that should be considered in Seattle's station area planning.

- *Quick Start Implementation Actions.* While sustained economic revitalization requires long-term, phased implementation, quick-start actions create opportunities to establish a foundation for immediate economic revitalization benefits for the community. San Francisco's 3rd Street Light Rail Project, for example, proposed actions included a neighborhood ground-breaking celebration, neighborhood murals to screen construction staging areas, and the rail alignment painted on Third Street.
- *Success Breeds Success.* Since not all station areas will develop at the same rate, city planners should establish priorities to focus their efforts. Demonstrating success early in the life of the light rail system can help foster future development. On-the-ground examples can provide better models for convincing developers of the virtues of transit-oriented development than abstract theories.
- *Coordination with Sound Transit on joint development.* The City of Seattle and Sound Transit should consider joint development opportunities where Sound Transit may be able to acquire excess land under its current legislative authority. The City can take the lead on land use planning and providing other redevelopment incentives, such as land assembly.
- *Strong Merchant Participation.* Where transit operators and local governments have sought the neighborhood business community's participation, the potential for transit-oriented development and revitalization is increased, as the experience at the BART Fruitvale and San Francisco 3rd Street light rail line project demonstrates.
- *Community Involvement in Technical Planning.* Emphasizing a community-based approach to planning encourages community involvement in such technical aspects of project development as station siting and right-of-way configuration and avoids confrontational meetings.
- *Planning for Appropriate Development.* Models of development should be appropriate to the local character. It is useful to learn from the experience of other places, but adopting a cookie-cutter approach may not work in a different region. For example, Toronto's model of high-density, high-rise residential development at rail stations, which transit planners originally sought to replicate in Atlanta, has been slow to gain acceptance among local residents. In preparing for the future, planners should also recognize that areas may not receive the development that planners expect. Accordingly, plans should be flexible enough to adapt to unanticipated changes in development patterns, types, and locations.

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- *Working with Private Developers.* Municipalities and transit agencies should communicate with developers throughout the planning process and work to create opportunities for transit-supportive developments that benefit communities, developers, and transit systems. Communication can help foster realistic expectations on both sides of the table and may lead to mutually beneficial outcomes. For example, when MARTA first attempted to charge fees for direct connections into rail stations, developers balked. In subsequent cases, however, MARTA and developers found ways to build and fund system connections that benefit private developments as well as foster transit ridership.



In Portland, the Stadium Station apartments are a joint development, involving Tri-Met as the lead agency and a private developer.

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