



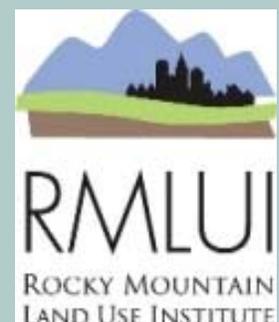
Transit Oriented Development

Joe Holmes & James van Hemert

The Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute

**Sustainable Community Development
Code**

Research Monologue Series:
Urban Form, Transportation



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About the Research Monologue Series

The Sustainable Community Development Code, an initiative of the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute, represents the next generation of local government development codes. Environmental, social, and economic sustainability are the central guiding principles of the code. Supporting research for the code is represented by a series of research monologues commissioned, presented and discussed at a symposium held at the University of Denver in September of 2007. RMLUI and the University of Denver's Sturm College of Law extend its gratitude to the authors of the papers who have provided their talents and work pro bono in the service of the mission of RMLUI and the stewardship of the creation.

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www.law.du.edu/rmlui

*cover picture from <http://www.transitorienteddevelopment.org/>

About the Authors

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James van Hemert, AICP, is the Executive Director of the Rocky Mountain Land Use Institute at the University of Denver where he is responsible for the institute's conferences, seminars, publications, and research endeavors. He has published articles and books on urban planning, Western rural and town land use patterns, the development review process, and development impact fees. He is currently leading the Institute's Sustainable Community Development Code (Zoning) initiative. He is a frequent speaker at regional and national conferences and is the President Elect of the Colorado Chapter of the American Planning Association. James received a B.A. from Calvin College (Michigan) and an M.A. in Regional Planning from the University of Waterloo (Ontario, Canada). He has a wide range of planning and community development experience in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors and has worked in the Toronto region, the Philippines, Mississippi, and Colorado.

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Transit-oriented development (TOD) is a mixed-use residential or commercial area intended to maximize access to public transportation. Such neighborhoods often consist of a center with a public transit station, surrounded by high-density development with gradually lower-density development spreading outward from the center. TODs or transit zones are typically located within a radius of one-half mile from a transit station, as this is generally considered a reasonable walking distance for pedestrians.¹ However, geographic proximity alone does not make development transit oriented. Indeed, many developments can be said to be transit adjacent (i.e. within close physical proximity to transit) but not necessarily designed to promote access and use. On the contrary, TOD creates a vibrant community centered on transit access and reduced automobile dependence. As such, a pedestrian-friendly environment is critical to TOD, but is not essential to transit adjacent development.

According to the 2000 census, 6 million households live near public transit. By 2030, an estimated 16 million households will want to live near public transit.² This changing demand for varied housing options creates both promises and challenges. Generally, TOD areas are both more economically and racially diverse than traditional housing options.³ Transit zones today present real opportunities and choices for lower-income residents in their increasingly difficult search for affordable housing. Additionally, median gross rents in transit zones tend to be notably less than non-transit areas.⁴ Demographic shifts, such as, increased immigration, an increased percentage of the population that is older and no longer has children living at home, and an increased number of non-family households (which today account for nearly a third of all households) all contribute to the demand for denser communities with increased access to public transit.⁵ To meet these growing demands for transit, many cities are embarking upon significant expansions of existing transit facilities while others are beginning to plan for transit development.⁶

Because of these changing demands, some transit areas have become increasingly expensive, shutting out low-income individuals and families in search of convenient transit access. Therefore, varied housing options for diverse economic demands are an essential component to successful TOD. Successful transit zones include larger single family homes, bungalows, townhouses, and an ample supply of affordable rental units.⁷ Varied housing options should help promote vibrant, diverse neighborhoods that provide more community character than traditionally more homogenous housing communities. In order to ensure TOD adequately meets the needs of potential residents, it is important to ensure frequent, high-quality transit service, good connections between transit and the community, community amenities and a dedication to place making, and adequate review to ensure economic efficiency.⁸ In order for TOD to live up to its promise, it is essential that city planning departments allow for both customized zoning for unique transit integration projects while also minimizing planning review time for standard projects. In Denver's 16th Street Market Square project, for example, although mandatory design review was required, the eight-story, 380,000 square foot building was approved under the city's B-7 zoning district supplemented by the design and street requirements already in place for the Lower Downtown district. No customized regulations were necessary to approve the project. This relatively easy process

contributed to the fabric of the transit-oriented district and lead to more rapid development.⁹



Denver's 16th Street Mall

Source: Downtown Denver Business Improvement District
<http://www.downtowndenver.com/BID/BID16thStreetMall.htm>

Increased dialogue between city planners and city transit organizations can also lead to more effective development and a more streamlined process. In San Jose, California, the Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) worked with cities throughout the region to plan and develop higher density, mixed-use projects around transit stations. VTA helped identify existing and planned station areas that would benefit most from TOD and helped create urban design plans for these properties. Ultimately, while local city governments have jurisdiction over the actual land-use decisions, increased dialogue between transit agencies and city governments can lead to more effective TOD.¹⁰

Many planners have identified three essential zoning strategies for TOD, known as the ABC's of TOD zoning, **A**ctive pedestrian friendly streets, **B**uilding intensity and scale, and **C**areful transit integration. In order to promote a more pedestrian friendly environment, cities should ensure adequate sidewalk space, strategically consider building placement and orientation, carefully decide the placement and supply of parking, and create shorter blocks. Cities can control building intensities by specifying minimum or average densities and by setting minimum building height requirements in transit zones. In San Jose, city zoning law requires that for all residential development within 2,000 feet of transit stops there must be at least 20 units per acre for suburban locations and 45 units per acre for urban locations. Similarly, buildings facing Denver's 16th Street Mall are required to be at least four stories tall. In addition, cities can offer development bonuses for providing residential units at specified affordability levels.

Atlanta's special public interest zoning and a number of Denver's downtown and mixed-use districts have implemented such incentives.¹¹ In order to carefully integrate transit into a community, citizens must feel comfortable and safe in their neighborhoods. In addition, transit authorities must ensure transit service is safe and unobtrusive.

TOD can provide unique benefits at the regional, local, and individual scales. With thorough planning, TOD can promote local businesses and retail, capture the increase in land value that stem from the public investment in new transit routes, and replace costly surface parking and auto-related infrastructure with uses that generate more revenue for local governments and business. Generally, TOD can create more desirable communities for people to live and work in. While these benefits are substantial, perhaps the most striking benefit comes at the regional level in the form of more sustainable travel behavior and development patterns.¹² TOD helps generate cost effective usage of public transit. Forty-five percent of workers in transit zones walk, bike, or take transit to work, contrasted with just 14 percent of worker in regions with public transit. Additionally, approximately three-fourths of households living near transit own one or fewer cars.¹³ Furthermore, TOD has a significant impact on vehicle miles traveled (VMT). Residents of TOD-like neighborhoods in the San Francisco Bay Area traveled almost half the vehicle miles per year of new suburban developments. A California statewide study by Caltrans reported that the 27 neighborhoods in Northern and Southern California doubling residential density resulted in 20 to 30 percent fewer annual VMT.¹⁴

Such benefits of TOD bring together varied people in search of different things. Young urbanites seeking fast-paced lifestyles will be able to find affordable housing in TOD communities. Similarly, active older adults and those unable to drive will be able to live in neighborhoods where shops and services are within walking distance and trips to cultural events, medical appointments, and visits to family and friends can be made by transit. Low-income residents living near transit will have access to greater job opportunities and more varied housing options.¹⁵ Governments will also benefit due to reduced spending on streets, parking, and highway improvements. These reductions should help free up funds for improving transit service or adding neighborhood amenities like parks and open spaces. TOD can help create a virtuous circle of reduced spending on automobile transportation, increased and expanded transit service, and improved housing options for residents of all socio-economic groups.

Finally, TOD promotes an environment allowing for mixed uses, in addition to transit benefits. Denver's T-MU-30 (transit mixed use) and C-MU-30 (residential mixed use) zoning codes are examples of TOD centered regulation designed to encourage a compatible mix of uses. In a MU-30 district, a balanced mix of compatible uses is essential to create a high-quality TOD community. Moreover, Denver's B-7 districts are designed to promote a mixture of various uses. B-7 districts specifically state what uses will be tolerated and what uses will not. Some uses include automobile auctioning, automobile inspection facilities, communication services, eating places, food sale places and markets, and retail stores. Uses are subject to strict distance and structure

limitations. It is necessary to Incorporate specific mixed uses that are balanced and in harmony to promote a thriving TOD environment.

Potential sustainability measures:

1. Income variance in TOD neighborhoods (the greater, the better)
2. Number of housing units per acre at various distances from transit stations (increasingly higher nearer station)
3. Percentage of persons living in TOD using transit
4. Increased income levels of TOD residents over a period of time
5. Harmony of mixed uses
6. Thriving enterprise in TOD communities

Land Use Code Strategies

Removing Obstacles

1. Remove restrictions requiring uniform housing development in certain areas so as to increase housing options for diverse needs and demands
2. Minimize planning and discretionary review time for standardized projects
3. Remove or set more reasonable limits on minimum parking requirements in transit zones

Incentives

1. Encourage affordable housing options by providing density and/or height bonuses for providing residential units at specified affordability levels
2. Provide “location efficient mortgages”

Regulations

1. Allow zoning to reflect increased housing choices in transit zones
2. Create customized zoning for projects integrating transit facilities
3. Require large, well lit walkways and sidewalks throughout TOD zones
4. Strategically site buildings and entrances to buildings to be more pedestrian, bicycle, and transit friendly
5. When planning communities from the ground up, ensure small, pedestrian friendly city blocks
6. Specify minimum densities and/or height requirements in the immediate transit zone
7. Set and mandate specific mixed uses, including distances between similar uses and distance from transit center

Strategic Success Factors:

1. Create a dialogue between city planners and city transit organizations to help plan transit stops and sites most likely to benefit from TOD
2. Work with transit agencies to ensure frequent, high quality service Integrate with affordable housing programs

3. Work closely with regional transit agencies to ensure a coherent vision of high capacity transit connections between regional centers
4. Appropriate street standards
5. Appropriate design guidelines
6. Foster the establishment of business improvement districts
7. Link public improvements with private investments

Notes

¹ Center for Transit-Oriented Development, <http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/public/tod>.

² Center for Transit Oriented Development, "Preserving and Promoting Diverse Transit-Oriented Neighborhoods," http://www.cnt.org/repository/diverseTOD_FullReport.pdf, p. 2.

³ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁵ Hank Dittmar and Gloria Ohland, *The New Transit Town Best Practices in Transit-Oriented Development* (Washington D.C.: Island Press, 2004), p. 10-11.

⁶ Center for Transit Oriented Development, "Preserving and Promoting Diverse Transit-Oriented Neighborhoods," http://www.cnt.org/repository/diverseTOD_FullReport.pdf, p. 27-29.

⁷ Hank Dittmar and Gloria Ohland, *The New Transit Town Best Practices in Transit-Oriented Development* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2004), p. 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

¹² Center for Transit Oriented Development, "Preserving and Promoting Diverse Transit-Oriented Neighborhoods," http://www.cnt.org/repository/diverseTOD_FullReport.pdf, p. 20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23

¹⁴ John Holtzclaw, "Using Residential Patterns and Transit to Decrease Auto Dependence and Costs," <http://www.smartgrowth.org/library/cheers.html>.

¹⁵ Center for Transit Oriented Development, "Preserving and Promoting Diverse Transit-Oriented Neighborhoods," http://www.cnt.org/repository/diverseTOD_FullReport.pdf, p. 26.