



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration



Transit-Oriented Development Technical Assistance: First Summary Report

Background

One of the great benefits of public transit is how it spurs economic activity and improves neighborhoods. There are many positive spin-off effects when transit is built or extended into new areas. More importantly, when transit is linked to development, communities can generate healthy, livable areas and transit-oriented development (TOD) fits such criteria. TOD is generally defined as a walkable community that is close to frequent, reliable transit service with a mix of resources and land uses. The proximity of TODs to transit stations creates high-value, mixed-land-use communities that provide increased access to employment and services for people of all travel abilities, ages, and incomes.

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) invests billions of dollars every year in transit systems and facilities across the country, several of which are the nexus of TODs. Communities across the country are interested in capitalizing on the development potential of transit; however, they approach the issue from various circumstances and need different kinds of information, technical assistance, and models for success. In October 2015, FTA, through the Section 5314 program, launched its Transit-Oriented Development Technical Assistance Initiative that provides on-the-ground and online technical assistance to advance TOD, improve access to public transportation, and build new economic opportunities and pathways to employment for local communities with a focus on supporting economically-distressed communities. The eight communities highlighted in this first summary report are Stamford, CT; Louisville, KY; Moline, IL; Kansas City, MO; Oklahoma City, OK; San Antonio, TX; Richmond, VA; and Lynnwood, WA.

Objectives

The main objective of the Initiative is to bring together expertise, resources, and training on public transportation, TOD, land use, urban planning, affordable housing, and community-based economic development to help local governments get the most out of transit investments and advance TOD. To assist in this project, FTA partnered with Smart Growth America (SGA), which is leading a team of experts to support TOD activities that will benefit economically-distressed communities across the country.

Findings and Conclusions

The TOD Technical Assistance Initiative resulted in the provision of direct technical assistance to eight communities, establishment of a Peer Network of communities to share TOD experiences, and creation of a website to serve as a national database to TOD resources.

The first year of work included a range of technical assistance activities in eight communities across the US to address a variety of TOD challenges and resulted in several outcomes and successes. Needs were assessed and scopes of work were developed; existing plans, data, and documents were reviewed; site visits were conducted; and technical assistance was executed in the form of charrettes, market analyses, peer exchanges, workshops, case studies, expert panels, and plan reviews. The first year of technical assistance highlighted common themes that will be built upon to ensure future communities selected for technical assistance maximize TOD potential:

- **TOD education** – There is a strong need to provide basic education about TOD, in particular, components needed to advance and support successful TOD.
- **TOD case studies** – Few comparable TOD case studies are sufficiently relevant due to different economic and geographic scales of the communities assisted and the unique assistance requested.
- **First- and last-mile connections** – Most communities assisted in the first year of the project lacked first- and last-mile connections.
- **TOD and Market dynamics** – Communities need to understand that the economic components that support TOD are just as crucial as the physical components, and leveraging private investment in addition to public funding is important.
- **TOD and Affordable housing** – Communities need to develop strategies that incorporate affordable housing into TOD project.

Benefits

As a result of the Initiative, local governments can better understand the factors that come into play when planning for, advancing, and implementing TOD. Continuing to support the communities and following their progress through the peer network will be crucial to better understanding what worked and what did not work and applying these lessons nationwide.

Project Information

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This research project was conducted by Smart Growth America. For more information, contact Kimberly Gayle, Director, FTA Office of Policy Review and Development, at (202) 366-1429 or kimberly.gayle@dot.gov. All research reports can be found at <https://www.transit.dot.gov/about/research-innovation>