



Transit-Oriented Development, a Smart Growth Strategy for Los Angeles

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Many of the problems we experience day to day here in Los Angeles, including traffic and poor air quality, have been linked to sprawl, the low-density and automobile-dependent type of development that the region is known for. The Los Angeles metropolitan area has the worst pediatric asthma rates in the nation, according to the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. LA also has some of the longest commute times in the nation, according to the US census. Estimates of the cost of congestion vary, with some as high as \$20 billion statewide, but there is no doubt that we are wasting fuel and losing productivity. As LA continues to grow, more and more leaders are recognizing the need for new development strategies and smarter growth. According to projections by the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), LA County can expect to grow to more than 12 million residents by the year 2025. Unless our growth patterns change, this increase also means increased vehicle miles traveled (VMT), resulting in more congestion, lost productivity, and worsened air quality. Fortunately, there are many promising solutions for managing this growth that also address these environmental and health problems. Transit-oriented development is one strategy that has multifaceted economic, environmental, and social benefits.

Transit-oriented development, or TOD, is a transportation-related land use strategy. It is not just traditional suburban development that is adjacent to transit. TOD is characterized by higher density, mixed-use development (retail and residential), and pedestrian-friendly design. A recent statewide study commissioned by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), found that TOD not only improves access to transit facilities and increases ridership, but also produces a variety of other local and regional benefits by encouraging more compact and infill development.

Examining existing TOD projects, Caltrans found a variety of benefits including, reduced rates of VMT, reduced air pollution and energy consumption rates, conservation of resource lands and open space, increase in households' disposable income, economic development, increased affordable housing, increase of pedestrian activity, and decrease in local infrastructure costs. Caltrans also identified barriers and challenges to TOD implementation including difficulty in obtaining financing and local zoning that isn't transit friendly.

The number of TOD projects is increasing across the state and the nation. The City of Los Angeles has recognized the importance of TOD and has begun to address some of the barriers to implementation. Livable Places, an organization whose mission is to advance affordable vibrant healthy Southern California communities through advocacy, innovation, and building, has identified a number of existing policies that encourage TOD in Los Angeles. These policies including density bonuses and parking requirement reductions near transit. Jaime De La Vega, the Mayor's transportation deputy, said in a September Daily News article titled "Transit Villages for LA?", "The goal is to produce urban villages with high-quality developments that would encourage pedestrian and transit-oriented design." According to the article, the Mayor is calling for rezoning of parcels to better facilitate TOD construction, and MTA and city executives are looking at relaxing rules that keep building heights at a minimum and decreasing requirements for parking spaces. Livable Places recommends additional policies such as Location Efficient Mortgages, a new type of mortgage that rewards households with lower transportation expenses, and property tax abatements for developers of higher-density, mixed-use, residential developments.

There are many opportunities for transit-oriented development in Los Angeles, along existing Metro rail lines, including the Gold Line, Red Line, and Blue Line and the new Exposition light rail line. TOD can also be used in coordination with bus lines, such as the Orange Line in the San Fernando Valley, and other rapid bus lines. Successful TOD requires reliable transit, and complementary strategies such as priority bus lanes would strengthen the City's efforts. Successful transit-oriented development also requires early planning and

communication between diverse stakeholders, including transit agencies, neighbors and community members, transit riders, local, state, and federal government, developers, and lenders. The public, private, and citizen sectors all have an active role to play in creating a more livable Los Angeles. Working together to increase mixed-use and transit-oriented development in Los Angeles will bring us closer to the Mayor's dream of making Los Angeles the "cleanest and greenest big city in America."