

A National Movement for Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Takes Root



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Connected Communities Impact Table

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Executive Summary

The lack of connected high-quality, affordable housing and transit infrastructure exacerbates economic and racial inequities in our cities. It also contributes to increased toxic pollution and greenhouse gas emissions while perpetuating racial segregation. Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD), which is designed to increase transit ridership, connect people to economic and social opportunities, and reduce negative impacts of greenhouse gas emissions, offers a solution for communities and public agencies to address existing housing and land use inequities, with social equity, inclusivity, and affordability at the core. Yet, community-based work and public and private investments and decision-making are siloed and under-resourced, resulting in duplicated efforts and missed opportunities to collaborate on state and federal investments.

Over the course of two years, the Connected Communities Impact Table, comprised of community-based organizations and local and regional collaboratives in Chicago, IL, Los Angeles, CA, and Atlanta, GA, joined efforts to delve into innovative solutions to foster equitable transit-oriented developments. While cultivating partnerships, promoting cross-site learning, and connecting with a broader network of advocates and organizers in the ETOD space.

[A National Movement for Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Takes Root](#) presents a transformative approach to urban planning to create equitable and vibrant communities. We uncover the roots of the ETOD movement by walking through the historical transition beyond conventional TOD (Transit-Oriented Development) into one with ‘capital E Equity’ at the forefront. Throughout these pages, we offer a nuanced understanding of the motivations and challenges that led to emphasizing equity in urban development around public transit systems. By defining ETOD beyond business-as-usual TOD, we aim to equip readers with the knowledge and tools to become advocates for ETOD. We share stories from pioneers in the ETOD movement, highlight successful ETOD policies, present national and global examples, reflect on the current state of practice, and provide recommendations for ETOD advocates and decision-makers—philanthropists, government entities, and developers—to advance the ETOD movement. Throughout, we explore the past, present, and future of ETOD across the three Connected Communities Impact Table Cities—Atlanta, GA; Chicago, IL; and Los Angeles, CA—with additional examples and insights from Washington, DC; Austin, TX; Portland, OR; Buffalo-Niagara Falls, NY; Charlotte, NC; Seattle, WA, Phoenix, AZ; and Medellín, Colombia.

To advance the ETOD movement, [A National Movement for Equitable Transit-Oriented Development Takes Root](#) outlines lessons learned, successes, and challenges from cities across the nation that are working in the ETOD sphere:

- 1. A highly diverse collaborative approach across sectors:** It is vital for different groups and agencies across sectors—including those in the health, transportation, housing, climate, and cultures spaces—to collaborate to develop and implement strategies that improve the lives of individuals living near ETODs and those that depend on transit and affordable housing the most. Additionally, it is crucial to build strong relationships among planning agencies and local governments.
- 2. ETOD efforts should be community-driven,** ensuring community leaders have seats at the decision-making table.
- 3. Intentionally bringing the ‘E’ into policies, practices, community organizing, and processes.**
- 4. Flip the expectation (autocentric) and the exception (transit).** Most U.S. cities still prioritize cars, allocating the majority of transportation dollars to fund highways and roads in wealthier, more abled communities. A change in systems is paramount, prioritizing the development of livable communities around transit.
- 5. The need to build a solid capacity base:** ETOD work requires much human capital. Which becomes challenging when there is a constant need to adapt to organizational—internal and external—and political changes.

Additionally, federal, state, county, and local investments offer incredible opportunities for cities and regions to support ETOD elements. However, local collaborative groups centered on transit and ETOD rarely communicate with one another, resulting in duplicated efforts or missed key opportunities to collaborate that often impact opportunities at the state and federal levels. Simultaneously, investors and other entities intent on developing infrastructure and TOD for private profit are well-connected and well-represented at the decision-making table. Greater capacity and collaboration within and across cities and regions are needed to counter these well-funded entities.

As indicated by the Impact Table, ETOD is the future. At the federal level, there must be a clear, strong, and collaborative message around this. The federal government has invested trillions in infrastructure that often seems disjointed. It would be far more productive if the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), and the U.S Department of Transportation (USDOT) came together and worked in partnership with advocates on the ETOD path. Together, they could create a comprehensive cross-departmental and cross-funded approach to support—funding, capacity, and technical expertise—communities that embody the values of ETOD.

Furthermore, support, messaging, and knowledge building around successes and known and missed opportunities are needed at the state and local levels to foster the growth of the ETOD movement.

Introduction

The Connected Communities Impact Table builds off work started under the Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC). Based on shared interests, co-leads across three cities (Chicago, Los Angeles, and Atlanta) joined efforts to create the Connected Communities Impact Table. The Impact Table aimed to continue resourcing local organizations to develop and implement innovative solutions for mobility justice and ETOD, strengthen the relationships among Chicago, LA, and Atlanta-based organizations, facilitate cross-site learning between the cities and a broader network throughout the nation, expand knowledge on public policy, and educate the public sector about transit justice and ETOD. Additionally, the Impact Table collaborated with the national organization, National Equitable Recovery Alliance (NERA), led by Deya Zavala at the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII), to further support and disseminate the work.

1. What is Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)?

Transit-oriented development (TOD), first coined in the late 1980s by Congress for the New Urbanism co-founder Peter Calthorpe, refers to dense, pedestrian-oriented, mixed-use development near transit to lessen a city dweller's dependence on owning and driving cars to get to the places they need to. It is designed to increase transit ridership, connect people to each other and to jobs all while improving public health and mitigating the climate crisis through reductions in urban greenhouse gas emissions.¹ While the term 'TOD' is less than half a century old, the phenomena has existed for generations. As Chris Zimmerman, vice president of Smart Growth America elucidates in a Greater Greater Washington [Post](#), "Basically what you want is what every city, town, and village was for 10,000 years or so before we invented cars. Things have to be within walkable distance because that's how people get to them. That's TOD."²

As critical as TOD has been, planning for sustainability without planning for social equity is planning for failure. Without an explicit focus on equity, TOD can exacerbate segregation in investment, contributing to displacement due to continued disinvestment in some neighborhoods and gentrification in others. A study in Chicago found that 90% of developments that benefited from TOD zoning incentives (through a series of ordinances) around public transit between 2016 and 2019 took place in some of Chicago's most wealthy and predominantly White populated areas, and most of it was neither affordable nor community driven.³ The resulting displacement—by 2019, Chicago's rapidly gentrifying Logan Square neighborhood saw a 47% decline in its Latine population, and the City of Chicago saw a 27% decline in its Black population from neighborhoods affected by long standing patterns of racialized disinvestment—is why an explicit equity focus is required.^{4,5,6}

Beyond the distribution of TODs across a city, the types of TODs and the way they are planned can also create or exacerbate inequities. Development in accelerated real estate markets, even well-intentioned “green” developments, can cause longtime residents—often people of color and lower income populations—to be physically displaced by rising rents and property values. Gentrification also destroys a neighborhood’s cultural identity and residents’ sense of belonging, resulting in cultural displacement.

See Appendix A for examples of “green gentrification.”

ETOD starts with Equity. Equity here refers to both a process and an outcome, where all people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, class, citizenship status, ability, religion, or age, and especially those with one or more marginalized identities, have power over what is planned in their neighborhood and the opportunity to experience the benefits of TOD. In short, ETOD is TOD but with more respect to uplifting the rights and dignity of the global majority—people of color who have often been labeled “minorities” but actually make-up the majority of the global population.

There is no universal definition or cookie cutter approach to ETOD, as communities are innately diverse in comparison to each other or within themselves. Different communities have different needs, desires, challenges, priorities, and developments. Meeting those needs and priorities will be unique to each neighborhood. Even the term ‘ETOD’ represents jargon that may cause a barrier to effectively communicate about the subject; many locally owned small businesses may effectively encapsulate the values of ETOD without identifying with the term. When done right, ETOD is a practice, policy, and process that can powerfully benefit people and the places they call home.

ETOD can be broken down into four parts: the type of development (the *what*), the location of the development (the *where*), the planning process for the development (the *how*), and the short- and long-term outcomes of the development (the *when*).

What: There are countless ways ETOD can look, from a mix of essential services to skill-building opportunities to recreation. Here are some examples:

- **Affordable housing** that creates safe and stable living conditions, including the preservation of existing affordable housing units and the creation of new inclusionary affordable units or subsidized units.
- **Thriving small businesses** that contribute to vibrant commercial corridors, including grocery stores, retail, and restaurants.
- **Community amenities** that provide essential services, including community centers, daycare centers, health facilities, public libraries, and schools.
- **Art and gathering spaces** that protect and celebrate local culture and foster community connection, including murals, public art, theaters, gardens, and parks.

Where: Generally, ETODs are developments that exist within walking distance (often a quarter- or half mile) to a public transit asset, including high-frequency bus routes, train stations and commuter rail. However, simply being transit-adjacent is not enough. Pedestrians should feel safe in their commute (e.g., no proximity to heavy motorized vehicle traffic) and pedestrian-friendly infrastructure should be well-maintained. In both rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods and neighborhoods that have been disinvested in, ETOD developers need to be thoughtful about community context, aware of displacement pressure and cultural retention, and intentional about orienting their project to connect people to key services, amenities, and each other.

How: At its core, ETOD is community-led, community-first development, where equity is central. This means that community members (defining community by shared interests, location, or history) have a say in every step of the development process and feel a sense of connection and empowerment with what is built regardless of divisiveness in community opinion in some cases. This authentic or meaningful community engagement must go beyond simply involving or informing to ensure that community members have decision-making power and, in some cases, own the development themselves (e.g., co-ops) over all aspects of designing, planning, and implementation.

Short- and Long-term Outcomes: The process of creating ETODs can be a valuable outcome in and of itself. Empowering community residents to create ETOD projects with other developers, nonprofit, and government leaders and see them come to fruition can blossom into the practice of *placekeeping*. The U.S. Department of Arts and Culture defines *placekeeping* as “the active care and maintenance of a place and its social fabric by the people who live and work there. It is not just preserving buildings but keeping the cultural memories associated with a locale alive, while supporting the ability of local people to maintain their way of life as they choose.”⁴

Depending on the type of development, the inauguration of an ETOD can bring an array of benefits, such as job creation via the construction and management of ETOD sites and the creation of space for small businesses. These encompass adapting to the climate crisis (promoting climate resiliency), enhancing energy efficiency, addressing food apartheid, fostering community cohesion, stimulating creativity, enriching community wealth building, providing safety from traffic violence, improving overall mental and physical wellness, and more. ETODs, regardless of type, can increase pedestrian mobility for everyone, regardless of physical ability, and offer a more comfortable lifestyle, especially for those who have faced systemic barriers to thriving. ETODs save people money, especially those who need it most, by intentionally orienting residents to affordable and reliable public transit options. Areas with ETODs can counter historical racism in housing policies, desegregate neighborhoods, and redress inequitable development to promote community vibrancy.⁵ Through higher connectivity and a deliberate emphasis on affordable housing, community ownership, and cultural retention, ETOD areas allow for diverse identities to regard the same neighborhood as their home. It is crucial to properly maintain ETODs after their inauguration to continue these benefits.

Past: The Origins of TOD

Transit-oriented development (TOD) plays a crucial role in transportation and community planning, aiming to address the challenges posed by climate change. Despite the recent formalization of TOD, it is not a new concept. As Jacky Grimshaw, vice president of government affairs at the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT), pointed out, “transit-oriented development is how cities developed over centuries.” Throughout history, development has been accompanied by some form of transit. The concept of TOD represents a modern-day interpretation of this long-standing practice.

Yet, to grasp the gravity of TOD and equitable transit-oriented developments (ETOD), it is important to first reflect on the past and assess the influence development has had on urban areas. This reflection helps us understand why and how ‘equity’ emerged as a vital strategy to build affordable, healthier, and more socially equitable communities.

Chicago, Illinois

In the 1980s, the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) planned to demolish the underutilized Lake Street Line (now the Green Line) on the West Side. The local community opposed this decision, emphasizing the service’s importance as an affordable transit option, and instead requested to have the line repaired. After unsuccessful attempts to persuade the CTA, the community sought help from the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) for strategic support to overturn the decision.

The in-house architect at CNT recently attended a meeting led by Peter Calthorpe, co-founder of CNU, who introduced the concept of “transit villages,” which later evolved into TOD.⁶ These villages aimed to create density in greenfield areas with integrated transit stations, but such areas were lacking in the parts of Chicago that would benefit the most. As Grimshaw noted, “On the West Side, there were no green fields, but, instead, gray fields. It was the area that had gone up in flames after riots following Dr. Martin Luther King Junior’s assassination. So, there was a lot of vacant land and disinvestment as a result. Businesses were few and far between, and housing was few and far between, but certain areas were still populated. And those populated areas still wanted to use the Lake Street Line.

With this new concept in hand, CNT’s Scott Bernstein, Michael Freedberg, and Jacky Grimshaw set out to explore the possibility of creating something similar to a “transit village” within the gray areas encompassing the Lake Street (CTA) rail line. To further refine their vision, CNT invited master designer Doug Farr to collaborate. By reimagining the historical development of cities, they presented the concept to the community for input. With backing from the community, CNT partnered with them to form a plan for one station. A station situated on the West Side within a gray field area and in proximity to a shopping corridor was selected as the focal point. The team aimed to revive the community by bringing in the essential missing amenities that the community identified. In the early 2000s, this collaborative effort resulted in what can be considered Chicago's initial TOD.^{7,8}

Washington, D.C.

In the District of Columbia, the concept of TOD evolved differently than in Chicago. During the Clinton Administration and on the heels of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA), TOD stemmed from the Livable Communities Initiative and the FTA Joint Development Policy.⁹ The Livable Communities Initiative, led by Effie Stallsmith, FTA Office of Planning & Environment, involved funding the creation of essential community purposes, such as child-care or job training centers, that help to support transit ridership. Through that initiative, the FTA Joint Development Policy emerged, which focused on allowing housing near transit. At this time, transit and housing were disjointed from one another and seen as separate entities. At the federal level, as stated by Transit Oriented-Development Specialist Mariia Zimmerman, a great deal of effort went in “to convince people that thinking about land use and the types of activities and the types of developments near transit was fundamental to transit ridership. And so, it was okay for us to talk about transit and talk about development together and think about ways to make communities safer and more vibrant.

“My first work was within the Federal Transit Administration and then trying to reframe why the federal government, especially the FTA, even had an interest in trying to think about development from a transportation perspective.”

- Mariia Zimmerman, TOD Specialist

The concept of TOD saw significant growth when transit agencies, particularly the legacy systems, such as WMATA in Washington D.C. and BART in the Bay Area, had robust federal funding and had excess land in the 1970s and 1980s. With these specific circumstances, urban planners like Calthorpe and others began exploring the next steps. Yet, simultaneously, changes were happening at the FTA, making it more difficult for other transit project sponsors to purchase additional land for a transit project. Zimmerman recalled a “sort of tension and friction around making the case that development is a transportation strategy.” Furthermore, in partnership with the Center for TOD, efforts were made to demonstrate that transit access is a development strategy.¹⁰ In essence, development became a transportation strategy, and transit access became a development strategy.

2. Uncovering the Adverse Effects Associated with TOD and the Need for An Equitable Framework

“Traditional TOD refers to a planning and design strategy that promotes compact, mixed-use, pedestrian/bike-friendly communities built around mass transit systems. However, traditional TOD projects often do not benefit everyone equitably and have historically lacked meaningful engagement of people impacted by the implementation of TOD and often result in the rise of property values. This ends up disproportionately displacing low-income households and communities of color.” (CapMetro, 2023, p.13)

Washington, D.C.

By the early 2000s, the Federal Government saw the first generation of TOD sites emerging. During this period, the federal government began analyzing these sites to assess whether TOD was fostering more livable communities around transit infrastructure while also promoting affordable housing and economic development.

The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) jointly funded a research project titled [Realizing the Potential: Expanding Housing Opportunities Near Transit](#).¹¹ This project aimed to evaluate case studies of early movers in the TOD space as well as those considering TOD. The qualitative research and anecdotal evidence revealed that the strategy behind TOD was not developing more affordable housing or supporting the existing community. Rather, TOD transformed the neighborhood by constructing luxury housing that attracted new, high-income residents.

“Equitable TOD works towards building equitable outcomes through proactive actions to ensure that everyone, especially historically marginalized communities of color, can benefit from transit connectivity. At the core of ETOD is the tenet that new transit infrastructure should be accompanied by policies and strategies to mitigate displacement of existing residents and create economic opportunity” (CapMetro, 2023, p.13)

To evaluate this problem, HUD, FTA, and the National Housing Trust (NHT) performed a joint analysis. The analysis revealed that during the TOD planning process, municipalities and transit agencies were not effectively engaging with or including the voices of those living in those impacted communities. With no concrete strategy or policy to address this issue, it became apparent that TOD was not promoting equity but contributed to gentrification, which often displaces long-term residents.

Chicago, Illinois

In 2013, Chicago introduced the TOD Ordinance, promoting density and reducing parking around transit stations.¹² However, TOD developments were mainly concentrated in affluent neighborhoods on the North Side, leading to gentrification. For example, the CTA Blue Line to O'Hare International Airport (ORD) passes through Logan Square, a predominantly Latine area, which saw an influx of luxury developments, raising living costs and displacement of long-term residents.

There are a number of community development corporations in Chicago. These are community-based housing and economic development organizations who look at opportunities to build affordable houses, to provide opportunities for entrepreneurship, and so forth. And what was happening was that they were getting priced out of the land by the big developers, who had lots of money...and would outbid the community developers. - Grimshaw

To better understand the challenges community developers were facing around acquiring land, CNT organized a workshop. This led CNT to develop an analytical tool to streamline development processes, cutting costs and time for community developers. However, community developers identified gaps in the tool, as their work differed from traditional TOD. Instead, their work aimed to foster inclusive communities where residents can age in place. As Grimshaw highlighted, they advocated for "development plans and funding schemes that would create Equitable TOD." This collaboration between CNT and community developers gave rise to Equitable TOD.

ETOD is transit-oriented development with an emphasis on equity. How is this providing access to people who are moderate and low incomes, how is this providing an opportunity for entrepreneurs to have access to affordable properties to have their business. It is an opportunity for people to be able to visit local development because of transit access. In short, Transit-Oriented Development that is focused on Equity.

- Jacky Grimshaw, Senior Director, Transportation and Policy and CNT

The expanded concept of TOD prompted Chicago to amend its 2013 TOD Ordinance in 2015, which primarily expanded the geography for TOD. Yet, it was not until 2022, with the enactment of the Connect Communities Ordinance, did Chicago see its first comprehensive ETOD zoning update, positioning Chicago at the forefront of ETOD work.

For further details on the key changes to the Chicago TOD ordinances and policies, see Appendix B.

3. Current: A Constructive Look at Implementing TOD and ETOD Efforts in Four Case Study Cities Across the Nation

3.1 Case Study: Austin, Texas

Introduction

Austin's pathway to Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD) represents a significant move toward sustainable urban planning. It aims to address the city's growth and transit infrastructure needs by promoting inclusive development that protects the interests of marginalized communities while fostering economic growth and accessibility. Anchored by the Project Connect initiative, a collaborative transit expansion program led by a collective partnership between CapMetro (Austin's transit agency), the City of Austin, and the Austin Transit Partnership (a local government corporation), ETOD highlights Austin's commitment to creating vibrant, transit-friendly neighborhoods for diverse socio-economic groups.¹³

Over the past three decades, Austin has seen significant population and job growth, but this has varied among racial and ethnic groups, leading to displacement and gentrification. Additionally, Austin faces an affordable housing crisis and increasing traffic congestion as costs push new and existing residents to the periphery. To address these challenges, Austin is heavily investing in transit to better connect the Austin region.¹⁴ Jay Blazek Crossley, the executive director at Farm & City, noted, "Even in a place like Texas, it's important to give people options...the opportunity to live where they want."

Context

Austin's pursuit of equitable transit expansion has endured many challenges. Attempts to advance transit in 2000 and 2014 fell short. In 2000 and 2014, most voters in the urban core supported the plan to advance transit—via light rail—but were defeated by suburban voters. In 2014, outgoing Mayor Leffingwell attributed the 2014 failure to "all [the] talk about taxes and affordability," as many residents viewed rail as not cost-effective, underscoring the complexities of transit planning.^{15,16} It was not until 2020 that Austin made significant progress toward equitable transit when voters approved Project Connect (Proposition A), a comprehensive transit plan guided by an ETOD framework for developing light rail and rapid bus transit expansion. It includes a multi-billion expansion of CapMetro, funded by dedicating 8.75 cents of Austin's property tax revenue to the Austin Transit Partnership.¹⁷

Bill McCamley, former executive director of Transit Forward, noted that Project Connect's open-ended funding mechanism is unique. "There is no end date, so theoretically, the funding stream can be used to improve the transit system in Austin in the future, as it allows for infrastructure, operations, and maintenance funding. It is brilliant and groundbreaking." This funding measure signaled a paradigm shift, reflecting a significant change in civic engagement and progressive aspirations among Austin's diverse and growing population.¹⁸

Political Context

The political landscape around ETOD in Austin is multifaceted. While initiatives like Project Connect have local progressive support, they face resistance from state lawmakers who are largely fiscally and socially conservative. Legal disputes over funding and jurisdiction highlight the tensions between local autonomy and state oversight. As McCamley noted, “State law doesn’t allow for affordability requirements. [With various restrictions in place, such as zoning, it’s practically] illegal in the state of Texas to have those affordability guidelines around ETOD zones. So, that is what we’re starting to look at moving forward—yes, we can get more density, but we need to start putting more affordability into those programs.



Additionally, amendments to the Land Development Code—a law that determines how land can be used throughout the City of Austin as well as what, where, and how much (or not) can be built on said land—have sparked debates over housing regulations and environmental preservation, highlighting the need to balance urban development with sustainability goals.¹⁹

The Transition from TOD to ETOD

Austin's approach to ETOD goes beyond traditional TOD by prioritizing equitable outcomes and preventing displacement. ETOD addresses systemic issues, such as discriminatory practices like redlining that have historically marginalized communities. It aims to foster economic opportunity for all residents by focusing on the needs of those who have been excluded from the planning process.²⁰

Current ETOD Policy

“Five years ago, only 10 people knew the acronym ETOD.”
- Jay Blazek Crossley, executive director at Farm&City

Austin's ETOD policy journey began with a City Council resolution in June 2021, which aimed at integrating transit planning with equitable development. Led by Council Members Natasha Harper-Madison and Ryan Alter, the initiative gained support through partnerships with community advocates and transit stakeholders. This was succeeded by the ETOD Policy Plan in March 2023, highlighting Austin's commitment to fostering equitable growth and addressing socio-economic disparities.²¹

Shared Vision and Objectives:

As cited within the ETOD Policy Plan, the framework rests upon the following six goals:

1. Enable All Residents to Benefit from Safe, Sustainable, and Accessible Transportation
2. Help Close Racial Health and Wealth Gaps
3. Preserve and Increase Housing Opportunities that are Affordable and Attainable
4. Expand Access to High-Quality Jobs & Career Opportunities
5. Support Healthy Neighborhoods That Meet Daily Needs
6. Expand Austin's Diverse Cultural Heritage and Small, BIPOC-Owned, and Legacy Businesses

The ETOD policy, while commendable, faced resistance and logistical challenges. Including amendments to the Land Development Code, which have raised concerns about regulatory and environmental impacts. Legal disputes over funding and jurisdiction have complicated implementation, emphasizing the need for collaboration among stakeholders and governance.²²

Project Connect Partnership Structure and Funding

The collaborative partnership between CapMetro, the City of Austin, and the Austin Transit Partnership (ATP) drives the Project Connect ETOD policy and programs, with the Community Advisory Committee (CAC) advising on equity and anti-displacement matters.²³

In 2020, Austin received \$7.1 billion from the Federal Transit Administration's Transit-Oriented Development Pilot Grant to support the Project Connect vision, which includes two light rail lines and transit-oriented development for 21 stations. CapMetro has developed a community engagement plan—engaging affordable housing champions and community organizations—to address displacement risks, focusing on historically underrepresented groups with help from paid "community connectors," demographic analysis, and market research published in a public dashboard.²⁴

Community Engagement

The success of Project Connect's ETOD efforts hinges on meaningful community engagement. Project Connect has sought and gathered input from underrepresented voices through focus groups, workshops, and open houses, among others. Key challenges identified include rising rents, pressure on small businesses, dissatisfaction with current transit services, and the need for support in addressing the affordability crisis.²⁵

During the ETOD Study Phase, Project Connect implemented the Community Connectors program, recruiting 12 individuals from over 150 applicants to engage historically underrepresented groups. Their involvement was crucial for reaching diverse audiences. Furthermore, the Connectors played a key role in the implementation of the ETOD policy, which continues to be utilized by Project Connect.²⁶

Conclusion

Austin's journey towards equitable transit-oriented development represents a paradigm shift in urban planning. By centering community voices, addressing systemic inequities, and fostering collaboration, the city aims to create inclusive, vibrant, and sustainable neighborhoods accessible to all residents. With Project Connect as a catalyst, Austin paves the way for a more equitable future.

3.2 Case Study: Atlanta, Georgia

Introduction

Atlanta, Georgia, has made significant strides in TOD through its work in the city and surrounding counties. Although the city has not yet explicitly focused on ETOD, organizations such as TransFormation Alliance (TFA) and Propel ATL continue to advocate for it, emphasizing the importance of applying an equity lens to inform TOD. This case study highlights the Atlanta area's ongoing TOD work and the commitment of transit advocates to meaningfully involve communities throughout the planning process, ensuring that local needs are determined.

Context

Like many sunbelt cities, Atlanta, Georgia, has seen a 17% population increase from 2010 to 2020 (from 420,003 to 498,715).²⁷ Despite being an autocentric city, their rail agency, Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), has made significant strides in providing transportation options, with [38 rail stations and over 550 bus stations](#).²⁸ In the last 15 years, MARTA has focused on transit-oriented development (TOD), launching a TOD department in 2013 and adopting guidelines to support this initiative. These guidelines reflect MARTA's commitment to advancing TOD through three overarching strategic goals:

- “To generate greater transit ridership—a natural consequence of clustering mixed-use development around stations and along corridors.

- To promote a sustainable, affordable, and growing future for the people of Metro Atlanta.
- To generate a return on MARTA’s transit investment—through enhanced passenger revenues, greater federal support, and, where applicable, development on MARTA property.”²⁹

As MARTA indicated, TOD is at the intersection of public transportation and community building. “TOD is the key that unlocks Smart Growth. Smart Growth means sustainable development based on livable, walkable, mixed-use communities that minimize greenhouse gas emissions and preserve open space.”³⁰ Smart Growth spurs economic development in addition to reducing air and water pollution, increasing infrastructure affordability, reducing congestion on roadways, improving access to employment, providing more housing options, and resuscitating neighborhoods and central business districts.³¹

Furthermore, Invest Atlanta—the official economic development authority for the City of Atlanta—launched a \$15 million pilot TOD fund in 2018.^{32,33}

Transit-Oriented Development Sites

Noteworthy TOD sites within the city include Lindbergh Station City Center (now Uptown Atlanta), Edgewood/Candler Park Station, and Kensington Station (in unincorporated DeKalb County). Completed in 2004 for \$24 million, Lindbergh Station features a ground-level plaza and surrounding developments with over a million square feet of office and retail space, along with 714 market-rate residential units.³⁴ Recently, the Atlanta Beltline acquired three acres near Lindbergh Station to develop mixed-use buildings with 130 residential units, primarily aimed at below-market rates.

The Edgewood/Candler Park Station is Atlanta’s latest TOD site. This heavy rail transit station is on MARTA’s Blue and Green lines, providing rapid rail services and connections to MARTA buses. Much of the development around the station caters to residential and neighborhood-focused commercial businesses.³⁵ Lastly, Kensington Station is underway, breaking ground in November 2023.³⁶ The project plan includes 100 percent affordable housing, including a 74-unit senior living community, a 186-unit family community, and a 15,000-square-foot office space for the new headquarters for the Housing Authority of DeKalb County (HADC).^{37,38}

Transit Advocates and the City of Atlanta

Transit advocates are central players in promoting Equitable TOD in the Atlanta area. The TransFormation Alliance (TFA) is a grassroots coalition of organizations dedicated to revitalizing the public transit system and restoring public confidence in MARTA. While also advocating for affordable housing and community-driven economic development around transit stations.

More narrowly, TFA focuses on anti-displacement within ETOD by fostering connections between Atlanta’s Department of City Planning, Department of Transportation, and MARTA. Amari Foster, managing director at TFA, emphasized TFA’s role as a bridge between MARTA and the City of Atlanta while emphasizing the equity aspect of ETOD.



Lindbergh Station (Uptown), Atlanta, GA | Image by Transformation Alliance

As Atlanta grows, incorporating equity into all work is a key belief of TFA. TFA is committed to addressing historical inequalities through actions and policy changes, ensuring everyone benefits from transportation investments. Currently, TFA is working with local communities to promote equitable transit access and inclusive developments while advocating for a citywide ETOD policy.

Propel ATL is another transit advocacy coalition in Atlanta focused on community-driven public and active transportation initiatives, prioritizing pedestrian safety in high-injury areas through projects like Walk ATL. Propel ATL collaborates with the Oakland City and Mosley Park neighborhoods to create pedestrian safety action plans and enhance connectivity. Central to their mission is ensuring community involvement throughout the decision-making process, where Propel ATL plays an intermediary role by connecting residents with decision-makers and advocating for infrastructure improvements based on community needs.

Moreover, Rebecca Serna, the executive director at Propel ATL, highlighted the positive effects of reforming zoning to eliminate parking minimums, allowing developers to work more efficiently and affordably. Their Safe Streets policies and the E-bike rebate program are other noteworthy community-based initiatives in their portfolio, all contributing to the overarching goal of ETOD.

ETOD Initiatives

As noted earlier, ETOD comes in various shapes and sizes. Atlanta features the first transit soccer fields, a concept developed by Sanjay Patel of Soccer in the Streets in 2013. While using MARTA, Patel noticed vast vacant land around rail stations, and inspired by similar transportation hubs in England, Patel created



SoccerStation, Atlanta, GA | Photo by TransFormation Alliance

the StationSoccer—a community project designed to establish mini soccer fields near transit spots. This initiative, launched in 2016, strives to build equitable communities through soccer villages in and around transit hubs, with thoughtful consideration of community needs both on and off the field.³⁹ Today, as the StationSoccer continues to expand, the existing locations are at Five Points, West End, East Point, and Lindbergh, with plans for soccer fields at Doraville, Bankhead, H.E. Holmes, and Civic Center.

Conclusion

Atlanta's efforts to enhance transit and housing through TOD deserve recognition. This case study emphasized MARTA's commitment to advancing TOD, as well as highlighting some of the key TOD sites in the city. Additionally, advocates have played a crucial role in promoting more equitable TODs. Notably, TFA and Propel ATL have made significant progress for ETOD through their efforts around anti-displacement, community safety, and zoning reforms.

3.3 Case Study: Los Angeles, California

Introduction

Despite the challenges faced in delivering effective transit throughout Los Angeles (LA), County, LA has made progress in expanding its transit network and implementing Transit Oriented Communities (TOC) initiatives—akin to TOD. These efforts behind TOC have been led by advocacy coalitions like ACT-LA, in partnership with the City of Los Angeles Department of City Planning and Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro)-the transit agency for LA County.

Context

The City of Los Angeles (LA), the second most populous in the United States, is in southern California, nestled between mountains and the Pacific Ocean. The city covers 469 square miles and is one of 88 cities that make up LA County, which consists of 4,084 square miles that spans across desert and seacoast lands.⁴⁰ Once served by a robust streetcar trolley system, the rise of the automobile in the mid-1900s led to the decline of streetcars and increased reliance on cars, resulting in unplanned development and confusing and disorganized travel patterns. Now, it is a county interconnected by a network of intricate highways for drivers.⁴¹ “As traffic and air quality worsened throughout the 1950s and 1960s, nostalgia for the rail system became widespread, particularly in the urban core. Downtown businesses lobbied to get a new rail network started, out of fear that downtown would become a hollowed-out economic wasteland due to competition from suburban job centers.”⁴²

With a lack of dedicated funding for transit, in the late 1960s, Los Angeles sought local funding for transit through a sales tax, but it was not until the 1980s that a successful countywide measure passed. This measure allocated sales tax revenue to rail, buses, and local road improvements. It marked the first of several sales tax measures to pass in the area to support public transit, including Measure R (2008) and Measure M (2016).⁴³ Today, as Los Angeles County continues to expand its transit network and integrate fragmented public transit lines, the focus has included equitably developing opportunities around transit stations.

Transit-Oriented Communities Policy Plan

After the approval of Measure R, which introduced a Countywide sales tax for public transit expansion, grassroots organizations in LA shifted their focus to tenant rights, concerned about speculation around the development of new rail stops in residential areas. Despite LA's success in securing community benefits like affordable housing percentages around various projects like the Staples Center, these organizations worried about the risk of displacement and gentrification near transit hubs. As a result, they advocated for a comprehensive citywide policy to address these issues and avoid site-specific conflicts proactively.

ACT-LA—a broad-based coalition made up of organizations with expertise engaging in transit justice, housing justice, environmental justice, and public health—was developed in 2011 to create this citywide policy plan, the Transit-Oriented Communities (TOC) program.⁴⁴

ACT-LA partnered with the local labor movement (led by the LA County Federation of Labor) to place the TOC policy on the ballot (through Measure JJJ) in 2015. Measure JJJ, which aimed at promoting affordable housing through zone changes and increased density allowances near transit stations, was approved by voters in 2016.⁴⁵ This program incentivizes affordable housing development within a half mile of bus and train stations, providing options for low-income residents and encouraging alternatives to car travel. While the city council did not actively promote this initiative, it faced no government opposition during the campaign.⁴⁶



LA Advocates for Measure JJJ | Photo by ACT-LA

Measure JJJ mandated that the City of Los Angeles Planning Department create guidelines for its incentive program, effective since 2017. A key aspect of the TOC policy is an anti-displacement framework requiring a one-for-one replacement of each demolished unit, preventing a net loss of affordable housing. Advocates suggest a two-for-one replacement strategy to promote a net gain and discourage the demolition of rent-controlled units.

The original policy included a ten-year sunset clause, which prompted plans for a permanent policy during the City of LA's rezoning process. Throughout 2023 and 2024, the City of Los Angeles collaborated with ACT-LA and other relevant parties to develop a new TOC program with stronger anti-displacement measures, which was adopted by LA City Council in December 2024.

ACT-LA worked with LA Metro to develop a regional TOC policy to improve hous

ing policies across LA County's 88 cities and its unincorporated areas in anticipation of transit development. Laura Raymond, former director of ACT-LA, stated that these enhancements would "include how to incentivize cities to put stronger tenant protections into place, affordable housing, planning, and things like that." Additionally, the TOC policy has led to the establishment of several important TOC programs, including the Joint Development Program, each playing an essential role in the effective integration of transit and community development.

Joint Development

"Metro has a plan for improving quality of life by creating more opportunities to live and work near transit."⁴⁷ LA Metro, in partnership with local jurisdictions and the community, has launched the Joint Development Initiative to encourage more housing construction on Metro-owned land, which has already led to the construction of affordable units near transit stations. Through the "10K Initiative," Metro has committed to growing its portfolio to 10,000 housing units, including 5,000 affordable, by 2031⁴⁸. To facilitate this, Metro has "20 new sites that we're going to bring to market, and in 2024, the Metro Board approved a bench of pre-qualified developers who will have access to these 20 sites. And in doing so, we're taking steps to move more quickly. Additionally, one of the areas of focus we've had relative to our TOC policy objectives to deliver on our joint-development program is to lift up and support community-based development organizations (CBDOs), incentivized through a point structure in developing that bench. Twenty-five of the 80 firms on that bench are CBDOs. Right now, we're working through the process of operationalizing that in our Request for Proposals (RFPs) and our deliveries. We're constantly trying to figure out how, in this newer territory, to make sure we're doing right by the communities we serve while, at the same time, delivering housing more quickly," stated Nick Saponara, executive officer of transit-oriented communities at LA Metro.

Housing Initiatives

LA has made progress with its TOC initiatives, notably through the 2022 ballot measure United to House LA (ULA), a city ordinance that established a tax on property transfers to fund affordable housing and assist at-risk tenants. The ULA imposes a 4% tax on property transfers valued between \$5 million and \$10 million and a 5.5% tax on properties over \$10 million.⁴⁹ While "it's not popular in the [non-mission driven market] development community, it's a much-needed source of affordable housing funding for the city," noted Matthew Glesne, senior city planner at the Los Angeles City Planning Department, even though revenue has been lower than expected.

"In her first week in office, Bass signed Executive Directive 1 as an emergency measure to combat LA's affordable housing shortage."⁵⁰

Moreover, as Glesne noted, Mayor Bass's controversial Executive Directive 1 (ED1) "is the biggest thing happening in LA right now." ED1 allows unlimited density and waives all hearings and environmental reviews for 100% affordable housing developments, to name a few, making it more appealing to developers than the ULA program. However, tenant advocates argue that protections for renters, especially those in rent-controlled units at risk of displacement, are insufficient, prompting efforts to strengthen protections. There are also concerns that

landlords are abusing the ED1 program by selling properties to developers who turn and replace existing rental units with costlier yet still affordable units.⁵¹ Despite calls for changes, ED1 remains a significant aspect of the TOC landscape.

Finally, and most recently, is the proposed Citywide Housing Incentive Program (CHIP) Ordinance, which seeks to tackle LA's housing affordability crisis by offering incentives for mixed-income and 100% affordable housing development while minimizing tenant displacement. CHIP will amend the Los Angeles Municipal Code (LAMC) to streamline project review processes and introduce incentives for projects that "expand[s] access to affordable housing near transit, jobs, along corridors, and in higher opportunity areas."⁵²

While the CHIP program permits developers to build larger and denser developments when building affordable housing units on-site, the program is limited. The program excludes single-family zones, limiting developers to building in commercial zones, which preserves single-family homes and increases pressure on those designated commercial areas. CHIP "did not touch underlying zoning; it only touched areas where you can already build multi-family housing, where multi-family housing already exists," said Glesne.⁵³

"It's one of the hard things in a built-out city where you need more housing, we're under supplied, and in our ideal world we'd find new areas of land like single-family areas where displacement isn't a concern" - Matt Glesne, senior city planner at the Los Angeles City Planning Department

As LA works to combat displacement, California Senate Bill 330 includes a "right of return" provision, allowing any tenant displaced by redevelopment to have the first right to return to the new building once completed. However, the uptake on this provision is low due to the typical four to five-year wait between the tenant relocation and the rebuild being completed, highlighted Glesne. To strengthen this anti-displacement measure, LA is increasing the relocation assistance payments to tenants to help them stay in their community during the multi-year wait.

Glesne pointed out that the scale of development stemming from the TOC policy plan is not ambitious enough to tackle climate change and the housing affordability crisis. He emphasized the need to scale up TOC developments, citing that four to seven-story buildings (which is the standard for most TOC developments in LA) are the minimum level of development happening around the globe, where TOD developments are significantly larger.

Conclusion

Los Angeles's TOC policy plan exemplifies effective ETOD integration, driven by the community, with ACT-LA playing an integral role. LA Metro's regional TOC policy has demonstrated the potential for regional and local agencies to embed ETOD in municipal policy. Additionally, the Joint Development Initiative underscores the importance of government-led initiatives in advancing ETOD efforts. Despite the challenges around ETOD initiatives faced by LA County and the City of Los Angeles, progress continues.

Although the LA City Planning Department has yet to release the number of sites and housing units built under the above TOC-related policies, the number is in the tens of thousands.

3.4 Case Study: Chicago, Illinois

Introduction

Chicago, Illinois, while late in adopting TOD policies, was an early leader in ETOD work. Through the hard work of advocates with the organization Elevated Chicago, —a multi-sector collaborative that promotes more equitable development in Chicago—the city has been able to improve the equitability of its transit-oriented development work.⁵⁴ This case study highlights this work by providing examples of key ETOD sites, as well as outlining the work that has been done to incorporate equity into both the 95th Street Corridor Plan and the Red Line Extension Transit-Supportive Development Plan.

Context

The City of Chicago sits along the edge of Lake Michigan, spanning 234 square miles of land and is the third most populous city in the nation.⁵⁵ In the early 20th Century, Chicago was home to robust freight and transit systems. Yet, akin to Los Angeles, as the automobile became standardized in the 1950s, Chicago's transit systems fell into crisis. To salvage transit, the Illinois General Assembly, in 1973, created the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA) giving it the power to levy a sales tax to support the Chicago Transit Authority. In 1983, the General Assembly provided more funding for the CTA as well as a failing commuter rail system (which was unified and named Metra) and privately owned municipal bus routes in the suburbs were similarly united under the name Pace (1983).⁵⁶

Today, their transit network ranks among the top three in ridership in the U.S., alongside New York City and Los Angeles. It is also a key railway hub with thousands of freight and passenger trains traversing the area daily. However, while transit continues to serve locals and visitors alike, the transit system is, once again, in crisis. Ridership has been declining for over a decade, worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to access gaps, high operator vacancies, and aging infrastructure. As Chicago addresses its transit network's shortfalls, the need to build livable communities has become part of the planning process.

Chicago's ETOD Policy

The historical impact of infrastructure investments at local and regional levels has often led to divisions within and across neighborhoods, limited opportunities, and adverse effects on the health of communities of color and low-income populations, such as the Eisenhower Expressway. The construction of the Eisenhower expressway, or I-290, built between 1949 and 1961, displaced more than 12,000 individuals and over 400 businesses. Slicing areas like the Near West Side, which, in 1950, had the largest population of Blacks.⁵⁷ Additionally, socioeconomic data has shown that health outcomes, employment, and other risk factors are correlated to where you live. In other words, your zip code significantly influences your opportunities. These underlying factors contributed to the adoption of the ETOD framework and the development of Chicago's ETOD policy in 2020.

Since 2013, under the City of Chicago’s initial limited TOD ordinance, Chicago has been encouraging dense, mix-use development around CTA and Metra rail stations via policy and zoning incentives for locating new developments near transit. Yet, as the buildout of TOD sites grew, private developments were predominantly concentrated in one section of the city, leading to further division and disinvestment within and across communities.⁵⁸

Elevated Chicago aims to transform areas within a half-mile radius of transit stations by equitably investing in the people, places, and processes that contribute to the cultural vibrancy, health, and climate resilience of communities of color.⁵⁹ This collaborative took the initiative to assess the TOD program in Chicago and found that while some neighborhoods, particularly those on the North Side, had good transit connections and amenities, they were unaffordable for many. Moreover, other communities, particularly those on the South and West Sides, were also transit rich but faced challenges attracting new development due to disinvestment, resulting in a lack of amenities and a high prevalence of vacant land near transit hubs. These observations led Elevated Chicago to recognize the lack of equity in outcomes from the implementation of the 2013 TOD ordinance, prompting a call for change.



Chicago Community Planning Academy at Starling | Photo by Jon Kuta, CNT

As TOD projects materialized, displacement and gentrification became a concern, with “nearly all projects that used the TOD incentives were located downtown and on the North Side, continuing a pattern of disinvestment long familiar to the city’s South and West Sides.”⁶⁰

To achieve meaningful change, Elevated Chicago focused across three interconnected elements, **Process, People, and Place**:

Process Systems Change

System change focuses on reforming existing systems. Elevated Chicago made several attempts to amend the ordinance that mandates TOD incentives. Efforts began with the work on an ETOD Policy Plan in 2020, with equity as the guiding framework. The ETOD Policy Plan built on Chicago’s TOD ordinance, which had been subsequently amended in 2015 and 2019, and based on public comment, was revised and finally adopted by the City of Chicago in 2021.

In 2022, the Connected Communities Ordinance was enacted. “This ordinance is the most comprehensive and equity-focused update to the City’s transit-oriented development policy yet.”⁶¹ With Elevated Chicago at the forefront, the development of the Connected Communities Ordinance was a collaborative effort between the City of Chicago, 80 community organizations, and other constituents.

See appendix B for further details.

People Community Engagement⁶²

The second investment area prioritizes investing in community engagement by fostering collaborative spaces and organizing efforts. It included hosting community meetings that are relevant and accessible and promote effective practices to ensure that the voices of community members are heard and valued. To support developers, community groups, public employees and others in adopting more inclusive and delightful community engagement practices, Elevated Chicago and Duo Development have developed a [toolkit](#) for practitioners.⁶³

Place Transformative Development

Place focuses on the investment in places, going beyond the brick and mortar. Investments must also consider the physical spaces people experience as they walk to and from transit, creating beautiful, climate-resilient, and walkable places.

Today, under the Connected Communities Ordinance, Chicago has over 60 ETOD sites in the pipeline.

Equitable-Transit Oriented Sites

The City of Chicago, in collaboration with the CTA, Department of Housing (DOH), and the Department of Planning and Development (DPD), is proactively planning for the development of ETOD sites across the city, shifting the TOD focus from the North Side and downtown, with emphasis on revitalizing vacant parcels and buildings. As the largest landowner of vacant lots, the City of Chicago can exercise control over the development of these parcels and promote affordable housing and community-led developments on the South and West Sides.

“CTA is very supportive of ETOD as a strategy to build sustainable and equitable communities that benefit from proximity to our transit lines. However, we are not a land use authority. Independently, we cannot change zoning or acquire properties for development, so we benefit greatly from collaboration with our partners who are able to take such actions,” said Jennifer Henry, director of strategic planning and policy at the CTA.

43 Green (ETOD)

43 Green, situated on the South Side of Chicago in the Bronzeville neighborhood near the 43rd Green Line CTA rail station. The \$100 million development is a mixed-income, mixed-use project that broke ground in January 2022.⁶⁴ In Phase I of the development, a 10-story building was constructed with 99 units, half reserved for renters earning 60% of the area median income (AMI). The building offers a mix of units, including studio, one- and two-bedroom apartments, retail space, and amenities such as an exercise space, a community room with a kitchen, a rooftop terrace, laundry facilities, bicycle storage, and off-street parking. Phase II of the project will feature a 10-story building with 44 of the 80 units designated as affordable, offering similar amenities and unit types. Phase III, expected to break ground in early 2025, will be approximately 70 units. The retail spaces in each building aim to cater to the needs of South Side Chicago residents, focusing on convenience and dining services. Residents have already started to move into the Phase I building.

The Hatchery Chicago (ETOD)

East Garfield Park was once a thriving neighborhood filled with numerous businesses, particularly along Madison Street, but now grapples with empty lots and vacant storefronts. East Garfield Park's decline began with the 1968 uprising that erupted in the area, triggered by the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., leading to the destruction of businesses. Many of which would never be rebuilt. Furthermore, like many other Black and Brown communities across the nation, East Garfield Park faced a shortage of investment from both public and private sectors, leading to further descent.⁶⁵



The Hatchery | Image by Garfield Park Community Council

In 2018, [The Hatchery](#) was established as a food and beverage incubator near the Kedzie Green Line CTA rail stop in East Garfield Park on a vacant lot in the community.⁶⁶ The vision behind the incubator was to assist local entrepreneurs to establish and expand successful businesses.⁶⁷ It is a 67,000-square-foot facility that features 56 culinary-equipped kitchens for rent. Additionally, it includes a shared kitchen space, dry-cold storage space, loading docks, and meeting and office spaces. It is also home to Garfield Park Community Council's Neighborhood Market. Besides providing space and equipment for local food and beverage businesses, The Hatchery offers classes and workshops for food and beverage entrepreneurs. Due to its numerous benefits and significant impact, the incubator is a thriving ETOD site spurring economic development throughout East Garfield Park and neighboring West Side communities.⁶⁸

Incoming ETOD economic developments include:

- The Hub 32. The "78,000-square-foot building is planned to include 14 one-, 34 two- and 15 three-bedroom apartments to be rented at rates affordable to households earning up to 60% of the Area Median Income (AMI)...rooftop amenities for residents, 5,600 square feet of ground-floor retail space, 16 exterior parking spots, and a public plaza for outdoor dining and community gathering."⁶⁹
- Fifth City Commons, opened in December 2024. It is a new construction in East Garfield Park with 43 income-restricted apartments, ranging from one- to three-bedroom units.⁷⁰ Additionally, the site has "two community rooms, a resident terrace and fitness room, three laundry rooms and on-site management offices," and green amenities such as EV charging stations.⁷¹

95th Street Corridor Plan

For years, there has been a strong interest in enhancing transit accessibility within various communities, particularly along the CTA Red Line. The Red Line serves as the primary rail route for many South Side Chicago residents, providing round-the-clock service. In 2019, the CTA completed the reconstruction of the 95th/Dan Ryan Red Line station and bus terminal, one of the largest station projects in its history. This station is a crucial interchange and transportation hub connecting residents from the Far South Side with many points across the Chicago region. The reconstruction project raised questions among residents about its impact on the community and how this investment can foster equitable growth in the surrounding areas. In response, the Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD) and CTA attained funding to complete a comprehensive land use plan in the area called the 95th Street Corridor Plan. The study area encompasses a two-mile stretch of 95th Street, between Halsted Street on the west and Cottage Grove on the east. The goal is to leverage anticipated transit enhancements along the Corridor, including the station project and four others along the Corridor from CTA, commuter rail service Metra, and suburban bus service Pace, for inclusive economic growth.

Today, "The 95th street is sort of like a thoroughfare, you come there to go somewhere else. And this plan is really about creating more...working with the local residents and creating a destination and seeing what they want. This is the place, the neighborhoods, that they live in. What amenities and businesses and things do they want to see along that corridor to enhance their neighborhood and community," said Jasmine Gunn, city planner V for the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, Far South Region.

Despite limited available property around the 95th/Dan Ryan station, the CTA (which is limited on land ownership and direct influence on land use) did acquire a parcel of land to stage construction equipment during the station reconstruction project. This strategically located land, adjacent to the expressway and 95th station, was purchased with the understanding of the potential for future development, particularly for equitable TOD. Conversations with city officials and community members—many of whom have been engaged in this process for over a



95th Street Corridor Plan Illustrative ETOD Concept | Renderings by Chicago DPD and Chicago Transit Authority

decade—has shifted the focus to recognizing 95th Street as a dynamic mixed-use corridor that serves community needs rather than a thoroughfare. “Instead of just recommending business growth, we’re looking at what types of businesses could benefit people who live in the community. Or how can we connect Chicago State University and the opportunities it offers specifically to the people that live along this corridor,” said Quinn Kasal, strategic planner II - rail at the CTA.

The 95th Street Corridor Plan includes a notable feature - the performance of a Health and Racial Equity Impact Assessment (HREIA). This endeavor evaluates the potential impacts of new developments and businesses through the lens of racial equity. This is one of the few instances in which an HREIA of this nature has been implemented. Furthermore, the plan aims to establish a framework for integrating HREIA into future community planning endeavors to ensure plans comprehensively and cohesively address health and racial equity. “I think that’s also what ETOD is about, is not just transit-oriented development, not just building buildings next to a development, but really thinking about the racial and equity impacts from the past, the present, and how that looks like in the future,” said Gunn.

The 95th Street Corridor Plan introduces a chance for the CTA, DPD, and community leaders to help actively shape community development. The plan outlines community disparities and suggests strategies to address them, including identification of potential ETOD locations along the corridor. Community engagement was essential in determining optimal site uses reflected in the plan. The project team “created a framework [of existing conditions] first, prioritizing rehabbing and investing in existing businesses and homes, and then looking for opportunities for infill to help keep people in place or incentivize preferred development,” said Gunn. The next stages included proposing mobility improvements and developing illustrative concepts for ETOD projects on potential sites based on input from the community and partners, which are documented in the plan. “The hope is to bring some more neighborhood amenities to the area because it really is disconnected from a lot of things and needs those resources,” said Gunn.

“The Dan Ryan branch of the Red Line is an example of CTA not owning much land outside of the footprint of the line itself, and it’s in the middle of a highway, so there are challenges in planning ETOD along it. But it still makes sense to do so because it is a critical and highly utilized transit node that links the South Side with the rest of the city and beyond.”

- Quinn Kasal, Strategic Planner II - Rail at the CTA



Red Line Extension Aerial Diagram | Chicago Transit Authority

Red Line Extension Transit-Supportive Development Plan

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has designated funding to study transit-oriented development around new transit projects, such as the Red Line Extension (RLE) that will extend 5.6 miles south from the 95th/Dan Ryan station. This is an exciting initiative working towards improving transit access and development in the community. The CTA has led the development of the RLE Transit Support Development (TSD) Plan, in collaboration with the Chicago Department of Planning and Development (DPD).⁷² This plan aimed to create a guide for future development in the areas surrounding each of the four new stations on the RLE. Informed by robust community engagement, a profile was developed for each station area detailing potential ETOD sites, desired uses and scale, and strategies for implementation. Similar to the 95th Street Corridor Plan, the proposed ETOD concepts are intended to address numerous community needs identified during the planning process.

“It is worth noting that to get funding, one aspect needed was a plan for future development and growth around the stations. So, it was not just about building the train, but also what the neighborhood and things look like around it,” noted Gunn.



Red Line Extension Transit-Supportive Development Plan | Renderings by Chicago Transit Authority and Chicago DPD

Conclusion

Chicago is a key player in the ETOD movement, showcasing various projects and developments. Elevated Chicago has played an integral role in promoting ETOD throughout Chicago, around their focus on equity in processes, people, and places. "As of 2024, there are 60+ equitable transit-oriented development projects in the Elevated Chicago ETOD pipeline."⁷³

3.5 Case Study: Medellín, Colombia

Introduction

Throughout this report, we have observed various cities in the U.S. implementing ETOD initiatives. Yet, this concept is not limited to the U.S.; it is practiced globally. To explore how another country is applying ETOD, we interviewed Hugo Coronado, a manager at the Metropolitan Planning Council, who is originally from Colombia. Our focus was on an ETOD initiative in Medellín, Colombia.

The City of Medellín is a prominent international case study on ETOD. Medellín made a purposeful and strategic decision to invest in better infrastructure and transit options specifically for its low-income residents, alongside participatory planning through the construction of new infrastructure.



Google Earth (2022),
Claudia Roman, Cable-car station Santo Domingo, Medellín,
Antioquia, Colombia, 6°17'35"N 75°32'30"W.
Available from: <https://earth.google.com/web/>
[Accessed 12 February 2025].

Context

The City of Medellín, founded in 1675, is one of the largest cities in Colombia and is heavily industrialized, especially in the steel and clothing industries. Although the city is nearly 350 years old, its layout is on modern planning lines. In the early 1900s, after the completion of the Panama Canal and the coming of the railroad from the southern city of Cali, Medellín saw rapid growth in the region.⁷⁴

In the early 2000s, Medellín improved its transportation system and developed several community projects to integrate the low-income periphery hillside communities physically and socially into the larger city. “By integrating the design of the system with other forms of mass transit and improving access for pedestrians, the city’s Metrocable system has helped connect low-income residents to their city and put urban mobility at the heart of equity.”⁷⁵ Among these developments, the city created the Metrocable system, a system of aerial cable cars designed to connect the hillside neighborhoods to the city’s bus system.

Additionally, Medellín built schools, libraries (e.g., the notable [Parque Biblioteca España](#)), and parks in low-income areas near transit stations, collaborating with the community to ensure the new developments fit their needs.⁷⁶ It is important to emphasize that a significant

factor in Medellín’s progress is the “early moves by the city leaders to bring people impacted by the decisions into the planning process.”⁷⁷

The results of the Metrocable system have led to greater economic opportunities, particularly for female citizens from low socioeconomic backgrounds.⁷⁸ In addition, it avoided displacement issues from increased housing costs because projects were part of a larger urban regeneration plan seeking to improve the quality of life for low-income communities.⁷⁹ Furthermore, catalyzed by the Metrocable

system, the Municipality of Medellín also promoted two affordable housing projects, noted Coronado:

- [Ciudadela Nuevo Occidente](#)
- [Proyecto Habitacional el triunfo](#)

These projects were possible thanks to the program "Compra Tu Casa" (Buy Your House) strategy, which is a district subsidy program aimed at providing over 4,000 financial aids to families in Medellín from 2024 to 2027. Beneficiaries receive between 13 and 15 million Colombian pesos that went directly to construction companies developing Priority Housing (VIP) and Social Housing (VIS) projects in Medellín. For the first year, the program budgeted over 12 billion pesos. In collaboration with the Governor of Antioquia Office, the National Government, compensation funds, and the private sector, the ISVIMED (Instituto Social de Vivienda y Hábitat de Medellín) manages the program.

However, there are still some concerns regarding the transit system. A significant issue is the inequities stemming from the stratification system. Hugo Coronado, manager with the Metropolitan Planning Council, highlighted that the city's zoning codes are outdated, dividing neighborhoods based on their levels of development. As a result, development opportunities in peripheral areas neglect impoverished families residing in higher-stratum (i.e., higher-income) neighborhoods, while underdeveloped areas lack private investment. Although the system appears equitable on paper, these outdated zoning codes prevent this system from reaching its full potential in terms of ETOD.

Conclusion

Despite such issues, Coronado points to Medellín as the best model of a functional transit system. It effectively integrates community services with transit and adopts a holistic approach to community engagement. This example illustrates that investment in poorer neighborhoods can foster infrastructural egalitarianism.⁸⁰

Other notable aspects of Medellín's transportation system include the Metro, the BRT system, trams, and the EnCicla bicycle sharing program. The city has won many awards, including the U.N. Sustainable Transport Award, and was named one of the top transport systems in the world by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP).

4. What Strategies have proven successful in the implementation of (E)TOD?

The formulation of this report involved conducting interviews with multiple representatives from transit agencies, city departments, and transit advocacy organizations. These discussions yielded rich insights relevant to our analysis of ETOD. The sections that follow highlight the advantages of executing (E)TOD initiatives, categorized into three groups: Community Involvement; Invested Partners; and Capital.

4.1 Community Involvement

Several organizations and transit agencies underscored the significance of engaging communities and centering their voices throughout ETOD work.

Considering the diverse nature of communities, it is vital to involve them at every stage of the planning process, as there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Furthermore, including community leaders at the decision-making table has resulted in significant improvements in the infrastructure projects undertaken.

“Not every project but more now includes those ETOD elements in the design, affordability. There are neighborhood policies now, zoning changes. The issues haven’t fully gone away but the types of conversations are better now, types of projects are better, who is helping make these decisions are changing and diversifying,” which is a hopeful future, said Zimmerman.

Moreover, empowering community voices while respecting their time is essential to prevent engagement burnout. The City of Charlotte, North Carolina, addresses this by pairing capacity-building with coalition-building, acknowledging the resource and capacity constraints on both the agency and advocacy sides. To support this effort, they partnered with the Community Building Initiative (CBI) as their local consultant, which has established strong community relationships.

The Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority (NFTA) in the Buffalo-Niagara Falls Metropolitan Area is shifting from a traditional “top-down” approach to a more inclusive engagement framework for infrastructure planning. They engage the community early, prioritizing residents' visions over planners' assumptions of community needs. Darren Kempner, NFTA's director of grants and development, noted that this method has proven to be more effective. NFTA emphasized empowering the community, building relationships, and promoting transparency. Similarly, the City of Charlotte highlighted the importance of working with community-based organizations (CBOs) to guide the planning process. Above all, as

Kempner emphasized, “compensating people for their time to get involved in the planning process” is needed.

Furthermore, as LISC Phoenix highlighted, it is necessary to “always work at the speed of trust, which means we don't work at the speed of what a funder may tell us that we need to get accomplished. And that we don't share our trusted relationships with other institutions unless we have built a safe space for those institutions to come in.”

4.2 Invested Partners

Transit-focused organizations should collaborate with government bodies and other invested parties. The Central Puget Sound Regional Transit Authority (Sound Transit), serving the Seattle Metropolitan Area, has effectively implemented TOD projects by building relationships and partnering with parties across sectors. For instance, Sound Transit collaborated with Amazon to build affordable housing outside Seattle, filling a financial gap due to limited regional funding. With Amazon's support, Sound Transit constructed affordable housing near transit stations in the suburbs of Seattle. Without this help, the construction of affordable housing units might not have been possible.

If they relied on regional dollars the housing units would be far smaller. We have an ongoing relationship now with Amazon, because even though the county is bringing in money there is still a gap. If it was Seattle then the city would step in and there would be more money, but it's not. Maintained their integrity (“what's important to Sound Transit”) while getting their projects funded.

- Thatcher Imboden, director of community development at Sound Transit

Similarly, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Phoenix in Phoenix, Arizona, commented on its partnerships with the public sector to develop affordable housing near the light rail line that travels through Tempe, Mesa, and Phoenix, particularly, focusing on the Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP).^{81,82} Following the launch of the light rail in the Phoenix area in 2008, the absence of nearby affordable housing left neighboring residents apprehensive about the impact of future incoming investments. According to Terry Benelli, executive director at LISC Phoenix, “Affordable housing was one of the requests of the community so that they could remain...[as residents] wanted to ensure that there was a place for the residents who had been in the geographic area of the neighborhoods for generations, for them to remain when investments started coming, and they would be priced out of the neighborhood or the culture would be different and they wouldn't feel comfortable in the neighborhood anymore.”

In response to this concern, LISC Phoenix partnered with the Arizona State Department of Housing, led then by Michael Traylor, to introduce extra bonus points for QAP. While points were already available for constructing housing near a grocery store, a high-performing school, or a federally qualified healthcare center, there were none for housing near transit. Before this, the Department of Housing only utilized the low-income housing tax credit to finance affordable housing, with developers having to navigate the highly competitive QAP to access these funds. The introduction of extra bonus points to support housing near light rail stations provided "an incentive to make sure that those tax credits at least supported some housing along the light rail...which really changed the dynamics of things. So affordable housing started to capture the tax credits and being built along the rail," noted Benelli.

QAP's extra bonus points for affordable housing have since been eliminated, but the program's tenure enabled LISC Phoenix to get its foot in the door and acquire land for affordable housing before the surge in development occurred.

The importance of partnerships across sectors is also visible in Chicago. There, staff from the Office of the Mayor, DPD, and DOH were critical in championing the inclusion of ETOD elements in QAP, the updated Affordable Requirements Ordinance, the citywide planning process, and targeted redevelopment opportunities. With commitment from the mayoral administration, Chicago also passed landmark zoning reforms and invested \$10 million to support ETOD projects.

4.3 Capital

The resulting equitable TOD initiatives and those on the horizon would not have been possible without the capital support from public, private, and philanthropic investments. On various levels, capital supports efforts such as:

- Community development and affordable housing;
- Infrastructure and walkability improvements;
- Community engagement and coalition building.

Improved coordination between and among these financial sources can further advance the ETOD movement.

5. What Challenges Have Risen in Implementing ETOD?

Conversely, several interviewees highlighted challenges encountered in developing and implementing ETOD programs. While some organizations and agencies have overcome such barriers, it is a work in progress for others. We have categorized these challenges into three areas: Difficulties in navigating political structures and policies to advance ETOD initiatives; How historical inequities from racist practices and exclusionary zoning still impact communities; and Challenges faced when decision-makers exclude community voices and when transit agencies have limited capacity.

5.1 Difficulties in navigating political structures and policies to advance ETOD initiatives:

At all government levels—local, state, and federal—political structures and entities can be complex and frustrating for organizations and transit agencies to navigate. Barriers range from the difficulty of working with bureaucracies due to the lack of capacity at government agencies, lack of understanding around the benefits of ETOD, to outright opposition. Furthermore, as expressed by NFTA, working with various governments can be difficult because of a lack of vulnerability and understanding in the government sector. “Regional politics are really, really challenging to navigate and to build buy-in and to build the actual kind of trust and support that people will stand up for what they’ve said or indicated that they support when they’re challenged on it,” said Ashley Smith, assistant manager for grants and development at NFTA.

Sound Transit discussed the hardship of working with local jurisdictions. In the Seattle Metro Region, the local jurisdictions approach their work with Sound Transit from a permitting or regulatory headspace rather than a partnership headspace. Yet, to perform meaningful ETOD work, a partnership mindset is necessary.

Transit Forward, a transit advocacy organization in Austin, Texas, noted that the silo nature within city departments impedes their work.⁸³ The lack of communication between city departments makes saying “no” easier than working towards a “yes” on some problems. Additionally, “The city bureaucracy is pretty hard. There are a lot of balkanizations within city departments in terms of traditional departments not talking with one another, there are examples of city departments saying no rather than working towards yes on some of these projects, especially permitting wise,” said McCamley, former executive director of Transit Forward.

LISC Phoenix has faced numerous challenges in getting a tax measure to support the local light rail approved by legislators on the ballot for public view. “The public always supports the light rail, and the expansion of light rail and the money that they will pay to support this. But our legislature wants to put roadblocks in the way...I have to believe that they're just not proponents of public transportation,” said Benelli.

It is also worth noting that even in municipalities where ETOD policies have been successfully implemented, ongoing changes may still be necessary. For instance, Chicago's Connected Community Ordinance had to remove some provisions (such as the legalization of small multi-family housing near transit and parking reduction) to gain Aldermanic approval, highlighting the lack of consensus on all aspects of the ordinance. As further expressed by Grimshaw, senior director of transportation and policy at CNT, "Policy changes are still needed, at least in Chicago. We still need to make it easier for people to develop. Just going through the process, we found that we need a streamline process because so much time is spent going from one approval process to the next agency that must approve it, etc. So, if we can simplify the approval process, it will cut time and help reduce costs."

The preceding matters all tie back to the complexities in navigating political structures and relationships.

Accomplishing the E in ETOD also faces numerous challenges due to politics and policies. While affordable housing offers a fairer solution for meeting housing needs near transit, it remains a significant challenge, as highlighted by TriMet in the Portland Metro Area, Oregon, and Transit Forward in Austin, Texas.

TriMet faces challenges in securing funding for affordable housing. The existing funding structures have limited flexibility and do not provide a pipeline for promoting affordable housing. Additionally, TriMet has minimal land use control or zoning authority and must depend on the City of Portland's discretion regarding decisions on affordable housing construction.

Transit Forward also faces challenges around building affordable housing. For newly constructed housing in Austin and throughout the State of Texas, there are no regulations in place that mandate developers to meet an affordability requirement. Coupled with zoning restrictions and pushback from homeowners, among other barriers, has limited the ability of Texan cities to execute citywide regulations around affordable housing. As McCamley stated, "You really have to entice developers with bonuses to get them to put development together where the profit margin isn't good enough but is worth them doing. And that's even for affordable housing developers, that's tough. We've had some success, but it is something other cities don't face."

"The financing issues in Austin are going to be one of the big topics of discussion moving forward. They've started to play around with the idea of advocating for an affordable housing revolving loan fund. That might be aimed at the ETOD zone. Just because you can get rid of the minimum parking requirements, which is what the city did. You can zone for more dense allowances, can give some bonuses, but because you can't regulate a certain amount of units to be involved in the development, you have to have the financing available. So, finding ways to get financing that promotes affordability will likely be one of the biggest topics of discussions moving forward. And having options that will really assist the community in making the E part of ETOD a reality."

- Bill McCamley, former executive director of Transit Forward

The City of Charlotte also faces challenges in gaining support for affordable housing, but from residents. Laura Bandara, the ETOD project manager at the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS), expressed the duality her team faces when they work with residents. “It is one of those things that in theory people think equity is a good idea but if people do not have those lived experiences, they may not understand what equity means and assume it is instead equality. My team is really trying to drive home the point that it is equity first, and people who have historically been marginalized are the ones that need to be the ones guiding this entire process...communities that have historically had a lot of access and a lot of involvement in development may start to question why they are not at the table.”

The goal is to develop a system that fosters allies for affordable housing without allowing historically dominant communities to control the process. Educating stable communities about equity and equitable frameworks can help address this issue. This approach can ensure that affordable housing opportunities are available in all areas, including wealthier neighborhoods.

5.2 How historical inequities from racist practices and exclusionary zoning still impact communities:

“The transit fiscal issues are very real, as is the continued inequities, racial segregation, and disinvestment in communities. And when you see it pushing those households out to areas that are not well served by transit we have doubly failed. We are continuing to segregate people, and we are not even providing them with some of those mobility and accessibility options that maybe were not great but at least you had something in an urban neighborhood, that might not be in a suburban area. Challenges haven’t gone away, they’ve increased, some of them are the same. In the development community, way more developers are supportive and understanding in what we are doing on the TOD side and on the affordable housing side. But the predominate development model is still to do sprawl development, or expensive high-rise development.”

- Mariia Zimmerman, TOD specialist and Jacky Grimshaw, senior director of transportation and policy at CNT

Another significant challenge for agencies is addressing the impacts of historic inequities, such as redlining and race-based discrimination, which continue to affect U.S. cities and people's socioeconomic status. A 2014 Harvard University study found that Charlotte, North Carolina, ranked last in social mobility among the 50 largest U.S. cities, showing that upward income mobility is lower in areas with larger African American populations.⁸⁴ This correlation emphasizes the negative effects of racial segregation on upward mobility. These findings shocked the City of Charlotte, prompting action to tackle these issues." In the past 5-6 years, the city has really pivoted to equity and tried to build equity into everything they do," said Bandara.

Transit Forward highlighted the enduring impact of historical inequities on their work. Specifically, long-standing racist zoning laws in Austin have had lasting effects, especially around trust. Today, deep-seated distrust is impacting incoming transportation initiatives. As McCamley stated, “There is a real generational issue when it comes to trying to get some of these changes, and some of that is based on a real history of racism in zoning. A lot of land use and zoning caused a lot of divides. Now, there is a lot of mistrust of developers and city bureaucracy, with older Black and Brown residents who push back on some of those changes because of the mistrust. On the other hand, there are resident groups who want to keep the traditional character, which has to be fought as well. The challenge is having those hard conversations along the generational divides. The results of some of those arguments really hurt affordability and some of these new programs.”

5.3 Challenges faced when decision-makers exclude community voices and when transit agencies have limited capacity:

Traditionally, planners have excluded community voices throughout the planning processes. While this mindset is starting to shift, development and infrastructure decisions are often still made for communities rather than with communities. For instance:

The old-school “infrastructure-first” approach in transportation projects often neglects community input, leading to outcomes that rarely serve community needs. Sound Transit recently highlighted this with the Shoreline North light rail station, which sits next to a freeway. Initial findings suggested that just one side of the highway was suitable for TOD. However, during the final design phase, the City of Seattle requested relocating the park-and-ride to the TOD side of the freeway, a decision made without community representation. The final redesign is an unpleasant pedestrian experience, requiring travel across an overpass or a large parking lot. In the end, the station layout does not effectively serve the community.

“More capacity is better.”

- Darren Kempner, director of grants and development at NFTA

Limited internal capacity, as NFTA pointed out, is a significant barrier. This limitation often prevents NFTA from seizing key opportunities to make progress. “It’s hard to move quickly enough to obtain assistance and build capacity at the moment when an opportunity arises,” noted Smith. Moreover, this internal capacity constraint can affect external relationships, particularly in building partnerships with government allies—that are essential for advancing ETOD initiatives. Smith underscores this challenge, “It’s hard because the seats are moving, but when you get a good one, like a town supervisor who is an urban planner, [we cannot] necessarily take advantage of it. It’s definitely a missed opportunity.”

6. Recommendations To Advance ETOD

6.1 Recommendations for Developers

Developers should engage with ETOD plans, ensuring their projects embody all four pillars of ETOD: equity, transit, orientation, and development. The first pillar, equity, goes beyond surface-level assessment; it questions the authenticity of community engagement and assesses how the proposed plan, plans to address gaps in transit access, affordability, health, and climate change. As Roberto Requejo, founding director of Elevated Chicago, emphasized that, proposals should not simply be performative but truly reflect "community voices, opinions, perspectives, and their expertise."

Under the second pillar, transit, developers should implement ETOD plans that creatively redefine transit, going beyond rapid transit systems and considering bus networks and other transit hubs.

The third pillar is orientation. A distinction exists between developments that are designed with transit in mind and those that are simply located near transit. Developments that are oriented towards transit ensure that, "the walk to and from the station is safe, beautiful, is an environment that is culturally appropriate and reflects the community. Make sure there are other elements of walkability, bike stations, and bike racks; pay attention to people who use wheelchairs and other devices to move around, like micro-mobility options," stated Requejo.

The fourth pillar is development, which mainly focuses on feasibility. Developers should assess whether the proposed ETOD plan is practical or simply theoretical. According to Requejo, "Feasible proposals have embedded in them the promise to continue fighting through the many hurdles of the development journey, are realistic, and transparent, so the community won't feel slighted if the plan doesn't come to fruition."

The above recommendations should also be considered by government entities.

6.2 Federal Agency Recommendations

Federal agencies can be a catalyst in advancing ETOD initiatives that promote inclusive, sustainable, and thriving communities across the United States by adopting a collaborative and cross-sector approach.

Currently, the federal government, through the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and the Build America Bureau, offers programs for TOD projects. The Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) loan program provides credit assistance through direct loans, loan guarantees, and standby lines of credit. Projects eligible for TIFIA loans include those aimed at improving or constructing public infrastructure within walking distance of a transit facility, passenger rail station, intercity bus station, or intermodal facility, and projects aimed at sparking economic development, which may include commercial and residential development. These projects must have a minimum anticipated cost

of \$10 million and credit assistance must be limited to 33% of reasonably anticipated eligible project costs. However, specific projects are eligible for 49% credit assistance if they meet specific TOD eligibility criteria.⁸⁵

TOD projects are those eligible for assistance under 23 U.S.C. § 601(a)(12)(E), and include improving or building public infrastructure that is either:

1. Located within walking distance (approximately half mile) of, and accessible to, a fixed guideway transit facility, passenger rail station, intercity bus station, or intermodal facility, including transportation, public utility, or joint development projects, and related infrastructure; or,
2. For economic development, including commercial and residential development and related infrastructure and activities (a) that incorporate private investment; (b) that are physically or functionally related to a passenger rail station or multimodal station that includes rail service; (c) for which the project sponsors have a high probability of commencing the contracting process for construction not later than 90 days after the date on which credit assistance under the TIFIA program is provided for the projects; and (d) that have a high probability of reducing the need for financial assistance under any other Federal program for the relevant passenger train station or service by increasing ridership, tenant lease payments, or other activities that generate revenue exceeding costs.⁸⁶

The Railroad Rehabilitation & Improvement Financing (RRIF) program provides funding for a variety of purposes, including acquiring, improving, or rehabilitating intermodal or rail equipment or facilities, developing new intermodal or railroad facilities, reimbursing planning and design expenses, refinancing outstanding debt, and financing TOD. RRIF TOD projects must finance economic development activities, which may include commercial and residential development, as well as related infrastructure activities.⁸⁷

The FTA also offers additional funding opportunities for TOD and ETOD. The Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development Planning funds communities for comprehensive or site-specific planning studies to integrate land use and transportation planning for new fixed guideways or core capacity transit project corridors. To date, funding and financial incentives are administered by the transportation and infrastructure arms of the U.S. government.

Multiple additional agencies, such as the U.S. Housing and Urban Development and the Environmental Protection Agency, are well-positioned to execute the following recommendations alongside the U.S. Department of Transportation, building upon the work already underway to support communities reimagining land use and community development near transit.

Launch Formalized Interagency Coordination on TOD and ETOD Initiatives

To increase efficiency and reduce duplication among federal agencies, an interagency working group should be established to align ETOD-related policies and programs across USDOT, HUD, EPA, and other relevant agencies. These three federal agencies can develop a cadence for working together on many existing federal programs so that ETOD initiatives can be uplifted as a priority and a way forward.

The initial action should be to elevate projects that increase the housing supply, which can promote fair housing and economic stability. The federal government funds subsidized affordable housing through several programs—including the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit and Community Development Block Grant.^{88,89}

Build a Comprehensive Playbook of Financial Incentives for ETOD and Increase Access to Funds

CBOs and community development corporations looking to push ETOD initiatives must navigate many resources to understand what may be applicable in separate agencies—from low-income housing credit provided to be managed at the state level to FTA TOD planning grants. The federal government can support this by building a playbook of available financial incentives and eligibility for ETOD activities, akin to the guidebook for the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). This should include programs not only under USDOT but HUD, EPA, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) as well. Within this playbook, FTA or HUD could develop a list of regulations and guidance that touch on ETOD as well.

It is suggested that the eligibility and funding for the TOD Planning Pilot Program be expanded.⁹⁰ Currently, it is limited to projects that would qualify for FTA's Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program—which "provides funding to communities to integrate land use and transportation planning in new fixed guideway and core capacity transit project corridors"—but leaves out stations and corridors that have already been built, as well as bus or intermodal hubs.^{91,92}

It is also critical that federal grant programs firmly outline what ETOD activities can be included in USDOT, FTA, and EPA's Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs), such as enhancing mobility and environmental projects aimed at improving communities. To further advance ETOD initiatives, pre-development costs should no longer be subjected to additional scrutiny. Instead, any pre-development activities—planning, feasibility study, engineering design—should also be eligible for reimbursement.^{93,94} When NOFOs are only considering shovel ready projects, it limits the list of eligible projects which may result in less impactful projects being constructed in communities.⁹⁵

Furthermore, within the TIFIA Program in the Build America Bureau, creditworthiness is the major criterion for selection. Initially, the TIFIA Program was "a competitive, discretionary credit facility. Under this approach, the secretary of transportation reviewed candidate projects to determine both their creditworthiness (i.e., the likelihood of repaying the federal loan) and the extent to which projects advanced national policy goals," including sustainability.⁹⁶ However, in 2012, the "surface transportation bill, known as Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century (MAP-21) Act, amended the program to issue loans on a first-come, first-served basis to creditworthy projects."⁹⁷ Through Congressional legislation, it is suggested that TIFIA be reformed to a discretionary loan program to account for project selection criteria, again, allowing Build America Bureau to weigh gas emissions, land use, and equitable access to opportunities for diverse communities. Moreover, there are no current requirements for a community engagement process in TIFIA. Requiring applicants of a certain threshold to partner with community developers can unlock access to a community-focused vision in development.

Fund Capacity Building to Support TOD and ETOD

ETOD has the power to unlock communities and address transportation needs while proactively tackling land use patterns that will positively impact affordability and economic growth. Building coordination and collaboration among USDOT, HUD, and EPA will help the advancement of ETOD initiatives. Yet, additional resources are still necessary. Moreover, to continue moving the efforts forward, the federal government should also proactively fund research on ETOD best practices, data collection, and metrics for evaluating impacts and identifying barriers to ETOD implementation.

A pathway for smaller, community-driven developments to be funded by these federal programs (the current programs want only multi-million deals)

Current federal funding opportunities for ETOD efforts are largely only accessible to larger corporate and institutional development efforts. To meet the equity goals of ETOD, pathways should be created to allow for smaller, community-driven development efforts to access federal funding programs. Smaller, emerging developers—defined as first-time, community-based, and women and BIPOC developers—are often limited in their ability to access federal funding due to procedural and regulatory requirements, such as reimbursement-only models which require access to upfront capital to incur costs for eventual reimbursement.

Avenues for large funding programs (such as the EPA GGRF, or the CDBG, to prioritize ETOD in funding allocations)

Lastly, the federal government has many existing funding streams and programs that could support local ETOD efforts. Adding additional criteria or prioritization to federal funding programs like GGRF or CDBG is one avenue to direct existing funds towards ETOD projects and programs.

6.3 Recommendations for Public Decision-Makers

Decision-makers at the city and state government levels—transit agencies, Metropolitan Planning Agencies (MPOs), municipal, regional, and state agencies, and elected officials—play a vital role in advancing ETOD initiatives. These leaders are responsible for determining funding for transportation projects. Yet, beyond financial support, decision-makers should also consider the economic impact the project will have on the community by focusing on vacant and underutilized land to foster economic development. According to Grimshaw, “It’s not just a transportation route; it’s about service to the community. So, you want to give people the ability to access whatever they need outside the community. But you also want to make sure that they have the ability to have economic activity within their communities...we want to look at those stops and connections to either existing business opportunities or potential to build new economic opportunities. And if you can bring transportation to those vacant lands, it can be a spot for economic development, affordable housing, recreation, parks, and so forth.”

Decision-makers should assess internal expertise gaps and address them by partnering with relevant agencies, such as a land use planner, if a transit agency lacks this expertise. Agencies should avoid taking on planning roles unless qual-

ified, but if they have land use planners on staff to exploit data to identify existing and potential populations along transportation routes. As highlighted previously, plans should go beyond merely planning a transit route. Collaboration with local communities, developers, and land use planners is essential to create a plan that supports equitable TOD and boosts economic activity and recreation within the community.

“Agencies should not look at requirements and regulations to find a reason why not, they should look at those regulations as a way of determining why they can and why they should. They need to use a little innovative thought and creative processes to use regulations to create that community that people deserve,” stated Grimshaw.

Furthermore, state legislators should explore ways to grant transit agencies the authority to acquire land using their transportation funds. This includes land used for storage during construction or underutilized spaces beneath rail lines. Transit agencies should be allowed to purchase such land to develop it themselves or collaborate with a developer to promote ETOD.

State leaders should take a comprehensive approach to transportation projects, including transit, roads, or highways, and consider associated externalities and overall suitability. Grimshaw emphasized the importance of evaluating air quality, the potential for induced congestion, and the impacts on communities, whether urban or rural. She noted that engineers often draw from outdated plans and stressed the need to reassess these plans and seek community input to ensure the transportation system meets current needs.

Moreover, when centering disadvantaged communities, municipal leaders and MPOs should consider the following to ensure equity is integrated into the infrastructure project planning and implementation processes:

1. City leaders and MPOs must understand the problem at hand. This requires historical awareness of the affected community before proposing any infrastructure projects. As Grimshaw highlighted, decision-makers must reflect on “Where we came from and how we got here and how to go about ameliorating the inequities that have been inflicted on these communities in the past.”
2. City leaders and MPOs must avoid making assumptions about service needs on behalf of the community. Listening to and incorporating community input is essential in determining whether the proposed project will provide the right kind of service for the community.
3. They should take into account the potential impacts on the community. If any negative consequences are detected, city leaders and MPOs should seek measures to address these inequities. Whether services need to be added or removed from the plan, the final project should ultimately benefit those most impacted.
4. Finally, decision-makers should actively engage with community members early on and often. Those directly affected by the proposed project need to be informed of any changes—from project planning to implementation—and final decisions. This can be done through in-person and/or virtual meetings, social media, paper announcements, and attendance at community events, among others.

6.4 Recommendations for Community Leaders

Community leaders, including civic and community-based organizations (CBOs), play a critical intermediary role in ensuring an equitable approach to transportation planning by amplifying community voices and community needs. As Grimshaw argued, “effective transportation planners are the folks in the community, as they understand their own mobility needs best. Once community needs are known, community leaders must translate them into planning terms for decision-makers, which helps remove any confusion between the two parties.”



Connected Communities Impact Table In-Person Convening, 2024, Los Angeles, CA | Photo by Mike Bonin

Participation opportunities are available for community input throughout the planning process, but challenges like timing, location, and Internet access can hinder attendance. Therefore, community leaders need to actively engage in project discussions on behalf of their community. In addition, community representatives are entrusted with holding local officials accountable. As Grimshaw noted, “It is not enough for decision-makers to talk a good game, but are they following through to ensure they’re playing a good game? Are they implementing what the community said they needed rather than a predetermined project?”

6.5 Recommendations for Philanthropists

Philanthropy continues to play an integral role in promoting ETOD. To further advance this movement, we have outlined recommendations for foundations that encompass equitable initiatives, elements to consider in ETOD plans, and potential risks to avoid to ensure the implementation of authentic ETOD.

For this section, philanthropy and foundations are synonymous here.

Foundations should promote equity in ETOD by being transparent about their past actions and acknowledging their role in any harm to communities via supporting projects that led to displacement and gentrification. By recognizing these harms, they can then focus on repair. Philanthropists are encouraged to build meaningful relationships with affected communities and partner with CBOs as part of this reparative process.

Foundations are vital in promoting equity through grants and systemic change initiatives for ETOD, especially given the limited federal resources and bureaucratic barriers. Grants from foundations—such as pre-development, program-related investments, and community engagement grants—are essential for funding ETOD initiatives. Additionally, foundations have the influence to advocate for federal systems change, though few are willing to do so.

Those collaborating with CBOs to advocate for ETOD programs are in the best position to drive meaningful change.

Foundations have traditionally relied on intermediaries to serve as conduits between foundations and local organizations. A more effective approach would be for foundations to engage directly with those on the ground, prioritizing the insights and perspectives of community members. A shift toward grassroots engagement fosters a deeper understanding of local needs and promotes a collaborative environment for community development.

Community development typically has long lifespans, often requiring 5- to 10-year efforts. Foundations should consider this and provide support that aligns with those timelines rather than having a piecemeal approach with 1- or 2-year grants, which can leave developments partially complete.

Foundations play influential roles but often feel overwhelmed navigating the complexities around transportation, urban planning, and development issues. Philanthropists do not need to be experts in these areas; instead, they should lean on the technical experts within their staff who have lived community experiences. According to Requejo, “There are a lot of people in foundations who have a ton of lived experience. They are the experts. They live in a community that needs ETOD. They have suffered themselves from the effects of bad development. Give them space. Give them power. Put them at the center of your foundation. When it comes to projects, philanthropists should center and empower these individuals’ voices.”

Foundations that excel in the previously discussed areas include the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Chicago Community Trust (CCT), The California Endowment, and The Funders Network (TFN). These foundations serve as exemplary models for other funders seeking to effectively contribute to ETOD initiatives, prioritizing collaborative efforts and target investments.

Learn more

If you would like more information about the case studies or to connect with any of the individuals quoted in this report, please reach out to Center for Neighborhood Technology to be connected.

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Endnotes

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Appendix A

One example of “green gentrification” in Chicago is the Bloomingdale Trail (also called The 606), a rails-to-trails project that opened to the public in 2015. The 2.7-mile linear park includes several access points within walking distance of public transit and connects a set of diverse neighborhoods. The population living on the west end of the trail are lower income, are predominantly Latine and are more likely to be renters, while the east end of the trail is characterized by higher incomes, a predominantly White population and high levels of home ownership⁷. This large-scale greening project, despite bringing in “economic development, public health, safety, environmental, and transportation”⁸ benefits to the city, became the most notorious contemporary example of inequity through displacement. After construction began on The 606 in 2013, proximity to the trail began to demand a housing price premium – but only on the western side of the trail. Housing prices on the west end of The 606 have increased over 48% since the project started construction in 2013, while homes to its east by 13%⁹.

Lower-income homeowners and renters are both affected by rising costs and are more prone to displacement. While rising housing prices can mean more home equity for homeowners, they also result in higher, and more unaffordable, property taxes. A growing-demand market can also lead to rising rents, requiring renters to either dedicate a higher proportion of their income to housing costs or move to a more affordable location. Proximity to higher-priced markets also makes certain communities more attractive to investors and more vulnerable to rising costs. This means that any benefits that resulted from The 606 were not experienced by the long-time residents of the area.¹⁰

Another example of “green gentrification” is the BeltLine in Atlanta, Georgia. This topic has been explored in the following articles:

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Appendix B

The expanded concept of TOD to ETOD led Chicago to amend its 2013 TOD Ordinance in 2015 and later in 2019. In addition to the release of the ETOD Policy Plan (2021) and the Connected Communities Ordinance (2022). Below provides a chronological list of these amendments and recent ordinances:

2015 amendment:

- Expanded the size of the TOD zones.
 - TOD incentives became available within an expanded radius from a transit station: up to 1,320 feet (quarter mile) or 2,640 feet (half mile) on a pedestrian-designated street, as opposed to the original 600 feet or 1,200 feet, respectively.
- Eliminated the parking requirements in these areas altogether.^{1,2}
 - A 100% reduction from residential parking requirements if replaced with alternative transportation options, such as a car sharing station on site, or bike parking.³
- Added new incentives for affordable housing.
 - Any project benefiting from increased floor area ratio (FAR) or additional building heights must increase its share of affordable housing units on site, following the rules of the City of Chicago's Affordable Requirements Ordinance (ARO).⁴

2019 amendment:

- Included an explicit equity lens.⁵
- Required the City of Chicago to create an Equitable TOD (ETOD) Policy Plan.⁶
- Expanded TOD policy provisions to include property near several high-frequency bus corridors.⁷
- Extended the incentives to the densest residential zones, which had been previously excluded.⁸

ETOD Policy Plan (2021):

- Fulfilled the 2019 requirement that the City evaluate the performance of recent TOD projects and recommend revisions to the TOD provisions, where appropriate.⁹
- Included findings from quantitative analysis and stakeholder engagement.¹⁰
 - Engaged with more than 80 community organizations and other stakeholders over 18 months.¹¹
- Proposed a roadmap for City actions over the next three years to advance racial equity, community wealth building, climate resilience and public health goals through Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD).¹²

The Connected Communities Ordinance (2022):

- Implemented many recommendations in the ETOD Policy Plan to advance equity in TOD planning and execution. The Connected Communities Ordinance is one of the largest reforms to the Chicago zoning code in decades, focused on promoting development that will help residents live more conveniently, affordably, and sustainably while spurring economic development across the city.¹³
- Major provisions:
 - This ordinance made changes to the geographic and zoning eligibility for parking flexibility, how that flexibility can be used, as well as parking maximums.¹⁴
 - Made changes to existing Transit-Oriented Development density bonuses and created new bonus opportunities, for example:
 - A “parking swap” bonus – a new opportunity to add residential density when reducing on-site car parking.
 - Bonus variables are tied to the amount of affordable housing built on-site.
 - Zoning code allows more dwelling units in TOD areas than allowed outside TOD areas.¹⁵
 - Created a zoning incentive for developers to build units that are accessible to people with mobility-related disabilities.
 - Included new guidelines and requirements to promote safe public space for pedestrians and people in wheelchairs, bikes, scooters, or other mobility devices.
 - Communities with low levels of affordability, created a new mechanism to require a vote in the City Council Committee on Zoning, Landmarks, and Building Standards for certain residential zoning applications known as “inclusionary applications.”
 - In communities facing displacement pressures, restricted low-density development in certain areas zoned for multifamily in TOD areas.¹⁶

Appendix Endnotes

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