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CONCLUSION

Despite the larger trends in the St. Louis region concerning relatively flat growth, significant potential exists to create and expand transit oriented development around the various MetroLink stations. By focusing relatively dense, mixed-use development in and around the existing light rail stations along the MetroLink system, the region can begin to reverse decades of urban sprawl and help to regenerate a number of older communities in both Missouri and Illinois. Well planned TOD can create walkable, vibrant neighborhoods where residents can live, work, and find entertainment and recreation all within close proximity of transit. The various communities have the opportunity to locate significant employment centers around the MetroLink stations as well. Strategically outlining space for employment centers along the light rail line will appeal to the desires of knowledge workers and other key sources of employment growth in the 21st century and therefore should help the region in competing for new companies and in supporting ongoing expansions. In this way, transit-oriented development can help lead an economic revitalization for the overall St. Louis region.

Achieving this goal will involve a good deal of political courage, cooperation, and creativity. As the overall agency in charge of MetroLink and tasked with promoting development around the light rail stations, Metro will fulfill an important leadership role. First, the Metro Board of Directors must endorse this Framework Master Plan as a guide to future development around the various MetroLink stations. Second, the Metro Board must use its role as a leader in the region to work with local jurisdictions along the system in building support for the regulatory frameworks necessary for TOD. In particular, the Metro Board should lobby various municipalities for promoting increased housing and employment density near stations and actively rezoning the station areas for mixed-use classifications, along with zoning parameters that support TOD. This support from Metro will be very important, as a number of communities across the metro have had difficulties in approving higher density projects in the face of opposition. Third, Metro must partner with Great Rivers Greenway in GRG's efforts to expand trail networks across the region, including connections to MetroLink station areas, and ongoing efforts to implement Great Streets across the region. Metro should also partner with TrailNet in promoting the design of streets for bicycle traffic, both near MetroLink stations and community-wide. The Metro agency should fully embrace and campaign for the philosophy of multi-modal transportation in TOD planning.

Regional partners, including the public and private sector, should look for early victories in the overall effort to spread TOD throughout the MetroLink system. Building upon the five station plans for the North Hanley, Rock Road, Union Station / Civic Center, JJK/Emerson, and Fairview Heights stations, Metro should seek to create successful demonstrations of the transit-oriented development at one or more of these stations. County and municipal support is in place at all of these stations for TOD-supportive zoning. Sufficient market demand also exists at each station area to support at least small-scale initial stages of TOD. Metro should build strong partnerships with each county as well as the local municipality and work together to outline realistic public finance strategies to support ongoing development. At Rock Road, Metro already has a strong non-profit development partner in Beyond Housing in place. At Union Station / Civic Center, the SLDC already has strong relationships in place with local property owners and can help to promote the vision for TOD in the area. At North Hanley and Fairview Heights, Metro owns significant parcels of land, which presents a great opportunity to use parts of this acreage for TOD without having to contend with property assemblage issues. Metro should begin to work with the Federal Transportation Administration to obtain approval for the use of portions of this land for development. With these steps in place, Metro then should formally engage the private sector and actively promote the real estate opportunities at each of these five stations.

While similar steps can be taken at each of the stations within the Metro system, it should be remembered that “nothing succeeds like success.” The agency, along with public and private sector partners, can demonstrate the value of the transit oriented development concept by bringing it to life. Proving the value of TOD at a few sample locations will help a great deal in educating other municipalities about the benefits of TOD and helping them to embrace further TOD in their own communities.

The creation of transit-oriented development throughout the Metro system has the potential to transform the character of the region and to revitalize local communities and the economy. There is much to be done but success is well within reach. It is now time for action.