

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The St. Louis metropolitan region is at a crossroads. The region, in total, has remained nearly flat in terms of population growth over the last two decades and has lost significant key employers and a noticeable portion of its historic employment base. At the same time, development has continued to expand outward, up to 50 miles west of Downtown St. Louis in Missouri and over 20 miles east into St Clair County, Illinois. This trend has translated into the region's cities in total spending more money on roads, bridges, sewers, and other infrastructure to service new development at the core, even with a net zero gain in economic activity and population base. From an environmental perspective, the trends of the last few decades have resulted in increased drive times and average number of miles driven in a given week, the loss of prime farmland, and the degradation of watersheds far from the metropolitan area. Looking more closely, recent trends have contributed to the deterioration of many older, post-World War II suburbs in both Missouri and Illinois, leaving many of the significant number of very small and older suburbs in the region without the resources or tools to spur meaningful economic revitalization or to counter these recent trends.

While St. Louis has continued to report lackluster or even flat growth and has fallen behind its Midwestern peers – Kansas City, Indianapolis, and Columbus, to name a few – the bi-state region has a resource present that many of these same cities continue to covet – light rail service. While Minneapolis and Dallas expanded their light rail systems in recent years, St. Louis remains perhaps the smallest and most economically challenged metropolitan area in the Midwest (and perhaps nationally) with a relatively comprehensive light rail system. MetroLink connects some of the greatest economic generators in the region – Lambert Airport, Washington University, Barnes-Jewish Hospital, Downtown, to name a few – as well as some of the region's biggest attractions (the Gateway Arch, Delmar Loop, Forest Park, and of course Busch Stadium). With this significant transportation resource already in place, the St. Louis region has a tremendous opportunity over the next several years to leverage the MetroLink system and use Transit Oriented Development to bolster the region's economic position, to fortify and revitalize urban neighborhoods as well as inner-ring suburbs, and to reduce pressure on the region's freeways and roads.



Photo courtesy of Design Workshop

View of MetroLink Train

Despite the overall relatively flat economic position of the St. Louis region, the potential to create successful developments around MetroLink stations in both Missouri and Illinois is significant. As discussed in this document, St. Louis City has already seized on trends among younger generations and Empty Nesters in favor of living in walkable urban environments with amenities to help stabilize its population and produce notable examples of urban revitalization. Newly “hip” districts such as Washington Avenue, Midtown, the Central West End, and Delmar Loop have attracted younger professionals in their 20s as well as older adults (many retired or nearing retirement) who have sought out urban living to take advantage of the city’s outstanding cultural resources. While this level of revitalization currently lags behind that of similar sized cities such as Minneapolis and Denver, according to observers across the region and nationally, it represents only the beginning of a trend that should continue for many years. Stations in St. Louis City near MetroLink in particular should continue to enjoy this trend toward living, working, and playing in urban environments over the next few decades.

Outside of St. Louis City, the location and access of the majority of MetroLink stations provides notable opportunities to create successful and well-planned Transit Oriented Development across the region over the next few decades. Access to universities and colleges, adjacency or access to nearby downtown districts in smaller communities, the presence of significant areas of land proximate to MetroLink suitable for development, and the overall central location of most MetroLink stations in the bi-state region translate into viable development potential for real TOD across the system.

Implementation and completion of TOD across the MetroLink system will require leadership, continued resources and investment from the public and private sectors, and continued patience. Given the healing economy, one or more significant examples of TOD may emerge in the St. Louis area within the next five years. However, development at some of the stations may still wait for many years. Redeveloping at all 37 stations within a relatively short time frame remains impractical. Development at a handful of MetroLink stations over the next few years will likely serve as examples for other communities in the region and perhaps as catalysts for additional development at nearby stations over the mid-term to long-term.

This TOD Framework Master Plan outlines the principles and actions needed to bring successful TOD to reality in the region over the coming years. The document begins by defining a vision for transit oriented development that aligns with the economic and political realities of the St. Louis region. TOD will likely not emerge in the same form in St. Louis as it has in Portland, San Francisco, Dallas, or other larger cities. The needs and desires of the individual communities along the MetroLink system must inform the character and design of development at each of the 37 station areas. Nevertheless, a common set of principles, based upon research and experience locally and nationally, must guide transit oriented development throughout the bi-state region.

This document explores in greater detail the various principles that should guide TOD system-wide, but the region’s leaders must importantly understand and follow a few key principles in particular. While the regulations and guidelines of many communities around the MetroLink system remained geared to lower density and conventional development, successful development around station areas must incorporate an increased density or concentration of residents and employment in order to provide for real estate viability and stimulate higher levels of ridership along the MetroLink system. Successful TOD must incorporate a mixture of land uses to be successful, including retail, residential, office, and entertainment uses. Finally, the design of successful TOD in the St. Louis region must orient around promoting increased levels of transit usage and in encouraging all modes of travel, including

walking and bicycling as well as vehicular and transit. The design of streets, greenways, and surrounding community connections must encourage more people to take MetroLink from various station areas and must provide good connections from nearby bus lines to the light rail system. Overall, the design for MetroLink stations going forward must go beyond an orientation that considers the needs of commuters first and foremost and must outline a framework for the creation of true communities around the station areas. Just as well-planned districts such as the Central West End, South Grand, and the Delmar Loop represent have become symbols of the revitalization of St. Louis, local communities could create similar examples of development around their MetroLink stations over time that will serve as anchors for continued economic revitalization and expansion.

The TOD Framework Master Plan follows the discussion of the key principles underlying successful TOD with a profile and evaluation of development potential at each of the 37 MetroLink stations. The document outlines opportunities and constraints at each station and provides a specific set of action items that local jurisdictions should complete in order to move transit oriented development efforts forward.

A toolbox of TOD implementation techniques toward the end of the document discusses key techniques that the public and private sectors may use to effectively create true examples of good TOD. Key tools include the incorporation of affordable housing in TOD, the establishment of parking replacement policies, and a range of public finance techniques applicable to both Missouri and Illinois.

The creation of transit oriented development throughout the MetroLink system has the potential to revitalize local communities and economies, increase ridership throughout the light rail system, produce environmental benefits throughout the region, and create unique districts and developments that will serve as sources of pride for local communities. Twenty years after the opening of the MetroLink system, the St. Louis region has an opportunity to create true transit oriented development and, in this way, maximize the return on investment from the initial creation of the region's light rail system. Now is the time for action. This TOD Framework Plan should help the region's leaders and citizens in moving forward.



Photo courtesy of Design Workshop

MetroLink train moving through the Shiloh-Scott station

Project Background

East-West Gateway Council of Governments, in conjunction with Metro and a host of regional stakeholder organizations, completed this TOD Framework Master Plan as part of the Regional TOD Study for the St. Louis region in 2013. While a number of studies and efforts have analyzed and documented the appropriate strategies and lessons learned pertaining to larger light rail systems in coastal metropolitan areas in America, the St. Louis region, and metro regions in Mid-America in general, have not benefited from as much planning concerning how to move transit-oriented development forward. In a metropolitan area that is growing relatively slowly and that has traditionally followed lower density suburban patterns of growth over the last several decades, leaders from throughout the region have continued to search for appropriate strategies to promote transit-oriented development. Throughout the post-war era, regions such as the San Francisco Bay Area and New York have maintained a strong focus on transit and associated development while national trends have favored automobile oriented development patterns. Comparatively, this regional TOD study helps metropolitan areas similar to St. Louis understand what TOD means for smaller and mid-sized cities that have instead focused on suburban sprawl over the last several decades. As the MetroLink system marks over two decades in service, leaders throughout the St. Louis region have looked to this study for answers regarding how to maximize the investment made in light rail for various jurisdictions and the overall region and to increase overall ridership rates on the MetroLink system. St. Louis was the envy of many other Midwestern cities when the region secured light rail two decades ago. Now, this study hopes to provide a roadmap for the region and its cities to make the most of this significant asset.

The regional TOD study not only helps to provide a guide for the overall St. Louis metro region, but also for the individual jurisdictions and stakeholders around the particular MetroLink stations. The goal of this study is to move TOD forward over the next three decades. Specifically, the St. Louis Regional TOD study included the following components:

- Completion of a regional market study documenting the potential for various forms of TOD at each station area between 2012 and 2040, based upon demographic and market data and analysis and input from local stakeholders and real estate experts.
- Completion of site analysis and development feasibility analysis for each of the 37 existing MetroLink stations
- Completion of the TOD Framework Master Plan document. This plan outlines the key issues impacting development viability at each of the 37 existing MetroLink stations and provides recommendations and action steps for local jurisdictions, Metro, and other stakeholders to complete in the near term, and long term, to encourage and nurture transit oriented development at each station area. The Framework Master Plan also identifies implementation tools that may apply to all existing MetroLink stations, or to particular stations within the system.
- Completion of detailed station area plans for five of the existing MetroLink station areas. This station area planning process involved completion of detailed plans and development discussions between local jurisdictions and development partners. Separate documents outline the details of the station area plans for the five station areas (or combinations of stations) selected: North Hanley, Rock Road, Union Station / Civic Center, Emerson Park / Jackie Joyner-Kersey, and Fairview Heights.

The intent of East-West Gateway, Metro, and its project partners is to outline a set of implementation tools and recommendations for all 37 MetroLink stations that respond to market realities and provide specific guidance to each jurisdiction within the system that will move

TOD forward over the next few years. Rather than outlining general principles applicable to TOD, this plan aims to tie specific site analysis and feasibility with appropriate tools and strategies to move development efforts along MetroLink forward quickly. The overall hope of this TOD Framework Master Plan, and the completion of five detailed station area master plans, is to move plans for an example TOD project forward toward construction and completion within three to five years. Creation of an “example” or model TOD would help provide momentum for subsequent TOD efforts throughout the St. Louis region over the next few years and establish precedents for best practices and standards of development that all communities along MetroLink should emulate.



Photo courtesy of Metro

Central West End Station Platform

Key Goals of the TOD Study

Drawing from this regional context and input from the general public and stakeholders, the Advisory Committee guiding the Regional TOD study arrived at the following key goals for this study and for TOD efforts in general moving forward across the bi-state St. Louis region.

Education Concerning TOD – The regional TOD study and this TOD Framework Master Plan will help to explain the concept of TOD to local leaders and the general population and what TOD could mean in the St. Louis region

Development of a Regional Vision for TOD – This project will outline a regional vision for what TOD can and should mean for different kinds of MetroLink stations (for example, in the city versus in the suburbs)

Outline of Implementation Tools and Strategies – This project will identify the tools and strategies that various local jurisdictions and the private sector may use to promote and complete successful and well-planned TOD.

Roadmap for TOD for Every Station – This framework master plan identifies the potential for TOD at each station and a series of “next steps” that leaders around each station may pursue to move forward with TOD over the near term, and long term.

Completion of Station Area Plans – As mentioned, one of the key outcomes of the regional TOD study involves completion of detailed station area plans for five MetroLink stations. The overarching goal of this effort is to produce, from the completion of these plans, a viable TOD project that begins construction within the next three to five years and will serve as a great example of well-designed and developed TOD for the rest of the region.

Integration With Other Planning Efforts

The planning efforts underlying the St. Louis Regional TOD Study tie with a number of previous and current TOD related planning efforts in the region, as outlined below. This study aims to tie the efforts of previous studies together with new thinking and detailed analysis of the entire MetroLink system and therefore help serve as a foundation for more detailed planning and design efforts for particular stations in the future.

ULI TAP and CMT Efforts

The Citizens for Modern Transit (CMT) organization in the St. Louis region has advocated for TOD and TOD-supportive policies in the area for several years and has helped to sponsor a series of speakers, workshops, and related events related to TOD. As part of these efforts, CMT has helped to convene Technical Advisory Panels for two MetroLink station areas, Belleville and UMSL South, over the last few years. These panels have gathered real estate development and government officials with significant national experience in planning for and executing transit oriented development on advisory boards charged with outlining recommendations and tools for particular TOD locations in the St. Louis region. In 2010 a ULI Advisory Panel examined the potential for TOD at the Scheel Street station on MetroLink in Belleville. A ULI Advisory Panel has also completed an analysis of the UMSL South station in Normandy. The efforts of CMT and its associated ULI Advisory Panels helped to inform the site analysis and conclusions of this regional TOD study and the TOD Framework Master Plan.

City of St. Louis Planning Efforts

The St. Louis Development Corporation, along with the City of St. Louis, is working to complete three additional station area plans for MetroLink stations within the City during 2013, for the Delmar / DeBaliviere station areas, for the Arch / Laclede’s Landing station, and for the Stadium and 8th and Pine station areas.. The overall recommendations of the market study associated with the Regional TOD Study and the implementation tools outlined by this plan help to inform SLDC’s effort to complete these three additional station area plans.

Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD)

The completion of the Regional TOD Study represents one component of the overall effort by East-West Gateway Council of Governments (EWG) to complete a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) for the bi-state region. EWG is working to complete this RPSD as part of a Sustainable Communities Initiative and grant provided to the region by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The RPSD has involved

the completion of public outreach and plan formation based upon a series of community planning efforts in the region, with the intent to outline a vision and goals for how to promote sustainable development and sustainability throughout the St. Louis metropolitan region. Because focusing transportation and related development around mass transit represents one of the key tools in promoting a sustainable region, this TOD Framework Master Plan will serve as one of the key components of the overall regional plan for sustainability. The Regional TOD Study continued to interact and share ideas with the RPSD effort throughout the process.

Planning by Local Jurisdictions

Local efforts by particular cities or jurisdictions to update comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, and design guidelines helped to inform the completion of the TOD Framework Master Plan. For example, the project team examined existing documents and determined how they would impact the viability and implementation of TOD for various jurisdictions and specific stations along MetroLink in the future. In turn, the recommendations of the TOD Framework Master Plan will inform updates to comprehensive plans and related planning documents in the various jurisdictions around the 37 MetroLink stations.

How This Plan Will Be Used

Local jurisdictions and local and regional stakeholders and partners will use the deliverables of the TOD Framework Master Plan in different ways, with the overall goal of promoting and ensuring the proper execution of transit oriented development throughout the St. Louis metropolitan area going forward.

Identification of Development Opportunities at Particular Stations

The individual TOD Action Plans for each station area, contained in this document, outline the existing conditions and various factors impacting the potential viability for TOD at each station area and identify the likely development strategies and scenarios for each station. This document, while not providing specific development plans for each station area in terms of particular tenants, provides conceptual ideas concerning the layout of future buildings from an urban design perspective and the layout of future street, bicycle, and pedestrian networks in order to promote ongoing development around the MetroLink stations. This plan should help identify likely development opportunities that local jurisdictions as well as the private sector may use in formulating formal development proposals.

Identification of Market Potential at Each Station

Based upon the results of the market study as part of the overall regional TOD study, this Framework Master Plan identifies the likely supportable scale and type of development by land use category for each station area. While this market analysis does not constitute a formal and detailed market study for each of the 37 station areas, it does outline the general scale of potential development over the next three decades and the types of likely real estate products in terms of density and orientation (for example, single family attached versus detached, or townhome versus apartment).

Bike and Pedestrian Strategies for Each Station and for Overall System

This TOD Framework Master Plan includes the completion of a Bike and Pedestrian Guide for the MetroLink system, which includes recommended bike and pedestrian strategies and projects for each of the MetroLink stations and general strategies to promote and ensure greater access and safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Action Steps for Local Partners, Prioritized

The profiles of each station area identify particular action steps that the local jurisdictions, Metro, or the particular developer should pursue in order to move TOD forward at particular stations. This plan identifies the priorities for the action plan steps in order to ensure that the efforts of local officials and stakeholders are utilized to maximize the potential for TOD as soon as possible.

Implementation Tools for TOD

For each station area, and for the overall MetroLink system, the TOD Framework Master Plan identifies implementation tools and strategies that local partners should explore to promote and implement TOD at particular station areas.

In general, the local jurisdictions, potential developers, and regional partners will use this TOD Framework Master Plan in order to understand the potential for TOD at each station and to move forward with initial and subsequent implementation steps necessary to promote development. Common follow-up steps resulting from this plan, as spelled out for each station area, include amending zoning or design guidelines to promote the creation of TOD, developing plans and designs for adjacent roads to ensure greater bike / ped safety and access, and engaging local developers and stakeholders to help formulate specific development plans for particular TODs.

Public Outreach Process

The Regional TOD Study completed a comprehensive public outreach process during mid-2012 in order to gain input from the general public throughout the region concerning their goals for Transit Oriented Development and how they envision the MetroLink system potentially impacting them, from a development and land use perspective.

The public outreach process involved the following components:

Public Open Houses, July 2012:

During July 2012, the project team hosted a series of four public open houses in Belleville, East St. Louis, St. Louis City, and Maplewood. These sessions outlined the goals of the Regional TOD Study, background concerning TOD and what it could mean in the St. Louis region, the results and findings from the regional TOD market study, and takeaways from initial site analysis concerning all 37 MetroLink stations. The public open houses also presented a series of “keypad polling” questions to the groups at the regional open houses in



Photo courtesy of Design Workshop



Public Open House in the Rock Road Station Area

order to gain input from the public concerning their main goals for TOD, ideas concerning how to improve the performance of MetroLink for riders, potential residents, employees, and employers, and input concerning how to implement TOD throughout the region.

Online Version of Keypad Polling

The project team provided an online version of the 25-question keypad polling survey for anyone in the region to contribute input concerning the questions raised at the July public meetings. The following summarizes some of the notable findings from the combined results of the online and in-person survey questions.

- The plurality of respondents use MetroLink only on special occasions, including attending sporting events (Cardinals, Rams, Blues, etc.) and going to the airport. Most of the remaining respondents use MetroLink daily, for commuting.
- The most common reason cited for not using MetroLink was that the system “does not go where I need to go”.
- Respondents cited personal security, the amount of time it takes to use MetroLink versus driving, pedestrian safety, and the lack of places to eat, shop, and drink as their main concerns with the current MetroLink system.
- The majority of respondents indicated that the supply of parking at MetroLink stations does not pose any issues.
- Respondents favored the following types of public investment in development around MetroLink stations:
 - » Purchasing or assembling land for development around MetroLink stations
 - » Providing tax incentives in order to facilitate private sector development
 - » Investing in parks or trails around or connecting to stations
 - » Investment in civic facilities located in or around MetroLink stations
- The vast majority of respondents favored altering zoning and development regulations to facilitate TOD
- Respondents cited “reducing dependence on automobile use in the region” and providing for increased ridership on MetroLink as the top goals for the Regional TOD Study
- Planning for the interface between MetroLink station areas and surrounding neighborhoods and reducing crime were cited as the key community planning goals for this effort
- In terms of economics, respondents favored the Regional TOD Study resulting in the attraction of businesses from outside the region to locate in Metro St. Louis, and the refocusing of development toward infill rather than suburban expansion, as key goals of the study.
- Respondents most strongly favored installing retail kiosks and additional restrooms in current or future MetroLink station areas
- Respondents favored the introduction of additional restaurants, retail, and entertainment uses around the MetroLink stations.
- In terms of residential, respondents favor the introduction of apartments, condominiums, and townhomes around MetroLink station areas
- In terms of retail, respondents in particular favor seeing additional grocery stores, coffee shops, and bakeries around MetroLink stations

- In terms of entertainment uses, respondents in particular favored seeing additional movie theaters, comedy clubs, and sporting venues around MetroLink stations

Mindmixer Input

The project website for the St. Louis Regional TOD Study included a Mindmixer application, in which participants were able to contribute ideas concerning various topics concerning Transit Oriented Development and then either “second” or contribute comments concerning their own, or others, ideas as a follow up. The list of TOD topics on the Mindmixer website included the following:

- The most important goals for the St. Louis Regional TOD Study
- Are there certain stations or areas that are more favorable for development around MetroLink stations?
- What are some reasons that currently discourage you from using MetroLink?
- Parking around MetroLink
- Services around MetroLink
- What kinds of development would you like to see around MetroLink?

Stakeholder Discussions

In addition to input from the larger public, the project team conducted a variety of discussions with stakeholders throughout the region to gain input concerning TOD and how the region and particular cities should proceed with TOD strategies in the future. The project team met with city staff from various municipalities, economic development authorities, developers from around the region, and representatives from Metro and state departments of transportation to gain input regarding TOD at the outset and throughout the study.

Additional Public Process

A series of three public meetings were held for each of the five detailed station areas, gaining input concerning the potential for TOD and reviewing preliminary and final plans for each station. The public meetings for the five station area plans took place from December 2012 to May 2013. The meetings discussed the public’s broad goals for the station planning effort, the type and scale of development the public would like to see at each station, land uses, density, desired amenities, phasing, character, and potential locations for streets, buildings, and open space connections. Full summaries of these meetings are available in the Station Area Plans for Fairview Heights, Jackie Joyner-Kersey/Emerson Park, Union Station/Civic Center, Rock Road, and North Hanley.

The Role of TOD in the St. Louis Region

What Does “TOD” Mean?

The term “Transit Oriented Development” or “TOD” commonly refers to mixed-use development designed to maximize access to, and promote use of, public transportation, with an emphasis on pedestrian circulation and accessibility. Well-planned TODs typically include the following design attributes:

Increased densities. By planning for an increase in the number of residents, employees, or visitors within the station area, TODs increase the potential ridership for adjacent light rail systems

Mixing of land uses. By concentrating a diversity of retail, office, residential, and public spaces around transit stations, TODs increase the prominence of transit lines in the daily lives of residents (which contributes to increased ridership) and promote the combination of trips for different purposes. For example, someone riding the train home from work can stop for convenience items or conduct other errands at TODs, rather than making a separate trip (perhaps by car) on the way home. The mixing of land uses simply integrates transit usage along with the variety of needs an individual has during the day, in a convenient gathering place.

Pedestrian and bicycle orientation. By locating daily goods and services and community amenities within walking distance of local communities and by providing good access and facilities for bicyclists, TODs can help to reduce dependence on the automobile as the only viable mode of transportation.

Cities throughout the country have promoted TOD as a strategy to boost the use of transit, reduce automobile dependence and traffic congestion, reduce air pollution, reduce urban sprawl, and to provide for better planned civic spaces and gathering places in various communities.

Overall, TOD does not involve a new or highly unique planning principle. Well planned Transit Oriented Development simply translates into well planned communities that interact with nearby transit facilities and help to encourage increased ridership. Communities pursuing well-conceived TOD must use the same principles of urban design, real estate strategy, and community planning involved in creating any successful project. Just as communities can plan and execute poorly in other areas, communities have the potential to plan for poorly executed TOD.

Trends Favoring TOD

Following several decades of automobile and suburban oriented growth, several trends around the country, and in the Midwest, now favor the development of TOD. While advocates have discussed the need for TOD over the last two decades, trends emerging in just the last few years have greatly enhanced the appeal and viability of well-planned Transit Oriented Development.

Aging Population

St. Louis, like the Midwest and greater United States, exhibits rapid change in the aging population as the very large Baby Boomer generation moves into old age. This is having a fundamental impact on the design and operation of cities nationwide. As Boomers age

and encounter difficulties in driving, the need for public transit or ride sharing will increase. Developments that orient around transit facilities (including local buses as well as light rail systems) will likely appeal more to aging seniors (many of whom will not be able to drive) compared to far-flung and disconnected developments in cities and suburbs. The greater the extent a given development connects with transit facilities and in turn with community facilities such as libraries, shopping districts, and senior centers, the more a given project will appeal to the expanding senior population.

Increased Fuel Costs

As gasoline prices have escalated significantly over the last several years, the appeal of using transit has increased. Trends favoring increased fuel prices are likely to continue into the foreseeable future in the Midwest and nationally. Access to transit facilities has as a result enhanced the market viability and appeal of TOD to developers, local officials, and the general public. Any development that features access to transit gains a competitive advantage over those that remain disconnected from transit networks.

Increased Traffic Congestion

As cities in the U.S. have continued to sprawl outward in recent decades, traffic congestion on major freeways has continued to escalate. At the same time, spending devoted to constructing additional freeways and freeway lanes has not increased at the same rate. In addition, in most cities adequate space necessary to expand freeways does not exist and political opposition to freeway and road expansion has escalated. In cities where traffic congestion has increased, the value of access to transit lines from retail, entertainment, and employment centers has increased significantly. While St. Louis continues to face fewer issues with traffic congestion compared to coastal cities, traffic jams on freeways such as I-70, I-64, and I-55 only enhance the appeal of using MetroLink and developing various land uses around the light rail system.

Smaller Households

As the divorce rate has escalated and as many younger Americans delay or never marry, the average household size in the country has continued to decrease. This trend will likely continue for the foreseeable future. These smaller households in many cases cannot afford the typical suburban single family detached home or may find owning a larger home to be impractical. In turn, smaller units such as townhomes, condominiums, and apartments appeal more to smaller households. These types of housing units integrate well with transit oriented development and only enhance the appeal of TOD to a wider segment of households.

Urban Regeneration

Following decades of non-stop suburban expansion, urban living has gained increased appeal with the Generation X, Generation Y, and younger generations. In Midwest cities such as Kansas City, St. Louis, Indianapolis and beyond, developers have redeveloped notable urban neighborhoods that appeal to 20- and 30-somethings. In the St. Louis region, the City of St. Louis remained fairly consistent in population over the last ten years following decades of massive population losses as residents fled to the suburbs. The influx of younger professionals and single people to newly developed lofts, apartments, townhomes, and single family residential units in the city helped to reverse the city's longstanding downward trend. The movement, even in the Midwest, to live in the city and enjoy the benefits of urban living will only enhance demand for transit and for well planned land uses located around major transit facilities.

Benefits of Transit Oriented Development

Transit Oriented Development provides innumerable benefits to a region. TOD supports a more sustainable development and land use pattern than traditional outward expansion. Depopulation, disinvestment, and increased average household costs result from sprawling development patterns. TOD, however, is able to leverage the region's assets to foster more livable and sustainable communities through coordinated land use policies, zoning regulations, and design guidelines. The demand for TOD is growing amongst the general public, and particularly in the young professional and retiree cohorts. This demand for higher density development has sparked interest in the real estate and financial industries.

TOD provides community members, stakeholders, and local governments with many economic and social benefits, including urban and neighborhood revitalization, regional economic development opportunities, decreased personal automobile travel and traffic congestion, enhanced connections between people, jobs, retail, and regional destinations, and greater provisions for a mix of housing options.

In addition, the St. Louis Regional Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Best Practices Guide further outlines the following benefits:

Urban Revitalization

Central Business Districts and older, inner-ring suburbs that maintained access to transit often are more attractive to businesses and workers due to a wider range of travel options, enhanced access to numerous destinations and activities, and a full range of urban amenities. TOD improves the physical surroundings and residential quality of life by growing businesses that meet the day-to-day needs of residents, transit riders and employees; creating active, ground-level uses that attract pedestrian traffic; and providing public spaces that enhance the actual – or even perceived – level of public safety. TOD is a powerful tool for revitalizing communities that have experienced abandonment, neglect, and disinvestment over the last few decades.

Regional Economic Development

Transit-oriented development, if carefully planned and implemented, offers significant economic spillover throughout a region. TOD can attract new residents and generate new businesses – especially when part of a dynamic, comprehensive economic development strategy – in turn producing jobs, tax revenue, and positive secondary economic impacts. Building a range of new housing options and businesses around transit stations will improve connections and commute times between people and jobs. That enhanced connectivity provides a wider array of employment options for people who cannot travel to areas of new job growth in car-centered suburbs, particularly the urban poor. It may also attract 'choice' riders from cars to transit, reducing congestion on the region's highways and saving businesses time and money on freight and truck transportation.

Affordable Housing

Moderate- and low-income families across the country are moving ever farther away from jobs in order to find housing they can afford; however, the increased cost of commuting often amounts to more than the amount saved. The Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities promotes greater coordination of housing and transit policy, and encourages affordable housing to be built with direct access to transit. This initiative promotes infill development and employment opportunities in the inner city and inner-ring suburbs. Homes may be smaller and sometimes more costly, but residents in these homes save money due to the decreased costs of owning and operating an automobile.

Jobs/Housing Balance

By bringing jobs, housing, and services closer together and linking them with transit, TOD can help shorten travel times and improve connections between people and jobs. For the last few decades, business development and job growth has been expanding ever-outward in suburbs and exurbs, leaving the working poor in inner cities and older suburbs either unable to access those jobs, or spending a large portion of their income and time traveling to work. Redirecting the majority of growth to areas served by transit will help alleviate this spatial disconnect between the location of jobs and the homes of the labor force.

Urban and Environmental Sustainability

Compared to car-oriented development, compact, mixed-use, transit-oriented development offers a broad range of environmentally-sustainable benefits, including more efficient use of public infrastructure, land use, and transit; fewer vehicles miles traveled; and reduction in traffic congestion. TOD and infill development generally use existing infrastructure, and would maximize the public sector's return on investment for any new or expanded infrastructure.

Land Conservation

TOD, whether infill or not, consumes less land than low-density, car-oriented growth. TOD reduces the need to convert farmland and open spaces into new development.

Increased Property Values

Proximity to transit, well-designed public spaces, and substantial public amenities are proven to increase surrounding property values. Pedestrian-oriented development and easy transit access are distinct, easily-recognizable, and marketable attributes of a neighborhood that will generate higher tax revenues.

Return on Investment for Developers

TOD can be more profitable for developers and investors than traditional, suburban development. Land acquisition and construction costs may be higher, especially for urban infill, but higher-density projects produce more residential units for sale or rent as well as greater retail square footage. Developments centered around transit infrastructure can assume a percentage of residents and retail customers will use transit, allowing developers to replace some parking spaces with more profitable floor area.

Entrepreneurship

Traditional suburban developments often focus on big-box and formula business retail tenants. Local entrepreneurs, who thrive on foot-traffic, can take advantage of the business opportunities afforded by TOD's focus on compact development, smaller building footprints, and pedestrian traffic. This effect can be considerably stronger if TOD is part of a larger, comprehensive economic development strategy geared towards growing small business and supporting local entrepreneurs.

Intelligent Framework for Smarter Growth

TOD offers an opportunity for policy-makers to direct growth and economic activity over time, which allows for targeted, strategic investments that help planners and decision-makers implement other regional sustainability goals.

Why has TOD not occurred along the Metro system to date?

In considering a plan for transit oriented development in the St. Louis region, one must first ask why TOD has not already occurred. While one cannot know with certainty, there are a number of existing factors that have no doubt hampered such development.

- It is important to remember that in creating the MetroLink light rail system, rail lines were located where corridors were available. For much of the system, light rail lines followed existing industrial rail lines which were often located at some distance from residential populations or from the heart of local municipalities. As a result, some of the potential transit oriented development sites within the system are not ideally located for development.
- The growth of the St. Louis region is generally flat, and within portions of St. Louis County and East St. Louis, the population continues to decline. At many stations, at least at the present time, sufficient market demand or investor confidence does not exist to drive development.
- The overall standards for development in the St. Louis region encourage further low density suburban development. Highway investment policies, land use planning standards, and conventional zoning in the bi-state area support lower density and dispersed development as opposed to denser and more walkable forms of development that can more easily be served by transit (including either bus or light rail). Until state, county, and local jurisdictions coalesce around development standards and regulations that support a more walkable, transit ready development pattern, TOD in the St. Louis region will remain difficult.
- Existing zoning in most communities along the MetroLink system does not allow for multi-family or higher density development, and public resistance to these forms of development remains in many areas. In order for TOD to successfully produce economic development, a reduction in vehicle trips, and increased transit usage, the communities near the system must allow for denser development near MetroLink. Given the current typical regulatory framework in the St. Louis region, a developer seeking to create TOD would face a long and expensive process in gaining project approvals. In a weak economic climate, particularly during the Great Recession of 2008 - 2012, the proper economic climate or market demand has not existed to justify this level of risk.
- The financing of larger, mixed-use, and dense development projects can be challenging under any circumstances, and was particularly difficult during the 2008 to 2012 period, when financing for almost any kind of development was very hard to secure. At the same time, a concerted and organized effort to bring together the various public financing mechanisms that could support TOD projects in a coordinated fashion has not existed. The complexity and increased risk inherent in TOD means that public financial assistance is often required to make these ventures a success. A common incentive tool, tax increment financing, has often been applied in the region to attract big box retailers in suburban developments rather than to support transit oriented land use patterns. Therefore, communities and developers pursuing TOD may need to explore other incentive tools and strategies in order to facilitate transit supportive land use patterns.
- Fractured land ownership patterns and the inherent difficulties in assembling parcels for development projects present significant impediments at many stations within the MetroLink system. Land assembly, even in the best circumstances, can be time consuming, expensive, and difficult. In a weak market, a developer has little incentive to engage in the effort. In addition, the public nationally is generally hostile to the use of

eminent domain in assembling parcels for development projects, and as a result the public sector has limited ability to assist developers in the process. Furthermore, the presence of owners of active or abandoned industrial uses at a number of station areas often means that developers are dealing with individuals or entities not traditionally engaged in the real estate development business. Relatively large parcels of land owned by Metro could be made available for development at a number of stations. However, Metro has not elected to pursue approval from the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) necessary to utilize these lands for transit oriented development. Where development has occurred on Metro-owned lands it has tended to proceed in a small scale or episodic fashion, rather than tied to a more comprehensive plan or development strategy.

- While some progress has been made in the creation of Complete Streets and the development of multi-modal transportation within the St. Louis region, state, county, and municipal transportation agencies have not made a coordinated and consistent commitment to these concepts across the region. Rail transit cannot exist in isolation from the surrounding bus, auto, bike, and pedestrian network. For successful transit oriented development all modes of transit must be planned for and accommodated at high levels of service. A singular focus on automobile transportation above all other modes has in some cases hindered transit oriented development as well.
- Finally and most importantly, while there is growing support in some quarters for transit oriented development and the emergence of non-profit organizations such as Citizens for Modern Transit and Great Rivers Greenway for multi-modal transportation, one must question whether the leadership has been in place to create transit oriented development in the St. Louis region. What role, if any, does Metro see for itself in initiating such development? Alternately, is Metro primarily focused on moving rail passengers? How supportive are other elected and appointed officials in the region to realizing a vision of transit oriented development for the St. Louis region?



Photo courtesy of Design Workshop

View of North Hanley Station

Transit-First Orientation

Some communities, notably San Francisco, have adopted transit-first policies to guide land use decision making and investment decisions within their communities. The San Francisco transit-first policy was adopted forty years ago. A key provision of the policy states: “Decisions regarding the use of limited public street and sidewalk space shall encourage the use of public rights of way by pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit, and shall strive to reduce traffic and improve public health and safety.” The policy gives priority to public transit investments as the centerpiece of the city’s transportation policy and to adopting street capacity and parking policies to discourage an increase in automobile traffic. It also calls for priority to be given to public transit and other alternatives to the private automobile as the means of meeting the community’s transportation needs, particularly for commuters.

While such a policy may be a desirable goal for the St. Louis region to pursue over time, given the current state of transit usage and transit-oriented development in the region, a more pragmatic near-term objective would be to ensure a balanced, multi-modal transportation system, including public transit, ride-sharing, automobiles, bicycles, and pedestrians, not only for a high quality of life but also to maintain the economic well-being of the community. While San Francisco’s transit first policies have not reduced the percentage of automobiles as a percent of all trips in the Bay area, it has led to high transit modal split over the last twenty years and reduced the burden on the city’s employers to comply with provisions of the state’s Clean Air Act.

With a transit-first policy in mind, station area development in the St. Louis region should seek to provide as convenient and enjoyable a transit experience as possible with equal emphasis on safe and efficient auto, bike, and pedestrian access to each station. The goal is to provide the mobility necessary for residents to pursue a wide range of opportunities for work, education, recreation, and contact with others. As has been observed throughout the country, mass transit may be given priority for work trips within St. Louis, to other densely developed parts of the region, and especially to major employment centers. Transit and transit-oriented development can be of particular value in and around institutions where large numbers of people with limited financial means or low automobile ownership rates live or go to destinations where travel demand exceeds the capacity of an area to absorb more vehicular traffic without substantial environmental or neighborhood damage, or where additional capacity for automobile movement or storage is very costly. As is currently seen in the St. Louis region, transit can also be useful for trips to major recreation areas and to sports, cultural, and other heavily attended events, or for trips to neighborhood commercial districts, especially those that do not contain many automobile-oriented uses.

What Does Successful TOD Mean in St. Louis?

While many coastal cities and metropolitan areas in the United States already orient areas of density in population and employment centers around well-established transit lines and never departed from concepts of Transit Oriented Development, even during the post-war era of suburban expansion, the St. Louis region faces a much different context in the first part of this century. While the region has witnessed slower rates of economic and population growth overall during the last few decades, the region’s cities and suburbs have continued to spread quickly to outlying areas. Older cities and suburbs in the region have continued to see flat or declining economic performance, while far-flung suburbs in places such as St. Charles County, Missouri and outlying St. Clair County, Illinois have witnessed an increase in suburban growth.

These trends, characterized by slow regional growth and a heritage of significant lower density and dispersed suburban growth, mean that St. Louis likely cannot create TODs around the various MetroLink stations that fit the tenets and guidelines of “ideal” TOD overnight. Cities and counties in the St. Louis region will likely need to develop a few key examples of TOD on both the Illinois and Missouri sides of the metro, and in both urban and suburban contexts, in order to support an ongoing trend toward TOD in the region. The initial examples of well-planned TOD in the St. Louis region also will likely feature somewhat lower levels of density compared to precedent projects elsewhere in the Midwest or on the coasts. In general, successful TOD in the St. Louis region, over the next few decades, will help to drive increased ridership on the MetroLink and associated transit lines, create economic value for host cities and counties, and provide great examples of TOD that will only further enhance the appetite for TOD regionally. Ideally, a series of well-planned and successful TOD in the bi-state region will encourage the development of additional, somewhat higher density TOD elsewhere in the region over time. The presence of successful TOD in the St. Louis region may also spur additional interest in expansion of transit facilities and transit lines, such as extensions of MetroLink to additional service areas, the introduction of Bus Rapid Transit to additional communities, and the enhancement and expansion of local bus routes throughout Metro St. Louis.

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This publication and the associated planning and public engagement process was completed in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and related statutes and regulations in all programs and activities.