

CASE STUDY

Transit Stop Transformation Project at the Emerson Park Transit Center



Impacting Communities through Transformation of Transit Stops

CITIZENS FOR MODERN TRANSIT

www.cmt-stl.org

AARP IN ST. LOUIS

www.aarp.org/stlouis



Partners:

- St. Clair County Transit District
- Citizens for Modern Transit
- AARP in St. Louis
- Bi-State Development
- REALTOR® Association of Southwestern Illinois
- East St. Louis High School

Project Description

The St. Clair County Transit District (SCCTD) teamed up with Citizens for Modern Transit and AARP in St. Louis to activate the space at the Emerson Park Transit Center in East St. Louis, IL, in 2020. This location provides access to the MetroLink, MetroBus, Madison County Transit Buses and the SCCTD Flyer.

A transit stop can serve as a transformational tool to reconnect a community, promote social equality, increase accessibility, position an area for growth, activate and beautify the public space, and enhance neighborhood safety. With the permission

of Bi-State Development/Metro Transit as the property owner, SCCTD and its partners completed the project in August of 2021. The Transit Stop Transformation Project at the Emerson Park Transit Center converted the concrete area between the bus bays and MetroLink entrance into an interactive, playful, engaging space that boasts a vibrant-colored jazz theme, spaces to gather, greenery, shaded seating, canopies and a mural inspired by design concepts submitted by local high school students.

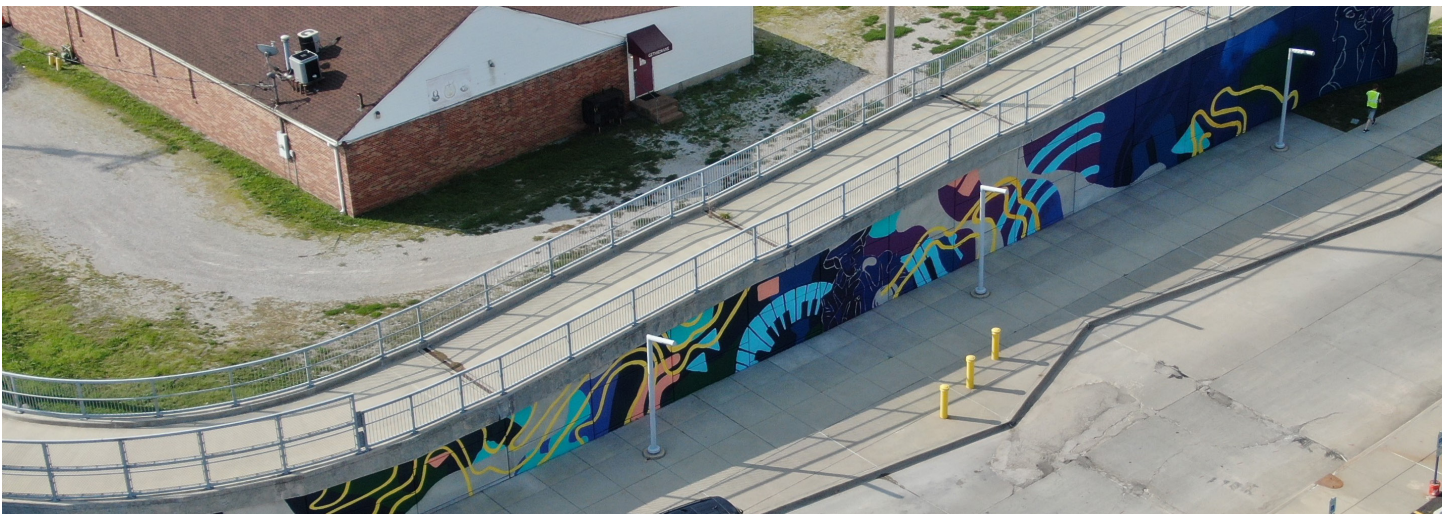
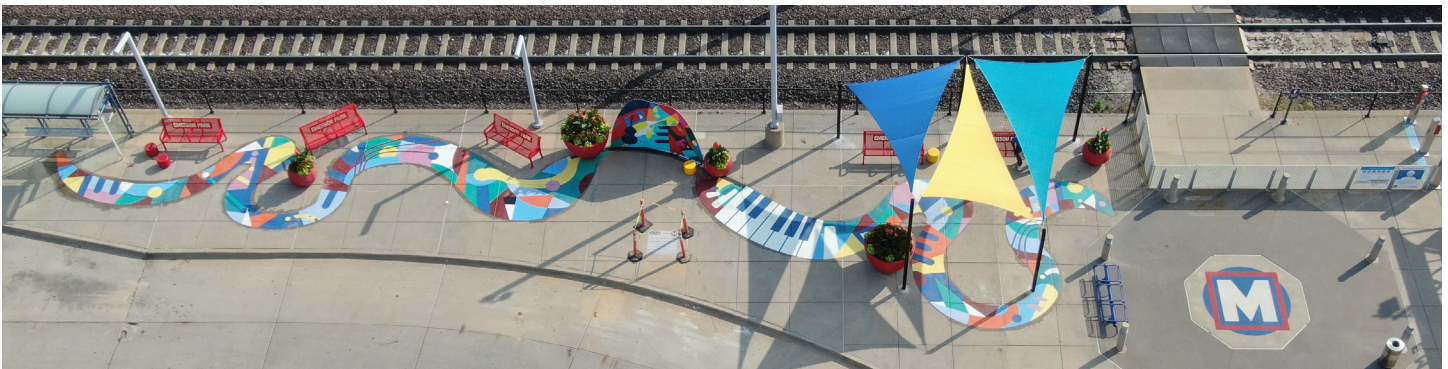
Prior to the transformation, this site had seen significant investment and development, including newly renovated parking lots, LED lighting installations, development of Neighbors Grocery, and the future \$2.5 million investment in the area for the 911 Dispatch Center for the MetroLink Police Unit.

CMT & AARP IN ST. LOUIS PROJECT PROCESS

1. Public Engagement

The first step in this process was the opportunity to garner public engagement around the idea of placemaking around transit. In winter 2021, AARP in St. Louis and CMT engaged with the consulting team Added Dimension to partner with community members/residents, elected officials, stakeholders, transit riders, students, artists, the landowner and other interested parties in visioning events.

Events included onsite surveying of MetroLink and bus riders at the Emerson Park Transit Center, attendance at community events, outreach to local business owners, engagement with residents adjacent to the station, outreach to students at East St. Louis High School, onsite engagement with transit operators, and an online survey to determine the following:



Significant community engagement around the Emerson Park Transit Center resulted in a design that gives a nod to the history of music in East St. Louis. From pavement paint to a wall mural, images reflect the culture and the growth of music as a part of the community in the area.

- a. Themes for the transformation
- b. Possible design elements
- c. Ideas for permanent art/installation at the site
- d. Amenities for riders

Ideas Generated:

- Color
- Interactive
- Vibrant
- History of Music
- Safety
- Shelter
- East St. Louis Culture

A resounding theme from this project was to create a space with a nod to the history of music/jazz in East St. Louis. Elements included wall mural, sidewalk activation, benches, stools, canopies and piped in jazz music at the site.

This engagement provided the framework for the placemaking construction for the summer 2021 based on renderings from CBB/PGAV.

The process included RFPs for an architect for site work and artist for wall mural.

2. Placemaking Installation Events

This project included a Community Plant Day and a celebration of art and music for the opening in August 2021.

3. Put into Action

The final step was the promotion of this new amenity to the community as well as the region as a whole. In addition, programming around the station was a top priority.

Coverage Included:

- Earned media
- Social media – Facebook, Instagram, Twitter
- Blogs/Websites
- Video



Funding Partners:

- St. Clair County Transit District
- CMT
- AARP in St. Louis
- AARP Community Challenge Grant
- REALTOR® Association of Southwestern Illinois

PROJECT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Opportunities:

1. Transit Stop Transformation Projects are Replicable.

While many of the project parameters differed from the Transit Stop Transformation Project at the Maplewood MetroBus Stop, this project was also able to leverage partnerships to create a colorful, inviting, interactive, vibrant space that energizes transit riders and creates a sense of place for the community.

2. Public Partners. St. Clair County Transit District was a critical partner on this project. They provided capital assistance and agreed to maintain the site in partnership with Metro Transit. Maintenance can be a hurdle unless the local government or a local partner agrees to take on ongoing maintenance of the site.

3. Corporate Participation. These projects provide an opportunity for corporations to potentially take ownership of transit stops outside their doors or in communities where they are located. REALTOR® Association of Southwestern Illinois saw the impact and value of this project for East St. Louis and became a project partner.

4. Private Partners. AARP in St. Louis is a key, founding partner. The organization represents thousands of constituents in areas across the region. In addition, they are a respected organization which provides additional credibility to these efforts.

5. Additional Investment. Following this transformation, St. Clair County Transit District was awarded a \$9.75 million Rebuild Illinois grant to add additional infrastructure at the station. With matching funds from SCCTD, the \$13.5 million public safety building ground breaking was held in January 2023.

Challenges:

1. Funding. While these developments are not large-scale Transit Oriented Development sites, there are costs associated with developing a light rail stop into a more permanent, substantial piece of the fabric of the community.

2. Project Oversight. There are many moving pieces including consultants which require project oversight from one or several organizations spearheading the project.

3. Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs). Agreements between partnering organizations outlining areas of accountability related to the transformation.

4. Project Goals. Goals need to be clearly delineated prior to hitting “go” button. This will help ensure collaboration throughout the process.