CLIMATE CABINET EDUCATION

# Transportation 101: Transit Supportive Land Use

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) describes land use and zoning codes that promote development around transit that explicitly increases transit's usefulness. The benefits for residents of TOD policies are enormous – one study found that these types of policies can halve a family's transit costs.

TOD is not a new concept, even if the term is. Many beloved traditional city neighborhoods, suburban communities, and small towns were developed prior to widespread car use, and they were built using practices we now call TOD. Even in communities where transit options have been reduced over the years, or never existed at all, TOD development models can still enhance local quality of life, economic development, and climate-friendly lifestyles by making it easier for people to get to and from their destinations.

Building a successful transit system that has strong ridership and gets people where they're going requires more than building rails and stations or running buses. Transit needs to connect people to the places they live, work, and play. People also need to easily access transit stations and bus routes without getting in a car. Transit relies on the quality of the service *and* the type of the land use around it. That's where TOD approaches play an important role.

While Transit Oriented Development is a critical climate policy because it makes it easier for people to choose transit instead of more polluting transportation options like driving, the benefits extend beyond that. Transit Oriented Development policies promote housing development and strengthen commercial districts by giving people more ways to live near and get to local amenities and businesses.

Municipal and state governments across the country are adopting Transit Oriented Development policies to make local, regional, and even intercity transit convenient and a better transportation choice for more trips. More riders means more stable and reliable transit, which fuels a positive feedback loop to grow better, more useful transit systems that serve more and more of a region's transportation needs. As policymakers invest in transit, they should adopt TOD policies to amplify the economic benefits of their projects and create more enjoyable communities in the process.

## WHAT DOES "TRANSIT ORIENTED" LOOK LIKE?

- New Transit Oriented Development usually takes the form of an overlay district, which is a zoning district that "lays on top" of the existing zoning within defined areas to guide development in specific ways. TOD districts generally apply to areas within walking distance of a transit station or service.

- A successful TOD policy will generally include these core components:
    - Applies to areas zoned for residential, commercial, or mixed-use development and within a specified distance of a transit stop or busy bus route. Most TOD zones

apply to areas within a half-mile of a transit route or stop because most people can walk a half mile in 15 minutes or less.
    - Allows a higher number of housing units per development within TOD zones than would otherwise be permitted by the local zoning code.
    - Permits a reduction in the number of on-site vehicle parking spots within the TOD zone because TODs target residents who drive less, or who do not or cannot drive.
    - Establishes design guidelines intended to make walking, rolling, and biking safe and comfortable options for people traveling to and from transit stations and stops. Generally, these design guidelines require unbroken sidewalks, promote the installation of bike lanes or bike racks, and prohibit uses that would diminish a pedestrian's experience such as car-oriented businesses like auto dealerships.

- TOD can work in any community with policies tailored to fit the transit options available and existing neighborhood characteristics.
    - In large municipalities and urban regions, TOD policies are generally comprehensive and apply to all relevant areas close to transit within a jurisdiction.
    - At the scale of a large urban region, TOD generally cannot be implemented across jurisdictional boundaries, but transit agencies, housing authorities, and metropolitan planning organizations promote TOD by developing and funding incentive programs and resource toolkits to help local governments establish their own local TOD programs.
    - Smaller cities and towns served by intercity transit but located outside large urban areas have adopted station area development plans that are similar to TOD because they promote development near a transit hub. Station area plans encourage TOD-style development near a city's main train station. Sometimes this may involve redeveloping downtown areas or a new neighborhood with a focus on local economic development. Focusing development near intercity transit hubs can encourage more business and leisure travel in these communities as a result of expanded travel choices for people who are unable to or prefer not to drive.

## TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT IMPROVES CLIMATE OUTCOMES AND MORE

- Research shows that implementing TOD policies increases transit ridership and reduces trips made by car, which is important for reducing congestion and climate pollution from the transportation sector.
    - In TOD areas, transit ridership is 3-5 times higher than in adjacent areas with less transit, and the greatest positive impact on ridership occurs within ½ mile of a transit station or stop. The cited study also found living in a TOD area can reduce household transportation costs by half, even for people who still own and use a car.
- TOD also produces co-benefits that improve economic development, public health, safety, and climate outcomes in communities that adopt TOD policies.
    - In addition to higher transit ridership, TOD policies help reduce car crash rates involving drivers and pedestrians in dense TOD areas. This is a critically important outcome of TOD policies, because reducing pollution from transportation can happen by making it easier and safer to walk, roll, and bike as well as take transit.