Working Paper

Urban Form, Density, and Land Use Regulation

Regional Transit-Oriented Development Strategy
April 16, 2015
PREFACE

A series of Working Papers has been prepared for SANDAG as part of its efforts to develop a Regional TOD Strategy for the San Diego Region. The Working Papers focus on issues associated with implementing TODs in the San Diego region, drawing upon the experience and lessons learned from other metropolitan areas in their attempts to address similar issues. The Working Papers address the following topic areas:

- Urban Form, Density and Land Use
- Financing Infrastructure and Community Facilities
- Housing Choices and Affordability
- CEQA Streamlining and Travel Forecasting
- Connections: Travel Options, Mobility Management and Access Enhancements
- Readiness Criteria: Metrics for Transit-Oriented Districts

“TOD” is typically an acronym for “Transit-Oriented Development.” This definition focuses on real estate development projects next to transit stations, often as public/private partnerships; however, this definition is narrow and does not reflect the importance of the relationship between transit stations and the surrounding community.

The Working Papers approach the “D” in TODs as “District,” an area, neighborhood or community that is conveniently accessible to transit. The size of a district will vary by location, topography, community characteristics, the pattern and concentration of residential and employment, and other unique factors. Districts are larger areas where some people are close enough to walk to a station, others are close enough to bike to a station or be dropped off by a friend or family member who is driving, or even use a car-sharing service. Thinking of the district in this larger context enables more opportunities to find sites for various types of development that are feasible – small lot housing and town homes, low-rise and loft housing, flats and, residential towers, or main-street type of commercial, urban flex and campus space, institutional facilities, and taller office buildings – all within mixed-use environments that are walkable. TOD is an important to the San Diego region’s future and is expected to contribute significantly to meeting the projected demand for new housing and employment growth that SANDAG estimates will occur in the future.

The Working Papers are focused on how to implement TODs. They describe the challenges, some of which are not unique to San Diego. They mention examples of how other metropolitan areas around the country are trying to address these challenges and conclude by suggesting some ideas for consideration. The ideas for consideration are meant to stimulate thought, questions, and possible solutions.

The Working Papers are being published prior to a TOD Implementation Forum (January 27 and 28, 2015) that SANDAG is holding to get input that inform the development of SANDAG’s Regional TOD Strategy. As such, the Working Papers are drafts that will be augmented by the input received during the TOD Implementation Forum, and will be used to support the preparation of the Regional TOD Strategy and an agenda for success.
Transportation and land use policies are interdependent. Transportation enables access to and from properties, essential for their market and economic value. Land use and density policies, with associated regulation, influence demand for different modes of transportation and can support or hinder investments made. Transit uses a smaller right-of-way footprint than highways to accommodate a given number of travelers. Other forms of mobility that support transit use, such as pedestrian, bicycle, and car access, have their own right-of-way capacity and design needs, some of which overlap. The mix and design of the full mobility network, coordinated with public place-making and building architecture, are the backbone of urban form within a district.

Planning policies, particularly related to land use, mobility, and urban form & design, and the associated zoning, engineering, and design regulations to implement those policies, influence transit-oriented development (TOD) potential. They can enable or constrain the market. They can allow for variety or proscribe uniformity. They can provide the capacity and flexibility for the market to evolve over time, or they can be rigid and assume that the market will adjust, even if it means accepting that development may not occur for some time until the market is ready to comply with the policies and regulations in place. They can create new districts or redevelop existing ones; influence the manner in which new development transitions to existing contexts and surrounding neighborhoods; allow a mixture of forms; and be bold or be incremental. There is no single formula and different approaches are used based on an area’s characteristics, market opportunities, and local preferences, but there are lessons learned from cities and regions that have implemented successful TODs.

One thing is clear, while planning efforts can tap latent demand that just needs the right mix of policies and regulations to manifest itself, these efforts alone cannot create demand where one inherently does not exist. Most people need jobs and income before they can afford housing. Employers need access to a workforce. Retail, entertainment, and cultural uses need customers. TODs can facilitate these connections within a region.

Supportive TOD Land Use and Urban Form Policies

The Vertical Coordination of Plans

The coordination of urban form and land use with transit is a combination of planning regionally and planning locally. While SANDAG is charged to prepare a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) and Regional Comprehensive Plan (RCP), with the new combined plan update called “San Diego Forward,” SANDAG does not have local land use authority. The RCP is a coordinating document of local comprehensive plans, called General Plans, among the jurisdictions within San Diego County. SANDAG does, however, manage regional, state, and federal transportation dollars and has responsibility under California law to prepare the region’s Sustainable Communities Strategy and, with the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), San Diego Metropolitan Transit System (MTS), and North County Transportation District (NCTD), to implement the region’s transportation network. SANDAG’s investment in transportation influences local land use planning. Conversely, local land use plans influence SANDAG’s transportation investment choices.

This creates a nesting of planning that is vertically coordinated. San Diego Forward is the plan for the region. Within this region, the County of San Diego has its General Plan with land use authority for the unincorporated rural and developed areas of the region. The respective incorporated cities have their own General Plans, of which
the City of San Diego is the largest. Within the cities, most have area, community, or neighborhood plans. Within some of the communities, there may be a specific plan for a targeted subarea, or a master plan for a particular site. Individual parcels are subject to land use policies and zoning regulations. Each type of plan focuses on those issues appropriate for their scale. A regional plan is the appropriate scale for planning regional transportation systems, habitat areas, and support for the regional economy, but is not the scale to address streetscape, property use, and building design. Conversely, the community or neighborhood plan is the appropriate scale for more fine-grained planning and regulation that respects the character and context of an area, but is not the scale to address regional issues such as air quality. Each scale, however, should be consistent with and reinforce the other scales to have a truly sustainable system.

TODs are typically planned and regulated at the community, neighborhood, or master plan scale, even though they are part of a regional land use and transportation network. The transit station or mobility hub of a TOD typically becomes a focal point of a district, often supporting a mixed-use core that becomes the “heart” of a community. Most of the cities within the region have updated their General Plans based on this approach for future growth.

**Regulatory and Zoning Strategies to Facilitate TOD Development**

Zoning regulations are primary tools for implementing adopted plans. However, when zoning codes are not up to date, communities often fall into the practice of amending zoning on a case-by-case basis. When base zoning districts are inadequate for delivering desired TOD development, one of the following results—development occurs that is inconsistent with a TOD strategy; the zoning deters TOD investment; or a variety of negotiated zoning techniques, such as Planned Unit Development permits (PUDs), are employed on a site-by-site basis, particularly for larger sites. In the short term, this reactive approach might provide politically acceptable solutions for affected and surrounding property owners; however, over time, it can create inconsistent code interpretations and enforcement. Relying on custom-tailored rezonings that use different standards, different review and notice procedures, and/or different code formats creates more uncertainty to already speculative development processes. More uncertainty (and resulting time and costs) added to TOD sites can significantly affect their market feasibility and create greater barriers to a community’s affordability, growth, and design quality goals.

Blueprint Denver is Denver’s integrated land use and transportation plan and provides strategies for accommodating future growth in ways that balance increased density (in Areas of Change) with protection of established neighborhoods (in Areas of Stability). It is the foundation of major initiatives, including the 2006 Denver Transit Oriented Development Strategic Plan (and the 2014 update); numerous transit station area and corridor plans; and the citywide update of the zoning code and map. Prior to the update of the Denver Zoning Code, zoning practice for Areas of Change such as TOD sites often involved time-consuming negotiated rezonings where unique districts were created for each project. These rezonings also often included design guidelines requiring further interpretation and negotiation at the permit review stage. So, not only was the rezoning of these prioritized Areas of Change cumbersome, the permit process for individual projects would be subject to additional, often protracted permit review time. This reactive approach to zoning ran counter to Blueprint Denver’s priority to direct growth to Areas of Change, especially around new transit investments.

In the citywide remapping of the new Denver Zoning Code, many transit station areas and corridors were proactively up-zoned in accordance with Blueprint Denver and local adopted plans. Today, with a robust menu of context and form-based zoning districts, rezoning of TOD districts in Denver occurs more quickly and delivers more
predictable outcomes for developers and neighborhoods. The old approach of using customized PUDs and/or Waivers and Conditions is no longer necessary. Now equipped with better zoning tools, as a matter of policy, Denver is very clear about what is and isn’t controlled by zoning. When special local conditions need to be addressed, other methods such as development agreements and deeds are available.

While a complete update of a community’s zoning code isn’t necessary, proactive rezonings (based on adopted plans) that use consistent format and procedural requirements can make TODs more viable and competitive.

**Specific Regulatory Issues and Approaches**

**Density, Height, and Relationship to Neighborhoods**

Context and form-based codes are highly effective techniques for shaping walkable urban places and especially TODs.

Context-based approaches work for existing places (established neighborhoods, downtowns, and infill sites) as well as new development areas where there are clear planning visions. This approach relies on thorough inventory and analysis of desired existing and future urban form and land use patterns to create a menu of neighborhood character types. These typologies capture the range of development patterns in a community from the most walkable urban to more automobile-dependent suburban and rural conditions. Context-based approaches are used in many cities, such as Denver and Miami, and the zoning code updates underway in Austin and downtown Los Angeles are using context-based techniques to calibrate new standards to shape a variety of place types. Context-based zoning can provide smooth transitions between new development and adjacent and nearby existing neighborhoods and is especially effective in calming sensitive or controversial situations where typical one-size-fits-all zoning simply doesn’t work.

Form-based zoning is an effective approach for creating walkable urban places where human scale is the design priority and is highly appropriate for TODs. Form-based codes focus on how the placement and scale of buildings shape the public realm. Building frontage standards (using minimum build-to instead of minimum setback) combined with height standards (minimums and maximums expressed in stories, not feet) ensure new development shapes with some variety consistent with an intended urban design character, while ground-story activation and minimum transparency requirements enliven the pedestrian experience. Because form-based approaches emphasize the relationship of building forms to each other and adjacent development, as well as to public spaces, they are also extremely effective in providing smooth transitions between new and existing development, especially along transit corridors adjacent to lower-density residential neighborhoods.

Form-based codes use simple graphics and illustrations, which makes them typically easier to understand and use than conventional use-based codes and they provide a clearer description of desired development character. During the preparation of the Denver East Colfax Plan and subsequent mapping of Denver’s Main Street zone districts, the form-based approach helped participants visualize future development and focus more on qualitative design issues and less on quantitative elements of the old zoning such as parking minimums and floor area ratios (FAR). The form-based approach helped convince property owners, neighborhood organizations, and elected officials to support lower parking requirements and increase off-site options such as shared-parking. The lowered parking requirements support more affordable construction and assignment of building square footage to more productive revenue sources. The form-based approach also helped replace FAR density measures with more
specific form and height standards. Denver’s Main Street zone districts define minimum and maximum building heights as well upper-story setbacks to attenuate scale in taller height districts and to provide transitions to lower, adjacent buildings when appropriate. These form standards enabled an increase in the effective density that gained political support because there was more certainty (for both neighbors and developers) regarding the character and scale of new development and how transitions to existing neighborhoods would occur.

In the area surrounding the Alameda transit station in Denver, new form-based mixed-use districts combined with form-based Main Street districts along nearby bus corridors provided significant density increases from the previous zoning in support of TODs. Because the form-based standards clearly illustrated how the Alameda Station Plan’s vision would be accomplished, property owners and nearby residents supported the rezoning. In fact, some areas near the station were zoned to allow even more height than had been recommended in the plan because property owners clearly understood that greater intensity of development closer to the station would make TOD more successful. Clearly, the property owners understood how the form-based standards would shape transitions in the development scale that would protect the surrounding existing residential neighborhoods.

The Denver Form Context regulatory or zoning approach had the following attributes and influences:

**Flexibility and Clarity**
- Accommodate market and design preferences change over time;
- Flexibility within a clearly defined range.

**Better Zoning Informing Better Planning**
- An established “menu” of context/form-based districts that streamlines neighborhood, corridor, and station area planning processes, including:
  - Context and form-based districts that provide tools for visualizing different types of places in the planning/public engagement process;
  - New regulations that don’t need to be created/negotiated on a project basis (which supports consistent and effective enforcement in the future).
- Strategic TOD Plan Typologies
  - Typological context approach that influenced the citywide zoning code update;
  - A new zoning code that is now influencing the update of the Denver Strategic TOD Plan.

**Supportive Land Uses – Planning TODs as a Network**

While planning TODs as a central district to a community, and designing TODs to relate to an existing neighborhood and context are important, particularly for place-making and community support, a successful regional TOD network also coordinates land uses regionally or at least along one or two transit lines. Most TODs are a mixture of uses in varying degree, including a combination of mixed-use buildings and single-use buildings within a mixed-use district. However, some TODs are more focused as employment and institutional centers, some as residential centers, and some as entertainment or cultural centers. If coordinated along the same line, they help build a market for the real estate within the respective TODs along the line, reinforcing each other. For example, if
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One TOD on a line is a major employment center and other TODs along the same line focus on housing, they are reinforced when the housing is at a price-point mix that is consistent with the wages paid by employers in the employment center. If a TOD is an institutional center, such as a medical and hospital district or a university, an opportunity exists to provide housing along the line not just for workers, but for customers as well—senior housing in the case of medical needs, and student and faculty housing in the case of universities. This reinforces the institution, while the institution creates demand for the specialty housing. The direct access to a workforce and customers attracts employers to TOD locations along the line. The direct access to jobs and services attracts residents to TOD locations along the same line. The attraction of employers and residents creates demand for real estate, which attracts investors and developers to implement TODs—if the appropriate urban form, densities, and land use regulations are in place. The customer base of workers and customers creates demand for commercial-retail development within a TOD area and along the line.

Parking

Parking policy and strategy are a major determinant of economic feasibility for TOD-related development. The desire to create a clustered urban form that is based on a mixture of uses; a streetscape and urban design that enhances the walking experience, including minimizing curb cuts; and a density that supports transit use lends itself to structured parking. Various forms of structured parking are integrated with development, in order of cost—a single-level of at-grade or tuck-under (half below and half above-grade) parking; a single-level of subterranean parking; multi-level subterranean parking; above-grade multi-level structured parking, sometimes with development wrapped around it or on top; or some mix. While distributed surface parking may be part of a mix, especially on larger parcels and within a shared-parking district at the lower end of the TOD density spectrum, there is a relatively high opportunity cost for the land placed into surface lots and the urban form desired is often not achieved. Surface parking, however, may be a good interim use as a TOD area is transitioning, or in townhome, small-lot single-family housing clusters.

The higher the parking ratio per residential unit or 1,000 square feet of commercial space, the more TOD-related development must use more expensive forms of structured parking and amortize that cost over higher densities. Only a few places in the San Diego region are at the densities or values that can support multi-level subterranean parking, the most expensive at $35,000 to $50,000 per space. Above-grade structured parking at $15,000 to $18,000 a space is more affordable in more places, but takes development volume that could otherwise be devoted to more residential or commercial space. Single-level subterranean and tuck-under parking, sometimes mixed with surface parking spaces on larger lot developments, is more common and affordable in more places, including suburban environments.
Given these economic constraints, the parking ratio is critical. For example, if the lot on which to develop an infill project is 1 acre, approximately 130 parking spaces may be accommodated on one level (assuming a 90 percent efficiency and 300 square feet per space). If the minimum parking ratio is 2 spaces per residential unit, only 65 residential units could be built. If the ratio is 1 space per unit, 130 residential units could be built, generating significantly more land value, some of which can be leveraged to finance TOD infrastructure and amenities.

While some cities with heavy rail and subway systems are able to support parking maximums given the high level of transit service, most western metropolitan areas, including the San Diego region, are not at that level of service yet with light rail and bus rapid transit-based BRT networks. Most households still have cars, even those that rely on transit to commute, so some level of parking does need to be accommodated, if not on site, then within a parking district that services the site.

Disaggregating and charging for parking separately from the rent for a residential unit or office space is one way to generate a market solution to match supply with demand. Those who want and need more parking pay for it, and those who don’t, or need fewer spaces, pay less. The revenue can help support the construction and operating costs of parking. As prices rise, a market is generated to develop district parking spaces that can be rented out or sold. Some of the more urban city centers in the country that have low or no minimum parking requirements, and require disaggregation, have created such a market.

Still, in the San Diego region, interviews with developers indicate that consumers of residential units or commercial space still want some level of parking on site and, given that national equity investors and lenders still require parking on site. The requirements are often in excess of the required zoning ratios, in order to maintain an adequate level of absorption and rent or sale value.

Other cities that are still in auto-dependent markets, however, have been able to make the transition to lower parking ratios that the market and investors accept in their urban districts and TOD locations—such as Denver, Portland, Seattle, Minneapolis, Pasadena, San Jose, Miami, and the San Francisco Bay Area. Most have very low minimums, and some have no parking requirements in their urban cores, but do not have maximums. If developers want to build more for marketing reasons, they can—it’s their economic choice. If developers feel that more
parking is not necessary to attract end users and would rather save costs or devote more investment to other project attributes or land, it’s their choice.

Cities such as Portland used redevelopment funds in the early years of their transition to subsidize projects with lower parking ratios in their TODs to prove to the investment community that there was market support for homes and commercial space with less parking but accessible to transit or in walkable and bike friendly environments. Once the comparable projects and their values were established, higher parking ratios no longer became an underwriting condition in those locations. The City of San Diego recently reduced its parking ratios for affordable housing near transit after a detailed study documented that parking was being over-built. The unnecessary parking used funds that otherwise could help subsidize more affordable housing units for families.

Lot Configuration and Size

The larger the lot, the greater the flexibility to accommodate alternative development scales, more architectural and urban design options, on-site storm water compliance, and space to provide public amenities, often leading to better economic outcomes. Smaller parcels also present opportunities, but, at their scale, they have fewer design options and must rely more on the base land use policy and zoning. Consequently, there is no normative standard site size for TOD projects. However, smaller parcels would have to be assembled to provide the flexibility of larger parcels, which adds complication and costs, overall and on a per square foot basis. Some planners, such as Donald Shoupe, PhD, from UCLA, have advocated for density bonuses as sites are assembled and become larger to accommodate for these extra assemblage costs. Some communities, however, want to discourage land assembly in order to maintain a desired community character. For them, parcel regulations are critical.

Many cities are looking at obsolete shopping center, commercial, and light industrial sites as opportunities to reinvent for TOD projects. The land is already assembled with fewer property owners (although easements, multiple ownerships, and trusts still often exist). Many of these sites can increase their density with mixed development while staying within the road system’s peak-hour capacity by including new uses that have different traffic generation characteristics, especially when combined with a transit option.

Value Capture Approaches

Public investment in transit and supportive mobility infrastructure with associated streetscape and public realm amenities, the provision of public facilities, and increased entitlements that expand development capacity often creates or enhances property values. This can occur if (1) market support in terms of demand and supportable rents and prices exists, and (2) the incremental cost of development (including timing and risk) does not exceed the incremental gain in revenue given a rate-of-return to capital.

Value Capture is the concept that some of the gain to real estate value, in particular residual land value, after a sufficient rate of return to the developer and investors necessary to attract capital, is captured back to help fund public investments and amenities that help create the value. There are several value-capture techniques used around North America. Vancouver, BC, negotiates a form of development agreement whereby the developer helps fund some public amenities guided by area plans. Arlington, VA, requires payment of a fee per square foot for each floor of additional development above a base level entitlement for development around its Metro stations. It uses this revenue to help fund infrastructure and amenities to support the increased density. San Francisco increased density for properties around its Transbay Central (future High-Speed Rail Station),
which includes in its design concept an urban park on the roof of the transit station. To take advantage of the enhanced density and entitlement, property owners have to participate in a special tax district to help finance the park, public amenities, and infrastructure. Density-bonus and incentive or performance zoning techniques that allow increased density above a base entitlement in exchange for public benefits are common in major cities. They are used to help fund affordable housing, public spaces, historic preservation, and transit area improvements.

In most cases, the public benefit funded by capturing a portion of the increased value is for extraordinary public improvements, not for mitigating environmental impacts or paying fair share impact fees for public facilities.

**Positioning for Private Investment**

Positioning TODs for private investment is enhanced by the following:

- Demonstrating and providing capacity to capture obvious and latent market demand;
- Investing in public infrastructure and amenities that create value for private properties;
- Designing a policy framework and regulatory system that reduces time and transaction costs by providing a clear and efficient path for ministerial or discretionary decision-making;
- Making clear what are private cost responsibilities, especially regarding off-site impacts, public facilities, and public policy compliance;
- Reducing risk, including entitlement risk, time delay risk, and political risk. The objective is to reduce risk not only for the investor or developer, but also for the public and community regarding the outcomes and quality of TOD development, thereby reducing political risk that causes delays or could result in denying a project after significant predevelopment investment. Good plans and policies can also reduce the risk of asset value erosion by ensuring that other properties nearby are subject to similar standards of quality.

**Property Owner Incentive**

The property owner needs to obtain a sufficient lift in value to provide an incentive to redevelop the property for TOD projects. A marginal increase in density, and therefore revenue potential with added cost obligations, could actually reduce residual property value, providing no incentives. For example, only in rare contexts, such as possibly high-end coastal communities, would going from a two-story building to a three-story building be sufficient to generate value that would induce a property owner to redevelop, especially if structured parking would be required to accommodate the marginal increase in density.

**Developer Incentive**

The developer needs to generate sufficient return to cover costs and to attract capital investors and lenders. The greater the risk, the higher the return required. The developer takes on revenue risk based on market conditions and entitlements; transaction risk to assemble land and financing; and cost risk including predevelopment, construction, and marketing. Delays or uncertainty regarding process, timing, and the level of entitlements conveyed increases these risks. Developers look for opportunities to create value through targeting market opportunities, enhancing entitlements, innovative design, efficient delivery of development, and cost-effective
building operations. This value creation is reflected in better rents or prices, and faster absorption and higher occupancies. Several cities with robust urban infill and TOD markets, such as Portland and Seattle, cite a community of engaged developers who have vision, place an importance on place-making, and approach infill development as a partnership with the community and local government to create a public benefit beyond just the private returns.

**Equity Investor**

The equity investor looks for a sufficient rate of return on their investment relative to the risk and their position in the investment, confidence in market conditions and the entitlement process, cost management, value upside potential and downside risk management, a reasonable time for delivery, and a plausible exit strategy. The greater the risk, the greater return on capital required. Since most equity investors have options for investment available to them, they look for the best reward/risk investment opportunities, so cities and communities that offer the best ratios attract the most investment interest.

**Lender**

The lender is first in line to receive payment and therefore has less risk and a lower return requirement than equity. However, lenders are also the most risk averse. They need assurance that their debt investments will be paid back on time, that the development and its investment team have the experience and capacity to do so, and that the real estate asset’s value exceeds the outstanding debt and is quality collateral.

Of course, there are different types of property owners, developers, equity investors, and lenders, each with their own criterion. Some are more attracted to TOD projects than others given their criterion and investment expectations or thresholds. Some are small and regional, and some are large and national. Some, however, do specialize in infill-related development and are especially attracted to TOD opportunities in the right markets and contexts, and they should be targeted for marketing TOD opportunities in the San Diego region. The land use and urban design regulatory framework and entitlement process can be a hindrance or asset for such marketing efforts.

**Public Engagement and Partnership Formation**

Assuming the region-wide framework has been set as a matter of policy and the work to implement these policies is now largely up to local jurisdictions and private development partners, in a sense the real work to realize transit-oriented districts now begins. There are some key principles to bear in mind when going about this implementation step, whether that involves changing local zoning, introducing incentive programs and policies, or engaging in development partnerships and building TODs:

- SANDAG should be an active partner with local governments, but the local government and local development partners should take a front seat in local efforts to implement transit-oriented district policies. That said, to the extent that SANDAG can provide seed funding, technical assistance, and marketing support, these can be available support and assurance to the local government and participants.

- Realize that not all prospective centers and corridors will be ready for intensive TOD at once. These are long-term regional policies, and both market conditions and local attitudes about development (appetite
for density) must mature. Go first where the conditions are ripe and focus on achieving quality developments that are truly transit served and part of a complete community concept, so that they can serve as good examples that will encourage other jurisdictions and developers to replicate them.

- Framing implementation activities as *district* rather than *project* development is key. A one-off development at a transit node may look out of place and not be sufficient to create a truly walkable community; therefore, even if projects are developed one at a time, the local policies and messaging should be around development of the surrounding walkable district that includes a variety of uses and pedestrian-serving amenities. Framing the district development in this way helps in three ways: it gives the public a sense of the whole—a community hub, a “there, there” for the larger community; it reassures developers and lenders that they will not be alone in taking risk; and it provides local jurisdictions leverage in negotiation with developers and lenders over design and parking standards.

- Good design is critical. Striving for high-quality design in the initial projects sets the tone for everything to come. It is not so much a matter of materials and finishes, although those are beneficial. What is most important is to minimize and diminish the visibility of parking; engage the pedestrian environment in a meaningful way through building orientation, location of entrances, and building elements/ancillary uses that engage the street; and ensure an overall character though building massing and architectural features that feel like a good fit with the community and contribute to a sense of place. The encouragement that SANDAG gives to local jurisdictions in these matters, to “set the bar” for aspirations about design in implementation are quite meaningful and should be continued. This can be done by hosting or participating in design charettes, producing materials that can be used as toolkits, and evaluating and advertising successes and lessons learned. One possibility is to work with the local design community to help support the development of a TOD design studio as a resource to member jurisdictions, communities, and developers. Several models are available from around the country.

- Assisting local jurisdictions with a toolkit for local implementing policies and programs can be helpful. This can be developed with the participation of SANDAG; representatives of local governments; and representatives of the design, development, and finance communities. This work can focus on removing obstacles in local codes, permitting process, and infrastructure provision. If the desire is to create a viable and vibrant transit-supportive district, then local codes and processes should make projects that help achieve this vision easier to do, not harder. Involving lenders (particularly local lenders) in this process can move them from having effective veto power over aspired development qualities, to becoming educated supporters of the vision. Augmenting technical and convening assistance with seed money that can be leveraged is also very beneficial—this can take the form of funding local implementation materials or as serving as gap financing for initial, qualifying developments in one form or another.

- Developing a network of willing partners is key. Here SANDAG can join with local mayors, community leaders, and members of the design and development community to educate themselves and build momentum. In addition to the aforementioned focused charettes, sponsoring visits to other jurisdictions to learn how they were able to achieve robust, walkable districts served by transit proves indispensable for creating a local coalition of the willing. Also, local communities and players in the San Diego region hosting other local communities to tell their success stories and lessons learned can be valuable, especially when part of a series of sessions.
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- Advertising success is surprisingly important. As opposed to the development conversation and decisions behind the eventual outcomes being largely confined to planners, developers, and local officials, it is critical to communicate local successes (and challenges) along the way with the public at large. This can be done through a variety of means—local newsletters, media, and hosted community events—and should always frame the events or developments as playing a part in the effort to create a locally serving, walkable and vibrant center or corridor, served by quick access to other parts of the region via public transit. The goal here should be to inculcate a bona fide regional narrative about this kind of community form being part of the essence of the San Diego region.

These principles echo the lessons learned over more than two decades of creating transit-served districts in the Portland metropolitan region, which has a regional policy framework much like that of San Diego’s. In Portland, the Metro government not only formulated policy but partnered with local governments and the development community to assist with implementation. The regional “Get Centered” effort, the TOD development program, and the report on Removing Barriers to the Development of Centers and Corridors are three among many efforts that deserve reading. (See www.oregonmetro.gov for a variety of relevant documents.)

Ideas for Consideration

The “Ideas for Consideration” are provided as a starting point for developing recommendations as part of SANDAG’s Regional TOD Strategy. The “Ideas for Consideration” will continue to be refined, added to, and further evaluated.

1. Prepare TOD plans by transit corridor jointly between SANDAG and relevant member cities, consistent with the General Plans of the member cities, that achieve the following:
   - Coordinate land use, housing, and economic development strategies along the corridors;
   - Include a TOD Form Context overlay code for willing jurisdictions along the corridor to utilize;
   - Provide environmental clearance or a CEQA-tiering framework;
   - Become the basis for a discontiguous TOD Financing District;
   - Align scoring weight for SANDAG transit and active transportation investments, Smart Growth Planning and Capital grants, and willing jurisdictions’ capital improvement program CIP priorities.

2. Develop a Web-based Wiki Plan Game for TODs based on place-types and sample urban forms and development prototypes for communities, stakeholder groups, schools, and the general public to use. Use the game to introduce the public to the concepts of TOD, and engage them in future planning efforts and public notices.

3. Prepare a Web-based TOD-Readiness Dashboard for property owners, developers, investors, lenders, and the general public to use to identify potential near-, mid-, and long-term opportunities.

4. Research and develop a San Diego Region TOD-project market and financial performance database for developers, lenders, investors, brokers, and local regulatory bodies to create comparable data, particularly regarding absorption, rents and sales prices per square foot, and occupancy rates by parking ratio categories.
5. Organize and fund jointly with local jurisdictions, the design community, and foundations a not-for-profit Regional Urban Design Studio to assist community organizations, developers, agency staff, and the public to work through TOD-related design approaches and mediate design controversies. Use this studio to develop a network of the willing, including multi-stakeholder study tours, within and outside the region, of exemplary TOD projects.