

What exactly is transit oriented development?

Editor's note: The authors head up transit oriented development for the city of Minneapolis (David Frank), Metro Transit (Lucy Galbraith) and the city of St. Paul (Gary Leavitt). The viewpoints expressed in this column belong to the authors.

Those of us with “transit oriented development” on our business cards are part of the network of professionals working to create more TOD in this region.

What is TOD? A TOD is a great urban place: it is walkable and bikable, where people have the option of good transit, and it typically contains more people living or working there than the surrounding area.

TOD offers an option that is scarce within the region, where most existing developments reflect the auto dominance of the last 60 years. We know there is strong demand for TOD since every new development that meets the definition fills up quickly and charges premium rents, unless all or some units are explicitly limited to those who qualify for affordable housing.

A TOD is almost always mixed use and is often a redevelopment project. By contrast, typical developments are usually single-family or multifamily housing, retail, or office. Most developers, nearly all financing sources and cities are used to working with single-use developments.

“Greenfield” developments are inherently simpler than infill redevelopment projects. Getting the most leverage out of transit access requires understanding transit service as well as the potential market of those projects that want to be a TOD. Governments get involved to encourage these more complex and less familiar mixed-use redevelopment projects to benefit established and burgeoning communities.

Many cities, including Minneapolis and St. Paul, have targeted policies and programs in station areas to incentivize good TOD. The Metropolitan Council also has policies, programs and grants for developments in transit-rich areas and works with all communities served by transit in the seven-county region.

At some point in the future, TOD might be the common development type and everyone will know how to manage them without having specific TOD staff. But we aren't there yet.

With our expertise in private development and government, the three of us offer a friendly point of contact for anyone wanting to know more about TOD. We provide information about how to design and strategize for TOD (including station area planning, density and parking), what funding sources exist for TOD, and how to build a great TOD. Internally, we coordinate across departments to streamline and assist processes in these complex projects across public and private sectors.

Together, we are working to ensure that publicly owned land is considered for mixed-use redevelopment in transit-rich areas. TOD can be very efficient for government uses, allowing public employees and residents the option to get to public facilities by using transit. In the future, we want to be sure that the TOD option is considered when governments build new facilities such as libraries, affordable housing, government offices, etc. Cities can implement the compact development strategy in their own TOD projects, as well as encourage these strategies in private developments.

To achieve a livable and competitive metro area, efficiency in government is a key strategy. TODs and compact communities can be served more efficiently than less compact places. Transit is most efficient serving stations and stops that provide riders with many reasons to travel throughout the day and night in both directions, creating a

synergy of destinations and connections. Achieving these developments requires collaboration and sharing of best practices.

Within cities, we focus on redeveloping transit-served areas rather than encouraging denser developments everywhere. One reason is that dense developments without transit service tend to generate a lot of traffic in their immediate neighborhood and are not consistent with our overall efforts to reduce congestion, improve air quality and create healthier places.

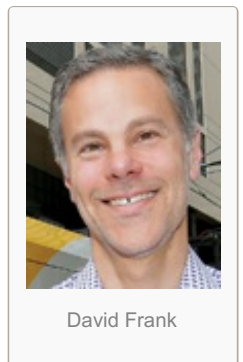
Another reason is our overall mission to foster transportation choices and diverse real estate options. We are expanding the region's portfolio of place types in response to the growing generational demands, rather than limiting anyone to a particular place or type of place.

Whether you are a developer, finance professional, community leader, bicycle activist or resident, we encourage you to explore TOD projects and their potential in our region.

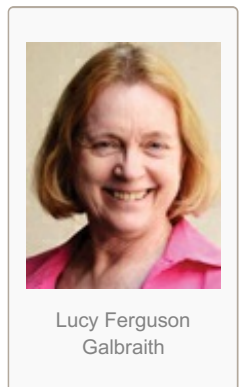
We hope to work with you to strengthen our communities by increasing vital connections and destinations that transcend city boundaries.

About the Authors

David Frank has served five years as the director of transit development for the city of Minneapolis, where he works on light rail and streetcar projects, and on creating high-density development projects around transit. He previously worked for developer Schafer Richardson. He also is the president of the North Loop Neighborhood Association and a steering committee member of 2020 Partners, a public/private effort to coordinate development and infrastructure improvements around Target Field and the adjacent Target Field Station. He can be reached at david.frank@minneapolismn.gov or 612-673-5238.



Lucy Ferguson Galbraith was recently hired as the director of transit oriented development for Metro Transit, a division of the Metropolitan Council. She previously served as manager of transit oriented development for the Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority in Austin, Texas. She has degrees from Rice University and Yale University and has taught at the University of Texas, Austin. She can be reached at Lucy.Galbraith@metrotransit.org or 612-349-7669.



Gary Leavitt started earlier this year as the transit oriented development manager for the city of St. Paul. He has owned a private development company and real estate brokerage in Phoenix, where he often focused on projects along a new light rail line between Tempe and Phoenix. He has a forensic accounting background and has worked in asset management and private equity syndication for real estate ventures. He can be reached at gary.leavitt@ci.stpaul.mn.us or 651-207-9900.

