

Transit Oriented Development (TOD)

In a Nutshell

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) refers to mixed-use development near rail transit stops. The communities are designed to be walkable and sustainable, thus allowing residents to live, work and play and be able to walk safely to the closest rail system. TOD communities are vital to OneSTL, because they allow residents to have a higher quality life while being sustainable. A brief summary and in depth report of plans for 8 stations in the region is available under [Resources -> Reports -> Transit Oriented Development](#).

The “How To”

[Citizens for Modern Transit](#) is a good place to start your search on TOD. Their website has a wealth of resources concerning TOD in both Saint Louis and nationally.

TOD does not require a reinvention of the planning wheel. In fact, most of these developments adhere to the same principles of urban design, real estate strategy and community planning involved in any successful venture. According to [Metro](#), TOD communities share these basic qualities.

- Transit station at the heart of the community
- Neighborhood must be walkable and economically vibrant. Housing, retail, basic services and office space/employment should all be within walking distance (quarter to half-mile) of transit stop
- TOD neighborhoods should contain a well-rounded variety of uses
- Buildings have direct access to the street
- Plan is designed with the pedestrian and cyclist in mind
- TOD community has a unique identity and sense of “place”
- A dynamic mix of small business/start-ups and anchor/chain brands to ensure economic vibrancy and establishment of a sense of place.

Benefits of a TOD project include:

- The increase in walking, bicycling and transit use means healthier and more sustainable communities
- Connects everyone to the region because of the close proximity to the train station
- Increased economic activity including more jobs, and more tax revenue
- Increased property value
- Reduces street traffic
- Stabilizes a community with affordable housing and new business development

Planning & Zoning

As part of the OneSTL project, several train stations have already undergone TOD studies which are available on our [website](#). When looking to move forward with a Transit Oriented Development, here are a few things to keep in mind.

Relevant Laws and Ordinances-There are several laws and ordinances that can aid in the development of transit oriented development. Below are some of the more common ones.

Creation of TOD Specific Zoning – TOD specific zoning encourages TODs by setting development standards that are in line with TOD in terms of community density, and residential/business zoning requirements. Several of the municipalities around train station stops contain commercial zoning that does not allow for residential zoning, or residential zoning classifications that do not allow for retail or office land uses. TOD specific zoning could be as simple as putting incentives in place to develop TOD communities.

Form Based Codes – Form Based Codes provide specific guidance regarding building setbacks, sidewalk and street sections, building mass, and related urban design factors. Form Based Codes help to sure the creation of districts and communities that retain their sense of identity over many decades, even after particular land uses or tenants change ownership. St. Louis County has recently developed Form Based Codes for various MetroLink stations and local jurisdictions.

Expedited Entitlements – Developers of various projects, whether conventional or transit-oriented, often complain that the process of obtaining entitlement approvals consumes a good deal of time and harms the viability of potential projects. Cities can help encourage TOD in part by creating expedited or streamlined entitlement approval processes for TODs that follow the guidelines, zoning, or related regulatory tools pertaining to TOD in their particular communities. Removing steps in the process can help to speed approvals for TOD and therefore provide these projects with an advantage in the marketplace compared to standard development submittals with public entities. Please click on the Dollar and Cents tab for more information.

Bicycle Planning- A major component of TOD is bicycling. Our page on [Bicycle and Pedestrian Facilities and Programs](#) has a lot of information on how to develop a bicycle and walking friendly community. Below is a list of best practices concerning bicycle and pedestrian planning around TOD.

Bicycle Storage-

- Bike racks should be located in close proximity to the station platforms and under protective sheds or overhangs to provide shelter from snow or rain
- Bike racks need to be placed in well-lit areas and should not block main passageways to or from train station platforms
- Signage and way finding should help direct transit bicyclist to the bike racks
- Bike facilities should incorporate innovative and attractive designs, perhaps incorporating public art

Bicycle Rental and Bike Sharing-

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Organizations and businesses can partner together to provide a bicycle renting or sharing program

- The program needs to be reliable, easy and affordable to use

Connecting Train Stations and Bicycle/Pedestrian Trails and Facilities

- Every effort should be made to connect train stations to nearby trails and facilities which are used by the local bicyclists and pedestrians

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Dollars & Cents

Below is a list of financial tools available to cities to encourage Transit Oriented Development within their borders. These tools give developers financial incentives to put developments within a city but also put certain kinds of developments within the city as well.

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) – The City of St. Louis’ [website](#) provides a great overview of TIFs in Missouri. As their website explains, TIFs are “a development tool designed to help finance certain eligible improvements to property in designated redevelopment areas (TIF Districts) by utilizing the new, or incremental, tax revenues generated by the project after completion.” TIFs give communities the opportunity to bring in major developments. A TIF district could easily be established for a TOD. It is important to remember that Tax Increment Financing has its fair share of critics who view TIFs as an under the table trick. Also, some communities in our region have lost money on TIFs in recent years. Before establishing a TIF, a community and developer should be sure that the project is designed in such a way to ensure success of the project.

Tax Abatement – Tax Abatement is a tool, which freezes the tax assessment of properties at pre-development levels. Many cities traditionally use property tax abatement as an incentive to lure new development, particularly for projects that involve significant job creation such as business parks. Again, the various jurisdictions in the region could tie tax abatement to TOD or provide additional tax abatement provisions or benefits for those projects that involve transit-related components. The City of Saint Louis [webpage](#) on Tax Abatement is very informative.

Waiver of Development Fees and Levies – Many cities routinely charge new developments with impact fees, for roads, schools, community facilities, parks, and related amenities and community-related components. Cities could wave these fees for TOD projects, and/or charge higher fees for non-TOD projects. The former option is preferable to the latter because development is almost always good. Either way, the use of fees and levies can make a TOD project more financially viable for a region.

Location Efficient Mortgages (LEMs) – Location Efficient Mortgages allow lenders to lend more money to home owners by taking into account savings incurred by the location of a home. These projected savings allow a bank to lend more money to a homeowner who now has more money to pay the loan off. The [National Resources Defense Council](#) and the [National Housing Institute](#) both have great information on LEMs on their website. LEMs could be implemented for housing available around MetroLink stops, once again spurring development along these corridors.

Property Acquisition – Securing the necessary parcels to proceed with a viable project often represents one of the largest hurdles to creating TOD in a given area. Local cities and counties may help in promoting TOD by purchasing available parcels at station areas and “land banking” these holdings until the time is right to proceed with formal TOD efforts. By offering up significant pools of land for TOD, the public sector can help drive the design and implementation of projects at transit stations and perhaps also gain an investment return on its land holdings from these deals.

Measuring Success

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, oriented around 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.

Discover More

In the St. Louis region one the best resources for exploring Transit Oriented Development is the Center for Modern Transit's [TOD Clearinghouse](#).

Case Studies

Cortex Technical Assistance Panel

Contact

Citizens for Modern Transit

Description

The [CORTEX District Study](#) was prepared by Citizens for Modern Transit. The CORTEX district is nestled between the Central West End, Forest Park Southeast, Midtown, and the BJC Kingshighway Campus. This study seeks to establish projections for net new riders on the MetroLink system over a 20-year planning horizon resulting from the construction of a new MetroLink station in the CORTEX District.

Cost \$0

Emerson-JJK-Station Area Plan

Description

[The Emerson-JJK-Station Plan](#) studies two adjacent MetroLink stop, the Emerson Park and Jackie Joyner-Kersey (JJK) Center. Emerson Park Station is located near the intersection of the North 15th Street and Bowman Avenue in East St. Louis. The surrounding neighborhood consists largely of one- to two-story single-family homes and two-story apartments. A mixed office/retail building near the station is one of the first commercial properties to develop in the area. A new senior housing development containing approximately 76 units, community space, and ground-floor retail is currently under construction. The quarter-mile station area covers 330 lots on 31 blocks, with a total assessed value of \$2,879,228. The JJK Center Station provides a connection to the Joyner-Kersey Center which provides a number of services the community. Most of the quarter-mile station area is occupied by the JJK Center, Jones-Hall Park, large vacant lots and I-64. The quarter-mile station area covers 178 lots on 20 blocks, with a total asessed value of \$1,387,092.

The study suggests an initial development plan that involves turning a parking lot and adjoining lands between JJK and the interstate into an area of highway retail or lodging. The plan also suggests several development strategy tools to assist the region in moving forward with the project, including the issuance of RFPs and rezoning of the station area.

Cost \$0

Fairview Heights-Station Area Plan

Description

The [Fairview Heights-Station Area Plan](#) studies the area around the Fairview Heights Station stop. This station is located in the City of Fairview Heights, near the border with the City of East St. Louis. The station area is divided between a single-family home residential area in Fairview Heights, and commercial and light industry in East St. Louis. The quarter-mile station area covers 117 lots on 13 blocks, with a total assessed value of \$4,503,848.

The plan includes recommendations calling for Metro to use some of its surrounding property to jump start development in the area. The hope is for new development to include local-serving retail and residential housing.

Cost \$0

Grand Station Technical Assistance Panel

Description

[The Grand Station Technical Assistance Panel study](#) looks into possible development around the Grand MetroLink Station located on Grand Avenue, below the Grand Avenue bridge.

Cost \$0

MetroLink Station Area Profiles

Description

Part of OneSTL was the development of profiles for each of the [37 MetroLink Stations](#). Each profile consists of a general overview, overview of local transit options, demographic, housing and employment overview, "Neighborhood Context" and a zoning/land use overview.

Cost \$0

North Hanley-Station Area Plan

Description

[The North Hanley-Station Area Plan](#) studies the MetroLink station located just south of I-70 by the City of Berkeley in St. Louis County. The plan calls for putting new retail and residential developments on parking lots near the the station. Overtime, the area just south of the station could be used for retail development.

Cost \$0

Rock Road-Station Area Plan

Description

[The Rock Road-Station Area Plan](#) analyzes the station located on St. Charles Rock Road. Most of the land around the MetroLink Station itself is developed with industrial and commercial uses, though there are also several large vacant parcels in the immediate vicinity. Residential neighborhoods of single-family homes are located about a block away from the station. The quarter-mile station area also benefits from the presence of considerable open space and community facilities, including St. Peters Cemetery, Normandy High School and Pagedale Family Support Center.

The initial development plan will likely include developing a mix of residential, local serving retail, community and office space. Over time the area to the south would be developed into retail or employment center uses.

Cost \$0