

At the Heart of Your Community

A CITIZEN'S GUIDE TO TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT



I live in a town with a train station. I work in a town with a train station.

What opportunities does the train station in my town present?

A train station can provide increased mobility to and from your town, and increase the number of people who can access your goods, services and employment opportunities. An active train station can be the core of a **vibrant, walkable downtown**. Train stations are real estate assets paid for regionally that can be used to increase the values, services and amenities within your town.



Why is development near train stations becoming more popular?

Train stations and public transportation are important components of a growing trend toward creating **“sustainable communities”**—communities that balance economic growth, environmental preservation and social equity, and where planning for the long-term health of the community is as important as meeting immediate needs.

Consumer preferences and recent demographic trends in New Jersey and across the nation are increasing the interest in development near train stations. People **across all age and income groups** are expressing a growing preference for smaller, more manageable homes where they are less dependent on driving and can walk to a multitude of community amenities, including arts, culture, parks, shopping and restaurants.

Fueling this trend are two demographic groups that represent an expanding share of homebuyers, and whose tastes will have a big impact on the market in coming years: aging baby boomers, whose children have moved out (also known as “empty nesters”), and younger people in their 20s and 30s. By 2025, it is estimated that only 25 percent of New Jersey homebuyers will be families with children, while 50 percent will be single-person households.

At the same time, **companies are increasingly looking to locate** in places that are attractive and more accessible to a wide range of employees, which means being near a train station rather than an automobile-dependent suburban office park.

NEW JERSEY + PUBLIC TRANSIT

- 3 main providers: NJ Transit, PATH, PATCO
- 221 million passenger trips annually
- 11 rail lines and more than 200 bus routes
- 216 train stations (light and commuter rail)
- 70% of NJ residents live within 5 miles of a rail station
- 10% of NJ residents commute on public transit (2nd highest in U.S.)
- 45% increase in transit ridership between 1997-2007

How could redeveloping the area around the train station improve my community?

Train stations are already a **hub of activity** in many communities, and harnessing that energy to spur redevelopment in and around the station area can have many benefits, for both the neighborhood and the community at large.

A mix of new uses around the train station can include more housing and shopping choices for both young and old, creating a **vibrant and fun** place to visit, shop, and walk around.

New biking, walking and street improvements mean increased access to the station for many more people, giving your friends, visitors, employees and customers more ways to get to and from public transportation—and more ways to get to you. As the transit network expands, it becomes **easier and more convenient** to take public transportation to transit oriented destinations in all directions.

As more development takes place, train station ridership increases. As ridership increases, local businesses and attractions have access to **more customers and visitors**, and there is additional incentive for the transit agency to improve service and the infrastructure around the station.

In areas that have not seen investment in a while, the new development activity can have a revitalizing effect. New investments can increase property values immediately around the train station and generate new or expanded tax ratables.



What are the characteristics of well-planned development around transit stations?

There is no one-size-fits-all prescription for new development, even near train stations. There are certain basic elements, however, that underpin successful developments of this type, referred to as **transit oriented development (TOD)**, and should be taken into consideration when planning new development near transit:

HOUSING

With three-quarters of homebuyers in coming years projected to be childless households, people are increasingly choosing smaller, more accessible housing near transportation. These types of developments also tend to be more appealing to younger generations, creating new opportunities for young people to live in the community where they grew up. A well-designed TOD project should include housing that provides a range of options, including size of homes, number of bedrooms, amenities and prices for both existing and prospective residents.

MIX OF USES

Mixed-use development (combining retail, residential, office, entertainment and other uses) provides vibrancy, a safe “24-hour” atmosphere, convenience, and the flexibility for the community to adapt to changing market conditions. Achieving the right mix means balancing daytime uses, such as offices and shops, with uses that encourage evening activity, such as restaurants, theaters and bars.

ORIENTATION

A building that is constructed next to a train station is not automatically transit oriented. To maximize the value of the train station, it is important to intentionally design, orient and scale the buildings, roads, sidewalks, parking and other related infrastructure to pedestrians, bicycles and the station itself, and to connect and integrate into existing neighborhoods.

EQUITY

Residential development should include a range of housing prices, including homes affordable to families earning moderate and low incomes. This provides an opportunity for people to live near their work and to access alternative (and in many cases less expensive) transportation options. For the community this means less traffic, a more diverse labor pool, and greater accessibility for those in the service professions.

COMPACT

Having a certain number of people living and working in close proximity to each other creates the “critical mass” of activity that makes transit oriented development projects successful. Well-designed TOD should include enough structures at a sufficiently large scale to make the project both financially viable and vibrant, and may include housing above stores and offices, as well as multi-story buildings that add charm and activity on the street.

CONNECTIVITY

Incorporating a broad range of transportation options should be an integral part of any transit oriented development project. Pedestrian, bicycle, bus lines, and car-share programs should all be considered, and these options should not be planned in isolation but rather designed to work together. For example, the bike route ends at a bike rack that connects to the bus stop. New roads should offer more options by connecting to and improving the existing street network.



Where did the idea for transit oriented development come from?

While the concept may be experiencing newfound popularity, transit oriented development has been around since the 1800s, when many towns across the country **grew and prospered** because of their proximity to rail lines. In New Jersey, many communities grew up around commuter rail stops,

with the train station serving as the focal point for activity and commerce. Places like South Orange and Montclair in North Jersey, and Pitman and Woodbury in South Jersey, are examples of communities that came of age during the heyday of rail travel.

Now, many of the same reasons that made TOD attractive so many years ago are making it popular with transit communities again. Concerns about high gas prices, loss of open space and struggling older downtowns and Main Streets are combining to create a resurgence of interest in train station development in communities across New Jersey.

What are some good examples of development around train stations in New Jersey?

COLLINGSWOOD

While many communities work hard to attract new residents and promote businesses, Collingswood's aggressiveness in pursuing revitalization makes it a special case. After years of stagnation and vacant businesses, Collingswood has experienced a rebirth over the last decade, thanks in part to its commuter train station on the PATCO high-speed line. Led by its enthusiastic mayor, the town has taken a hands-on approach to redevelopment, buying up several neglected residential and office properties near downtown, refurbishing them, and then returning them to the tax rolls by selling or leasing them.

The results have been dramatic. In a downtown that was once marked by vacant storefronts and little foot traffic, there is now a growing restaurant scene of BYOBs (Collingswood is a dry town). Home prices have risen as commuters seek to take advantage of the town's easy access to Philadelphia via PATCO, and new condos have sprouted next to the town's

train station. Explained Mayor James Maley, "We've been able to create a pedestrian-friendly town for our residents and business owners where people can walk to pick up their dry cleaning, go to dinner, shop, patronize local businesses and enjoy a yearly calendar of festivities."

Community engagement has been an integral part of Collingswood's redevelopment efforts. In 2002, the borough conducted a visioning study with residents of the downtown to decide the character of development they preferred. More recently, in 2007, the town held planning meetings and collected feedback as a part of an effort to plan for TOD on the surface parking lots surrounding its train station. The first phase of this effort, the award-winning LumberYard development, is now complete and the combination condominium, retail, garage and public space is already a popular destination in the heart of town.



Photo courtesy of the Borough of Collingswood

CRANFORD

Cranford's position on the Elizabethtown and Somerville Railroad in the 1800s gave it a direct connection to New York City, transforming the township into a bedroom community focused around its train station. Now, nearly two centuries later, Cranford is again using its train station as a catalyst for growth, this time as a way to revive its downtown.

Starting in the 1980s, Cranford chose to focus on streetscape improvements and promotions as a way to increase interest and private investment. Taking advantage of the state's Special Improvement District (SID) program, Cranford became the first town to create a SID and issue a special assessment

on property owners in the downtown district, which led to investment of more than \$3 million aimed at improving the downtown business climate.

This spurred a new round of private investment throughout the downtown area. Property owners have made extensive façade improvements and renovated the second and third floors of their buildings, creating new apartments and office space above the retail establishments. In 2010 alone, the downtown attracted many new businesses: a gourmet cheese shop and artisan bakery, three new restaurants and an independent apparel and accessory store, among others.

Two major projects helped jumpstart this downtown revitalization. One block away from the town's train station is the award-winning Cranford Crossing, which has 50 condominiums, with retail on the ground level and a carefully designed parking garage. The Riverfront Project, when complete, will have office and retail space, as well as residential units and two levels of parking. The project is located across from the train station and on the banks of the Rahway River.



SMART GROWTH SPOTLIGHT: Cranford Crossing



50 condominiums
22,000 sq ft of retail
310 space parking garage
1 block from train station
Smart Growth Award recipient



Photo courtesy of the Township of Cranford

How can I ensure that TOD will have a positive impact on my community?

Any new development, including transit oriented development, will lead to change in a community. Change is not always easy. The most important thing is to **consider what positive change can bring**; talk to your neighbors and planners and then participate in a process that ensures your town can take advantage of change opportunities. There are, however, specific issues associated with TOD that engaged citizens should consider:

RETHINK HOW PEOPLE GET AROUND

Many more people will be able to walk, bike, or take public transportation with effective transit oriented development. A busy train station will also serve people with cars. TOD offers new opportunities to build structured parking, hide that parking behind other buildings, explore shared parking solutions

and accommodate traffic flow in a way that reduces congestion and encourages alternative ways of moving around. Make sure parking, transportation flow and biking and walking routes are all taken into consideration during the planning.

ENSURE FAIRNESS AND AFFORDABILITY

New development can sometimes push real estate values up, causing displacement of community businesses or lower-income families, but it doesn't have to. Plan to develop in a way that improves the area, creates and captures new value, and continues to afford opportunities for a range of businesses and families. By its very nature, transit oriented development will generate a wide variety of opportunities, but only the town can ensure that the full range of affordable options is provided.

EMPHASIZE ATTRACTIVE DESIGN

TOD is an opportunity for communities to create a place that has a mix of interesting uses: homes, commercial spaces of different sizes and a host of amenities much like a traditional downtown. It is important to pay attention to design specifics, such as appropriate density, adequate mix of uses, sidewalks, trees, lighting, building appearance and materials. Be sure to avoid bland, cookie-cutter approaches that may save a few dollars today at the expense of building high-quality places for the long term.

How can I help make transit oriented development happen in my town?

Visit other communities that have successfully used their train stations to create amenities and a community "feel" that you like. See for yourself and bring back pictures and stories.

Host a community meeting to talk to neighbors about your train station and to learn what they'd like to see happen in the area. Invite local leaders and officials.

Work with municipal officials and developers to create a plan that articulates a workable vision for the area around your transit station.

Look into your town's master plan and zoning code. The creation of compact, walkable communities is not always supported by local plans and codes.

Find out if there are any proposed development projects. Watch to make sure they meet the characteristics of good TOD.



Working for Smarter Growth: More livable places and open spaces

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