

# MOVING FORWARD WITH TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT IN NZ

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The idea of developing communities around public transport can be traced back to the early 1900s, when many urban neighbourhoods around the world were designed around streetcar and tram routes. Post-war suburban development led to decades of paving over these streetcar tracks, and land use planning designed around the private car. Today, regional and local governments in the United States are beginning to re-invest in public transportation systems as a result of urban growth pressures on surrounding landscapes, traffic complaints and changing transportation policies that favour public transport. To support the growth and efficiency of these systems, new urban development that integrates transportation and land use planning through the creation of Transit-Oriented Developments (TODs) is becoming increasingly popular.

New Zealanders' love of private transport, and our sprawling urban and peri-urban areas, mean that the escalation of petrol prices over the past year has come as somewhat of a shock. Most people currently have little choice but to drive to work and play, as public transport systems are not yet either as efficient or as widely available as the car. However, the past few years have seen a growing policy emphasis on the idea of better integration of land use and transport, with

the aim of improving the sustainability of both (e.g. MfE's Urban Design Protocol publications; MOT's Transport Sector Strategic Directions 2005). The development of new town centres and communities along transport corridors, and enhanced connectivity between transport modes is starting to be actively promoted in some New Zealand cities such as Waitakere, Tauranga and Wellington. As a 'fast follower' of international trends, any lessons we can learn from others' experiences in achieving a more integrated urban form can only be helpful. This article reports on research carried out in 2005 in Portland, Oregon on what conditions favour the development of successful TODs.

## TODs in Portland

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) refers to a form of urban design that achieves pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use, mixed-income, high-density and location efficient communities centred on public transport nodes (Calthorpe 2001; Dittmar and Poticha 2004). In Portland, TODs vary from large mixed-use, mixed-income communities along light rail to single buildings adjacent to stations.

Portland is a relevant case study for New Zealand, as there are many similarities between it and Auckland. The two cities are of a similar

size and population, however Portland's forward-thinking approach to regional planning allows it to serve as an example of what Auckland could become. One of the first cities to have an Urban Growth Boundary (1973), and elected Regional Council (1973), the most profitable light rail system in the United States, voted "Most Bike Friendly" (2003) and a history of cleverly converting highway dollars to transit dollars, which funds the first and one of the most successful TOD programmes in the United States (over 20 TODs to date) Portland has a lot to teach.

The research (for a Masters degree in planning at Otago University) involved interviews and questionnaires on people's experiences in three different TODs – Orenco Station, Pearl and Gresham – from the early development process to living and working in the final product. Planners, city councillors, business owners, residents, workers, developers and transit agency representatives were all included in the research. Their experiences were then examined to determine the conditions necessary for developing a successful TOD.

## Condition 1: Strong regional champions

The success of Portland's TODs can in the first instance be attributed to the vision of the regional transportation agency, TriMet, and the

RIGHT: Multi-modal design in the Pearl District.

BELOW: The Orenco Station town centre.

Metropolitan Planning Organisation (Metro), which started the country's first Transit-Oriented Development Programme. TriMet offers financial and regulatory support for new TODs, requiring that TOD projects seeking its financial involvement must meet five goals:

- Increase Ridership
- Increase Revenues
- Improve the Total Transit Experience
- Catalyze Neighbourhoods
- Promote Transit Equity

### Condition 2: Public-private partnerships

Initiating TODs requires considerable investment and long-term commitment that may seem daunting to local government and developers. Given its distinctively different form to traditional suburban neighbourhoods, there has sometimes been reluctance among developers and real estate investors to build and finance them. Effective public-private partnerships are thus usually essential for making TOD more affordable and viable. These provide stability, conditions of certainty, and allow for open discussion amongst all stakeholders.

In Portland, TOD remains largely reliant on government subsidies and complex funding schemes to make up for the hesitance of financial institutions to provide lending for the development. However, several TODs such as the Orenco Station project and the Pearl District are receiving international acclaim for the strength of community and quality design, which is resulting in increased marketability and confidence in the product. The increasing popularity and financial success of TODs is now creating greater motivations for private involvement in their development.

### Condition 3: Design, community and amenity

Equally important is recognition that TOD is more than a just a physical product. The research at Orenco Station illustrated that buyers were attracted to the TOD not necessarily because of its access to light rail, but because of the quality



design and sense of community. One resident commented on the inherent relationship between design and community:

"When people walk through neighbourhoods they get to know one another. This builds a stronger sense of community. Orenco Station has garages in alleys, which de-emphasises the importance of the automobile and emphasises homes and the people who live in them."

Orenco Station was recently voted America's Best New Community.

High-quality urban design at TODs is thus a critical component in their success. The urban form plays a central role in attracting residents and businesses to begin with, but is equally important for supporting the high quality of life that is expected of those who choose to relocate to a TOD. Urban design features that play a direct role in enhancing mobility are highly valued by residents and business owners and workers. Mixed-uses, high-densities, safe transit stops, footpaths and pleasant green spaces are all

TABLE 1: The responsibilities of each stakeholder group in TOD development processes.

Stakeholder Involvement	Central and Regional Government	Local Government	Transit Agency	Development Community	Businesses	Residents
Stakeholder Responsibilities for TOD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Provide funding</li> <li>-Develop supportive regulatory framework</li> <li>-Support public transport initiatives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Develop support regulatory framework</li> <li>-Long term support</li> <li>-Consultation</li> <li>- Public/Private Partnerships</li> <li>-Support affordable housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Encourage integrated planning</li> <li>- Work in Public/Private Partnerships</li> <li>-Secure funding</li> <li>-Education</li> <li>-Advocacy for local governments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Public/Private Partnership</li> <li>-Public consultation</li> <li>- Secure funding</li> <li>-Participate in planning processes for zoning and infrastructure</li> <li>-Focus on building community</li> <li>- Promote quality design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Influence design of space</li> <li>-Placement of business in area visible to transit and automobile users</li> <li>- Support local community</li> <li>-Encourage employees and customers to use alternative transport</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Participate in consultation</li> <li>- Work with neighbourhood groups</li> <li>-Provide feedback for development designs</li> <li>-Support local businesses</li> </ul>

perceived to enhance pedestrian-accessibility; a highly valued amenity of the TODs. Often, new planning provisions are required to develop the appropriate mixed-use zoning that is necessary for TOD to be successful.

Convincing suburbanites to move into mixed-use, high-density environments can be difficult, but TOD's additional promise of connectivity can offer an enhanced quality of life that may make such developments more attractive.

#### Condition 4: Collaborative planning

The planning process for TOD must resolve the tension between its role as a node in a transport corridor, and its role as a place to live. Successful TODs have done this by employing a collaborative planning process that focuses on developing a community, not just a pool of future transit riders. Developers have focused on creating a sense of place, character, community and amenity. Public consultation is inherent in this process.

"The planning comes from the older parts of Portland, the neighbourhoods that were built when the trolley ran. We studied the neighbourhoods and what people like about them: a sense of community; sense of place. This led to the town centre becoming the cohesive link using old design features and live/work homes. People locked onto this aspect; it evoked emotions in focus groups."

– TOD developer in Portland

#### Condition 5: Multi-modal design and connectivity

A successful TOD should be designed to promote a variety of travel modes, and Calthorpe (1993, 2001) suggests these should be offered in a hierarchy that puts the pedestrian first, followed by the cyclist and transit user, with drivers of private cars given lowest priority.

The success of TODs multi-modal design should

be reflected in a reduction in automobile reliance. TODs that are designed to support high levels of pedestrian-connectivity and safety, combined with a town centre where basic needs can be met, and easy access to alternative transport modes, are most likely to see a reduced use of private cars and an increase in TOD residents' walking and cycling.

#### Condition 6: Business advantages

The responses from businesses that participated in this research indicated that there are many advantages to having a business within a TOD that cannot be realised in an isolated office park or "big box" retail environment. TODs allow businesses to be part of the community, as they were in turn-of-the-century streetcar suburbs, and many business owners find this attractive. Because of the density, businesses in TODs have the advantage of a significant and diverse customer base within walking distance, something that cannot be offered in the suburbs.

In the TOD environment, customers can come by foot, bike, car or public transport, which further increases the potential customer base. A business owner in the Pearl District, a large-scale transit neighbourhood with a population of approximately 4,000 people, described the advantages of having a business in a TOD:

"With rail, sleepy streets come alive. The design elements [of the Pearl] are amazing. Building come alive and ignited because of traffic getting on and off. This all wasn't here two years ago – rail is breeding life in the Pearl District."

#### The future for TOD in New Zealand

New Zealand is in the very early stages of encouraging integrated transportation and land use planning, and has yet to develop the strong statutory and planning support for TOD that is seen in Portland. Despite the new planning and policy directions that are starting to emerge here,

the mindset that urban areas must be primarily designed around roads is still uppermost. Before TOD can be a viable reality, a change needs to occur at all levels of the planning process to support a shift in focus from to support the development of public transport systems supported by transit-oriented land uses. Planning at a regional level must be a key factor in this shift towards fully integrated transportation and land use planning. Table 1 indicates how these responsibilities could be shared if TOD is to take off in New Zealand.

Successful TOD relies on a multitude of conditions, including a supportive legislative framework, adequate funding, subsidies and incentives for private investment, inclusiveness of all stakeholder groups through consultation and partnerships, development of appropriate zoning, and willingness to invest in quality urban design. It requires a significant amount of upfront initiative and stakeholder involvement to be successful, and it can seem like an intimidating urban form for local governments and transit agencies to promote. Though New Zealand still needs to develop the right framework for TOD, cities like Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch could easily support TOD. Improvements to public transport systems can be undertaken simultaneously with new TOD developments to be mutually supportive.

As an island nation heavily reliant on imported petrol, the future sustainability of New Zealand cities may rely on alternative urban forms that reduce the need to drive. As 85% of New Zealanders live in urban areas, keen attention to the shape of these cities and choices that its residents make will heavily impact the overall sustainability of the nation. Portland's experience with TOD shows that when developed properly, TOD can be an attractive, successful and sustainable option for shaping New Zealand's urban settlements.