

BY DAVID LINDSEY, AUCKLAND REGIONAL COUNCIL, WRITES ABOUT RECENT SEMINARS IN AUCKLAND BY BOTH PETER CALTHORPE AND SPENSER HAVLICK.

TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

PLANNING FOR CHOICE, HEALTH, PROSPERITY AND DEMOCRACY

'Sustainability' is the mantra of Boulder, Colorado. This city of just under 100,000 people enforces a one per cent growth rate, controlled through issuing a limited number of building permits each year. There are strident rules about developments, including a standard maximum building height of 12 metres – the height that the trees grow to.

Here in the 'most bicycle-friendly city in America (2003)' new buildings are required to provide safe storage for cycles and showers for their riders. Thousands and thousands of people commute on 210 miles (350km) of bicycle paths year-round, even in sub-zero temperatures. And when it snows, the bike paths are ploughed and cleared before the roads.

Dr Spenser Havlick, Professor of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado, and Boulder City councillor, is one of two renowned American planners who visited New Zealand recently, on separate trips, to share their experiences of sustainable, transit oriented development. The other visitor was Peter Calthorpe from San Francisco, widely credited with 'founding' the new urbanism movement.

Dr Havlick says one of Boulder's goals is to reduce car dependency. This requires giving people viable alternatives. Choice, he says, is fundamental to a democratic society.

The city has been innovative in trying to find all the excuses for people not walking or taking the bus, and then provides solutions to eliminate the barriers. For example:

Excuse: "I don't want to have to walk six blocks to the bus stop."

Solution: The city put bike racks on 4000 local buses.

Excuse: "Sometimes I work late, until after the buses stop."

Solution: The 'Eco Pass' – for \$40-50 per year residents can get a pass that gives them unlimited access to free taxi rides after bus services have finished.

Excuse: The footpaths/cycle paths aren't

safe/pleasant enough to use.

Solutions: Contractors hired to grind/repair uneven footpaths. 'Splash barrier' between footpaths and roads. Separate bike paths that go through parks and by streams. Change of lane use to give cyclists more space and safer navigation. In-ground lights across pedestrian crossings to make them highly visible.

Boulder has introduced a colourful fleet of 24-seater buses to replace the large buses that were driving empty around the city. Each bus and route is distinctively painted and branded with a fun name. The first route introduced was called the 'Hop'. The next was the 'Skip'. Naturally, the 'Jump' was third, followed by the 'Route' the 'Dart', and the 'Stampede'. Passengers can take food on the bus and even take their favourite a tape or CD on board for the driver to play. The fun, attractive, cycle-friendly buses are now heavily used.

There are measures to control parking demand. Scaled fees means parking costs less if you car pool. City employees are even paid for not driving to work.

Dr Havlick says much of Boulder's ability to fund local transport initiatives is due to legislation that allows individual states or cities to charge targeted sales taxes – something that New Zealand's local authorities are not currently enabled to do. A 0.6% sales tax is ring-fenced specifically for local transport improvements. A further local sales tax of 0.1% secures \$12 million of public open space for Boulder's residents and its three million visitors each year. The city now has 100,000 acres of undeveloped wilderness at its doorstep.

"Every rose garden has its thorns," says Dr Havlick. "When you begin to restrict your growth, the land becomes dearer. So affordable housing is a real challenge." Therefore, 20-30% of all housing permits have to be for low income or affordable housing. The more affordable housing developers provide, the more density they are allowed.

Building permits are allocated on a points system. It encourages higher density along

transit corridors, and more points are also given for proximity to existing infrastructure, or initiatives such as providing residents with Eco-Passes. Dr Havlick also talked about Boulder's emphasis on trying to enhance the quality of people's lives by encouraging more physical activity (such as walking or biking) via transit-oriented development.

In a similar vein, Peter Calthorpe gave his audience a greater appreciation of some of the economic implications of transit-oriented development (TOD). He drew on case studies from a cross-section of American cities to illustrate how TOD creates a premium on developments (both commercial and residential) within an area, and attracts capital investment.

Dallas, Texas, a city where big cars, trucks and freeways appear to dominate, was one example. "When the 'Dallas Dart' light rail line was put in, all of a sudden it saw urban redevelopment in the downtown core, which had been 'hollowed out' by urban sprawl. Simultaneously it began to see suburban stations develop in pod-like forms," he explained. Since then, the city has seen premiums of 40% on residential properties and of 50% on businesses that are located within walking distance of transit. Similar premiums of between 20-53% have been seen across numerous other cities. "These are the kinds of numbers that make even the most cynical developers take notice and start reshaping their land acquisition maps," Mr Calthorpe said.

Two fundamental requirements for TOD are infrastructure investment and land use rezoning, which go hand-in-hand. "Unless you change the pattern of infrastructure investment you are not going to change the pattern of land use," Mr Calthorpe says.

Like many regions in America, Auckland is now starting to consider land zoning in relation to market segmentation and industry type. The urban development framework presented in the Auckland Regional Growth Strategy plans for development 'nodes' around

public transport hubs across Auckland.

Mr Calthorpe says that to initiate TOD most places require a catalytic infrastructure investment, which usually comes from the public sector. Various solutions are being found to funding challenges. For example, in Denver City in Colorado funded infrastructure investment for TOD in the old Stapleton International Airport area through a bond from the future tax and rating revenues of future residents and businesses.

TOD projects are shown to deliver a return on investment by attracting capital investment – on an ongoing basis. Once infrastructure investment starts to happen, one or two developments that see the potential for gain become early initiators with capital projects. Then others catch on in increasing numbers. These figures show capital investment in some TOD areas:

- Charlotte South Corridor (Sth Carolina) – \$400 million since planning started in 2000
- Boston Silver Line – \$450 million since planning started late 1990s
- Dallas Dart – \$1 billion since 1996
- Portland MAX, – \$3 billion since the late 1970s
- Washington DC Metro – \$15 billion since 1976.

Mr Calthorpe believes that TOD needs to be the framework of the next wave of development, and that fixed infrastructure is an essential ingredient (i.e. light rail and transit lines create more surety than bus routes, which can be easily changed, or removed). He emphasizes the importance of developing layers of infrastructure to provide people with choices. He says simply building more roads to relieve congestion is not the answer. "It has been shown over and over again – when you expand road networks you don't relieve congestion. You either generate enough sprawl to consume that resource and/or you just immediately release the delayed or deferred trips. Once the capacity is there it would be absolutely filled up."

TOD can contribute to significant reductions in car use, for example around 60 percent of trips to downtown San Francisco are not by single occupant vehicles. While it may not be possible to ever overcome congestion altogether, Mr Calthorpe says the best approach is to provide people with choices of transport modes and choices of living near transit.