Transit Area Designs and Funding Requirements

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Abstract

The effects of funding requirements on transit area designs are rarely examined. Moreover, few studies have looked at how a regional agency, such as the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), is supporting community revitalization, convenience and accessibility of transit use, and transit-focused developments. This report summarizes case studies of two transit-oriented redevelopment projects in the Bay Area, which are partially funding through one of MTCs recently developed programs, the Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) program. The first project is in West Oakland. The plan for this project is to revitalize the Acorn and Prescott neighborhoods, which are near the Acorn Shopping Plaza and in the West Oakland BART corridor. The second project is in Richmond. The plan there is to redevelop the Richmond BART/Amtrak station by constructing a Transit Village on the vacant lots and parking lots surrounding the station. Through interviews and data collection, I found that the TLC funding guidelines affected the West Oakland project design. However, in Richmond I learned that the Transit Village was planned independently from the TLC funding requirements. Evaluating a development incentive, like regional funding for local projects, is important in order to understand what regional transportation agencies can do to curb suburban sprawl and decrease private automobile use.

Introduction

Two of the problems facing California and the United States are lower public transit ridership and increasing amounts of sprawl. Transit ridership in the United States is lower than in many other developed countries, while automobile use in the United States is increasing (Pucher and Lefevre 1996). The country is using up supplies of oil to fuel Americans' dependency on individual vehicles. Developed nations are using up the world supply of gasoline, a non-renewable resource, which is increasing the cost of gasoline. The cost of gas in California is higher than the rest of the nation because of stricter air pollution regulations and a small supply of refineries that make the unique blend of reformulated gasoline that meets state requirements (Hamm 2000). Therefore, it is certainly beneficial for Californians to find alternative forms of transportation to meet some of their traveling needs.

The development of low-density residential units, which supports lower population densities, is a popular form of development known as suburban sprawl. If sprawl occurs on open space it is known as greenbelt development. Suburban sprawl leaves less land available for wilderness and farmlands, while increasing environmental degradation and traffic congestion (Durning 1996). With available land space decreasing and population increasing, more efficient uses of land are needed in order to decrease environmental degradation and automobile dependency. Transit-based developments are intended to reduce sprawl, air pollution, and congestion, while improving the communities near transit stations (Bernick and Freilich 1998). Redevelopment and enhancement projects are also encouraged because they improve the use of land and aesthetics in the inner city, while deterring sprawling developments.

Improvements to public transportation, including the areas surrounding transit stops, may increase transit ridership and decrease automobile-dependency. Transit oriented developments (TOD) are intended to reduce congestion, automobile use and associated trip lengths by increasing transit ridership and providing housing along transit lines. Research has shown that transit service is most effective when supported by development with the following five characteristics: (1) convenient transit access from residential to employment clusters on a regional scale, (2) transit stations with concentrations of residents and employees within half a mile, (3) mixed use development, (4) convenient and attractive access to and from stations, and (5) limitations on parking as an incentive to use transit

(Porter 1998). Cervero and Landis (1997) determined that coordination between land-use regulations and development incentives are necessary to expand future development to the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) corridors.

Bernick and Freilich (1998) evaluated how government agencies can work with the private sector to create transit-based developments. They determined that transit agencies have become more active in working with the private sector to implement measures designed to increase development near transit stations, which is believed will increase transit ridership. In the Bay Area, BART officials are partnering with local organizations to improve areas surrounding BART stations.

Vessali (1996) consolidated studies on land use impacts of rapid transit. He focused on property value, population and employment growth, and changes in land use. Vessali concluded that in order to create more efficient use of rapid transit, there should be more supportive local land use policies and a local demand for high-density development. With the limited land space in the Bay Area, high-density developments are the most efficient use of land regardless of transit availability.

This study explored how the designs of a transit improvement project, and its development process, are affected by the availability of funds for transit-oriented designs. Moreover, it examined how regional agencies are supporting community revitalization projects that aim to improve convenience and accessibility of transit use in a transit-focused environment. I have examined how a regional organization, like the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), help different types of local organizations, such as land use planners, city agencies, and non-profit organizations (NPO), enhance transit environments. I focused on two projects that were granted capital funding in the 1998-1999 fiscal year (FY) through MTC's Transportation for Livable Communities (TLC) program. Moreover, I have evaluated how influential the TLC program is in assisting the design of a project reach the stage of construction, and how the availability of funds has affected the development of the projects.

The MTC has jurisdiction over transportation related issues in the San Francisco Bay Area, and is located in Oakland, CA. Since early 1998, MTC's TLC program has provided monetary incentives for designers to create transportation-related projects to foster pedestrian and bicycle-friendly residential and employment locations (MTC 2000). Eligible projects

include pedestrian and bicycle improvements, bus shelters/bulbs, and landscaping on eligible roadway routes or transit projects. The TLC program allows a wide range of public agencies to sponsor or co-sponsor a project, like cities, counties, transit operators, and NPOs. Allowing NPOs to apply for federal transportation money for transportation enhancement projects is a relatively new incentive that motivates more people to be involved in projects that encourage sustainable land use designs.

TLC receives funding from a combination of federal financing programs: the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement Program (CMAQ) funds and Transportation Enhancement (Enhancements) Program funds (MTC 2000). These funds are available because of the Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21). TEA-21 is a federal funding source for transportation programs. Transit Enhancement programs, funded by TEA-21, are a set aside of 2% of urban transit money for projects that increase the attractiveness, safety and convenience of transit facilities (Blumenauer 1998).

The purpose of the TLC program is to support planning and capital projects that enhance the communities' identity and mobility (MTC 2000). To be considered, projects must result from a collaborative and inclusive planning process for community development or redevelopment activities. The TLC program addresses Porter's fourth criterion for more efficient transit service because it funds projects that create convenient and attractive access to and from transit stations. However, some projects that are funded by TLC are part of a larger redevelopment plan, and may address more then one of Porter's characteristics of efficient transit service.

Although the TLC program is new, the funding process is highly competitive because there are few programs that are similar in design in the Bay Area. In the 1998-1999 FY there were 88 sponsoring agencies that turned in applications for capital projects. Capital funding is money for developmental purposes. In the applications they requested a total of $22 million for new capital projects. However, the TLC program had a budget of $9 million for capital projects that fiscal year. Only 15 applicants from the 88 sponsoring agencies were granted capital funding for their projects (Hammon 2000, pers. comm.).

Even though the TLC program is only implemented in the Bay Area, it is attracting a lot of national attention (Frick 2000, pers. comm.). It is the only federal funding category of Metropolitan Transportation Organizations (MPO) that allows non-profit agencies to claim

money for transportation projects that will enhance community vitality (MTC 1999). Washington D.C. is planning to design a TLC program for their city (Frick 2000, pers. comm.). There is one national program that is similar to the TLC; it is the Livable Communities Initiative, which is a product of the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). The Livable Communities Initiative provides financial and planning support for linking land use and transit

The 15 projects that received capital grants in 1999 were either designed to improve accessibility to transit stations from specific developments, such as housing units, downtown areas or shopping centers, and community centers, or improve pedestrian and/or bicycle paths with little regard to the transit station area. My research focused on two projects that aimed to improve areas near transit and housing units in order to encourage safer and attractive public transportation station areas. These projects are in urban areas and, when completed, intend to decrease commuter time and suburban sprawl. The urban redevelopment projects are in the City of Oakland, and in the City of Richmond. The City of Oakland is sponsoring the redevelopment of the Acorn and Prescott neighborhoods. The West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee (WCCTAC) is sponsoring the Nevin walkway and plaza reconstruction in Richmond.

Methods

This project was designed to evaluate how the requirements for funding transit enhancement projects affect the design of new projects in redevelopment areas. Therefore, I investigated whether the local agencies are developing designs independent of the MTC's TLC program funding requirements or are tailoring projects to meet the requirements of the TLC program.

I conducted two case studies on TLC-funded projects: the Acorn and Prescott redevelopment project and the Nevin Walkway and Plaza project. By looking at documents pertaining to these projects and then conducting interviews with the contact person at the respective sponsoring and co-sponsoring agencies, I was able to obtain information on the developmental process. The interview questions that I developed were based on those used by the Transportation Research Board (1997) in their survey of transit staff and local community development official to determine the role of transit in creating livable

metropolitan communities. The actual questions posed varied among interviews, and depended on the project being addressed. The intentions of the questions were to investigate the development process of the project, and whether or not the project developed independent of the TLC program requirements.

For the Acorn-Prescott project in Oakland, I interviewed Laura Simpson, the housing development coordinator from the City of Oakland, Community & Economic Development Agency. For the Nevin Walkway and Plaza project, I interviewed Lisa Hammon from the West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee, and Alan Wolken from the City of Richmond, Richmond Redevelopment Agency. I asked similar questions in each of the interviews:

- What is the goal of the project?
- How has the TLC helped the larger project?
- Would the project be less successful without the aid of the transportation funding from the TLC?
- Would a TOD be planned if aspects of it weren't required for TLC funding?
- What influenced the development committee to pursue a TOD?
- If TLC denied your request for money, how would you fund the project, and do you think it would be at the stage it is at now?

By interviewing people from the sponsoring agencies that acquired capital funds from MTC, I was able to evaluate how the availability of funds has affected the development of the two projects. I interpreted results from the interviews into comprehensive statements that clearly explain the development process of the projects. I expected the developmental process of transit-focused design of the two projects to be slightly similar and highly influenced by the TLC funding requirements.

City of Oakland Case Study

Site Background The Acorn-Prescott Neighborhood Transportation Plan Improvement in West Oakland is sponsored by the City of Oakland Community & Economic Development Agency (CEDA), and co-sponsored by East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation (EBALDC) (CEDA 1999). The redevelopment project in the lower West Oakland area is

intended to benefit residents in the Acorn and Prescott neighborhoods, which is located on 8th Street from Market Street to the West Oakland BART AC Transit hub on Mandela Parkway.

This part of West Oakland is one of the poorest and underserved communities in the City of Oakland. The median income for the residents in the Acorn and Prescott area was low in comparison to the residents in the entire City of Oakland (Simpson 2000, pers.comm). According to the 1990 census, the Acorn and Prescott area residents had a median income of about $9,000 per year, while the median income for residents in the City of Oakland was $27,095 per year (Geostat 2000, web site). Currently, this area lacks local transit-related improvements that promote alternatives to auto transit such as walking, biking, or using AC Transit or BART. Moreover, the neighborhood lacks the amenities that would create a safer environment near transit station areas such as street plantings, trees, lighting, and attractive landscaping.

Proposal Development The City of Oakland redevelopment staff was informed about MTC's TLC program when they were working with HUD on redeveloping large apartment complexes called Acorn (Simpson 2000, pers.comm.). Since grant money was available for the types of improvements that interested the people involved with improving the Acorn apartments, they saw a rare opportunity to improve the Acorn and Prescott neighborhoods. Funds were already being invested in the Acorn area by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and BRIDGE West Oakland Housing Inc. towards the rehabilitation of about 300 apartments in the Acorn housing project. The staff decided to continue improving this one area instead of various pieces of the city of Oakland.

The West Oakland Transportation Steering Committee was formed to access the funds for transportation improvements in the Acorn and Prescott neighborhoods (Simpson 2000, pers.comm.). The Steering Committee included representatives from the MTC, the City of Oakland, BART, AC Transit, and nonprofit developers such as East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, BRIDGE West Oakland Housing, Inc., and Oakland Community Housing, Inc.. Moreover, community based organizations and local residences such as the West Oakland Commerce Association, West Oakland District Council, and the Acorn Resident Council took part in the planning process. The steering committee met every other month. After the committee was formed, the project was able to move forward. The committee guided the entire project by selecting the consultant for the plan and prioritizing

the projects in the plan; therefore, they were able to apply for funding. The money they have received so far is for capital and enhancement projects, such as streetscape improvements. However, the steering committee wants to do more than enhancement projects; they want to establish shuttle service and improve the service of AC Transit for this community.

The TLC funding helped the overall redevelopment project for the Acorn and Prescott neighborhood because, in the previous fiscal year, it provided money for a planning grant that was used to design the whole redevelopment plan. At that time, the TLC provided the initial grant for the construction of the streetscape on 8th Street. Karen Frick, who designed the TLC program, was very helpful in the development of the project. She participated in the community planning process, and in the selection of the consultants who created the redevelopment plan (Simpson 2000, pers.comm.).

If TLC denied their request for money, pieces of the project might have been funded out of the Public Works Capital Improvements project list (Simpson 2000, pers.comm.). This is a list that is compiled every two years for different infrastructure projects; however, there are not enough funds to go around. The project would have been less successful without the aid of the funding from the TLC, and the planning process of the steering committee, because the process would have been a lot slower. Simpson (2000, pers.comm.) does not believe it would be at the developmental stage it is at now if TLC didn't help with the planning and capital grants.

Project Description In accordance with the TLC funding application, the purpose of the Acorn-Prescott project is to provide streetscape improvements that will better connect residents to the following areas: the neighborhood shopping center, the West Oakland BART/AC Transit hub, downtown Oakland, and new/renovated housing developments (City of Oakland CEDA 1999). The entire plan consists of twelve projects. In 1999, the sponsoring agencies applied for funding from the TLC program for four of the twelve projects, but only received enough money to begin three projects. The three projects are: a pedestrian crossing at 8th and Market Streets at the Acorn Plaza Shopping Center, pedestrian streetscape improvements for a main walking link at 8th Street along the Acorn Community, and the creation of pedestrian crossings and a pedestrian plaza at the 8th Street and Adeline Intersection. These projects are projected to increase safety and walkability because they improve the aesthetics of public spaces, which increase pedestrian use.

The goals of the projects currently being funded by the TLC program are safety improvements, visual impact, neighborhood identity and the creation of a physical environment (Simpson 2000, pers.comm.). The three goals for the larger neighborhood redevelopment project are to improve the streetscape, create a local shuttle services and improve AC transit in the area.

City of Richmond Case Study

Site Background The Nevin Walkway and Plaza project at the Richmond Transit Village is sponsored by the West Contra Costa Transportation Advisory Committee (WCCTAC) and co-sponsored by the City of Richmond, Richmond Redevelopment Agency. The redevelopment project is located around the Richmond BART station, within the Iron Triangle. The Iron Triangle is a part of Richmond that is surrounded by two sets of railroad tracks and Interstate 580. The Richmond BART station is the only location where Amtrak and BART stop at the same location. The area is most known for its past crime and drug problems, its dilapidated buildings, and its vacant lots (Masten 2000). Near the Richmond BART station are small vacant plots of land that are being incorporated into a Transit Village design. A Transit Village is defined as a compact, mixed-use community that surrounds a transit station (Bernick and Freilich 1998). By design it invites residents, workers, and shoppers to drive less and ride mass transit more. Ideally a transit village extends a quarter mile from the transit station.

The design of the Richmond Transit Village (RTV) fits Bernick's definition because it is on a 16-acre plot of land surrounding the Richmond BART and Amtrak stations. In the mid-1990s the Richmond Redevelopment Agency envisioned over one hundred for-sale housing units, a regional arts facility, and several small shops for residents and commuters (Bernick and Freilich 1998). That vision may become a reality as funding for the construction of the project is almost complete.

Proposal Development The Richmond Transit Village would still be planned even if aspects of it weren't required for TLC funding. According to Lisa Hammon (2000, pers. comm.) from WCCTAC, there was already a lot of political will to do a transit-oriented development. The area surrounding the Richmond BART and Amtrak station is considered an optimal area because BART and the Redevelopment Agency own the 16-acre parcel. The

land was available, no one would be displaced, and aside from the train lines, parking lots are the only thing existing. Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is a popular planning idea, so the WCCTAC decided to pursue a Transit Village design.

The Richmond Transit Village would have been slightly less successful without the aid of the transportation funding from the TLC. If they didn't receive the grant for the Nevin walkway and plaza, then the construction of the station building would have been delayed. The WCCTAC gained state funds for the walkway and plaza. However, when they got the TLC grant for the walkway and plaza, they decided to use the state money towards the station building. If they didn't get the TLC grant, the station building would have suffered in the long run because of delays due to the lack of funding. They would have had to put in more funding applications. However, they are still applying for money because the station building still needs more funds in order for construction to begin.

Project Description The Richmond Transit Village is designed to encourage walking, bicycling, regional and inter-city transit systems (BART, Amtrak, bus transit), while adding more retail shops, residential housing, and a regional cultural/educational facility near the BART/Amtrak stations (WCCTAC 1999a). The goal of the project is to increase transit ridership (BART, Bus, Amtrak), improve safety, and provide vitality to the station (Hammon 2000, pers.comm.). WCCTAC is in charge of the transportation-related portions of the Richmond Transit Village development, while the Redevelopment Agency oversees the remaining portions. The transportation-related development will occur in three phases: the first phase is the Center Platform; the second phase is the Nevin Walkway and plaza; and the third and final stage will be the Station building.

The Center Platform will be placed between the two Amtrak passenger rail tracks so that Amtrak passengers will not have to cross live tracks at any time (Wolken 2000, pers.comm.). The center platform will also take passengers down to the BART station and then out of the station.

The Nevin Walkway/Plaza project, which is partially funded by the TLC program, will construct a new pedestrian plaza on the west side of the Richmond BART/Amtrak Station (WCCTAC 1999a). Currently, the walkway on Nevin Avenue is a ramp that descends at about a 20% grade into the BART station, and then an escalator or stairwell takes passengers up to BART. Therefore, the walkway is perceived as unsafe (Hammon 2000, pers.comm.).

By improving the lighting, adding more elevators and stairwells, and raising the pathway to grade level—so everything will be at the same elevation—the new walkway and plaza are expected to create a safer environment for transit riders. Moreover, it is expected to increase the marketability of housing and retail in the area, and increase the activity along the pedestrian walkway.

The last phase of the project is the construction of a station building with restrooms. This improvement is needed because, aside from small BART signs, there is nothing to clearly identify the station. The station building will have a vertical clock tower to let people know that the station is there.

Discussion

This study determined whether the requirements for funding transit enhancement projects affected the design of new projects in two redevelopment areas. I discovered that the two case studies had two opposite results. The design of the Acorn and Prescott project was significantly influenced by the availability of TLC funds and the requirements necessary to obtain them; whereas, the Richmond Nevin walkway and plaza was not influenced. Overall, the TLC program was very beneficial in assisting both projects proceed to revitalize the area.

Oakland formed a committee based on the TLC program opportunities. The lead agencies saw the funding and decided that this was definitely an opportunity to take advantage of. Therefore, the steering committee chose to enhance the neighborhood transportation corridor partially because of the TLC funding requirements. The other motive for enhancing this neighborhood was because HUD and BRIDGE West Oakland Housing Inc. were already revitalizing some of the housing in the neighborhood. Because of the availability of funds for transit enhancement projects, the lead agencies were motivated to improve the Acorn and Prescott neighborhoods in the West Oakland BART corridor. This project is benefiting from MTC's TLC program because, without the program, the project would not be at the developmental stage it is at now.

This type of program may be one incentive for developers to design more transit-friendly designs, which would allow more people to create and fund projects that would benefit transit riders. Cervero and Landis (1997) suggested that development incentives are necessary in order to expand future development to BART corridors, and from looking at the

case study on the neighborhood redevelopment project in West Oakland, I believe this is a correct conclusion. There is a need for more development in BART corridors, or other transit corridors, so that the area feels safer and ridership increases. Therefore, determining incentives for transit-based developments would identify the conditions necessary to motivate planners to expand redevelopment improvement projects for transit corridors.

The Richmond area planned its project independently from the TLC program requirements, partially, because the area was planned to accommodate a transit village several years before the TLC program existed. In 1992, discussion for revitalizing the Richmond BART/Amtrak/Bus Transit station began, and by 1996 planning for a transit village was established; whereas, the TLC program was formed in 1998.

The Richmond multimodal station is a prime location for a transit village. Private development firms need not require land assembly and there was no neighborhood opposition to new multi-family housing. At the same time, the station area has real and perceived problems of public safety that needed to be improved because the downtown, for over twenty years, has not been a strong market for residential or retail development (Bernick and Freilich 1998). When completed, the Richmond Transit Village should be successful. The overall project design addresses four of Porter's (1998) characteristics for effective transit service. The transit station will have a medium concentration of residents/employees within half a mile from the station, and the station area will be a mixed-use development. Moreover, in terms of limiting parking, the RTV proposes to create a five-story parking structure to accommodate the increase in commuters using public transit at the multimodal station. The average daily transit ridership, at the RTV, is expected to increase by fifteen percent once the improvements are complete (WCCTAC 1999b). The intention is that passengers could use a commute alternative at the Richmond Intermodal Station instead of driving alone, causing traffic congestion, and air quality problems.

These case studies show that fund requirements can affect local planning if the circumstances are favorable. The case studies are a foundation to understanding when funding requirements affect project designs. For instance, if there are already ties established to the area, then it is more likely that various groups of people will come together to plan an enhancement project. If the area appears unsafe and funds are available to improve the area, then enhancement projects are more likely to be planned.

This type of study is important because if we are going to improve land usage, then we need to understand what will motivate planners and developers to create more multimodal, mixed use, and/or high-density developments. This study has a narrow scope, so the results of the case studies cannot be extrapolated effectively as an overall judgment. Further studies will be needed to better understand the impact fund availability has on potential projects. One future study could be similar to my study, except there would be more transit-friendly projects to evaluate. If the larger study concludes that funding requirements that encourage enhancement projects near transit stations are motivating more organizations to develop more environmental, ecological, and economical programs and projects, then, over time, land may be developed more efficiently. A follow-up study surveying local planners to find out if monetary incentives are sufficient in encouraging designs for more efficient land use, while learning new incentives for better development designs, would also be beneficial research. Discovering what can be done to efficiently improve land already in use is one approach to mediating sprawling developments; moreover, improving the areas near public transit stations is another approach to decrease automobile use. Sprawling developments and excessive automobile use needs to decrease in order to be more environmentally conscience in our land use decisions.

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