



# Transit and Development: The Transit Space Race & TOD Planning in St. Paul

Part 1 of 4

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Although Bottineau Boulevard has been considered a potential transit corridor for two decades, competition for federal funding has more recently increased – as well as the standards for transit oriented development. The current Bottineau Transitway Alternatives Analysis is the first step in the Federal Transit Administration’s New Starts funding process, but Bottineau and the Twin Cities are not alone. Cities from Denver to Charlotte are expanding their transit systems rapidly with light rail, bus rapid transit and streetcars. In all of these cities, the most successful transit lines are the product of integrated transit and development planning by public and private entities.

## The Transit Space Race

The “Transit Space Race,” a phrase coined by transit research institute Reconnecting America, describes the competition between cities for federal transportation funding. Thirty-five cities in the U.S. are planning to expand their transit systems with at least \$1 billion of new investment in fixed guideway transit lines – heavy rail, light rail (LRT), commuter rail, streetcar or dedicated busway (BRT), for a total of almost \$250 billion – yet the federal government spends about \$1.6 billion per year on transit. As Jeff Wood of Reconnecting America describes, “The enormous demand for little Federal money has manifested itself with a bit of playful competition between cities building transit – such as Salt Lake City saying they are going to out-Portland Portland.”

Many of these cities have relatively new transit systems. A quick survey of light rail systems finds that the first light rail line to open in Denver was in 1994; Salt Lake City proceeded in 1999; Houston and the Twin Cities started in 2004 and Charlotte followed in 2007. The watershed event of the Transit Space



An intersection of light rail lines in downtown Denver.

Race: the 2004 passage of Fastracks in Denver. “Voters in the Denver region approved a sales tax to build a whole transit network all at once,” Wood notes, “With the lack of money and locals having to raise funds themselves to compete, we thought of the relationship between the space race to the moon and today’s growth in livable communities and transit – both are major feats that require ingenuity and human capital.” Hence the Transit Space Race: who can build the best transit and transit oriented development, while competing for scarce funding.

Cities with at least \$1 Billion in new fixed guideway investment planned:

1.	Los Angeles	\$17.9
2.	Boston	\$17.2
3.	Seattle	\$16.3
4.	Atlanta	\$16.0
5.	San Francisco	\$13.4
6.	New York	\$12.2
7.	Baltimore	\$12.1
8.	Dallas/Fort Worth	\$11.6
9.	Miami	\$10.5
10.	Detroit	\$10.3
11.	Pittsburg	\$9.5
12.	New Jersey	\$8.9
13.	Portland	\$7.6
14.	Denver	\$6.1
15.	Chicago	\$5.7
16.	Washington DC	\$5.6
17.	Houston	\$5.2
18.	Cincinnati	\$5.1
19.	St. Louis	\$5.0
20.	Philadelphia	\$4.7
21.	Salt Lake City	\$4.6
22.	Raleigh Durham	\$4.2
23.	Little Rock	\$3.7
24.	Honolulu	\$3.7
25.	Mpls/St. Paul	\$3.4
26.	San Diego	\$3.4
27.	Phoenix	\$2.6
28.	Charlotte	\$2.5
29.	Orlando	\$2.3
30.	Cleveland	\$1.7
31.	Louisville	\$1.4
32.	Sacramento	\$1.4
33.	Austin	\$1.3
34.	Norfolk	\$1.1
35.	Buffalo	\$1.0

Primary sources included MPO long range plans, transit agency plans and project documents, information from local officials and information from local newspapers. This is a snapshot in time, cost estimates can change regularly.

Source: *Jumpstarting the Transit Space Race*, Reconnecting America

Although the transit line is the purview of transit agencies, other key players including policymakers, planners and developers in many cities are maximizing their investments in transit with transit oriented development in the area surrounding the station.

### TOD and DOT

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) – compact, walkable, mixed-use communities – can and should be built around transit stations. As new transit lines are planned, many people anticipate that new development will follow, but TOD does not happen automatically. Rather, TOD is a product of substantial planning and programmatic efforts by public and private stakeholders, as the results from other regions testify.

Development Oriented Transit (DOT) takes the opposite approach, considering how the design of a transit system can spur high density mixed-use walkable development. DOT is how the transit systems of the past were developed – build the transit first to provide better access to developable land, then follow with a new neighborhood around the transit line. One way to accomplish DOT would be to match future transit lines to current and future employment centers. Another way would be to create a destination retail center that includes high density residential within walking distance of the station. Either way, such an approach helps to ensure that a future transit line has multiple destinations along the route.

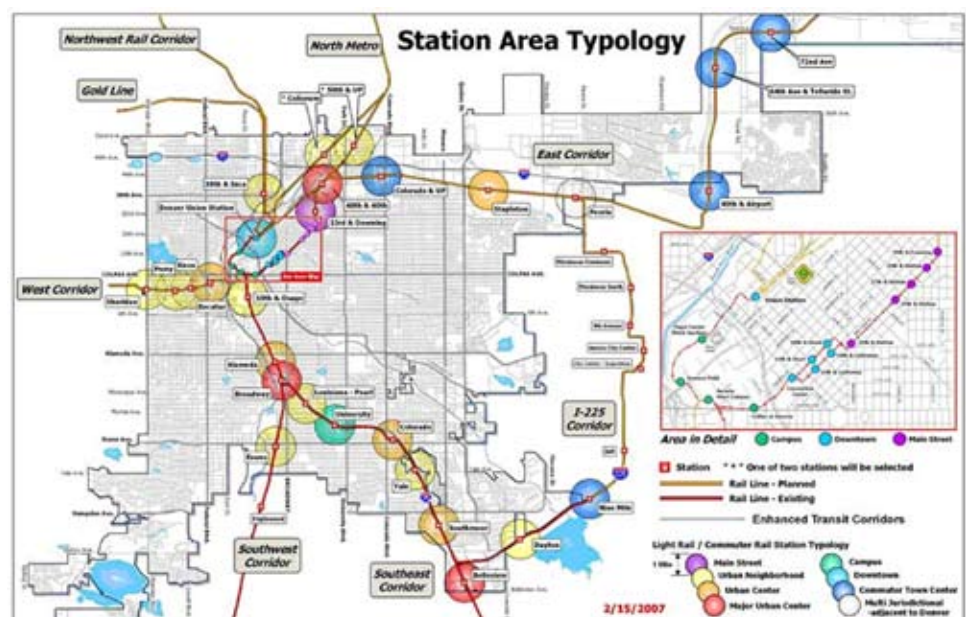
### From Station Area Typology to Station Area Planning

Whether conceived as TOD or DOT, Station Area Typology and Station Area Planning are becoming common features in the planning process. Station Area Typology is a tool Charlotte and other cities are using to organize transit planning efforts at the regional level. Station Area Planning takes a close look at each station area to identify the future character of the area around the station, usually covering a ½ mile around the station.

### Station Area Typology

Station Area Typologies should begin with a whole regional look at first that narrows down where future growth is going to be. “You can do any type of TOD plan, but unless there is a want and a market, it will just sit on the shelf. A regional or corridor typology can help determine where the best places are for initial planning and infrastructure investment as well as how land uses interact with each other,” Wood expresses. “We’ve found that on a corridor, if there is effective transit service, certain stations have the market for certain functions – more commercial, more office or even primarily residential.” There is no need for every station to have a uniformly even mix of uses. Instead, the transit improvement can tie a variety of places together that achieves the best mix of uses at each station area.

Station Area Typology works by identifying a “type” for each station, such as a regional center, suburban center, transit town center, urban neighborhood or special use district. By identifying the station area type, it



A Regional Plan for Station Area Typology in Denver.  
Source: <http://www.denvergov.org/TOD/StationTypology/tabid/395260/Default.aspx>

is easier to understand what to expect for the station area's future character, role and function. Some stations will be in established neighborhoods that will see incremental growth, while others will experience rapid growth. Station Area Typologies can differ by region or by corridor, yet these typologies are a useful way to speed the planning process and improve the quality of TOD plans.

### Station Area Planning

While Station Area Typology identifies the type of station and its relationship to the regional context, the Station Area Plans specify the potential land use change around a particular station. Similar to small area plans, Station Area Plans often consider the future development opportunities, public realm enhancements, built form and street improvements. Many cities try to time their station area planning process so it occurs parallel to the planning and design for transit line.

What do effective station area plans have in common? Effective Station Area Planning typically:

- is closely **coordinated with transit planning** to minimize incompatible uses;
- identifies and **completes rezoning** to transit-friendly zoning districts;
- specifies needed **infrastructure improvements**, often with new standards;
- and frequently employs a **TOD response team** of local government staff to help developers with new regulations.

The organization of the station area planning process – the agencies, programs and funding – often differs to align best with the resources of each region. The cases of Denver, Portland, Austin, Charlotte and St. Paul highlight effective station area planning strategies that can help TOD become a reality.

### ST. PAUL

St. Paul has invested extensively in TOD planning and produced excellent work. The Central Corridor line, connecting the downtowns of Minneapolis and St. Paul, is anticipated to open in 2014. It is expected to start final engineering in March and is completing the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

#### A Policy Framework

St. Paul's Central Corridor Development Strategy, the first part of the planning process, is the overarching framework for four themes: land use, built form, public realm and movement. The second part of planning process has been the creation of seven Station Area Plans which address the four themes on a localized level. The Development Strategy was created during the draft EIS process when the alignment was chosen and general locations for the platforms were determined. The Station Area Plans were developed during preliminary engineering, occurring over the last year and a half. St. Paul sought and received over \$1.5 million from foundations to complete the Station Area Plans.



Quality public space in downtown St. Paul was a result of the St. Paul on Mississippi Development Framework, a plan completed in 1997 that has served as the guiding document for reinvestment in downtown St. Paul and has been supported by the non-profit St. Paul Riverfront Corporation. The St. Paul Design Center is a program of the St. Paul Riverfront Corporation.

Although the timing of the plans allowed them to be integrated into the transit design, the fast pace had its downside. As City of St. Paul planner Lucy Thompson observes, “We wanted to do the planning work to inform the EIS which it did, but doing seven [plans] at a time was a lot of work – we could have worked 18 hours a day on them. Although the pace was tough, we wanted to be relevant to the preliminary

engineering process. Overall the Station Area Planning process was really good with a lot of community involvement.”

The community response was generally positive, but varied by location. The Development Strategy addressed sensitivity to gentrification and change, a major community concern, by delineating areas of change and areas of stability. These boundaries clearly identify where development should be focused. The areas of change are larger toward the western part of St. Paul, where more development opportunities are located. Toward the east near downtown, the neighborhoods are already strong and well-maintained; the Station Areas Plans endeavor to protect the historic buildings and character of those areas. As Thompson explains, “When we were drawing a line [between areas of change and stability], the neighborhood became more comfortable with higher density in a limited area.” Another response to community concerns generated recommendations for appropriate transitions from new development down to the lower density neighborhood areas.

### Ready for Implementation

The Central Corridor Overlay District has provided interim zoning prior to the adoption of new zoning. In 2009, the City will consider creating a new zoning district, Traditional Neighborhood 4 (TN4), to allow for greater density beyond the current traditional neighborhood districts (TN1, TN2 and TN3). While the overlay district tries to prevent anti-TOD development, the future TN4 district will ensure that higher densities, lower parking standards and appropriate building design featured in the Station Area Plans can be completed legally.

St. Paul has also committed expertise to provide ongoing TOD review. Recently established, the Central Corridor Design Center is similar to the St. Paul Downtown Design Center and shares the same goals: visioning, outreach, design review and tools & implementation. Since most of the visioning has occurred through the Station Area Plans, the Central Corridor Design Center will focus primarily on site planning review to ensure that development follows the overall vision.

The Center for Transit Oriented Development (CTOD), a program of Reconnecting America and Strategic Economics, evaluated the Station Area Plans and offered advice on the financial feasibility of several land use scenarios. While they noted that the site plans are very aggressive – higher density than the market could realistically build in the short-term especially in light of the recent real estate market downturn – CTOD concludes that the plans may be achievable in the long-term.

### The New Starts Application

The development strategy, station area planning and zoning were all used in the Central Corridor New Starts application. These items contributed to the “Land Use” section of the New Starts application, which is one of five categories in the New Starts Project Justification Rating. “The New Starts land use work was extensive – it all had to be reported [to the FTA] and then updated yearly. The FTA wants to see that you are setting the stage for TOD.” Thompson explains. “The FTA representative who came to St. Paul was very impressed by the level of planning for TOD we are doing here in St. Paul.”



The Rondo Library in St. Paul was recently built at the corner of University and Dale, above.

Source: [www.flickr.com](http://www.flickr.com)

Similar residential development has occurred near downtown St. Paul, below.

