

Executive Summary

Investing in Tomorrow's Transportation Today:
**Coordinating Investments
with Development Patterns**

**Livable Communities Coalition
Research for the
Georgia Regional Transportation Authority**

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About this Report

In 2008, Governor Perdue's Investing in Tomorrow's Transportation Today (IT³) plan demonstrated a fundamentally new, more effective way to spend transportation money. One of the key strategies suggested by IT³ was to increase the density and mix of uses in job centers, addressing jobs/housing ratios and supporting that growth with appropriate multi-modal connective transportation infrastructure.

This can be accomplished on both the local and state levels, ideally in a coordinated and complementary manner. But getting these results raises a number of key questions:

1. How much does housing density in those centers have to increase to make an impact?
2. What might be the attributes of these new, denser environments?
3. What would they look and feel like?
4. Which residential markets – owned and rental – might new development serve, and does the market demand already exist? What mix of housing – types and prices – will be needed?
5. Will existing zoning codes help or hinder such development?

To answer these questions and contribute concepts for the Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan, the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority (GRTA) asked the Livable Communities Coalition to produce a body of research that would demonstrate a range of housing densities in 10 job centers and describe demographics, attributes, and zoning for these 10 centers and other places to capture best practices that might be implemented in metro Atlanta. Research began in May 2009 and concluded in August 2009. This document is the final and complete report of findings from that research.

Although the work was completed in August 2009, a sampling of results from the research was presented to the GRTA Land Development Committee on November 10, 2009. On December 31, 2009, the draft Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan was released – concluding the work that began as the Governor's Investing in Tomorrow's Transportation Today (IT³) initiative.

What the Coalition Produced

The Coalition's report had three components:

1. Research on housing density in the following 10 job centers: Arlington, County, VA in the mid-Atlantic, Charlotte and Tampa in the south, Chicago and Minneapolis in the Midwest, Denver in the mountain west, and Bellevue, WA, Seattle, WA, San Francisco, CA, and Pasadena, CA in the west.
2. Best practice policies from the 10 job centers, and
3. Policy interventions for integrating transportation investments with development patterns from other locations and from other sources.

Summary of Findings

1) Housing density:

Housing density was measured for the one mile and half mile radius around the center of each job center. The least dense job center was Tampa at 2.5 units per acre average for the one mile radius. The most dense job center was San Francisco at 36.5 units per acre average for the one mile radius. The same city pair also demonstrated the extreme densities for the half mile radius with Tampa at 1.4 units per acre average and San Francisco at 65.3 units per acre average. The median density for the one mile radius 10 cities was 9.5 units per acre average. The following density measures were found for the one mile radius around each job center:

- Arlington (County), Virginia: 12.3 units per acre
- Bellevue, Washington: 5.2 units per acre
- Charlotte, North Carolina: 3 units per acre
- Chicago, Illinois: 12 units per acre
- Denver, Colorado: 6 units per acre
- Minneapolis, Minnesota: 9.5 units per acre
- Pasadena, California: 8.7 units per acre
- San Francisco, California: 36.5 units per acre
- Seattle, Washington: 18.5 units per acre
- Tampa, Florida: 2.5 units per acre.

2) Best practice polices:

The research resulted in a number of best practice policies. They occur on state, regional, and local levels, and are included in the report due to their key impact on the shape of the job center. Here are some of the most important findings from the job centers:

Arlington (County), Virginia

- The County developed a unified vision for what the rail corridor would be like and where it would be located. Through adherence to the plan over more than 30 years, the local government realized the vision that fixed rail transit investments and effective land development planning can facilitate mixed use development.
- Specific planning tools were introduced and implemented in the rail corridor. Some of the key tools included:
 - Limits on parking in mixed use areas along the rail corridor
 - Special permit process to obtain desired objectives from private sector development
 - Density bonuses to achieve dense development along the rail corridor
 - Required ground level retail
 - Required residential development in concurrence with office development
- Virginia supports a portion of METRO rail and bus transit services, which are critically important to the study area job center (in 2009, the figure was some percentage of \$760.3 million).

Bellevue, Washington

- Bellevue set a course in the 1980s to create a mixed-use, people-friendly, urban place in downtown through its zoning.
- Bellevue developed leading-edge transportation demand management programs (incentives for transit, ridesharing programs, etc.) to reduce auto dependence.

Charlotte, North Carolina

- NCDOT has worked with the city/county since the late 1980s to acquire and assemble land near the future multi-modal/intercity transit hub station.
- The city and transit agency work together to plan land use, transit, and affordable housing.

Denver, Colorado

- FastTracks, a 12-year comprehensive plan for regional transit that will add 57 new transit stations and 122 miles of light and commuter rail.
- Denver has a citywide Transit Oriented Development strategic plan (2006) that sets out a regional vision for the function, form, and value of its expanded transit system and stations.
- The transit authority has been aggressive about acquiring land adjacent to station areas for future affordable housing/mixed use development.

South Minneapolis, Minnesota

- Redevelopment of neglected and distressed neighborhoods in South Minneapolis was catalyzed by public/private partnerships, non-profit developers and CDCs, and the needs of large private landowners.
- Light rail line runs through major destinations and job centers (such as downtown, airport, and Mall of America), which has resulted in ridership levels that have already exceeded 2025 projections and housing units built that have exceeded 2020 projections.

Seattle, Washington

- Flexibility in the downtown zoning ordinance can support policy objectives and maintain steady growth at the same time. Permit applicants, developers and their design teams have a wide set of choices (height limits, materials, public space, etc.) to meet the overall goals for developing the city.
- Washington supports a portion of the light rail system that now serves downtown Seattle.

3) Policy interventions:

The policy interventions research resulted in a non-prioritized inventory of available options to encourage housing near job centers and improved livability through a balance of development patterns and transportation investment. More than 35 policy options were identified in the final report. Highlights of the list include the following:

- Adopt specific criteria to assist in project selection.
- Increase public transportation funding and leadership:
 - Support new and flexible funding.
 - Include operations and maintenance in transit funding.
 - Create division-level transit capacity at the Department of Transportation (DOT).
- Create incentives for efficient planning and development:
 - Create a state program modeled after Livable Centers Initiative (LCI).
 - Direct transit investments to areas with supportive land use practices and regulations.
 - Create incentives for local transit-oriented development planning.
- Develop appropriate street standards:
 - Gain a commitment by GDOT to revise, adopt, and apply urban street standards.
 - Revise the standards in collaboration with Community Improvement Districts (CIDs), LCI communities, and local government.

- Tailor the standards for urban, suburban, and rural settings.
- Incorporate “complete street” principles.
- Create an appropriate regional funding source for transportation:
 - Acknowledge that the common thread throughout the most successful employment centers studied is that city/counties were able to tax themselves to implement transportation improvements.
 - Provide legislative authority to counties within the Atlanta region to tax themselves as a region and/or individually.

For More Information

The complete report consists of density maps, in-depth job center research findings, and policy options for integrating transportation investments with development patterns. The complete version will be available at www.LivableCommunitiesCoalition.org as a PDF.