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INTRODUCTION

The city of Los Angeles has a first-class system of public transportation, operated by the Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (Metro). While Metro’s many bus lines are a crucial part of its service, the backbone of Metro’s system is its rail and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) lines. These lines provide frequent, rapid service that connects from Los Angeles’ center to many different outlying neighborhoods.

The station areas around each of Los Angeles’ rail and BRT stations—typically defined as the land within a half-mile radius of the station—are ideal places to leverage Metro’s investment in its transit infrastructure. By encouraging new transit-oriented development (TOD) in these station areas, the City is already helping to provide new housing and jobs for Los Angeles’ residents. The City is also encouraging the rehabilitation of existing buildings, helping to retain the homes and jobs that already exist. In addition, the City is undertaking its own development projects on City-owned land to catalyze change.

To further these efforts, the City is working to create Sustainable Transit Communities (STCs) around its rail and BRT stations. An STC is a walkable neighborhood that takes advantage of its proximity to a major transit station. While it may include single-family neighborhoods, it also provides higher-density, mixed-use development near the transit station, encouraging transit ridership and a reduction in private automobile use. Ideally, an STC provides job opportunities as well as places to live.

As part of his 2008 Housing That Works plan—a five-year, $5 billion housing plan for the City of Los Angeles—Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced a goal of creating 20 new STCs. As of 2010, the City has already created plans to transform 10 station areas into STCs, and it is preparing to plan for 10 more.

This report describes the key principles for creating successful STCs. These principles will be incorporated into future planning efforts. Many of these principles can be implemented by the City through public improvements. Others will require cooperation from private developers as they construct new buildings and rehabilitate Los Angeles’ existing stock of buildings. In some cases, public/private partnerships may be the most effective way to translate these principles into successful, thriving STCs.

In addition, this report explains how Los Angeles’ station areas can be classified into different “place types,” which provide a further aid to planning for STCs. The report also describes how to create truly balanced STCs that include a mix of housing and employment-generating uses, such as offices and cleantech enterprises.
This Framework of Sustainable Transit Communities identifies the qualities that ideally would be present in every Sustainable Transit Community (STC). When an STC has all of these qualities, it becomes a vibrant, thriving place with a strong local economy, encouraging further investment by private landowners and developers.

Some of Los Angeles’ Metro station areas have many of these qualities today. Others will need public and private investment to improve their existing land uses, streets, and built fabric. In either case, the principles in this Framework can serve as a guide for transforming Metro station areas into STCs.

A more detailed version of this Framework is available separately as a technical memorandum. The detailed version includes a tool for rating the quality of station areas based on the Framework. This tool provides a convenient way to compare station areas to one another, so the City can prioritize its investments as it works to create STCs.
A Sustainable Transit Community needs to include a diverse mix of land uses that provide the types of housing, employment, goods, and services that people rely upon in their daily lives. Having access to a diverse mix of uses helps create a vibrant community and healthy local economy.

**HOUSING**

Housing is an essential component of a Sustainable Transit Community. When people live within walking distance of a transit station, they have a strong incentive to use public transit for at least some of their trips. They also create activity in the station area in the evening, after many workers have gone home.

An ideal STC would have a variety of housing types, such as townhomes, apartments, condominiums, and potentially even single-family homes. In addition, the housing should be affordable for the people living in the area. While housing affordability is an issue throughout Los Angeles, many station areas present an opportunity to develop affordable housing in a place where residents would have access to transit and other services.

Housing in an STC may take many forms. It can include a mix of residential densities, as seen in the area surrounding the Pico/Aliso station, on the Gold Line Extension. It can even include high-density residential towers in some places, such as those found near the Hollywood/Vine station on the Red Line.
EVERYDAY USES

A Sustainable Transit Community needs access to everyday uses—the places where workers and residents go shopping, eat a meal, attend school, play outdoors, or run errands. These uses are part of the backbone of a healthy STC.

The quality of these everyday uses is also important. For example, rather than being dominated by convenience stores and fast-food restaurants, STCs should contain a wide variety of food choices, including access to healthier options such as grocery stores and farmers’ markets. These uses can be accommodated even in a highly urban environment. For example, grocery stores are located within a short walk of the Hollywood/Vine station on the Red Line and the 7th Street/Metro Center station on the Red, Blue, and Expo lines.

The Crenshaw station on the Expo Line is an example of a lower-density station area that has a large grocery store and other everyday uses within walking distance of the station.

top left Drugstore near the 7th Street/Metro Center station
top right Produce market near the Highland Park station
right Grocery Store near the 7th Street/Metro Center Station
ATTRACTIONS

Local and regional attractions, ranging from movie theaters to amusement parks, can help to create activity and economic vibrancy in a Sustainable Transit Community. Although most station areas do not include large regional attractions, many contain smaller attractions where people can enjoy local events and activities.

The Walt Disney Concert Hall, accessible from the Civic Center station on the Red and Purple Lines, is an example of a large regional attraction that brings people from throughout the Los Angeles area. Another major regional attraction is the Kodak Theatre, which is adjacent to the Hollywood/Highland station on the Red Line.

Local attractions can be found at the Warner Center station on the Orange Line, which is located near a large mall with a 16-screen movie theater. Similarly, the historic El Portal Theater is a local entertainment venue located near the North Hollywood station, on the Red and Orange Lines.
COLLEGES, UNIVERSITIES, AND VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

Colleges and universities, as well as vocational schools that teach a specific profession or trade, can also be an important part of a Sustainable Transit Community. The institution’s faculty, staff, and students support businesses around the station by shopping and eating meals nearby. Also, placing these institutions near a transit station encourages students to take transit to campus rather than driving. Schools with on- or off-campus housing help to further enhance the level of activity and diversity of a station area.

In most station areas, it is not possible to build new colleges or universities, but it may be possible to attract smaller satellite campuses or vocational schools that would contribute to the creation of STCs.

For example, the University of Southern California (USC) is the largest private employer, and one of the largest universities, in Los Angeles. With the completion of Phase I of the Exposition Line, there will be three Metro stations adjacent to the university (Expo/Vermont, Expo Park/USC, and Jefferson/USC). In addition, the Vermont/Santa Monica station on the Red Line is located a short walk from Los Angeles City College.
MARKET STRENGTH

A healthy local economy is essential to the success of a Sustainable Transit Community. A healthy local economy is created by three key factors:

- A thriving business community
- A strong market outlook for both residential and non-residential real estate
- An array of high-wage employment opportunities

Given the current economic downturn, many parts of Los Angeles are struggling economically, and job growth has slowed considerably. However, a 2010 study by Bay Area Economics (BAE) found opportunities to add high-wage jobs in certain sectors that would support STCs. These sectors include:

- Colleges and Universities
- Construction
- Finance and Insurance
- Healthcare and Social Assistance
- Information
- Management of Companies and Enterprises
- Manufacturing
- Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services
- Wholesale Trade

Based on BAE’s study, examples of areas with moderate to strong potential for high-wage jobs include the Red and Purple Lines-Wilshire/Westlake Market Area, which includes the Vermont/Beverly, Wilshire/Western, Wilshire/Normandie, Wilshire/Vermont, and Westlake/MacArthur Park stations; the Red and Blue Lines-Central City Market Area, which includes numerous stations in Downtown Los Angeles; and the Expo Line-West Adams Market Area, which includes the Western, Crenshaw, La Brea, La Cienega, and Venice/Roberston stations. BAE’s study is available as a technical appendix to this report.

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**WELL-DEFINED SENSE OF PLACE**

A "sense of place" is created by the qualities that give a place its unique identity. Those qualities can be created by buildings, street design, public art, plazas and parks, and many other factors. A Sustainable Transit Community with a strong sense of place is enjoyable for workers, residents, and visitors alike, making it appealing to walk to nearby destinations.

**URBAN FORM**

A Sustainable Transit Community needs to be laid out and organized so people can orient themselves within the neighborhood, and so it is well integrated with its surroundings. When a place has these qualities, urban planners and designers say it has "good urban form."

Good urban form can be created by places that feel special and unique. These places provide a distinctive identity that tells people they’ve arrived somewhere new. Sometimes these places are high-quality commercial centers, such as the Hollywood and Highland Center at Hollywood/Highland on the Red Line. They could also be shopping streets with many storefront businesses, such as Flower Street near the 7th Street/Metro Center station, on the Red and Purple Lines. Civic buildings, public art, parks, and plazas can also serve as important landmarks that give a place its character, and that help people find their way around. Mariachi Plaza on the Gold Line is one such public space.
PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED ARCHITECTURE

In a Sustainable Transit Community, the built environment is oriented towards pedestrians rather than cars. All of the following qualities of buildings contribute to pedestrian-oriented urban design:

- Buildings face the street, and they have entrances from the sidewalk rather than parking lots.
- Consistent, small building setbacks create a strong edge for the street.
- Building heights are at least half the width of the street, creating a sense of enclosure.
- Large buildings include architectural features that divide them into smaller, human-scaled components.
- Buildings incorporate architectural features that encourage walking, such as storefront windows, awnings, and arcades.
- Buildings are visually interesting when viewed close up, not just from far away.

There are many examples of pedestrian-oriented architecture near the North Hollywood station, which is on the Red and Orange Lines, and in Downtown Los Angeles. Many of the buildings in these places are oriented towards the street and have appealing storefronts on the ground floor, creating an enjoyable walking experience.
WALKABILITY AND THE PEDESTRIAN REALM

A Sustainable Transit Community needs to be “walkable,” meaning that walking is a viable and desirable way for people to get around. While many parts of this Framework contribute to walkability, the following sections describe the most basic ingredients of a walkable STC.

CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity refers to the physical layout of a community and the ability to move from one place to another. A station area’s connectivity is directly related to its street pattern, which can vary widely even within the station area. Some neighborhoods have short blocks in a grid pattern that are easy to navigate on foot. Others have long blocks or culs-de-sac that act as barriers for pedestrians. A Sustainable Transit Community needs a high level of connectivity for pedestrians as well as bicyclists.

There are many ways to measure a neighborhood’s connectivity. One way is to look at intersection density. A greater number of intersections within a given area indicates better connectivity. It is also useful to study how much ground a pedestrian can cover from the station in a 10-minute walk. This helps to identify barriers to connectivity that are created by freeways, missing sidewalks, and other gaps in the pedestrian network.

The Pershing Square station area, on the Red Line, and the 7th Street/Metro Center station area, on the Red and Purple Lines, have excellent connectivity because the downtown blocks are short and easy to navigate on foot. The Aviation station on the Green Line is an extreme example of mixed connectivity within a station area—to the southeast, it has short, walkable residential blocks, but to the west and north, it is surrounded by the Los Angeles International Airport and the adjacent industrial area.
WALKABLE STREETS

The design of street rights-of-way is also an important part of a Sustainable Transit Community. When a street is designed to be walkable, it makes the pedestrian experience safe, comfortable, and enjoyable.

As shown to the right, a highly walkable street typically includes a sidewalk with four distinct “zones”:

- An edge zone that provides space for car doors to open and diagonally parked cars to overhang the sidewalk.
- A furnishings zone that buffers pedestrians from vehicles. On a walkable street, this zone should include street trees that provide shade, as well as pedestrian amenities such as benches, sidewalk lighting, bus shelters, and waste bins.
- A throughway zone that provides a clear, well-maintained path for pedestrian travel.
- A frontage zone that provides space for pedestrians to enter and exit buildings. The frontage zone can also accommodate benches, planters, and outdoor displays.

Many of Los Angeles’ more urban station areas, especially Downtown and in Hollywood, have highly walkable streets. These station areas include Hollywood/Vine and Hollywood/Highland, on the Red Line, and 7th Street/Metro Center, on the Red and Purple Lines.
STREET CROSSINGS

Street crossings are locations where pedestrians and vehicles can come into conflict. The streets in a Sustainable Transit Community minimize potential conflicts by providing clearly visible, well-marked crosswalks that are accessible for all users. These crosswalks should be spaced no farther apart than a typical city block, so that pedestrians do not have to walk long distances to cross the street. They may also incorporate decorative paving treatments that make them more visible and attractive.

Most crosswalks are at stop-controlled or signalized intersections, where pedestrians have clear direction about when to cross. However, some crosswalks are located in the middle of a block, where cars must yield to pedestrians. At these crosswalks, pedestrians can benefit from safety measures such as overhead and in-pavement flashing lights.

Good examples of well-marked crosswalks are found in the Little Tokyo/Arts District station area and Chinatown, both on the Gold Line. Crosswalks in these areas are marked with distinctive designs that are highly visible to drivers and that contribute to the sense of place in these communities.
While a Sustainable Transit Community is focused around a rail or bus rapid transit (BRT) station, it must also provide a strong transportation network for pedestrians, bicycles, and vehicles. These modes of transportation need to work together to seamlessly connect different destinations. In addition, the rail or BRT transit needs to be closely coordinated with local bus transit.

**COMPLETE STREETS**

In a Sustainable Transit Community, the street network is composed of “complete streets” that are designed to accommodate all modes of travel. A complete street allows pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and abilities to safely move through a network of multimodal streets. Although the needs of each of these modes can conflict at times, a complete street provides the best possible balance among all modes.

AB 1358, the Complete Streets Act, requires cities and counties to incorporate provisions for multimodal streets into their next major update to their General Plan Circulation Element. In the future, this requirement will create new opportunities to plan for complete streets in Los Angeles.

**PUBLIC TRANSIT**

The public transit system in a Sustainable Transit Community must be efficient and reliable, and it must offer straightforward connections between different bus and train lines. In addition, the headways, or time between each bus or train on the same line, should be no more than 15 to 20 minutes, so that transit riders can simply show up without checking a schedule in advance.
Metro has made great strides in creating an extensive public transportation system that includes buses, BRT, and rail. Through the 30/10 Initiative—which aims to build 30 years’ worth of transportation improvements in just 10 years—Metro plans to complete 12 additional transit projects by 2019. These improvements create strong potential for the creation of new Sustainable Transit Communities.

**VEHICLES**

For many decades, transportation in Los Angeles has revolved around the personal automobile. While improved transit service will reduce the need for cars, it will not eliminate that need altogether. Therefore, a Sustainable Transit Community needs to include a street network that adequately serves vehicles as a complement to other forms of transportation.

Streets in a Sustainable Transit Community should accommodate multiple modes of travel, balancing the needs of private vehicles with the needs of pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit. On-street parking should also be allowed on many streets, to provide convenience for visitors and to serve as a barrier between pedestrians and vehicles.

One example of a station area that successfully balances the needs of vehicles with other modes is Jefferson, on the Expo Line, which includes major corridors such as Figueroa Street and more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly streets such as Hoover Street. The Soto station area on the Gold Line also has streets that balance the needs of vehicles with other users. The side streets have high-quality sidewalks that are buffered from traffic, as well as lower vehicle speeds, creating safe routes for pedestrians.
Los Angeles’ temperate climate makes it possible to ride a bicycle most days of the year. Because bicycling is an increasingly popular alternative to the automobile, it needs to be accommodated in a Sustainable Transit Community. A good bicycle network provides a range of safe and visible facilities for cyclists of all abilities. It includes a combination of marked bike routes, bike lanes, off-street paths, and parking facilities. These facilities must be connected and easily accessible to encourage cyclists to use them.

One especially strong example of a bicycle facility is the Orange Line Bicycle Path, which runs nearly the entire length of the Orange Line. There are also bike racks and bike lockers at each Orange Line stop, allowing bicyclists to easily connect to transit.
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

A Sustainable Transit Community helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by providing alternatives to the private automobile, and by encouraging compact development in previously developed areas. In recognition of these benefits, the State of California already provides incentives for qualified development near transit stations and along transit corridors. However, a Sustainable Transit Community also contributes to sustainability by including green buildings, landscaping with climate-appropriate plants, and stormwater management strategies that reduce runoff and pollution. These strategies can be incorporated into new construction projects, as well as existing development, to move a station area toward greater sustainability.

GREEN BUILDING

Development in a Sustainable Transit Community needs to incorporate green building practices wherever possible. Green building refers to the construction and operation of buildings that are designed to reduce negative impacts on the environment. A green building typically includes at least some of the following qualities:

- Energy-efficiency measures
- Low-water fixtures
- On-site energy generation
- Reuse of existing buildings or building materials
- Locally produced building materials

Some green buildings are constructed with sustainability in mind from the ground up. Others are buildings that have been retrofitted to make them greener.
California has adopted Green Building Standards that will require all new building projects in the state to follow mandatory green building practices, starting in 2011. There are also more stringent rating systems designed to certify buildings that achieve high levels of sustainability. For example, the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating systems can be used on a wide range of projects, including homes, businesses, and even entire new neighborhoods. California’s Build It Green also offers the GreenPoint rating system, which can be used to rate the sustainability of new and existing homes.

Many green building projects have been completed in Los Angeles, including the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) Headquarters, which has received a LEED Gold certification, and the Caltrans District 7 Headquarters, which has received a LEED Silver certification, located near the Civic Center station, on the Red and Purple Lines.

SUSTAINABLE LANDSCAPING

In addition to green building practices, a site’s landscaping can be designed to make development more sustainable. Sustainable landscaping in Los Angeles means using plants that are suitable for the local climate, require little or no watering, and do not generate large amounts of green waste. A Sustainable Transit Community needs to incorporate sustainable landscaping practices to contribute to the overall sustainability of the station area.

One example of sustainable landscaping in Los Angeles is the landscaping along the Orange Line Busway, which is primarily low-water plants that are appropriate for the region’s climate.
SUSTAINABLE STORMWATER MANAGEMENT

Los Angeles’ stormwater system relies upon drainage channels that quickly move water away from land and out to sea. This system was designed to protect against floods, but not to filter stormwater before it enters the ocean. As a result, a Sustainable Transit Community needs to incorporate greener methods of stormwater management that improve the quality of stormwater. It is also important to detain stormwater temporarily after a storm, so the stormwater network is not overly taxed by a large volume of water that arrives all at once.

Methods of sustainable stormwater management include:

- Planting landscaped swales and small “rain gardens” that retain water temporarily
- Installing cisterns or rain barrels that capture water for irrigation
- Minimizing the size of paved areas, or using permeable paving that lets water enter the ground rather than running off into storm drains

Examples of these practices are found throughout Los Angeles, such as permeable paving around street trees in the North Hollywood station area, on the Red and Orange Lines; vegetated infiltration strips along Hope Street near the Pico station on the Blue and Expo Lines; and the use of permeable surfaces around the LAPD Headquarters near the Civic Center station, on the Red and Purple Lines.
The areas around Los Angeles’ rail and BRT stations vary widely—each one has its own distinctive architectural character, mix of businesses, and level of economic success. However, the city’s station areas also share many qualities in common. For example, some station areas are primarily places of business, such as the Civic Center station area, while others are mostly places where people live, such as the Reseda station area. These shared qualities can be used to categorize the station areas into different “place types,” which can help inform efforts to transform them into Sustainable Transit Communities.

The Center for Transit-Oriented Development (CTOD) has developed a set of place types for Los Angeles’ station areas based on two factors. As shown on the following page, one factor is the balance between housing and employment in each station area. The other is the concentration of residents and workers in the station area. These factors can be used to organize the station areas into nine different place types.

Of the nine place types, three include a strong balance between housing and employment. As Chapter 4 explains, these place types are especially well-suited to becoming Sustainable Transit Communities. However, any station area has the potential to become a Sustainable Transit Community, even if it is primarily oriented towards housing or jobs.

This chapter expands on CTOD’s work by describing the ideal built character, mix of uses, and pedestrian and bicycle network for each of the place types. These descriptions start with the lowest-intensity place types at the bottom of the grid, moving up to the highest-density types. The qualities described for each place type reflect the Framework for Sustainable Transit Communities described in Chapter 2.
This chapter uses the key shown above to indicate different land use mixes and development intensities.

Source: Center for Transit-Oriented Development (CTOD)
SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD

An ideal Suburban Neighborhood is a primarily residential area composed of low-density, single-family homes and a small number of neighborhood-serving businesses. The housing stock may also include townhomes and condominiums located near the transit station. Single-family homes have small setbacks from the street, and their front yards are planted with attractive landscaping that requires minimal water. A small commercial center may be located near the transit station, providing residents with local shopping opportunities such as grocery stores, dry cleaners, and restaurants. Although the streets are designed to accommodate automobiles, vehicle speeds are low on most streets, sidewalks are well-maintained, and street trees are consistently present. These qualities result in a walkable and bikeable neighborhood.

NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER

An ideal Neighborhood Center has a balanced mix of residential and non-residential uses near a transit station. The residential component of a Neighborhood Center is primarily single-family homes, with some townhomes and multi-family buildings. Although the built intensity is generally low in a Neighborhood Center, there are areas of higher intensity, such as the core area around the transit station, where there are employment and shopping opportunities. The buildings in the core are oriented towards pedestrians, with a consistent street edge and appealing architecture that reflects the Neighborhood Center’s small-scale feel. Landscaping and street trees are provided on both residential and non-residential streets, creating a consistent street edge throughout the Neighborhood Center. Slow traffic speeds allow bicyclists to safely share the road with cars.
### Types of Station Areas

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#### Office/Industrial District

An ideal Office/Industrial District is an area that is primarily dedicated to employment uses, with large office and industrial complexes accessible by transit. The buildings may include high-rise office towers or low-rise industrial campuses that are large in scale, but brought up to the street edge to define the pedestrian realm. Architectural details and varied design create appealing street frontages. These large employment centers attract workers from throughout the region, many of whom commute on public transit. Connections between the transit station and nearby employers are improved with landscaping and shade trees, creating a walkable environment for commuters. In addition, bike routes and bike lanes connect the transit station to employers.

#### TransiT Neighborhood

An ideal TransiT Neighborhood is a primarily residential area, with single-family homes surrounding a higher-intensity core of townhomes, apartments, and condominiums near the transit station. The core may also include dense single-family homes on small lots; a limited number of offices; and mixed-use development, with homes or offices located above storefronts. While streets are well-connected and walkable throughout the TransiT Neighborhood, the quality of streets is especially high in the core of the Neighborhood. Buildings in the TransiT Neighborhood’s core have a strong presence along the street. Single-family homes and townhomes have alley-loaded parking where possible, making the smaller residential streets more walkable and bikeable.
### MIXED-USE CENTER

An ideal Mixed-Use Center has a balanced mix of residential and non-residential uses. A range of housing types are available, including single-family homes, townhomes, and multi-family units. Homes are located near employers and transit, allowing residents to easily walk to their destination. Major streets are lined with a vertical and horizontal mix of uses. The vertical mix of uses includes buildings with storefronts on the ground floor and offices or homes on the upper floors. The horizontal mix of uses includes adjacent buildings that each accommodate a different use. The walkability of the area is enhanced by well-lit sidewalks with mature street trees and pedestrian amenities, such as benches and waste bins. Bike lanes and bike routes provide a clear path of travel for bicyclists throughout the area.

![Mixed-Use Center](image)

### BUSINESS DISTRICT

An ideal Business District is an area that serves primarily as a moderately dense employment center, with large office complexes alongside limited industrial, retail, and residential uses. The Business District’s strong connection to public transit allows workers to commute to the Business District from other parts of the region, creating a large daytime population in the area. While most workers commute to the area, there may be a few townhomes, apartments, or condominiums in a Business District, creating the option of living a short walk from work. In addition, small numbers of restaurants and shops allow workers and residents to enjoy meals and run errands near their offices and homes. Although the streets in a Business District may carry large numbers of cars throughout the day, well-maintained sidewalks with abundant landscaping and street trees help create a safe and walkable environment. In addition, major streets include bike lanes, making it more practical to bike to work.

![Business District](image)

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**URBAN NEIGHBORHOOD**

An ideal Urban Neighborhood is a primarily high-density residential area, with an active commercial core surrounding a transit station. The housing, which is found within and surrounding the core, may include high-rise residential towers, townhomes, apartments, and condominiums. In Urban Neighborhoods where the greatest intensity is along a major corridor, there may also be single-family homes surrounding the dense corridor. The large number of people living within the Urban Neighborhood creates active streets at some times of day as residents travel between their homes, local businesses, and the transit station. A variety of storefronts, including restaurants, shops, and other services, are found in distinctive buildings lining the streets near the transit station. These streets are designed for pedestrians, with buildings brought up to the street edge, wide sidewalks, street trees, and lighting, resulting in a pleasant and safe walking environment. In addition, a network of bike routes and bike lanes helps bicyclists travel through the neighborhood.

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**URBAN CENTER**

An ideal Urban Center is a vibrant mixed-use area around a transit station, with a balance of high-density housing and employment uses. These uses may be located in vertical mixed-use buildings, with homes or offices above ground-floor retail, or in adjacent buildings that create a horizontal mix of uses. Although most buildings are developed at a large scale, they are designed with architectural variation and details to create a small-scale feel that is friendly to pedestrians. In addition, the sidewalks are wide, street trees are consistently planted along the street, and storefronts open onto the street, activating the pedestrian realm. The streets are filled with pedestrians both day and night as the mix of uses brings residents, workers, and visitors into the Urban Center. Bicyclists can also use a clear network of bike lanes and bike routes to navigate through the Urban Center.

Urban Neighborhood
Vermont/Santa Monica Station Area

Urban Center
Hollywood/Highland Station Area
CENTRAL BUSINESS DISTRICT (CBD)/SPECIAL DISTRICT

An ideal Central Business District (CBD)/Special District is a downtown or central city area with a high concentration of employers, as well as a variety of shopping and housing options. The intensity of these uses creates a bustling urban atmosphere that is amplified during business hours as workers, many commuting on public transit, fill the area. Buildings vary in architectural style and age, with modern high-rise offices and residential towers interspersed with historic buildings that have been reused for mixed-use projects. Regardless of the architectural style of buildings, they incorporate features that relate to the human scale, creating a comfortable environment for pedestrians. Coffee shops, drug stores, restaurants, and other everyday uses line many streets, helping to further enliven the public realm. Further adding to the pedestrian experience are wide sidewalks with street trees that bring greenery into the urban environment. For bicyclists, a network of bike lanes and bike routes provides safe access to all destinations.
CREATING BALANCED SUSTAINABLE TRANSIT COMMUNITIES

In an ideal world, nearly all of Los Angeles’ Metro stations would be surrounded by a mix of homes, workplaces, and stores. This mix of land uses would ensure that residents, workers, and visitors are all present in the station area, creating activity on the street throughout the day. It would also encourage people to walk between destinations, since homes, jobs, entertainment, and shops are all located within a close stroll of one another.

The reality in Los Angeles today is quite different. In many station areas, the existing uses are almost entirely businesses or homes. While many of these places function very well as neighborhoods, shopping districts, or office parks, they lack several valuable qualities:

- A mix of land uses that allows a place to thrive throughout the day
- Opportunities for people to live near their jobs
- “Third places,” in addition to the home and the workplace, where people can gather, interact, and relax

It makes sense for some station areas to be dominated by one use or another. Los Angeles’ Central Business District (CBD), for example, ought to retain its focus on employment. In addition, residents of the city’s single-family neighborhoods value their distance from the hustle and bustle of more urban areas, and any change in land uses around these neighborhoods would have to be managed carefully.

Nonetheless, in many of Los Angeles’ station areas—indeed, even in the CBD and in commercial areas near single-family neighborhoods—it is possible to create a more varied mix of uses while enhancing each station area’s fundamental character. In some places, this change would represent an improvement to an already strong neighborhood. In others, this change could happen only as part of a larger set of neighborhood improvements, often to address a longstanding lack of investment in the area. But the change must occur in order to create a balanced Sustainable Transit Community that offers places to live, work, and play.
ENCOURAGING BALANCE

The mix of uses in a station area is unlikely to become more balanced unless that change is planned for. There must be policies that encourage a variety of different land uses in the station area. Once these policies are in place, change can occur incrementally, as new tenants move in and property owners replace their existing buildings with new ones. Or it may occur almost all at once through major development projects on large sites.

In many station areas, the City of Los Angeles is already working to catalyze the creation of Sustainable Transit Communities. For example, the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles (CRA/LA) is heavily focused on developing new affordable housing and mixed-use projects, such as the Grand Avenue Project, adjacent to the Civic Center station. CRA/LA also supports the City's business development efforts by investing in retail, commercial and industrial development. The Los Angeles Housing Department is creating new and revitalized affordable housing through projects such as the Jordan Downs Community-Based Master Plan. And the
Department of City Planning is creating new long-range plans that will help to transform station areas into Sustainable Transit Communities. Continuing these efforts will help to create more balance between housing and jobs in Los Angeles’ station areas.

In addition, the City has a variety of implementation tools available for plans to create Sustainable Transit Communities. One such tool is Community Plan Implementation Overlay Districts (CPIOs), which provide area-specific zoning requirements to ensure that development enhances the unique architectural, environmental, and cultural qualities of each Community Plan area in Los Angeles. Another tool the City has adopted is the Adaptive Reuse Ordinance, which encourages the conversion of underutilized historic buildings into new housing. This tool helps the City create more balanced Sustainable Transit Communities in Downtown and other employment-focused parts of Los Angeles.

As the next section explains, planning for a balanced Sustainable Transit Community is more complicated than simply figuring out the right mix of land uses. There are many other issues to consider as well.
The figure to the right provides another look at the “place types” described in Chapter 3. As the figure shows, the place types on the left side of the grid are weighted heavily towards residential uses, while the place types on the right side emphasize employment. In contrast, the place types in the middle are balanced—they include a blend of housing and jobs.

To become a balanced Sustainable Transit Community, station areas need to “move towards the middle” of the grid by adding the housing or jobs that they lack. But simply adding housing or jobs isn’t always enough. For example, if a building in an office district is replaced by housing, there may be a need for new or improved parks to support the new residents. Creating a balanced Sustainable Transit Community requires attention to many different issues, not just land uses, and the issues that need to be addressed are different for each place type.

Using the Framework for Sustainable Transit Communities as a guide, the following sections explain the issues that need to be prioritized when improving a station area’s balance of low-intensity, moderate-intensity, and high-intensity place types. Of course, each station area is different, and not every station area needs the same type of improvements. The ideas in this chapter are not a cookbook for change—they are meant to explain the issues that are most crucial to creating balance.
The figure to the left shows the issues that are most important when transforming a Suburban Neighborhood or Office/Industrial District into a Neighborhood Center.

Turning an Office/Industrial District into a Neighborhood Center is a larger challenge. In general, Office/Industrial Districts often lack a well-defined sense of place. They also tend to have very large blocks, making it difficult to get around on foot. New development needs to create a sense of place, or to reinforce the sense of place that’s already there. And as new development occurs, new streets should be introduced where possible to break down “superblocks” into a finer-grained street network. Finally, it is important to introduce diverse housing types into the Office/Industrial District to provide a balance of uses, and to provide amenities such as parks and stores that will support the new residents.
BALANCING MODERATE-INTENSITY PLACE TYPES

The figure to the right shows the issues that are most important when transforming a Transit Neighborhood or Business District into a Mixed-Use Center.

Transit Neighborhoods may already have a mix of uses, but that mix usually emphasizes housing and retail, not offices or research & development (R&D) space. Introducing more employment-intensive uses is one way to help the station area become a strong Mixed-Use Center. It’s also key to ensure that residents have access to everyday uses, which can be provided on the ground floor of mixed-use buildings. If the existing streets aren’t walkable, they should be improved so residents and workers alike are encouraged to walk to local businesses.

Business Districts often have many of the same issues as lower-intensity Office/Industrial Districts. Existing buildings may be developed as “towers in a park,” far removed from the street, or they may have large parking lots between the building and the sidewalk. Either way, new development needs to do more to support pedestrian activity, and existing “superblocks” should be broken down into a finer-grained street network where possible. As new housing is built, it also needs to contribute to a strong pedestrian realm. In some places, it may be appropriate to require ground-floor townhomes with entrances facing the street. Multi-family buildings should either be built to the edge of the sidewalk or have small, landscaped setbacks along the street.
BALANCING HIGH-INTENSITY PLACE TYPES

The figure to the left shows the issues that are most important when transforming an Urban Neighborhood or CBD/Special District into an Urban Center.

While an Urban Neighborhood may already have a strong commercial core, it may lack intensive employment uses such as offices. Adding these uses is crucial to creating a strong Urban Center. It may make sense to concentrate the new offices around the transit station, or to place them along a major corridor, rather than allowing them to be scattered throughout the station area. In addition, because these station areas are so dense, it is especially important to foster a well-defined sense of place and to ensure that all streets—including large arterials and collectors—are walkable and safe.

Los Angeles’ CBD/Special District station areas are generally thriving, so there are fewer issues to focus on when transforming them into Urban Centers. Because these station areas may only serve the needs of workers, not residents, one especially important issue is access to everyday uses. For example, it may be important to recruit a grocery store to the station area so residents have a place to shop. Where new residential development occurs, it needs to help reinforce and strengthen the existing built form of the station area. New residential development also creates an opportunity to plant street trees, add benches and other pedestrian amenities, and make other improvements that create a more walkable street.
CONCLUSION

Los Angeles is in a constant state of change. Through the 30/10 Initiative, its transit service is expanding rapidly. Thanks to the work of numerous City agencies, its streets, parks, and other public spaces are becoming more beautiful and functional. And with the help of private developers and landowners, its housing and employment opportunities are expanding by the day. But change will improve the City and its neighborhoods only if it is managed effectively.

The Framework of Sustainable Transit Communities is a tool for shaping this change. It outlines the qualities that can transform Los Angeles’ rail and BRT stations into pedestrian-friendly STCs that offer places to live, work, and play. When an STC has all of the qualities described in the Framework, it will reflect the three “E’s” that define sustainability:

- **A prosperous economy.** An STC cannot succeed without thriving businesses that provide employment opportunities, and that serve the needs of people throughout the community or region. The STC’s strength as a community encourages ongoing investment by landowners.

- **A high-quality environment.** An STC includes green buildings that reduce the impacts of construction and operations, as well as stormwater management practices that improve the quality of storm runoff. Its built environment encourages people to walk, bike, or use transit instead of driving private automobiles.

- **Social equity.** An STC includes a variety of housing options to serve households of different sizes, ages, and incomes. Employment opportunities include high-wage jobs for people with many different levels of education.

In the years to come, the Mayor’s Office will work to create new Sustainable Transit Communities throughout the city. But landowners, developers, and business owners do not need to wait for the Mayor’s Office before they act. They can start today by building new homes and workplaces around Los Angeles’ transit stations, and by expanding their businesses to create new jobs. By doing this, they can begin to transform the city’s station areas into STCs today, so the station areas will be ready to meet the needs of tomorrow.
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