

# Platform

## Our Year Of Transforming Promising Ideas

**BY JOHN ROBERT SMITH**  
PRESIDENT AND CEO, RECONNECTING AMERICA

**W**elcome to the Fall 2010 issue of Platform. The staff of Reconnecting America has been busy all year. We have gone through a rebranding process and are currently overhauling our website, and have a number of accomplishments in transit-oriented development and policy work. In addition, we have expanded our talent roster to fulfill our mission of transforming promising ideas into thriving communities.

2010 has been a great year for our issues — TOD, multi-modal transportation links, livability, sustainability, equity and affordable housing. We have many advocates on Capitol Hill and in the Obama Administration. Under the direction of our chief of staff, Allison Brooks, staff has been advancing our cause both on Capitol Hill and in the administration, as well as in our expanded regional TOD work. We were delighted to receive news from the Federal Transit Administration that they will continue our partnership and have funded us for FY 2011. This will enable us to continue to help bring equitable TOD to scale across the country.

In March, I testified before the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on the transportation challenges facing rural areas and the need to address these in the next transportation bill. In conjunction with our testimony, Transportation for America released a white paper titled, “Principles for Improving Transportation Options in Rural and Small Town Communities.” I am happy to report that our message has been heard on the Hill and an active rural strategy is now being pursued.

We were excited to see HUD release its Notice of Funding Availability for the Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants. Reconnecting America staff provided guidance to several regions as they wrote their proposals and worked to build regional consortiums of local jurisdictions and community organizations. We have been reviewing the regional applications to get a sense of the activities each is proposing to undertake to help realize the federal livability principles.

Our technical assistance program continues to help facilitate innovative work. We recently completed an exciting effort in Portland, where we have been collaborating with Oregon Metro and Nelson\Nygaard to create an investment framework for Metro’s TOD program. (See the story on Page 4.) In the Bay Area, we have been working with the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), and a regional collaboration called the Great Communities Collaborative to help create what is slated to be a \$60 million dollar Affordable Housing Transit-Oriented Development Fund that is focused on preserving and producing affordable housing in key high-access locations across the region.

And last but not least, be sure to read the exciting news of the MITOD website on Page 8. We are certain this resource will prove invaluable to jurisdictions and planners as they develop creative and innovative mixed-income communities around planned transit stations.

As our new tagline says, Reconnecting America is all about People, Places and Possibilities. We look forward to continuing our work and appreciate your support. ★

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# Developing Innovative TOD Finance Strategies

BY SARAH KLINE  
POLICY DIRECTOR, RECONNECTING AMERICA

Reconnecting America's work around the country has shown that there is increasing demand for walkable, mixed-use communities served by reliable public transportation. In March 2010, Reconnecting America convened experts to discuss federal housing and transportation funding sources for transit-oriented development and to identify the critical financing obstacles that hinder the widespread production of equitable and sustainable TOD. The project, sponsored by Transportation for America with funding from the Ford Foundation, convened representatives from national policy think-tanks, community development-focused philanthropic foundations, state DOTs, regional transportation agencies, local transit agencies, national housing organizations, and the real estate development industry. This led to the development of 10 recommendations for federal program changes to more effectively leverage federal funding in support of equitable TOD.

In May, the Center for Transit-Oriented Development, along with Transportation for America, the National Housing Conference, the American Institute of Architects, and LOCUS: Responsible Real Estate Developers and Investors, hosted a Transit-Oriented Development Financing Forum on Capitol Hill where the 10 recommendations were released to the public. Congressional and Administration staff heard from experts on the state of TOD production, federal policy recommendations that could help existing programs encourage TOD, and new concepts that could expand TOD implementation.

One recommendation called for creation of a TOD credit facility within the Livable Communities Act (S.1619/H.R. 4690). The Act, introduced by Sen. Christopher Dodd of Connecticut and Rep. Ed Perlmutter of Colorado, will help communities plan for and create better places to live, work and raise families. The bill also provides resources for communities to coordinate transportation, housing, environmental and land-use planning.

## 10 Recommendations

1. **Modify and Expand the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) to work better for transit and TOD**
2. **Create a Livable Communities Credit Enhancement Program**
3. **Modify US Tax Code to Create Location Efficiency Incentives**
4. **Establish a "Self Starts" Companion Program to Section 5309 New Starts and Small Starts**
5. **Create a Multimodal Access Program for New Capacity**
6. **Support Integrated Long-Range Regional Planning**
7. **Expand eligibility of transportation funds for TOD**
8. **Create Multimodal Office of Livable Communities at USDOT**
9. **Modify the Federal New Starts and Small Starts Program**
10. **Establish affordable housing replacement requirement for all transportation projects**

The TOD credit facility was incorporated into Section 10 of the Livable Communities Act that passed out of the Senate Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee on Aug. 3. The credit enhancement section of the Act also includes language that requires development or preservation of affordable housing in project areas.

"These credit enhancements are tools, such as direct loans and loan guarantees, that encourage partnerships between the public and private sector, and leverage non-federal funds to help promote livable communities and enhance the efficiency of transit service," explained Reconnecting America CEO John Robert Smith, James Corless, director of Transportation for America, and Chris Leinberger, president of LOCUS, in a letter endorsing the amendment to the legislation.

Transportation for America, Reconnecting America and other project participants continue to promote the 10 recommendations that, through federal policy changes, will encourage the widespread production of equitable and sustainable TOD.

# Promoting Job Connectivity, Affordable Housing

By SARAH KLINE

POLICY DIRECTOR, RECONNECTING AMERICA

In late July, Reconnecting America worked with partners in the Center for Transit-Oriented Development to respond to the Federal Transit Administration's request for comments on project evaluation criteria in the New Starts and Small Starts program – the largest discretionary federal grant program that funds transit capital projects. CTOD developed these recommendations in coordination with several other partner organizations, including the Center for Housing Policy, Transportation for America, Smart Growth America, and others.

One key idea contained in CTOD's comments is that the metrics used to measure the economic development potential of New Starts and Small Starts projects should be revised to move away from land value increases as a measure of economic activity, and move toward measuring employment and transit connectivity. CTOD's work with regions around the country has shown that higher land values might be the result of speculation that will inhibit future development.

“Since much of the value of transit is directly related to the ability to use transit for commute trips, transit systems that do a good job in linking workers to employment centers have better potential to generate higher land values,” the CTOD letter notes. “FTA should look at how the transit investment connects existing job centers to facilitate mobility for the labor force and enhance ridership.”

Another of CTOD's recommendations is that FTA should promote affordable housing as a critical station area land use. Since 40 percent of future demand for housing near transit will come from households earning 50 percent or less of area median income (“Hidden in Plain Sight,” CTOD, 2004), it is essential that new transit lines are planned to serve existing affordable communities, shield affordable communities from gentrification and create new affordable units as part of future housing development. CTOD urges FTA to elevate proposed transit projects that demonstrate local commitment to preserving and creating permanently affordable housing.

FTA is expected to seek another round of comments in 2011 – watch [www.reconnectingamerica.org](http://www.reconnectingamerica.org) to find out when and how to comment. ✨

## High speed rail development

With the federal government's commitment to a national high-speed and intercity rail network, regions are racing to plan, design and build their systems. There is much debate and misunderstanding, however, about a number of design considerations related to HSR station areas. At the regional and larger scale, there is a lack of consensus and in some cases a lack of reliable information on complex issues, such as the relationship between HSR and transportation equity or the extent to which high-speed rail will facilitate community and economic development. Transportation, housing and land-use planners, elected leaders and development practitioners have an opportunity to define a new model of community development – high-speed-rail-oriented development – and to develop best practices that will leverage our HSR investment to support economically sustainable regions. Reconnecting America looks forward to being part of this dialogue. ✨

## T4 America campaign update

The Transportation for America campaign, co-chaired by Reconnecting America and Smart Growth America, is working with the Obama Administration and key congressional leaders to develop proposals for the federal surface transportation reauthorization that will fundamentally change the way America builds and maintains its transportation network, improving its performance and enabling America to continue as a global economic leader. Reconnecting America CEO John Robert Smith has met with congressional offices representing rural areas to share his experience with the transformational power of rail investments for rural communities. T4America has also launched an Equity Caucus, of which Reconnecting America is a member, to press for inclusion of policies in the reauthorization bill that advance economic and social equity. ✨

# Portland's Regional TOD Strategy

BY ABIGAIL THORNE-LYMAN

PROJECT DIRECTOR, RECONNECTING AMERICA

As we return to Portland, Ore., for Rail~Volution, we have many lessons to learn when it comes to the integration of transportation and land use. One lesson is that even in a place with great success, there is still work to be done to bring the principles of livability to scale on a regional basis.

While Portland's downtown and the Pearl District enjoy thriving, dense, mixed-use development, the intensity of station areas and bus corridors quickly drops off outside of this core. A comparison of Portland with Los Angeles station areas shows many non-downtown station areas in Los Angeles enjoy higher intensity land uses compared with Portland's outlying station areas. Even Portland's eastside neighborhoods – often hailed as areas of great success when it comes to walking and biking – are not as dense as might be when it comes to new development. Notably, Los Angeles's higher-intensity non-downtown station areas are predominantly residential. And it doesn't take many high-rise towers to achieve this density. In most cases the buildings are three to five stories, but densities and heights are more consistent throughout the surrounding neighborhoods.

Fortunately, Portland has a unique program for addressing this issue. Oregon Metro's TOD program operates with four key strategies for maximizing regional TOD:

1. Carry out place-making with repeated investments in catalyst projects and place-making elements that contribute to local identity.
2. Create market comparables for higher-density mixed-use development near transit and in centers.
3. Develop developers with expertise in higher-density and mixed-use development in suburban settings.
4. Build community acceptance of urban style building types in suburban communities.

Since its inception in 1998, the program has invested in new market-rate and affordable residential, mixed-use, and employment-related development in station

areas and frequent bus corridors. Other program activities include ongoing technical assistance and outreach in cities, regional implementation studies including a recent walkability audit of several Eastside MAX station areas, and investment in specific types of retail amenities (known within the program as "urban living infrastructure, or "ULI"). While the program has been tremendously successful, it operates on a shoestring budget of about \$5 million every two years.

To balance regional mandates with its limited budget and to seek out new investment opportunities, TOD program staff is developing a regional TOD strategy in collaboration with the Center for TOD and Nelson\Nygaard. The goal is to identify station areas and frequent bus corridors with the physical and market characteristics needed to support the types of investments that the TOD program makes.

Given that the program is primarily focused on a narrow range of investments mostly related to implementation and catalyzing the market for development, a subset of areas fall into the "sweet spot" where the market is strong enough to make such development truly catalytic, and physical neighborhood characteristics support reduced auto dependence and walkability. The regional TOD strategy uses quantitative indicators to measure the current market performance and urban form of station areas and bus corridors.

The TOD strategy overlays market strength indicators with an urban form measurement that is a raster-based GIS composite of "the five P's" associated with TOD:

1. **People:** The number of residents and workers in an area has a direct correlation with reducing VMT.
2. **Places:** Areas with more retail and service amenities attract transit trips and enable residents to complete daily activities without getting in a car.
3. **Physical Form:** Smaller block sizes promote more compact development and walkability..
4. **Performance:** Higher quality, frequent transit service makes public transportation a more reliable means of getting around, and is directly related to reducing vehicle miles traveled.



This Koreatown residential high-rise in Los Angeles illustrates why Los Angeles enjoys higher intensity land uses when compared with Portland's outlying station areas

**5. Pedestrian/Bicycle Connectivity:** access to sidewalks and low stress bikeways.

The result of this overlay is a typology that has divided station areas and corridors into nine place types. Within each of these, a different set of strategies and investments make sense, but the nine can be grouped into three distinct clusters reflecting the general types of activities that are appropriate: Plan and Partner, Catalyze and Connect and Infill and Enhance

Because the TOD program does complete a broader range of outreach, technical assistance and planning-related activities in addition to its core development investment activities, the typology identifies the types of investments that would be appropriate in all station areas, even those not ready for catalytic development investments. For example, a plan and partner station area such as Gateway doesn't have the physical infrastructure needed to support TOD. However, ongoing community visioning, station area planning, and significant infrastructure investments could prepare this station area for significant future development opportunities.

This strategic plan represents an exciting step forward in the evolution of regional planning tools for TOD implementation. While the plan only applies to the TOD Program within Metro, it creates a framework that Reconnecting America envisions could be used to guide a broader set of programs throughout the region. ★

## Technical Assistance: The Intersection Of Research And Action

By **SAM ZIMBABWE**  
DIRECTOR, CENTER FOR TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

The Center for Transit-Oriented Development partnership — Reconnecting America, Center for Neighborhood Technology and Strategic Economics—has been hard at work researching and providing technical assistance on equitable TOD, reducing GHG emissions and identifying the links between TOD and employment.

CTOD continues to lead the way in defining and achieving equitable TOD through our work on the role of Community Development Financing Institutions (CDFIs) in achieving equitable TOD with the Low Income Investment Fund. We have also been advising HUD on ways to better link affordable housing and transit.

In the spring, we released “Transit Oriented Development and The Potential for VMT-related Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction.” The report showed that households living within a half-mile of transit have lower transportation-related greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from auto use, 43 percent lower than households living in the average location in the Chicago Metropolitan Region. We continue to advance this research, working to develop performance-based metrics to evaluate the potential of TOD to reduce GHG emissions.

We have continued to advance our understanding of the links between transit and employment. In looking at data over the past decade, we've found employers value transit-accessible locations and that these areas have experienced job growth in recent years. We expect to complete two research papers on this subject this fall.

CTOD continues to work on making data on transit and TOD as broadly available as possible. We anticipate releasing our National TOD Database, with thousands of transit stations and hundreds of data fields, in the coming months. This data will empower local communities to

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# Goodbye And Hello At Reconnecting America

By **ALLISON BROOKS**  
CHIEF OF STAFF, RECONNECTING AMERICA

As our issues have evolved, our staff has as well. I have had a busy year of interviewing to search out the best talent for Reconnecting America as opportunities have arisen.

It was with a mixture of sadness and happiness that we bid farewell to Reconnecting America's vice president of public policy, Mariia Zimmerman, who left in May. Mariia opened our D.C. office five years ago and was instrumental in developing a reputation for Reconnecting America as a TOD expert and "go to" resource for the federal government. Though we were sad to see her go, we were elated that she was selected to serve in the Obama Administration at the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities, alongside our former president, Shelley Poticha. Mariia is now the deputy director for sustainable communities. A new opportunity also arose for our program and policy associate, Annie Finkenbinder. She went to Capitol Hill to handle housing and transportation issues for Rep. Earl Pomeroy (D-ND). We wish Mariia and Annie all of the best.



Our new policy director, **Sarah Kline**, was previously the director of policy and government relations for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. A lawyer by profession, Kline worked from 2000-2008 as counsel to Sen. Paul Sarbanes (D-MD) and Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT) on the U.S. Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs, developing transit policy positions for the committee. In this role, Sarah negotiated transit legislation, including transit provisions of SAFETEA-LU and transit security provisions of the 9/11 Act.



To further strengthen our public policy team at a critical time as we expand our TOD work around the country,

Reconnecting America hired **Darnell Grisby** in a new position of deputy policy director, where he plays a key role in our work in transit-oriented development and transportation equity. Darnell, who most recently worked as a legislative advocate in Sacramento, California, has extensive experience in local and state legislative policy development on both transportation and housing issues.



Rounding out our public policy team, **Sasha Forbes** joined us as a policy associate earlier this year. Sasha works on federal and local level transit-oriented development policies including mixed-income housing, equitable development, "green communities" and energy efficiency. Previously, Sasha was an urban planner with a land use firm in Ft. Lauderdale, FL where she worked on comprehensive plans, TOD corridor visioning, housing studies, and permit reviews.



Reconnecting America's communications team has also grown to aid us in getting out our message. Joining new media director/chief cartographer Jeff Wood this year is **Becky Sullivan** as communications director and John Hughes as communications manager. Becky has significant experience in communications and government relations, including positions at the U.S Department of Transportation, the White House and the International Council of Shopping Centers. John worked for more than 27 years for The Sacramento Bee, holding editing positions in the newsroom, Capitol bureau and the opinion pages. He previously consulted with Reconnecting America as webmaster and content manager. Jeff, Becky and John have been busy with our rebranding effort and website overhaul.



Our technical assistance team, under the direction of Sam Zimmerman, has also seen some growth since our last issue of Platform. **Abby Thorne-Lyman** joined our

Oakland office as senior project director, preceded a few months earlier by **Catherine Cox Blair** as program director in Denver. Abby manages a range of technical assistance projects throughout the United States. She was previously a Principal at Strategic Economics, a partner in the Center for Transit-Oriented Development, where she managed economic and real estate analyses for a range of different clients, including transit agencies and local governments. She has worked with CTOD since 2004, during which time she has completed a wide range of assignments supporting TOD at the station area, corridor, and regional scales.



Catherine brings her considerable public and private sector experience to bear in providing TOD planning and implementation strategies to a broad set of partners in places across the country. Prior to her arrival at Reconnecting America, Catherine served as a senior associate with Cherokee Investment Fund in Denver, a leading private equity firm that invests in brownfield redevelopment. Before that she worked for the city of Denver, managing the city's exemplary transit oriented development program. Catherine also led station area planning efforts and a number of other TOD initiatives, including a public housing redevelopment strategy. Working with Program Associate Kelley Britt, Program and Policy Associate Alia Anderson and Program Associate/Data Analyst Elizabeth Wampler, this team is now stronger than ever.



In the administrative area, **Vicki Watkins** was hired as the Executive Assistant to the President in the D.C. office. She coordinates closely with Administrative & Membership Coordinator Crystal Henle and Administrative Director Tina Pasco-Sanchez in Oakland. Vicki previously was an Executive Assistant in a large Washington, D.C. law firm.



Please welcome these new staff members to our Reconnecting America team!



## Technical assistance . . .

### Continued from Page 5

make fact-based decisions about their transit networks and will enable a range of analysis from equitable TOD needs to market opportunities. We expect to use the database over the coming year to add new US Census data as it becomes available, and start to do longitudinal analysis on TOD nationally and in select regions.

In addition to our national research work, CTOD has been engaged in developing corridor and regional TOD strategies in several regions. In the Twin Cities, we have worked with stakeholders to develop a Long-Term Investment Framework for the planned Central Corridor light rail project. Before construction begins, we have been working to integrate 35 existing plans and guiding documents for areas along the corridor into an integrated framework for realizing a TOD vision over 30 years.

In Denver, we are working with a unique partnership on the West Corridor on a TOD implementation strategy. The West Corridor, currently under construction, is the first FasTracks corridor to be implemented and will open in 2013. To fully realize the potential of the transit investment, the Denver Housing Authority, Metro West Housing Solutions (the housing authority in Lakewood), and the cities of Denver and Lakewood are partnering on a strategy that will leverage the transit investment to preserve existing affordable housing and balance the desire to attract new private investment along the corridor. The strategy will help prioritize future investments, identify existing and future funding sources and make recommendations on policy and programmatic interventions.

In Detroit, we're working with stakeholders to implement an innovative public/private/philanthropic rail investment that will anchor the revitalization of the greater downtown and begin to reshape the region's economy.

In Pittsburgh, we've been working with a network of neighborhood-based organizations to make the case for continued investment in transit and TOD and to address issues of local financing for TOD improvements through Pennsylvania's innovative Transit Revitalization Investment Districts program.

We look forward to continuing these relationships and beginning new ones around the country.



# MITOD: Creating Equitable Communities

BY SASHA FORBES  
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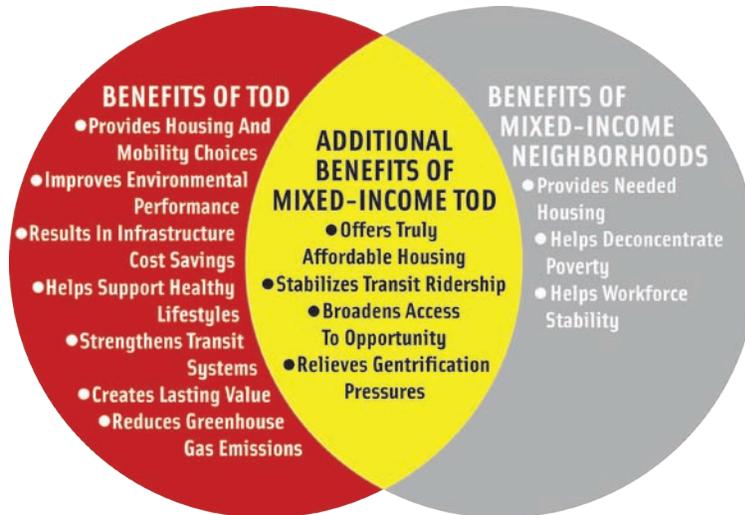
Equitable transit-oriented development (TOD) promotes healthy and inclusive communities, but creating such communities is not an easy task. Often the financial reality of the economic and commercial benefits of development near transit wins. Higher-end housing wins. Luxury condos win. Jobs geared toward higher paid professionals win. But they don't have to.

Though the topic can be daunting, tools do exist to help communities promote equitable TOD. One such tool is the Mixed-Income Transit-Oriented Development (MITOD) Action Guide developed by the Center for Transit-Oriented Development.

The online guide at MITOD.org is designed to help local jurisdictions, planners and other stakeholders develop strategies to encourage mixed-income transit-oriented development (TOD) around planned transit stations.

MITOD.org walks users through a multi-step analysis in order to identify mixed-income housing strategies that help practitioners think about the most appropriate and effective planning tools in any neighborhood — depending on the local market, the housing stock, and an inventory of existing development activity.

While MITOD isn't a silver bullet, it helps to promote equitable TOD by providing housing for a mix of incomes, making it possible for people of all incomes to live in neighborhoods near well-funded schools, good city



services and greater access to a wider variety of jobs and opportunities. Neighborhoods with a mix of both affordable and market-rate housing can provide many benefits, such as improved opportunities for low- and moderate-income families and stretching limited resources available to address affordable housing shortages. Mixed-income TOD also provides housing that is accessible to seniors and transit-dependent populations, helping them accomplish daily activities and maintain independent lives.

There are many factors to consider when developing equitable TOD, and the MITOD Action Guide helps to keep equity at the forefront.

Originally launched in March, the recently relaunched MITOD Action Guide features a number of improvements:

Updated case studies, providing more detail to mixed-income TOD tools

- Updated resources on MITOD strategies nationwide
- Added interactive features that invite users to suggest relevant mixed-income TOD resources

The biggest addition is the MITOD News section, which features timely information gathered daily from various news sources about mixed-income TOD and affordable housing near transit. The news page also includes upcoming events related to MITOD and will showcase research on subjects related to mixed-income TOD.

The MITOD Action Guide was developed with joint funding from the Federal Transit Administration and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. ★