

Platform

President's Corner

By JOHN ROBERT SMITH
PRESIDENT AND CEO

It is time to talk budgets in Washington. The president and Congress are discussing debt ceilings and budget cuts, and “living within our means” is a common refrain. As we engage in this exercise, it is useful to understand that we need to be smart about our cuts and make investments in our future. The rest of the world—including nations that are belt-tightening too, such as Britain—is spending money on infrastructure. There are clear reasons why.



Just take the example of two federal programs: Amtrak and the High-Speed and Intercity Rail (HSIR) Program. The two programs have asked for \$2.2 billion and \$2.5 billion respectively for next year's budget. The majority of the

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Collaboratives Take On TOD & Equity Issues

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Partnerships in support of equitable transit-oriented development – such as the Great Communities Collaborative (GCC) in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative in the Twin Cities – have been around for several years. These collaborations bring together local and national philanthropy with non-profit and community-based organizations to ensure that all populations have access to the benefits provided by transit. Some groups, such as the GCC, are focused on ensuring that station area plans around existing fixed-guideway transit consider affordable housing needs and maximize development potential, while others are motivated by workforce development opportunities, mitigating business impacts during transit construction or augmenting access to employment, education and services. Almost all are focused on transit expansion to pre-

pare station areas with policies, financing, and implementation measures that will ensure low- and moderate-income households access to opportunity.

Transit expansion and new funding sources have led other regions to pursue collaborative partnerships as well. In May, the Ford Foundation provided a grant to the Mile High Transit Opportunity Collaborative, a partnership of more than a dozen foundation and non-profit organizations in the Denver region, who will work to ensure that the rapidly expanding transit system will connect low- and moderate-income households to living and working opportunities. While this partnership is new, Denver advocates from Enterprise Community Partners and Reconnecting America have been working for years to highlight the benefits of mixed-income TOD and address housing preservation issues by creating a TOD acquisition fund. The collaborative will take these

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Emerging TOD Collaboratives . . .

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efforts to the next level by enabling partner groups to develop the region's first comprehensive strategy for preserving and promoting equitable TOD.

Los Angeles, with the largest sales tax devoted to transit in the country, is poised to double the size of its transit system, perhaps in the next 10 years if America Fast Forward becomes a federal priority. But there is limited funding to prepare communities for the potential impact of this significant transit investment. A budding coalition of non-profit and housing groups is working to ensure that low- and moderate-income households will be able to benefit from this improved transit access.

In the Tri-State Region (New York, New Jersey, Connecticut), in partnership with regional philanthropic foundations, a new collaboration is emerging among housing, environmental, and transportation advocacy organizations. The One Region Livable Communities Collaborative is intended to foster peer learning opportuni-

ties, share best practices, and develop common approaches to issues facing the region, while also supporting multi-jurisdictional planning and implementation efforts in subareas of the region, such as Long Island, Northern New Jersey, or the I-95 corridor through Westchester County and southern Connecticut. The various political contexts of the three states in an interdependent region provides a focus for regional collaboration and information sharing, while making other areas of region-wide policy reform more challenging to achieve.

Such collaborative efforts are not easy to create, and many of these efforts were ongoing for years before formal partnership agreements were established. Each collaborative has a different governance structure and objective, though providing affordable living opportunities near transit is a common thread. In the next issue of Platform we will identify some of the shared issues facing these collaboratives, and discuss how regions are working to create effective and synergistic partnerships. ★

Bay Area TOD Affordable Housing (TOAH) Fund

The Great Communities Collaborative (GCC) in the San Francisco Bay Area has worked for years to maximize equitable TOD opportunities. GCC commissioned the Center for Transit-Oriented Development (CTOD) and the Bay Area Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) to conduct an initial feasibility study for a fund that would be targeted to acquiring properties near quality transit for the purposes of building and preserving affordable housing, mixed-use development and other community amenities. This work helped convince the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), the MPO, to dedicate \$10 million as top-loss funding as long as the fund managers could raise an additional \$40 million from private sources. MTC's ability to leverage non-governmental sources of funding was a key incentive that made the dedication of funds politically feasible with elected officials on the commission, and might not have been as successful if the GCC had not initiated efforts to study the feasibility of a fund. The fund is managed by a consortium of six community development finance institutions (CDFI's) led by the Low Income Investment Fund and comprised of the Enterprise Foundation, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, the Opportunity Fund, Northern California Community Loan Fund and Corporation for Supportive Housing. ★