

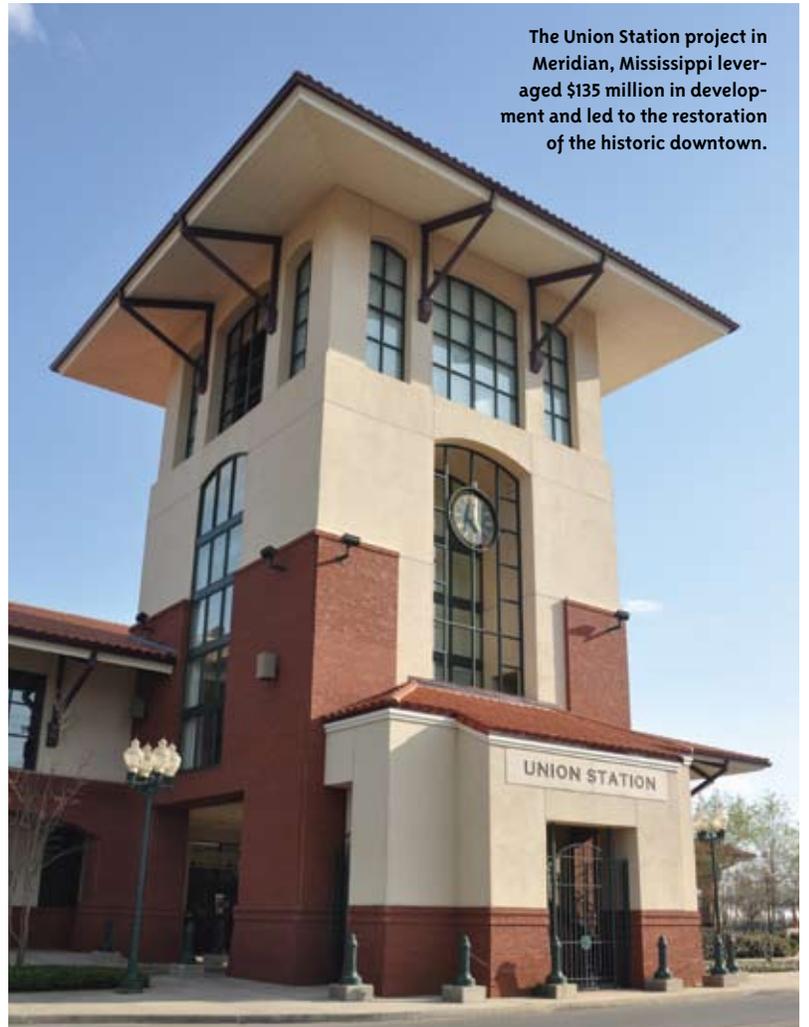
## Building The New Transit Town

### Reconnecting America's New CEO Shares His Experiences

By John Robert Smith

I WAS MAYOR OF MERIDIAN, Mississippi when we opened Meridian's Union Station 12 years ago to link rail, bus and city transit in a way that created a sense of place upon arrival in our downtown. This project was the first multi-modal transportation center in Mississippi and one of the first in any city of our size in the U.S. The investment in that station leveraged more than \$135 million in additional public and private investment in the downtown core, leading to the restoration of our historic downtown. In many ways that Union Station project was what we now call transit-oriented development.

The success of this project led a group of us to create the Great American Station Foundation in 1998 out of the belief that transportation investments can create real value for communities. As our knowledge and understanding of transit-oriented community development evolved, the Great American Station Foundation also evolved, becoming Reconnecting America in 2003. This national nonprofit effort began focusing on the ways that multiple modes of transportation could link to and complement every other mode and create healthier, more equitable and vibrant neighborhoods that together make up truly livable cities and regions. As President and CEO, Hank Dittmar broadened the understanding of the impact of transportation on quality of life. When Shelley Poticha took the job in 2004 she began focusing on place-making through our core program, the Center for Transit-Oriented Development (CTOD) — a partnership with the Center for Neighborhood Technology and Strategic Economics. My work begins on the



The Union Station project in Meridian, Mississippi leveraged \$135 million in development and led to the restoration of the historic downtown.

strong foundation of Hank's and Shelley's leadership.

Sam Zimbabwe has been named director of CTOD, and he will work to foster relationships that broaden our reach across the U.S. with the goal of creating replicable TOD models that bring equitable and sustainable development to scale. We will focus our energies and attention on the "reconnecting" piece of Reconnecting America, because if we are serious about this mission we must be strategically focused in cities and regions across the country — in urban centers and rural places alike. And while CTOD is the centerpiece of our work we do have three other primary work programs: policy development, leadership development, and Transportation for America.

Policy Director Mariia Zimmerman continues to promote federal transportation policy reform and federal partnerships in Washington

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# AARP, National Housing Trust and RA Report Finds Thousands Could Lose Affordable Apartments Near Transit



Almost all HUD-subsidized housing in transit-rich San Francisco are near transit lines and stations.

**THIS STUDY FINDS THAT** as many as 160,000 renters in 20 metro areas could lose their affordable apartments near transit in the next five years because the federal contracts that keep them affordable are due to expire. The renewed popularity of urban living has caused many properties in walkable neighborhoods near transit to increase in value, which means that property owners are likely to opt out of HUD's Section 8 and Section 202 housing programs and convert their housing units to market-rate. This housing is a very special affordability resource because it combines the cost-savings of the federally subsidized housing with the cost savings provided by transit. Almost a quarter of the units are designated for seniors.

AARP, Reconnecting America and the National Housing Trust released the results of the study at a symposium in Washington D.C. in September. The report recommends that Congress appropriate sufficient funding to renew all Section 8 contracts and increase funding for the Section 202 housing program, that state and local governments also allocate funds to preserve affordable housing in transit-rich areas, and that governments develop "early warning systems" for properties with expiring federal subsidies. CTOD research shows that households living near public transportation can reduce transportation expenditures by an average of 16 percent and that many of these households don't own a car and are transit-dependent.

A study released by the General Accounting Office earlier this month referenced the results of this study, noting that federal agencies are hampered in their efforts to monitor affordable housing because of a lack of research and data.

## TOD Help For MPOs

**METROPOLITAN PLANNING** organizations are beginning to take a more proactive role in planning and promoting compact growth along transit corridors: offering "livable communities" planning grants in Atlanta, requiring certain thresholds of housing density before funding transit extensions in the San Francisco Bay Area, and providing direct financial assistance for projects in Portland. The toolbox is increasing in size as transit agencies and MPOs work together to support the planning and implementation of TOD through station area plans and parking strategies, capital improvements and funding for infrastructure that supports station access.

The CTOD is developing a TOD best practices guide in order to assist MPOs in promoting and implementing TOD in spite of their limited authority over local land use. The guide is geared for small and medium-sized MPOs, is based on research and national case studies, and will include strategies that can be used to incentivize TOD and better integrate land use and transportation planning. The guide highlights best practices related to regulations, funding, information sharing and partnerships.

The guide will be produced in cooperation with the Federal Transit Administration, and CTOD will work with the National Charrette Institute and other partners to develop training modules for conferences and other events throughout 2010. Webinars, annotated Powerpoint presentations accessible via the internet, and peer-to-peer networks will also be offered.



CTOD is assisting MPOs in implementing TOD despite limited authority over local land use.

# CTOD Takes Its Transit and TOD Database Online

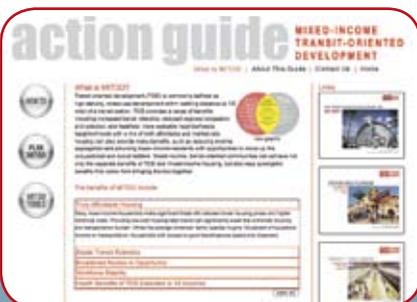
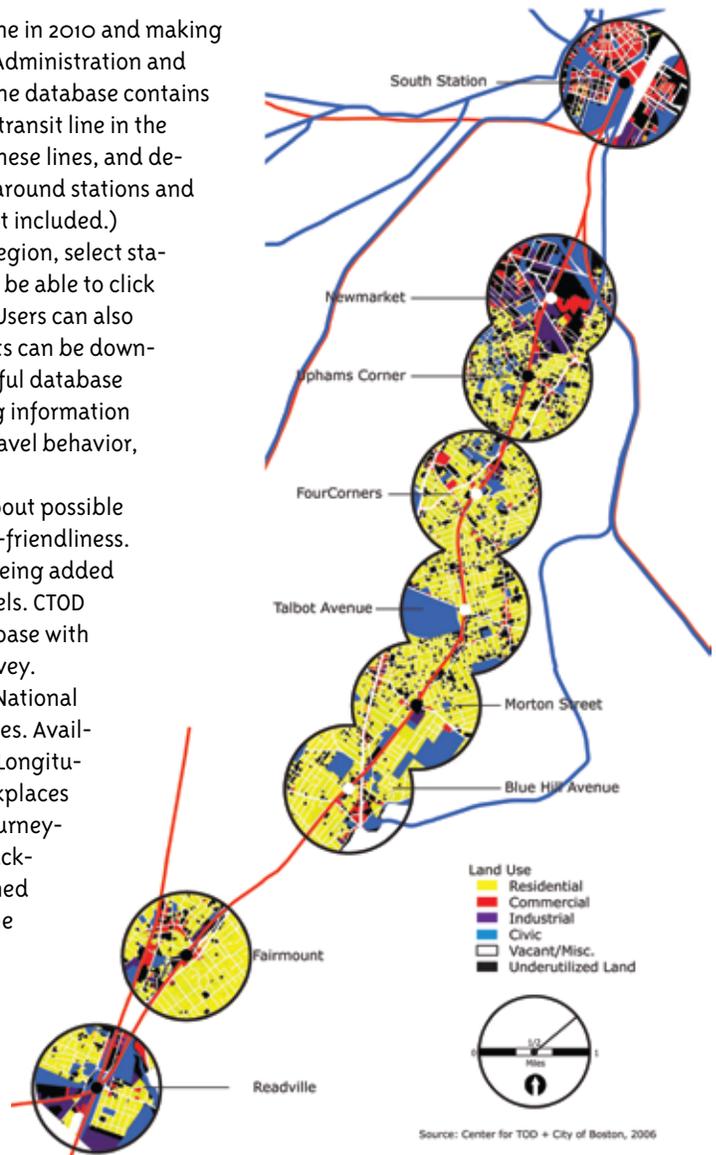
**THE CENTER FOR TOD** is putting its transit and TOD database online in 2010 and making it a map-based website that will be linked to the Federal Transit Administration and U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development websites. The database contains information about every existing and proposed fixed-guideway transit line in the U.S., the 3,572 existing stations and 699 planned stations along these lines, and demographic and land use information about the half-mile radius around stations and the people that live in these “transit zones.” (Bus networks are not included.)

The new website will allow users to view maps of the transit region, select stations, and choose data reports from a menu of choices. Users will be able to click on the maps to view snapshots of the data, or link to more data. Users can also query data for particular regions or demographic groups. Reports can be downloaded in both Microsoft Word and Excel formats. This is a powerful database that makes it possible to find out who lives near transit, including information about household size and type and the ages of residents, their travel behavior, income, home ownership, and car ownership.

Early this year the CTOD is conducting focus groups to talk about possible uses for the database and improvements that will maximize user-friendliness. A practitioners’ guidebook is being developed, and capacity is being added to make it easier to map data at the transit zone and corridor levels. CTOD is also working with the Bureau of the Census to update the database with information from the 2010 Census and American Community Survey.

The database was created in 2003 and 2004 using the 2003 National Transportation Atlas Database and has been updated several times. Available data besides the 2000 U.S. Census includes the 2002-2004 Longitudinal Employment Data on characteristics of residences and workplaces and quarterly workforce indicators where available, as well as journey-to-work information from the Census Transportation Planning Package. Updates now in progress include the addition of the combined cost of housing and transportation in all station areas utilizing the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s affordability index.

**CTOD’s database goes online in 2010, making it possible to select data and create maps of all 4,000 existing and planned transit stations in the U.S.**



## Online Mixed-Income TOD Action Guide

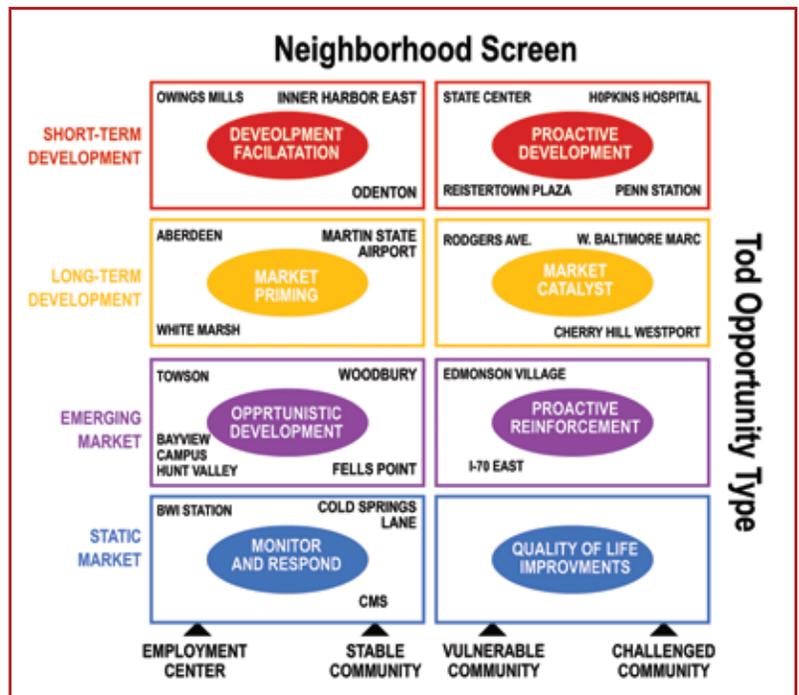
**MORE AND MORE** places are recognizing that affordability can be “deepened” by locating low-cost housing near low-cost transportation, which has prompted planners and advocates to want to better understand how they can incorporate mixed-income housing in station area plans. In response, the Center for TOD is creating an interactive web-based tool that walks users through a multi-step analysis in order to identify the mixed-income housing strategies that will work best in any neighborhood — depending on the local market, the housing stock, and an inventory of existing development activity. The action guide was developed in coordination with the Federal Transit Administration and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and includes a toolkit section describing more than 30 policies and mechanisms that promote mixed-income station areas, that explain the terminology, and provide case studies. Embedded links take users to data resources and the websites of relevant organizations. The website is geared for transit agency staff, local non-profits, advocates, real estate professionals, and government officials.

# A TOD Strategy For Central Maryland

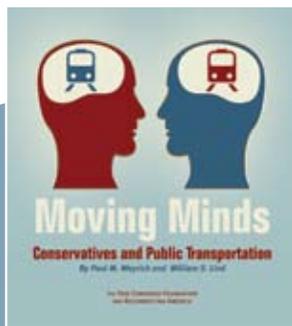
**THE NATIONWIDE HOUSING BOOM** and movement back into central cities has had a positive impact on Central Maryland, with development in downtown Baltimore and the revitalization of close-in neighborhoods. The national Base Realignment and Closure process is bringing in thousands of new jobs and residents and continued rail investment is helping set the stage for the location of housing and jobs, even as the economic downturn and foreclosure crisis has demonstrated the fragility of these gains.

The Center for TOD recently completed a year-long study to develop a TOD strategy for the Baltimore Transit Alliance of pro-transit businesses and nonprofits, concluding that continued prosperity will rely on transit investments that link jobs and housing in the kind of neighborhoods where people want to live. At the regional level TOD can generate momentum for market-driven TOD that can be self-sustaining over time by: linking people and jobs, providing lower housing and transportation costs, reducing infrastructure costs by directing new development to already-developed neighborhoods, improving public health by creating walkable neighborhoods near stations and reducing air and water pollution. At the local level TOD can direct the velocity and trajectory of neighborhood change and thereby also help to ensure neighborhood stability.

The report identifies priority locations for development and public investment, and provides a methodology for planning and investment in any location, depending on the market and on demographics. Detailed Strategic Plan recommendations for the short, middle and long term include: 1) Complete existing TOD projects to demonstrate high-quality transit-centered communities; 2) develop new corridor-level TOD initiatives — such as a vacant property strategy or an opportunity study — in key regional locations; 3) modify local, regional and state policies to support TOD by targeting state economic and community development incentives to TOD sites, modifying TIF districts to support equitable TOD, and creating a land bank — to cite three examples; 4) construct multimodal systems that support TOD; 5) foster cross-sector partnerships and build local capacity to implement TOD, including public-private partnerships and community outreach and organizing.



CTOD developed tools for the Baltimore region to help determine which stations are ready for TOD and which require some intervention.



## Moving Minds: Conservatives and Public Transportation

**MOVING MINDS** co-author William Lind has been making the rounds of talk radio shows lately to drum up interest in public transportation among political conservatives. Lind, a national security expert by training and a prominent cultural conservative, wrote this collection of studies and essays about public transportation with Paul Weyrich, who died last year. Weyrich was hailed as one of the most influential conservative figures of the last generation, and is widely credited with helping to bring Republicans to power in Washington in the 1990s because of his keen understanding of grassroots organizing and fundrais-

ing through direct mail campaigns. Weyrich and Lind have always contended that the way to enlist conservative support for public transportation is to talk about it in terms that conservatives can appreciate: because transit enhances national security by reducing dependence on foreign oil, promotes economic development, helps maintain conservative values including a sense of community, and provides welfare recipients with access to jobs. These studies are essential reading for all who need to build bipartisan support for transit — a critical endeavor as Congress considers reauthorizing the federal transportation bill. The book was the subject of a recent laudatory review in *Governing Magazine* by editor Alan Ehrenhalt. (Books available on our website.)

New study shows value creation near streetcars requires vacant or underutilized land, as in Portland (below).



## Can A Streetcar Capture Value In Washington D.C.?

**RECONNECTING AMERICA** and the Center for TOD recently completed a study on the value capture potential of streetcars for D.C. Surface Transit, a nonprofit effort that is advocating for a streetcar along the H Street Corridor in Washington D.C. We undertook three case studies of value capture along streetcar lines in Tampa, Seattle and Portland in order to identify the variables that determine how much value will be created. The study concludes that the most value is created when the streetcar alignment opens up land for infill development by connecting it with a nearby urban district that offers shopping and amenities, services and jobs — as was done in all three case study cities, where 400 percent increases in property values were not uncommon. The study also found the value creation potential is highest when the land available for redevelopment is underutilized — for example, old industrial and commercial districts where land is inexpensive and redevelopment efforts aren't likely to encounter opposition. The study also found that value capture potential is limited for single family homes compared to multi-family housing and commercial development.

## Shelley Poticha Works To Mainstream Sustainability



Shelley Poticha

**SHELLEY POTICHA** left Reconnecting America this past summer to become senior advisor for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's sustainable communities initiative — a job so new that the legislation creating her office hasn't even been approved by Congress. But she's been stumping for sustainability, arguing that it's time to move beyond what has been a "boutique movement" for "Prius-driving elites"

and bring green development initiatives to scale in the U.S. Spending bills in both the House and the Senate would provide HUD with more than \$150 million to fund regional planners working on innovative approaches to TOD and localities that want to revise local zoning codes to allow for mixed-use neighborhoods. HUD is leading the Interagency Partnership on Sustainable Communities with the U.S. Department of Transportation and the EPA, looking at ways to better align and leverage federal policies and investments to support livable communities in urban, suburban and rural places. The Livable Communities Act, introduced by U.S. Senator Chris Dodd in August, would authorize \$4 billion in funding for HUD and create Poticha's office. Reconnecting America Policy Director Mariia Zimmerman analyzes the Livable Communities Act at <http://www.reconnectingamerica.org/public/stories/889>.



### Contribute to Our New Blog!

**RECONNECTING AMERICA'S** new Half-Mile Circles blog hopes to bring together experts from around the country to write about best practices. For example, Dr. Ming Zhang, associate professor in the School of Community and Regional Planning at the University of Texas at Austin, has blogged about the relevance of TOD in Asia, and RA Policy Director Mariia Zimmerman analyzed U.S. Senator Chris Dodd's Livable Communities Act. Other recent blog posts have discussed the unexpected success of the new light rail system in Phoenix, Sacramento's plan to build a mixed-use sustainable neighborhood on 748 acres of underutilized industrial space, and new research including a TRB report that establishes the scientific basis for quantifying the relationships among development patterns, VMT and energy consumption. The blog was developed by Reconnecting America's Jeff Wood, and blog posts often expand upon the transit and TOD news that appears in his popular "Other Side of the Tracks" daily email brief. The blog is also a good place to keep up with the latest news about Reconnecting America, including job postings.



D.C. with great success. With the growing interest by Congress, the Administration and local elected officials in better linking policies and investments to sustainability goals, we will bring additional housing and environmental policy skills to our team in the coming months through new staff. Catherine Cox Blair, formerly with the City of Denver, will be in charge of the leadership development program, education and outreach. Catherine brings considerable experience in local government to our team, and will help us forge partnerships with elected and appointed leaders and diverse stakeholders in the community development and transportation arena. Catherine will share our best practices and the lessons learned from our work through a variety of venues including webinars and peer-to-peer exchanges, as well as our successful publications.

I co-chair Transportation for America, a broad coalition of 360 organizations that is focusing on reauthorization of the federal transportation bill as well as working to align our national, state and local transportation policies on an array of issues including economic opportunity, climate change, energy security, health, housing and community development. I find a pent-up enthusiasm and energized awareness of our shared beliefs: The South, Southwest and middle America as well as the far West and Northeast are all imagining a future in which communities and regions are connected by an integrated transportation system. That energy and enthusiasm is apparent on Capitol Hill as Congress and the Administration begin crafting what can and should be

a transformational reauthorization bill in which high-speed and conventional rail, local transit, walking and biking are an integral part of the solution to mobility, regional connectivity, and environmental and health concerns. More asphalt and concrete is no longer the answer. We need community development and housing around transit nodes with the goal of creating truly walkable, livable communities.

I was present when President Obama unveiled his vision for high-speed rail and committed to making it his signature public works project. I have never seen such devotion to transportation from the chief executive of our land, and it has inspired an exciting list of high-speed rail proposals. This effort will require the support of the mayors of cities large and small, as well as professional planners, community leaders and advocates, and public and private sector transportation operators. Now is the time to coalesce our efforts and raise our combined voices, for there is

a sense of urgency. This time we must get our transportation agenda right or we will lose the opportunity of a generation.

I left two children and my 3-year-old grandson Ethan in Meridian to come to Washington and engage in this work. The work we do today will in large measure set the course of Ethan's future. When he is a man will we still be fighting over precious oil reserves to fuel our economy or will he be free, really free, to make transportation choices? To fail now is to fail Ethan and his generation. We cannot afford to make this mistake. I look forward to our good work together.

**I left two children and my 3-year-old grandson Ethan in Meridian to come to Washington and engage in this work. The work we do today will, in large measure, set the course of Ethan's future. When he is a man, will we still be fighting over precious oil reserves to fuel our economy or will he be free, really free, to make transportation choices?**

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