

The Role of Transit in Creating Livable Metropolitan Communities

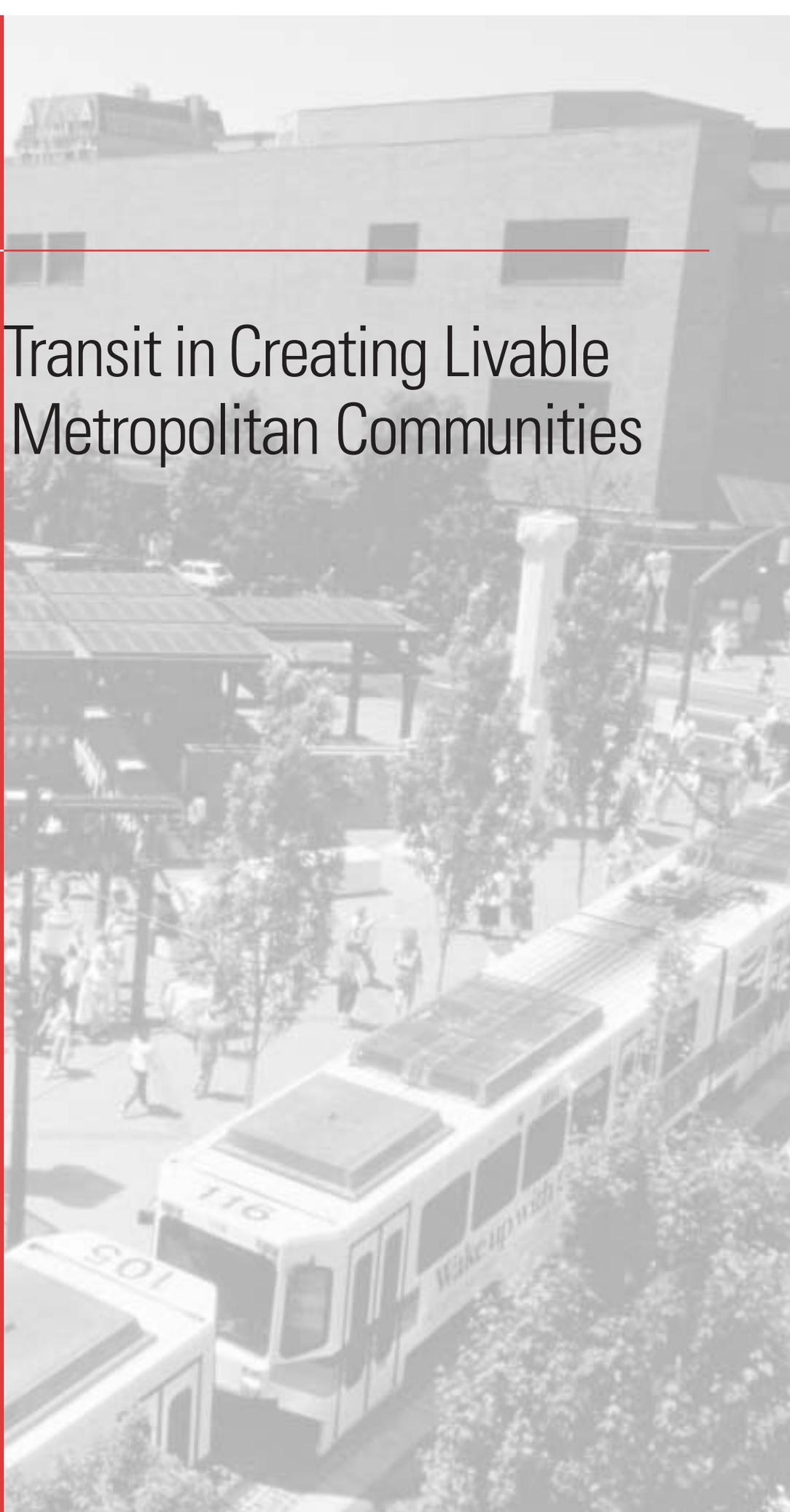
TCRP Report 22

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The Role of Transit in Creating Livable Metropolitan Communities

TCRP Report 22

Project for Public Spaces, Inc.
New York, NY

Transit Cooperative Research Program

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TRANSIT COOPERATIVE RESEARCH PROGRAM

The nation's growth and the need to meet mobility, environmental, and energy objectives place demands on public transit systems. Current systems, some of which are old and in need of upgrading, must expand service area, increase service frequency, and improve efficiency to serve these demands. Research is necessary to solve operating problems, to adapt appropriate new technologies from other industries, and to introduce innovations into the transit industry. The Transit Cooperative Research Program (TCRP) serves as one of the principal means by which the transit industry can develop innovative near-term solutions to meet demands placed on it.

The need for TCRP was originally identified in *TRB Special Report 213—Research for Public Transit: New Directions*, published in 1987 and based on a study sponsored by the Urban Mass Transportation Administration—now the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). A report by the American Public Transit Association (APTA), *Transportation 2000*, also recognized the need for local, problem-solving research. TCRP, modeled after the longstanding and successful National Cooperative Highway Research Program, undertakes research and other technical activities in response to the needs of transit service providers. The scope of TCRP includes a variety of transit research fields including planning, service configuration, equipment, facilities, operations, human resources, maintenance, policy, and administrative practices.

TCRP was established under FTA sponsorship in July 1992. Proposed by the U.S. Department of Transportation, TCRP was authorized as part of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991 (ISTEA). On May 13, 1992, a memorandum agreement outlining TCRP operating procedures was executed by the three cooperating organizations: FTA, the National Academy of Sciences, acting through the Transportation Research Board (TRB), and the Transit Development Corporation, Inc. (TDC), a nonprofit educational and research organization established by APTA. TDC is responsible for forming the independent governing board, designated as the TCRP Oversight and Project Selection (TOPS) Committee.

Research problem statements for TCRP are solicited periodically but may be submitted to TRB by anyone at any time. It is the responsibility of the TOPS Committee to formulate the research program by identifying the highest priority projects. As part of the evaluation, the TOPS Committee defines funding levels and expected products.

Once selected, each project is assigned to an expert panel, appointed by the Transportation Research Board. The panels prepare project statements (requests for proposals), select contractors, and provide technical guidance and counsel throughout the life of the project. The process for developing research problem statements and selecting research agencies has been used by TRB in managing cooperative research programs since 1962. As in other TRB activities, TCRP project panels serve voluntarily without compensation.

Because research cannot have the desired impact if products fail to reach the intended audience, special emphasis is placed on disseminating TCRP results to the intended end users of the research: transit agencies, service providers, and suppliers. TRB provides a series of research reports, syntheses of transit practice, and other supporting material developed by TCRP research. APTA will arrange for workshops, training aids, field visits, and other activities to ensure that results are implemented by urban and rural transit industry practitioners.

The TCRP provides a forum where transit agencies can cooperatively address common operational problems. The TCRP results support and complement other ongoing transit research and training programs.

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The members of the technical advisory panel selected to monitor this project and to review this report were chosen for recognized scholarly competence and with due consideration for the balance of disciplines appropriate to the project. The opinions and conclusions expressed or implied are those of the research agency that performed the research, and while they have been accepted as appropriate by the technical panel, they are not necessarily those of the Transportation Research Board, the National Research Council, the Transit Development Corporation, or the Federal Transit Administration of the U.S. Department of Transportation.

Each report is reviewed and accepted for publication by the technical panel according to procedures established and monitored by the Transportation Research Board Executive Committee and the Governing Board of the National Research Council.

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FOREWORD

*By Staff
Transportation Research
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This report will be of interest to individuals seeking to improve the livability of their communities and to those concerned with the role public transportation can play in pursuing this goal. The report combines guidelines and case studies to provide a comprehensive approach for improving community livability and transit ridership in the United States. It is directed toward a broad range of individuals and groups in the public and private sectors associated with community, business, and civic organizations, including public transportation providers, local and metropolitan governments, community groups, and private businesses.

A livable community is something that everybody wants, but it does not mean the same thing to all people. There is some agreement on the characteristics of “livability” or quality of life, such as safe and healthy neighborhoods; sustainable employment; adequate housing, retail and community services; positive image; sense of community; and neighborhood-based cultural and recreational opportunities. Transit can be integral to making communities more livable by providing access to goods and services and can support attainment of complementary community goals in other investment areas as well.

The objective of TCRP Project H-4D, *The Role of Transit in Creating Livable Metropolitan Communities*, was to explore the relationship between transit and livable communities. The research team—lead by Project for Public Spaces, Inc., and supported by its subcontractors (the International Downtown Association, the National Association of Neighborhoods, TransManagement, Inc., The Urban Partnership, and the Urban Mobility Corporation)—explored a “place-making” approach where a local community, working in partnership with a transit agency, plans and implements neighborhood-scale projects and programs that are mutually supportive of community livability and transit ridership goals.

The final report from this research provides considerable information and guidance. The report’s 12 chapters are divided into three major parts as follows:

- **Part I. Overview and Context.** The first two chapters of the report define the concept of livability and the impact of transportation on livability. These chapters also describe federal support for transit and livable community initiatives, the “place-making” approach to livability, and transportation strategies that impact livability.
- **Part II. Roles of Transit in Creating Livable Communities.** In conducting this project, the research team met with numerous people in many communities throughout the United States to examine diverse examples

of how public transportation supports and enhances community livability. This research, documented and presented in Chapters 3 through 9, includes “examples,” which briefly summarize the experience of the individual communities, and more lengthy case studies. More specifically, the examples and case studies are organized by the following topics:

- Creating places for community life,
- Using transit as a catalyst for downtown and neighborhood renewal,
- Creating opportunities for entrepreneurship and local economic development,
- Improving safety and amenity,
- Making communities accessible and convenient, and
- Shaping community growth.

The use of examples and case studies provides practical concepts and demonstrates how public transportation can meaningfully contribute to the livability of metropolitan communities.

- **Part III. Implementation.** Chapters 10 through 12 provide a guide to implementation by describing the importance of a community-based process for creating livable communities. (This process involves early participation in transportation planning and partnerships with public and private organizations implementing transportation and community projects.) Part III then describes specific planning, design, and management strategies for livable places and concludes with suggested next steps to increase awareness of livability-oriented transit programs.

This report is a valuable resource for executives, decisionmakers, managers, and planners from transit systems, local governments, community organizations, MPOs, the FTA, the FHWA, and other public and private organizations involved with public transportation and community livability.

In addition to the final report, a video was prepared by the research team. The video provides an overview of key attributes of livable communities and shows how transit systems contribute to community vitality. The video is available from the American Public Transit Association. Inquiries regarding the video should be addressed to:

TCRP Dissemination
American Public Transit Association
1201 New York Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20005
FAX: (202)898-4019
Internet: <http://www.apta.com/tcrp>

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The Role of Transit in Creating Livable Metropolitan Communities

THE ROLE OF TRANSIT IN CREATING LIVABLE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITIES

SUMMARY

This report describes transit's increasingly important role in improving the livability of communities.

Concerns about livability affect every community: inner cities, suburbs, small towns, and rural areas. The report explores a "place-making" approach where a local community, working in partnership with a transit agency, plans and implements neighborhood-scale projects and programs that are mutually supportive of community livability and transit ridership goals.

Part I of this report describes the place-making approach to livability and explores the relationships between transportation and livability that are keys to understanding the case studies.

In Chapter 2, the role of transportation in building communities through transit programs, strategies to "calm" traffic in residential and commercial neighborhoods, and a new understanding of the relationship between transportation and land use is explored.

Part II of the report—Chapters 3 through 9—presents examples and case studies of transit facilities and services that achieve community livability goals; the role played by communities, transit agencies, municipal agencies and authorities, and the federal government is also discussed. Each chapter in Part II has two sections: (1) an introduction with highlighted example projects and (2) case studies. Chapter 3 describes the selection criteria for case studies and the research approach used in collecting the data and background information for the case studies.

Livability topics covered in Chapters 4 through 9 include transit's role in the following:

- Creating places for community life,
- Acting as a catalyst for the renewal and revitalization of neighborhoods and entire downtowns,
- Creating opportunities for entrepreneurship and local economic development,
- Making communities safer and more comfortable,

- Making connections between neighborhoods, downtowns, and community destinations more accessible and convenient, and
- Shaping community growth.

Part III of the report is a guide to implementation. Chapter 10 outlines a series of model partnerships created between communities and transit agencies, a specific process for developing such partnerships, and steps to follow for involving communities in the planning, design, and management of transit projects and other livability initiatives. Chapter 11 provides a checklist of design, management, and transit strategies and how they can be used to address specific local problems as part of a place-making process.

Chapter 12 concludes by offering the next steps in this evolving partnership between transit and communities.

A bibliography and related literature and the results of research conducted to define livability, as well as actual livability studies, are found in Appendixes A and B, respectively.

Part I

Overview and Context

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

A revolution is going on today in American communities. Citizens are discovering that by working in partnership with government, they can reshape their neighborhoods and downtowns into vital, attractive, comfortable—and more livable—places.

A potent tool has emerged in this movement, one that is an important but still largely unrecognized catalyst for improving community life. That tool is transportation. Transportation facilities and networks are natural focal points for the kinds of activities that help restore a positive sense of community. This expanded role for transportation started with transit and has now spread to traffic planning.

This report is based on a year-long research effort to identify examples of best practices and provide concrete evidence of how transit can be a contributing force in achieving greater livability in all communities. Following a brief overview of the role played by transportation in community life, case studies are presented in which transit serves to foster livability. To assist in applying this process to other communities, a process for planning and implementing improvements, whereby transit agencies work in partnership with communities, is also presented.

WHAT IS “LIVABILITY”?

Bookstores today are filled with guides to “the best places to live in America.” Using census statistics, weather data, broad community surveys, and a range of other methods, researchers found when people say “livability,” they mean clean air and water, safe streets, positive race relations, affordable homes, quality public schools, greenery and open space, uncongested roads, and low taxes, among other things. (A detailed discussion of methods used to define livability and their findings appears in Appendix B.) Indeed, the avid interest in livability today seems to have emerged because people are

increasingly recognizing the unlivable aspects of the places where they live, work, and spend recreational time.

People express their strongest concerns about the livability of their communities when referring to problems encountered on a daily basis. For example, they talk about difficulty crossing streets and feeling threatened by automobile traffic. They grieve about the replacement of distinctive local structures with sterile and characterless architecture. They complain about a lack of parks to sit or stroll in and the dearth of scenic vistas. They lament the disappearance of centers where people once came together and took part in activities such as shopping, mailing letters, eating out, going to the theater, catching a train or bus, visiting the library, or meeting friends. These concerns reflect an underlying sense of isolation and erosion of community life. The result is more and more people are feeling a loss of community as well as a lack of control over and connection to their changing local environment.

Even though “livability” is difficult to define, people are able to apply it as a concept to their own community and way of life. Striving for livability puts the unlivable aspects of communities into clear focus and helps channel local energies into projects and programs that address daily livability problems. The case studies presented in this report clearly show how this process works: how communities set priorities for improving livability and establish programs that address community needs, problems, and visions for betterment.

CONCERNS ABOUT COMMUNITY LIVABILITY

People everywhere are concerned about the livability of their communities. Specifics cited include safety and fear of crime, easy access to jobs, availability and affordability of housing, diminishing environmental



Figure 1-1. Peachtree Street in suburban Atlanta, GA, lacks a sense of place. (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

quality, educational quality, race relations, runaway growth, and traffic congestion.

Concern about livability is not confined to neighborhoods in large inner cities: it exists in suburbs, small towns, and even in the smallest villages. This concern is expressed by residents of cities losing population as well as by city dwellers in booming regions. It comes up in poor and wealthy communities alike, and among people of varied ages and backgrounds. It is clear that Americans are facing a national livability dilemma.

Transportation strongly impacts community livability concerns. People are beginning to realize that



Figure 1-2. Livable places bring people together. (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

designing cities and suburbs to accommodate the automobile has often diminished, not improved, quality of life. Intrusive roads have created barriers that disrupt communities and erode their physical and social cohesion. At the same time, public transportation options are often viewed as inadequate alternatives. As a result, many communities end up with transportation networks that simply pass through them, without responding to community needs, relating to their surroundings, or reflecting local character.

A PLACE-MAKING APPROACH TO LIVABILITY

... Places have an impact on our sense of self, our sense of safety, the kind of work we get done, the ways we interact with other people, even our ability to function as citizens in a democracy. In short the places where we spend time affect the people we are and can become. [1]

—Tony Hiss, *The Experience of Place*

The two concepts of community and place are inseparable. 'Place' is the vessel within which the 'spirit' of community is stored; 'Community' is the catalyst that imbues a location with a 'sense' of place. The two are not divisible. You cannot have community without place; and a place without community is a location. A group of people with a shared concern but not a shared place is an interest group, not a community. [2]

—Donovan Rypkema

Urbanists focus on the micro before wrestling with the macro and understand that, in reality, the macro only changes for the better in micro steps . . . Innovation and ingenuity are the prevailing characteristics. Perseverance in the face of naysayers and determination in the face of obstacles are prerequisites. Step by step, essential and natural growth follows and spreads until larger areas prosper over time. [3]

—Roberta Gratz, *The Living City*

This report explores a place-making approach to livability, an approach that involves assessing the concerns and needs of a local community and then using this assessment to make improvements to the many places in that community. Because this approach focuses on “places,” it can apply to any community, regardless of differences in socioeconomic status, demographic makeup, or even geographic location.

Discussions about livability are often too broad or attempt to cover too large a geographic area to lead to the development of practical strategies that address local community concerns. Making communities livable through a place-making approach connects the concept of livability to the specific places used by people in communities. It begins at a scale that a community finds both manageable and relevant: a small area



Figure 1-3. A revitalized street corner in downtown New Haven, CT, features amenities and activities of a successful “place.” (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

around where people live or work, one that is probably no larger than a downtown or a neighborhood. When “closer to home” problems are defined, residents of an area are not only better able to identify priorities, but they are also more likely to become involved in a place’s improvement.

Communities are usually composed of many small areas, and improvement to specific places can cumulatively produce success on a broader scale. This place-making approach thus provides a way for municipal agencies and transit operators, which operate on a metropolitan or regional level, to take steps toward addressing a community’s livability goals.

While place-making does include design strategies, design is only a part of it. Many places have been improved through better provision of municipal services without any physical changes at all. Improving the maintenance and management of a public space, upgrading security, or establishing a special-events or vending program are all strategies for improving a place without making design changes. The development of special management districts to oversee such activities, funded by special assessments agreed to by property owners, has flourished across the country in both large cities and small towns as more local organizations have begun to take responsibility for ensuring that their commercial districts are safe, attractive, clean, active, and comfortable.

TRANSIT AND PLACE-MAKING

There is a kind of mass transit cities used to be very rich in . . . the kind that is part of the fabric of the city itself, doesn’t just go overhead and take people whoosh, but links all kinds of places within the city and that’s the kind of

mass transit we need to reconstitute . . . In a really healthy city, it’s something that knits the whole thing together . . .
—Jane Jacobs [4]

When you have this train running down the middle of the street every 3 ½ min, you don’t believe there’s going to be murder and robbery and violence.
—Alec Keefer, Architectural Conservancy of Ontario [5]

A focus on place-making can bring the ridership goals of the transit agency and the livability goals of the community together. For transit operators, this means that each decision made to provide service, locate a station or stop and maintain that station should be made in the context of how transit can contribute positively to the experience of that place. Mobility options must be developed and improved in response to expressed as well as observed community needs. These transportation options also must be regarded as a set of alternatives (cars, buses, trains, vans, bicycles, walking) that fit into a community’s broader vision as well as its self-image. When there is no existing community-based vision, transit planners should be prepared to insist that one be developed or learn to facilitate its development. Regardless of who guides this process, transit decisions should be made so as to complement and help realize a community’s vision and plans.

Opportunities for Communities

Case studies in this report demonstrate how transit services and facilities are already contributing to the livability of metropolitan communities throughout the United States—although clearly much more can



Figure 1-4. Harvard Square, in Cambridge, MA, is not only a world renowned “place” but also a transit hub serving both residents and tourists. (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

be done in many more communities. This report presents projects that involve communities, not just in a pro forma “approval” process, but in assuming a fundamental role transforming transit stations, and even bus stops, into community focal points. Transit agencies are establishing facilities like day care and senior centers as part of transit facilities. Transit is being integrated into downtowns in a visible and positive manner, through the creation of centralized transfer centers and specially designed streets that help stimulate economic development. New, flexible, neighborhood van systems now exist that cater to the needs of residents who find existing public transit to be inaccessible or inconvenient. Many of the new light rail systems around the country have brought new riders aboard—sometimes many more than expected—and have successfully changed transit’s image and use in automobile dominant cities like St. Louis and Denver.

Although the process for developing projects of this type is not new, recognition of the relationship between transit and the needs of communities and of the importance of a process that facilitates transit’s response to these needs is new. Community groups are rediscovering the value of services offered by trains, buses, and community shuttles and are embarking on projects that expand their use. More importantly, they are recognizing how transit services and facilities can enhance the livability of a downtown or a neighborhood. Although many projects are small or still in the planning stages, research for this report revealed that this community-oriented approach to addressing livability through transit is gaining momentum and that passion and dedication for community projects is waiting to be tapped.

However, obstacles still exist. The public, community organizations, and local governments do not always understand the connection between transit and livability. Most quality-of-life studies show that transportation in general is not currently a primary determining factor in influencing where people choose to live. Transit agencies themselves, therefore, need to recognize that the services they provide and facilities they create can have an enormous, positive impact on the livability of the neighborhood places they serve.

Opportunities for Transit

Historically, transit has been the central organizing feature around which communities were built and functioned. Today, transit needs a new direction if it is to continue to function effectively in metropolitan areas designed around the car. This challenge is par-

ticularly critical in areas outside the northeastern United States and other major transit cities. However, the long-term decline in transit ridership, even in cities like New York, shows that this problem is not geographically limited.

To ensure its own future, transit must become more visible and connected to people’s lives and the lives of the communities it serves. A transformation is required, much like the recent turn-around in the field of urban policing. Cities like New York, St. Louis, and Seattle have experienced extraordinary decreases in crime, largely because of the return of the “cop on the beat” and “community policing,” where police, citizens, and communities work together to reduce crime and improve the quality of life. This has completely changed the way police departments provide services and the way communities and police interact with one another.

While contributing toward the livability of a community is an admirable goal in itself, it is important to emphasize that there are other important benefits of this approach for transit agencies. Community building is an important and visible public business: the result can be tangible projects to which local officials can point with pride, thereby helping to build future support for transit. Working directly with communities, especially people who only occasionally use transit, helps to build a broader constituency of support for transit as well. Making transit better serve the needs of a community can translate not only into new transit riders, but a force that can lobby for funding to expand and improve service.

Finally, direct economic benefits also can accrue to a transit agency when it develops its facilities and properties to incorporate uses and activities—ranging from cafes to post offices—that generate income while providing a much needed service to transit patrons. Although such benefits are routinely considered part of major rail investments, they are often overlooked by the nation’s bus operators who handle most of today’s transit riders.

A community-based approach for transit works. In a day when many focus on the limits and constraints of transit, there are reasons to be optimistic about the future role of transit in communities. The key is enabling transit agencies to recognize and value their relevance in people’s lives and to encourage more communities to work in partnership with transit agencies.

FEDERAL SUPPORT FOR TRANSIT AND LIVABLE COMMUNITIES

Many of the activities described in this report would not have been possible without the support of

the Federal Transit Administration's (FTA) Livable Communities Initiative and the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) of 1991. By fostering new approaches to applying transportation in the service of community life, both are bringing about positive changes.

The **FTA's Livable Communities Initiative** has provided major funding and support for projects around the country, including many presented in this report. The FTA's Livable Communities Initiative has 15 capital demonstration projects underway. It also is sponsoring a series of transportation-based town meetings and developing an innovative traveling exhibition promoting a holistic approach to transit, including a video for display at conferences, workshops and symposia across the United States. The FTA also is writing a guidebook for livable communities and is developing guidelines for public/private partnerships around its facilities. *Growing Smart* is a planning document being produced by the Department of Housing and Urban Development in partnership with FTA, Environmental Protection Agency, and American Planning Association. It will significantly update examples of model United States development and planning guidelines to combat sprawl and promote transit-oriented development. In 1996, the initiative focused on evaluating projects underway in order to document the benefits of community-sensitive transit.

ISTEA, which has fundamentally redirected transportation policy, was also instrumental in many of the projects presented here. ISTEA has expanded local discretion for transportation investment decisions, including the diverting of highway funds into transit, pedestrian, and bicycle projects. ISTEA has also mandated greater public participation in decision making, encouraging investment in projects that link transit facilities to their communities and in projects that enhance livability through transit.

This report arrives at the moment when the U.S. Department of Transportation has committed itself to a new initiative, the National Partnership for Transportation and Livable Communities. This partnership brings together public and private nonprofit entities as well as foundations to advance the place of transportation (transit and highway) as a tool for creating livable communities. This will be achieved through education and outreach, research and information

exchange, and technical assistance and demonstration projects.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report is divided into three parts.

Part I, the Overview, describes the place-making approach to livability and explores the relationships between transportation and livability that are keys to understanding the case studies presented in the report.

Part II presents the specific ways in which transit can support the livability of communities, using extensive case studies as examples.

Part III is a practical guide to implementation, including a planning process and helpful suggestions on implementing the process. Case studies of partnerships involving transit agencies with city governments, community organizations and private developers are also presented to show the numerous ways programs and projects can be implemented.

The Appendixes A and B, respectively, contain a bibliography and related literature and the results of the in-depth research conducted on livability and quality of life and what these mean to communities.

A video was produced in conjunction with this report that presents an overview of the case studies covered and the planning, decision making, and place-making approaches outlined in the report. This video is intended to be used to assist communities in implementing projects and programs similar to those described in this report. (See Foreword for availability.)

ENDNOTES

1. Tony Hiss, *The Experience of Place*, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, New York (1990) p.1.
2. Donovan Rypkema, "Place, Community, and Economic Development," a talk delivered at the Annual Conference of the National Trust for Historic Preservation in St. Louis (September 29, 1993) as quoted in Roberta Gratz, *The Living City*, p.iii.
3. Roberta Gratz, *The Living City: How America's Cities Are Being Revitalized by Thinking Small in a Big Way*, The Preservation Press, Washington, DC (1994) pp.ii-iii.
4. Gratz, p.xxiii.
5. Alfred Holden, "Why Toronto Works," *Planning Magazine*, American Planning Association, Chicago, Illinois (March 1995) p.6.

CHAPTER 2

The Impact of Transportation on Livability

Transportation is at the core of everything.

—Roberta Gratz, *The Living City* [1]

Transportation plays a role in almost everyone's daily life. It is intrinsically woven into the fabric of our existence, encompassing not only how we get from place to place, but also how we conduct our daily routines and the choices we make about what we do. Getting to work, school, or appointments, running errands, shopping, socializing and recreational pursuits are among the many things we do that are affected by the kinds of transportation available (or not available) to us. Location of transportation facilities, design of streets and sidewalks and even placement of on-street parking can make all the difference in how we experience these day to day endeavors.

Because transportation is so tied to our daily lives, it provides a perfect opportunity to address the livability concerns of our communities. For example, when train stations, bus stops or transfer facilities are centrally situated, easy to reach, with convenient connections, they make it simple to get where we're going, without having to drive. Ample sidewalks and safe-to-cross streets also simplify our lives by giving us opportunities to walk, bicycle or stroll to our destinations while being able to look around, mingle with others and take part in all kinds of other activities, like shopping, eating, and entertainment.

Transportation can also enhance the quality of the general living environment when it responds to people's needs. When transit facilities provide pleasant waiting places with comfortable seating, congenial food service, clean restrooms, helpful signage and other amenities in lively, attractive surroundings, they become important places in their communities that people can enjoy. Similarly, streets designed to the scale of people, with colorful plantings, pleasing street furniture and positive activities, offer environ-

ments where people can feel safe, relaxed and free to savor life around them.

What's more, when transportation is people-oriented, it can help build communities and restore community life. It can provide the accessibility and exposure that helps develop business. It can allow for entrepreneurial opportunities by molding public spaces and transportation facilities that can nurture start-up enterprises. It can spur the identity and cohesiveness that bring communities together and help them grow and become safer and more attractive.

A ROLE FOR TRANSPORTATION AS A PLAYER IN BUILDING COMMUNITIES

For transportation to play an effective role in improving the livability of communities, it must become more of an integral part of community life and have a more direct link to the idea of "place." This view of transportation, as a catalyst for strengthening community life in the United States, also calls for a new way of measuring the success of transportation facilities.

In the case of streets and roads, the idea of transportation as a catalyst for community livability goes beyond the movement of vehicles as the sole bellwether of success to encompass the comfort and safety of pedestrians and bicyclists as well as the accommodation of alternative mobility options to meet the varying needs of different individuals within the community. It also includes requirements for an attractive, inviting, more human-scale street environment that reflects, preserves and enhances a community's unique personality, provides opportunities for people to come together and is supportive of local

businesses. This translates into commercial and residential areas where traffic moves more slowly in streets that are not excessively wide and are better connected to adjacent uses, in terms of scale, function and design. It also sets the stage for well marked pedestrian crosswalks, light cycles that are timed for walkers, not just drivers, convenient on-street parking, public amenities, attractive landscaping and management practices that increase the flexibility of existing roadway space to accommodate different kinds of uses at different times.

In the case of transit facilities, such as those presented in this report, this idea extends beyond system operations. It includes serving passengers' preferences and needs and focusing on how transit facilities can act as catalysts for regenerating surrounding communities as well as on how they can serve as centers of community life. This translates into transit facilities that are conveniently located in downtowns rather than on the outskirts of town. It also has resulted in stations and transfer centers that look inviting, are easily accessible on foot, provide amenities, and encourage local businesses to supply on-premise services, or to take part in local activities. It has created facilities like bus and trolley stops that are combined with other community uses that spur improvements to surrounding areas and create centers of activity. In the case of transit services, it has meant a new flexibility in providing alternative transit options such as small scale van and circulator systems.

TRANSPORTATION STRATEGIES IMPACTING LIVABILITY

Three overall transportation strategies that impact livability are explored below. They are transit strategies, traffic-calming strategies, and transportation and land-use strategies. Of these, only case studies of transit strategies are presented in this report. [2]

Transit Strategies

Transit strategies that help create livable communities are presented in this report, with Part II devoted to presenting many specific examples and case studies of how transit makes an impact. Strategies fall into two basic categories: design-oriented strategies and service-oriented strategies. Although they can be discussed separately, they very often work together.

Design-Oriented Strategies

Bus, light rail, heavy rail, and subway stops have the potential to be centers of community life. Design-



Figure 2-1. This bus shelter in Portland, OR, is one of many amenities provided on this successful downtown transit mall. (Credit: Tri-Met, Portland)

oriented strategies enhance the comfort and convenience of transit users, while having a positive impact on the surrounding area. With proper design and incentives, transit stops can attract a variety of activities and uses (like retail, community services, and special events) which increase the sense of security and help create an incubator for small retailers and entrepreneurs from the local community.

Acting as a stimulus for commercial redevelopment and neighborhood renewal, the stop or station can contribute toward the livability of an entire neighborhood area. Examples of these design-oriented strategies are redesign of bus and trolley stops to support adjacent retail uses; introduction of improved public spaces around a commuter rail station; and creation of transportation centers and intermodal terminals that serve as catalysts for neighborhood-scale development.

Service-Oriented Strategies

Service-oriented strategies are essentially transit services that increase mobility within a neighborhood area. For the purposes of this study, service-oriented strategies that only target special user groups (like special vans to transport the elderly or people with disabilities to specific social services) were excluded. The focus is on services that are currently available to the general public (including these special user groups) to improve livability through better mobility and access.

Service-oriented strategies include transit shuttles and connectors, which link residential neighborhoods with commuter rail and rapid transit stations; circulators and trolleys, which enable shoppers, visitors and office workers to move more freely about the central business district; and neighborhood-based



Figure 2-2. This historic style “trolley” bus links a downtown terminal in Corpus Christi, TX, with local attractions. Since the “trolley” was initiated, ridership has increased significantly. (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

transportation services. Introduction of these local transportation services helps support the goals of neighborhood livability by facilitating internal circulation to local destinations not well served by regular transit services. These new services carry residents to and from homes to jobs, shops, and local services: they transport the elderly to medical appointments, take children of working parents to day care centers and schools, serve the disabled, and transport residents to community-based social services. In metropolitan areas served by rail transit or regional bus services, small vans shuttle neighborhood residents to the nearest stations, providing convenient access to economic, educational, cultural, and recreational opportunities offered by the region.

While all these service-oriented strategies have the potential to add to community convenience and livability, it is important to remember that their effectiveness depends on their management. This includes, for example, efficient scheduling along with providing scheduling information, coordination of connections, user orientation, vehicle maintenance, and sensitive and responsive personnel.

“Traffic-Calming” Strategies

The impact of both design- and service-oriented kinds of transit improvements will be reduced, however, unless streets or roads also support community character and needs. Streets and roads can knit communities together and enhance the character and identity of the places where they pass. They can become symbols of pride for a community, have a considerable economic impact on local businesses and

help create strong and viable community centers. In other words, improving the livability of streets is not just a pedestrian, vehicle traffic, bicycle, or transit issue—all must be considered together. It is important to balance all of the functions on a street so that they serve users. This balanced approach to the use of streets has come to be known as “traffic calming.”

Traffic calming is a term that emerged in Europe to describe the practice of slowing down cars, but not necessarily banning them, as they move through commercial areas and residential neighborhoods. The benefit for pedestrians, transit riders, and bicyclists is that cars now drive at speeds that are safer and more compatible with walking and bicycling. Buses no longer have to vie for limited space and access. There is, in fact, a kind of equilibrium achieved among all of the uses of a street so no one mode can dominate at the



Figures 2-3 and 2-4. European experience with traffic calming is very extensive; this town is one of hundreds in Denmark that have redesigned their residential and commercial streets to make them more pedestrian-friendly (Figure 2-3). In the United States, cities like San Bernardino, CA, have begun traffic calming efforts of their own, in this example by introducing diagonal parking (Figure 2-4). (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

expense of another. The objective of traffic calming therefore necessitates a change in the role and goals of traffic engineers who traditionally have been asked to move traffic as efficiently and quickly as possible.

Traffic calming also requires an understanding of new techniques: one based on traffic-management strategies, the other on physical design. Traffic-management strategies include issuance of center-city passes, truck restrictions, signalization systems, transportation system management, parking management, traffic-reduction ordinances, car and fuel taxation, and speed limits. Traffic-calming design techniques create physical impediments to speeding, such as road narrowed lanes for vehicles, undulations in the roadway, crosswalks raised to sidewalk level, and elements that create pinch points or gateways to a street. Because a wide and straight street with perfect visibility is most conducive to speeding, these and other similar approaches are intended to alter driver perception and encourage slower speeds.

In general, well-conceived traffic-calming programs address the broad issues of a street and go well beyond vehicle concerns to enhance pedestrian, bicycle, and transit activities. For example, a sidewalk can be widened at an intersection to create a larger space for a bus stop shelter and seating. This wider sidewalk also reduces the width of the street for pedestrians who are crossing. The bus no longer has to pull in and out of traffic to pick up or drop off passengers, thereby speeding service, although momentarily delaying traffic. If the crosswalk is raised to sidewalk level, drivers are further encouraged to drive at lower speeds. Perhaps an adjacent business is created (or a newsstand located) to serve transit riders. All of these strategies work together, therefore, to create a balance of uses at that corner.

Transportation and Land-Use Strategies

Where and how Americans live has changed almost completely in the past 50 years. Fifty years ago, there was little suburban sprawl. People lived in small towns near cities, or they lived in cities or towns themselves. Compact, dense development was created by, and continued to be supported by, an extensive network of public transportation. Fifty years ago, even Los Angeles had its “Red Car” trolley system, which is now gone. During the first half of the twentieth century, people marveled at the growth of cities. This has paled by comparison with the growth during the second half of the century.

This massive transformation of cities, suburbs, and towns has been paralleled by unprecedented economic prosperity and growth. Yet it is clear that this

transformation has not been without its costs. The “American Dream” of spread-out, free-ranging development has come home to roost in places that lack human scale or identity, and with serious damage, if not downright destruction, to the central locales and neighborhoods that have long given people their communal focus and sense of belonging.

Much of this sprawling development has been related to land-use policies that favor low density and complete separation of residential and commercial uses. In the long run, if lasting and effective transportation improvements that act as a permanent, positive force for livability are to be achieved, then they must take place within the context of an overall land-use policy designed to further the preservation and



Figure 2-5 and 2-6. Aerial views of Harvard Square in Cambridge, MA (Figure 2-5) and suburban Los Angeles, CA (Figure 2-6) illustrate dramatically the difference between traditional and contemporary land-use patterns and transportation networks. (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

revitalization of dense, lively town centers as well as the creation of new nodes near public transportation. Such a policy can nurture initiatives that cluster activities around transit hubs, provide opportunities for short commutes and easy walking, promote alternative transit use and avoid the wastes of energy, land, and the environment that sprawl creates.

There is considerable existing literature on the subject of how macroscale land-use patterns and urban form encourage or discourage transit-oriented communities. This literature describes the principles (such as “The Ahwahnee Principles”) of changing the way American suburbs are structured to encourage more dense, transit-oriented communities. The “neotraditional” communities movement is an important lead in this effort. (See, for example, *Land Use Strategies for More Livable Communities*, by The Local Government Commission, Sacramento, CA.) The TCRP also has completed major research toward this effort (*TCRP Report 16, “Transit and Urban Form”*).

Fortunately, there are encouraging signs today of a broadening perspective, a growing awareness of the role of transit in the development process and in the creation of livable communities. A growing recognition of the importance of land use broadens the discussion further. Transportation planners increasingly view transportation and land use as complementary components of the larger metropolitan system. Now the question transportation planners often ask is: how can communities be designed to provide a better

environment for pedestrians, bicyclists and transit riders, and thus reduce automobile dependence? They also may ask: how can more opportunities and activities be provided within closer distances, and thus reduce total travel? Transportation planners are implicitly asking: how can accessibility be enhanced by changing land-use patterns rather than only by expanding the transportation system?

CONCLUSIONS

The case studies that follow in Part II show how the transit strategies discussed above are being used in communities throughout the United States and how they are succeeding at fostering greater livability. Each of these strategies has its own specific applications in response to specific local issues and opportunities, and all of them are not necessarily applicable in all cases. In many cases, however, a combination of strategies are at work, which demonstrate the intrinsic relationship between transportation and community life.

ENDNOTES

1. Roberta Gratz, *The Living City*, p.xviii.
2. In 1997, additional research will be completed to document specific case studies of management strategies, which enhance streets so that they too contribute to community livability goals and support more efficient, effective, and convenient transit operations.

Part II

Roles of Transit in Creating Livable Communities

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CHAPTER 3

Introduction and Approach to Case Studies

This chapter describes the many ways that transit currently helps to create livable metropolitan communities. Case studies, which describe in detail the origin, planning process, overall strategy, and assessment of each program exemplify specific roles. The research team has organized the case studies according to specific livability issues in order to reinforce the connection between transit strategies and broader community goals.

The case studies are not meant to illustrate every possible program and role that transit can play, rather, they are indicative of types of projects. The research team has attempted to provide a variety of innovative case studies representing different geographic areas, transit operating environments, transit ridership levels, and types of transit modes. Most of the projects conform to the overall place-making framework that is presented in Chapter 1, that is, they entail a high level of community involvement in design, planning, and implementation through some kind of community partnership. Because most projects fulfill more than one community livability goal, the introduction to each chapter cross-references case studies from other sections of the report that are relevant to the livability issues under discussion.

CASE STUDY SELECTION CRITERIA

The case studies presented in the report were selected according to the following criteria:

- *They demonstrate a link between transit and community livability objectives.* Case studies illustrate “best practices” in one or all of the following ways and transit is a key component of these efforts:
 - Active community involvement in planning process;
 - Integration of facility or system as part of larger community development or improvement strategy—encouraging a high level of accessibility with less auto-dependence;
 - Facility design, amenities, elements, public services and activities that respond to transit user and community needs;
 - Innovative implementation strategies, through community-based, public-private partnerships; and
 - Innovative management strategies for security, maintenance, and other operations.
- *There is considerable transferability to other places in the United States.* The examples included in the site visits and case studies will illustrate initiatives or objectives that other communities could pursue and achieve. Indeed, it is important that readers interested in a specific geographic area or transit mode consult all the case studies, because there are “generic” aspects of all of them that may have bearing on a specific local situation.
- *Different locations throughout the United States, as well as different sizes and types of communities and transit systems, are included.* The examples will show that the concept of transit contributing to livable communities can be effectively pursued, regardless of geography or type of transit service. Examples include both suburban areas and inner city communities, as well as downtowns and neighborhoods, large cities and small. Examples also provide a range of transit strategies, including place-oriented strategies and service-oriented strategies.
- *A range of budgets is represented.* The case studies illustrate short-term, small-scale efforts that have had an impact, as well as major and costly capital programs and redevelopment projects. Even many of the major, expensive programs had components that were inexpensive and were implemented in a short period of time.

- *Transit has had an impact.* Case studies clearly show how and why transit was critical to improving livability.
- *Transit and land-use policies are linked.* The relationship between transit and supportive land-use policies is important and is illustrated, especially in Chapter 9, “Shaping Community Growth.”
- *Transit investment is performed differently because a community is already livable.* Case studies demonstrate how communities benefit from customer-focused transit services and investments and how transit benefits from livable communities through increased ridership, more positive public image, and better use of facilities.
- *Obstacles have been overcome.* Transit innovations often face many internal as well as external obstacles and barriers. In nearly every project covered, obstacles had to be overcome, which influenced the nature of the final outcome and made a project or program even stronger.
- *Practitioners will find useful information and insights.* The transit industry and local communities are primary audiences for the research results. Consequently, they should benefit from the information and be able to use it to improve communities and local transit services quickly and easily.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Research for this study was accomplished through a series of site visits to ten communities to observe and document actual projects and programs that have been implemented, as well as to discuss projects with innovative planning processes where implementation is in process. The following communities were selected:

- Boston, Massachusetts;
- Boulder, Colorado;
- Chicago, Illinois;
- Corpus Christi, Texas;
- Los Angeles, California;
- New York City/New Jersey*;
- Oakland, California;
- Portland, Oregon;
- Tucson, Arizona; and
- Suburban Washington, DC.

* Statewide programs of New Jersey Transit

For each site, the research team accomplished the following activities.

Background Research

In preparation for the site visit, the research team conducted telephone interviews to identify innovative local programs and potential participants for the focus group discussion. In addition, PPS collected background planning reports, program evaluation studies, and current relevant socioeconomic data.

Focus Groups

PPS facilitated focus group meetings with local transit, transportation and community development officials to describe projects and programs taking place elsewhere in the country. This gave local officials more information about what was happening elsewhere, as well as an opportunity to discuss specific local livability concerns and projects and services that exist or are needed in their communities. Each of the focus groups was different; while the same types of people were invited to each group (a mix of public and private sector representatives as well as people from local community organizations and advocacy groups) and the same slide show was presented, the discussion varied greatly according to local issues and the interests of those attending.

The following specific topics were discussed during the focus groups:

- Perceptions of livability: what are the community’s key livability issues?
- Community development and improvement activities that have been implemented over the past decade that were designed to improve the livability of the community.
- Relationship between the transit agency and other community development activities and organizations.
- Transit strategies implemented related to enhancing livability and responding to customer needs, and what worked and what did not work; strategies that are in the planning process.
- If strategies were successful, where and how they worked, including the extent of community involvement in the planning process and the types of ongoing relationships and complementary actions initiated between transit and community development activities.
- Applicability of local successes to other localities. What was special or unique about these efforts?
- What still needs to be done and how this report could be of help.

Case Study Interviews

From each focus group site, specific projects were selected, and these are highlighted in this report. In addition, detailed interviews were conducted with transit staff and local community development officials responsible for the project or program. The purpose of the interviews was to obtain answers to the following questions:

- What prompted the project or program? Was there a particular opportunity you were taking advantage of, or a particular problem you were trying to solve?
- Where did the ideas originate? Within the transit organization? If so, in which department(s)? Outside the organization? If outside, was it another agency? If so, which one? A community group? Other? Was the program or project part of a larger redevelopment or improvement strategy for the area?
- How was the decision made to go ahead with the program? What was the process used? How long did it take? Was there a reason why a specific location was selected for the project/program? How was this decided?
- What was the public process used (workshops, public hearing, focus groups, etc.)? Was the process successful in obtaining community input and support?
- What role did other organizations or government agencies (such as community development, tourism, land-use planning, etc.) play? Was it a collaborative effort or an effort primarily of the transit agency?
- Who funded the project start-up? Were there other complementary activities or components to the project that came from other sources? Who funded these activities?
- Who operates or manages the program/project? (Is it public? private? public-private?) What is the relationship to the transit agency? What does operation and management entail? (maintenance? security? marketing?) How much does it cost to operate/manage? Who pays these operational costs?
- What obstacles did you face in implementing the program? Were these obstacles primarily within the transit agency or outside or both? Was the role of the transit agency different for this project/program than for its usual activities? If so, has this role carried over into other projects or programs?
- How did you overcome these obstacles? Do obstacles still exist? Who within the transit agency has been most instrumental in dealing with obstacles?
- Did you set a goal to describe what you wanted to achieve with these changes? Do you think you were successful in achieving your goals? What is left to be done? Have the goals been changed or refined over time?
- What has been the response from customers/users about the program? Do you have any demographic information about users? Surveys of users or community? Ridership/usage information? Other impacts,

such as increase in retail sales or decrease in vacancy rates? Job creation? New real estate development? More pedestrian traffic in area? How has the image of the transit agency changed as a result of the program?

- What would you do differently if you were starting over?
- Is your experience transferable to other transit agencies or communities? Do you have suggestions for how we might distribute the results of this research so that other communities might benefit from your experience?
- Is there anyone else we should talk to?

Detailed User Case Study Evaluations

In three cities (Woodbridge, NJ; Portland, OR; and Corpus Christi, TX) a series of systematic data collection efforts was undertaken to study people's actual use and perceptions of specific transit facilities. (The exact methodology used in each case study was tailored to the particular project, although methods for all case studies were consistent to allow cross comparisons.) In addition to the materials collected during the site visits, detailed user studies included the following activities:

- Additional interviews with transit operating staff (drivers, maintenance workers, and ticket agents); local officials; representatives of downtown or neighborhood associations and merchant associations; and other key individuals. When appropriate, interviews were conducted in a focus-group format.
- Behavioral observations of activities within and around the facility during the course of at least one full day, including the types of activity (waiting, eating, and socializing), the type of user (age, sex, and so forth), and the location of that activity. These observations and studies of activity patterns at the facility were evaluated to determine general types of uses and users.
- On-site surveys of users of the facility, nearby businesses and residents. PPS has developed and tested survey forms, which were used to solicit perceptions about a facility, frequency of use, general demographic information, and suggestions for improvement.

Telephone Surveys of Selected Model Projects

To supplement the information collected during the site visits, the research team conducted telephone surveys of projects that were of substantial interest and

value to the study, but for which a site visit was not warranted or possible. Telephone surveys of the following cities were conducted:

- Aspen, Colorado;
- Denver, Colorado;
- Meridian, Mississippi;
- St. Louis, Missouri;
- Wilmington, Delaware; and
- Seattle, Washington.

Preparation of Case Studies

Using the information collected, draft case studies were prepared. When necessary, additional interviews were conducted to obtain more information or to obtain the viewpoint of another person or organization within the community. Draft case studies also were circulated to the local contacts listed on each case study for comment and to check the accuracy of facts. These comments have been integrated into the final case studies presented in this report.

LIVABILITY ISSUES PRESENTED

To present the case studies, the research team focused on six major livability issues. These livability issues are not, however, meant to be an exhaustive list and are also not intended to imply that there are not other issues of concern to communities. Rather, these livability issues are ones that were important to community studies and ones in which transit played a key role in addressing.

These are the six livability themes presented in this report.

Creating places for community life: Transit can support places—public spaces, streets and buildings—helping to enliven their usage and making them centers for a range of community activities.

Serving as a catalyst for downtown and neighborhood renewal: Transit can serve as a key force in the re-vitalization of neighborhoods and center cities.

Creating opportunity for entrepreneurship and economic development: Transit can help create new businesses and improve access to job opportunities.

Improving safety and amenity: Transit can help make communities safer, in part by making them more comfortable and attractive.

Making communities accessible and convenient: Transit services and facilities can be tailored to meet community needs to provide a viable alternative to the automobile.

Shaping community growth: Transit can be a key component of efforts aimed at reducing sprawl and encouraging development of mixed-use centers.

Each chapter contains an introduction, which briefly presents the nature of the specific livability issue and how communities are addressing the concern. The specific roles of transit are then presented, cross-referencing case studies from other chapters where appropriate. (Case study names are shown in italics in the text.) Each chapter includes (1) brief examples, which summarize particularly relevant projects, and (2) more detailed case studies.

CHAPTER 4

Creating Places for Community Life

The road is now like television, violent and tawdry. The landscape it runs through is littered with cartoon buildings and commercial messages. We whiz by them at fifty-five miles an hour and forget them, because one convenience store looks like the next. They do not celebrate anything beyond their mechanistic ability to sell merchandise. We don't want to remember them. We did not savor the approach and we were not rewarded upon reaching the destination, and it will be the same next time, and every time. There is little sense of having arrived anywhere, because everyplace looks like noplac in particular.

—James Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere* [1]

INTRODUCTION

One of the continuing themes in livability and quality of life studies is the issue of “sense of place.” The combined impacts of sprawl, urban neglect and disinvestment, traffic, and city budget constraints have led to a situation in which we have few common places that bring people together and serve as a focal point for community life.

This was not always the case. Once, almost every place in a community—whether it was a downtown or a public library—served that goal. Today, many economic centers are located in suburban areas where pedestrian life tends to be nonexistent except in privately owned, legally restrictive shopping centers. As a result, there are few locations where a variety of people can come into contact with each other in a positive and inviting public environment.

In older cities, where spaces once thrived, public places have been decimated by the same economic and social forces. “As more and more private space is created,” PPS staff wrote in a recent op-ed piece in the *Los Angeles Times*, “true public spaces are under increasing pressure to accommodate the cultural diversity of Los Angeles and to survive economically. . . . Malls cannot replace the traditional town square.” [2] The result in small towns, suburbs, and cities alike is a lack of what can be broadly described as “places for community life.”

Overview of Community Strategies

There is new interest today in reversing this trend. Communities are working on a variety of “places” where people can come together. These places include public spaces—such as central squares, waterfront promenades, and parks—as well as traditional, stand-alone public institutions like libraries, schools, museums, public markets, and city halls. All of these traditional uses are being reconsidered in cities across the country and are becoming more multipurpose community-gathering spots.

Pioneer Square in Portland, Oregon, is one of the first in a new generation of public squares. No longer just passive green spaces, these squares are designed to be programmed and used by the public. In fact, the infrastructure for such uses is built in, and the spaces have management entities in charge of them to ensure their effective use.

Streets as important community public spaces are also being addressed. The impact of traffic, in particular, on inhibiting pedestrian activity and making spaces less hospitable for community activities was discussed in Chapter 2. Indeed, without effective traffic control in the future, it will be difficult to create more places for community life.

Finally, there are some more subtle design issues related to the goal of creating centers for people.



Figure 4-1. Harvard Square T-Station, Cambridge, MA, is a community gathering place. (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

Public art and special amenity features, for example, also contribute to a “sense of place,” as well as to people’s use and enjoyment of public spaces. Artists are now much more involved in street and public space projects where they actually create public amenities—lights, benches, and other features—rather than stand-alone sculptures. Many spaces are activated with temporary rather than permanent installations, or by art which invites public participation and comment. All of this helps to reinforce the goal of creating places that reflect the values and heritage of a community.

Role of Transit

Because transit brings people to a location, it influences the use and activity of these spaces and, indeed, transit is instrumental in making them work effectively. Transit can enhance destinations, helping to create community places by supporting existing spaces, as well as providing a place for new activities and services. A transit facility need not be just a place for transportation but can also become a setting for community interaction and a place that accommodates a diversity of people.

Because transit stops come in all shapes, sizes, and levels of use, there are abundant ways that transit can support places for community life. The transit services and facilities mentioned below are discussed in this report.

Linking transit to existing public places is the simplest, and probably the most obvious and common strategy. Transit agencies usually plan their stops so that they correspond to destinations like a main square or a public library or school. The case study for

the *Watts Shuttle in Los Angeles*, however, shows how the main transit system for the city did not adequately serve local, neighborhood destinations; the new shuttle now does.

There is a difference between providing a transit stop at a public place and making that stop truly integral to it. *Pioneer Square in Portland, Oregon*, is one of the premier examples in the country where transit is integrated into a public square known as “Portland’s Living Room.” Indeed, the two were designed at the same time. At a larger scale, *Union Station in Chicago* and *South Station in Boston*, both major commuter rail, bus, and Amtrak stations, have been revitalized to become focal points to the surrounding downtown areas.

Transit centers constitute a broadly defined strategy in which a bus stop, bus terminal, or train station becomes more than just a place for transportation. For example, *Woodbridge Station in Woodbridge, New Jersey*, was a well-used commuter rail station but was considered to be a maintenance burden by the transit agency and in a state of disrepair. Its case study shows how spaces around rail stations offer many positive opportunities for the surrounding community: train stations can become centers of community life, be welcoming gateways, and provide places for information about local attractions.

By creating places where people come together, transit centers can create focal points for a variety of activities, as well as links to the larger regional transit system. It is possible, for example, that a bus transfer center could include a staging area for employee commuter vans, a terminal for a local neighborhood circulator, and a taxi stand. Such centers are planned for *LINC in Seattle*.

Serving as a neighborhood focus, the center can act as a catalyst for neighborhood-scale joint development. With proper design and incentives, transit centers can attract a variety of activities and service establishments, such as open-air fresh produce markets (see Chapter 6), coffee shops, newsstands, video store rentals, branch bank offices, health clinics, and day care centers (e.g., *KidStop Child Care Center, Shady Grove Metro Station, Rockville, Maryland.*) *Staples Street Station in Corpus Christi* is designed to accommodate future small-scale retail.

These types of uses need not be permanent. In Tucson, the downtown transit center is used twice a month as the center stage for “Downtown Saturday Night.” In Portland, the Portland Saturday Market, which is served by a Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) light rail line stop in the center of the market, is a vibrant weekend attraction and a parking lot during the week.

ENDNOTES

1. James Kunstler, *The Geography of Nowhere*, Simon & Schuster, New York, New York (1993) p.131.
2. Fred I. Kent and Stephen C. Davies, "Hello, City Walk: But Can It Replace a Town Square?" *Los Angeles Times* (August 1, 1993).

EXAMPLES

Portland, OR: Tri-Met's MAX Station Anchors Saturday Market

For 20 years, the Portland Saturday Market has brought thousands of shoppers every weekend to the old warehouse district in downtown Portland, Oregon. As the largest craft market in continuous operation in the country, the market has not only revitalized the district around it, but has created thousands of jobs. The market features over 200 vendors every Saturday and Sunday from March through December, and offers a wide variety of products: household wares, jewelry, furniture, sculpture—all made and sold by local artists. Adding to the festivity of the place are food vendors and live entertainment.

When the market first opened, it was located under the Burnside Bridge next to Ankeny Park because it offered protection from Portland's unpredictable weather. Today, the market has expanded from this location, so that vendors extend across the street and into adjacent open areas. Several warehouse buildings now feature craft shops indoors.

The MAX light rail line, which began running in 1986, includes a stop right in the center of the market. When MAX was originally proposed, organizers of

the Saturday Market opposed the project because they feared that the presence of trains would cut the market in two and destroy the pedestrian environment. After careful planning work and attention to detail by Tri-Met, the system operator, exactly the opposite happened.

The result is a place where transit could not be more integrated; indeed it becomes part of the vitality of the market. Moreover, it brings hundreds of customers to the market and increases transit ridership. In a survey the research team conducted of people waiting for the train, the market was the main reason people were riding the train. In addition, market vendors surveyed believed MAX was very important to their businesses, so not surprisingly the market is prominently advertised in the trains themselves. The Portland Saturday Market has been enhanced as a community institution.

Boston, MA: Health Clinic Becomes Visible and Provides Accessible Community Service at Roxbury Crossing T-Station

The Health Station at Roxbury Crossing T-Station is run by the Whittier Street Neighborhood Health Center, which in 1993 moved into a space adjacent to the Orange Line subway station. The Roxbury Station is one of many newly built or renovated stations along the Orange Line, completed as part of the Southwest Corridor project (see Case Study 5-1). As part of its renovation program, the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) built space for retail into its new stations.

The T-Station location, the newest of three run by the Whittier Street Neighborhood Health Center, is used



Figures 4-2 and 4-3. Portland, OR, Saturday Market. The Portland Saturday Market is the largest craft market in continuous operation in the United States. The market is served by the MAX light rail and transforms a downtown parking lot adjacent to a transit stop into a community center every weekend. (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)



Figure 4-4. Health Station at Roxbury Crossing. By integrating a public health center into a subway station, the Whittier Street Neighborhood Health Center at Roxbury Crossing in Boston is able to reach and serve more of the people who require their services. The subway station entrance is located at the far left of the photograph. (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

for the Center’s “Healthy Stop” community education and outreach programs, which aim to prevent substance abuse and teach good parenting skills; Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and optometry services are also offered.

The Whittier Street Neighborhood Health Center is currently investigating additional MBTA property to house an “urgent care” out-patient, walk-in center. It is anticipated that many of the patients who visit the emergency center will come by train. This new space will have entrances leading directly into the station and out onto Main Street.

One difficulty that the operators of the center describe is a lack of visibility because the building does not open directly into the station. In addition, working with the state and city authorities to build out their space was time consuming and occasionally frustrating. Overall, the operators of the Health Station feel that their location adjacent to the T-Station, centrally positioned on a main street, has been good for business, particularly in terms of attracting people from the community for the health screenings and polls they conduct.

Tucson, AZ: Downtown Saturday Night Transit Center Becomes Focal Point for Downtown Revitalization Event

The Tucson Arts District Partnership, Inc. (TADP) is a 5-year-old arts organization created to develop

and manage the Tucson Arts District, a cultural district intended to better serve the arts community and revitalize downtown Tucson. One of the TADP’s most successful programs is “Downtown Saturday Night,” an arts and events series produced in collaboration with Sun Tran, the transit agency of the City of Tucson. The “main stage” of the series is at the Ronstadt Transit Center on the first and third Saturdays of each month.

Downtown Saturday Night functions as a community-wide arts district open house that attracts thousands of Tucson residents and visitors alike to the bus transit center for concerts, dance performances, theater, archery demonstrations, midnight basketball, and socializing. In addition to these events, adjacent shops, cafes and galleries stay open late to serve event-goers.

The Ronstadt Transit Center, built in 1991 at a cost of \$6 million, is located near the Amtrak station and airport buses serving seniors, students, and commuters traveling through the downtown corridor. The Ronstadt Transit Center was not originally designed as a venue for events and performance; utilities and other equipment were added to the facility after it was built. Because Sun Tran bus service at Ronstadt stops at 8 p.m. on Saturdays, however, there is no conflict in usage. A new strategy is now needed so that people can take the bus to Ronstadt to participate in the special events held there.



Figure 4-5. Tucson, AZ, Downtown Saturday Night. On the first and third Saturday nights of the month, the Ronstadt Bus Transit Center in downtown Tucson becomes a center stage and a venue for performances, concerts, and other community events. (Credit: Jerry Ferrin Photography)

Corpus Christi, TX: Staples Street Bus Transit Center Using Public Art to Inspire Community Ownership of a Transit Facility

You hear all those clichés about community involvement and sense of ownership, but here, it became a reality. It was a great thing to be part of.

—Ed Gates, artist

Active participation in the public art-making process can help a community develop a sense of ownership about its local transit facilities. The Regional Transit Authority and project architect and planners of the Staples Street bus transit facility wanted to integrate the transit facility into the community. Under the guidance of a local artist—who had a budget of \$25,000—residents produced 1,500 hand-painted ceramic tiles, which have been incorporated into the Staples Street bus transit facility (see also Case Study 9-3).

Tiles decorate the facility's entrance arch, bases of columns, benches, planters, light fixtures, and telephone booths. The Staples Street bus transit center was the recipient of a 1995 Presidential Design Achievement Award and is featured in a recent joint publication of the U.S. DOT and FTA regarding art-in-transit projects.

CASE STUDIES

Cases studies illustrate different aspects of how transit can create places for community life. Although the projects deal in different types of transit (bus, light



Figure 4-6. Corpus Christi Staples Street Bus Transit Center. Local artist, Ed Gates, worked with more than 1,500 members of the community to create hand-painted tiles which decorate this new downtown transit facility. (Credit: Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority)

rail, commuter rail, and subway), each one involved expanding the traditional role of a transit stop into a place for a variety of community activities.

Case Study 4-1: Portland, OR: Pioneer Courthouse Square

Transit Key in Creating the City's "Living Room"

Case Study 4-2: Woodbridge Station, NJ: Creating a Sense of Place at a Commuter Rail Station

Case Study 4-3: Shady Grove Metro Station, MD: KidStop Child Care Center Helps Make a Community "Family-Friendly"

Case Study 4-1

Portland, OR: Pioneer Courthouse Square Transit Key in Creating the City's "Living Room"

It's not just about transit. It's about a city.

—PPS focus group participant

Building rail lines is not an end in itself. The Portland story is more about community building than light rail building. MAX has been an effective means to the end of a livable community. What the community is interested in is livability. We enjoy great support for transit and land use because they are the tools we use to achieve a livable community.

—G.B. Arrington, Director, Strategic Planning, Tri-Met [1]

Pioneer Square respects the street. It respects the city.

—William H. Whyte

SUMMARY

The creation of this public space in downtown Portland cannot be separated from the fundamental role played by Tri-Met, the city's transit agency. Planned concurrently with the new Metropolitan Area Express (MAX) light rail system, Pioneer Square was an idea that dated back to the 1950s when the site was a parking lot. Tri-Met leveraged its funding for transit stops and an information center and helped to make the Square financially possible.

With extraordinary public support, the Square was built to be "Portland's living room," a center for the life of the city. Funded in part by the residents of Portland, the Square has continued its tradition of citizen participation with thousands of community events held during the past decade. With the opening of the light rail system in 1986, Pioneer Courthouse Square became both the city center and the bustling hub of transit for buses and light rail, as well as the main information center for Tri-Met.



Figures 4-7 and 4-8. Case Study 4-1. Portland's Pioneer Courthouse Square, nicknamed "Portland's Living Room," is both a central square and the bustling hub of bus and light rail service. (Credit: C. Bruce Forster, Figure 4-7 and Project for Public Spaces, Inc., Figure 4-8)

PLANNING PROCESS

The Pioneer Square site has served many purposes. Once home to Portland's first public school, it became the Hotel Portland in 1883—the place to stay and the center of downtown life. In the early 1950s, the hotel was razed and became a parking lot for the adjacent department store. Although the idea of making the parking lot a public square was discussed at that time, it was not seriously considered until 1969, when the department store proposed a 10-story parking garage on the site. The Portland Planning Commission, after several heated public hearings, denied the permit for the garage and recommended that a public square be built instead, with other peripheral sites chosen as alternative sites for garages.

The parking garage crisis initiated a planning dialogue between the city and the business community about the future of the downtown area itself. In 1972, Portland adopted its innovative downtown plan—the plan that served for more than 20 years as the guiding vision for the city. This plan contained a strong transportation component: reducing reliance on the automobile, increasing use of transit, and setting strict limits on the amount of parking in the downtown. Coupled with the establishment of an urban growth boundary for the region and efforts to promote pedestrian orientation downtown, the stage was set for the rebirth of the declining city core.

It is not coincidental that one of the first major projects resulting from the plan was the Portland Mall, a largely federally funded transit mall, which extends over 20 blocks on two parallel streets and provides comfortable waiting areas in attractive shelters, up-to-the-minute transit information, and easy transfers between lines. For the downtown, it provides an attractive brick promenade with trees and amenities for shoppers and downtown office workers.

Pioneer Courthouse Square itself was seen as one of the key projects of the plan, a space that would complement the new investment in the transit mall. Luckily, the square was being planned at the same time as the new MAX light rail system and Tri-Met, a tri-county transportation agency, saw the opportunity to leverage its construction budget for light rail stops and a central information center to help unify the square. Not only did this funding make the square economically possible, but the coordination of the two design processes created a seamless design for the square, which integrates transit with larger community goals.

The planning and design of the square took many interesting twists and turns that left an imprint on the final product. While there was general consensus that the square should become a "people place," an active plaza rather than a passive park, and that it should be built with private as well as public support, a design competition was needed to give these public goals a

tangible form. The rules for this competition stated that the square should do the following:

- Respond to its location as a major transfer/information point—the focus of a region;
- Provide unrestricted pedestrian access and general visibility from surrounding streets—open on all sides with no more than one-third of the square covered;
- Have a unified design concept, with multifunctional-functional spaces, commercial uses (like a cafe), which support the design program, and places of refuge, interest, and information for users; and
- Recognize the significance of Portland’s history.

A two-step competition process was implemented: an open competition (to which 162 entries were submitted) from which five finalists were selected and paid a modest fee to produce a more detailed design. This process allowed the public to see a variety of ways that the square could be designed and how transit stops could be integrated into it. Options presented ranged from glass conservatories to fir groves to water gardens; transit shelters were free-standing, incorporated into arcades, and left virtually bare of amenities.

The winning team, led by Will Martin, consisted of Portland natives. More than a group of architects, the team included a writer, a historian, and two artists. Will Martin himself was a painter, sociologist, humorist, historian, and inventor.

The square took 5 years to build and overcame many obstacles that threatened to prevent its completion. Concerns about the design, lack of funding, and fears of uncontrolled activities on the square shaped the final product considerably. An extensive fundraising campaign raised \$1.7 million from the community. The design was modified, but its initial integrity was retained despite pressures for greater modifications. An innovative management program was set up to oversee maintenance, security, and events in the square.

The square had its grand opening in 1984. It was not until 1986, however, that the square was truly complete, with the opening of MAX light rail transit service connecting downtown to the eastern suburbs. A westside line is now nearing completion, which should increase use of the square as a transit hub. A new north-south line in the planning stages will share the existing transit mall along the square with buses and cars. Over the past decade, both MAX and the square have become virtually synonymous with the revitalization of Portland as a city and its new identity as a livable community.

STRATEGY

Design. The design of the square—with its brick-paving and historic elements—complements other projects like the transit mall. It fills an entire block downtown, lending it great visibility. Throughout downtown—on the transit mall, at the square, along the MAX line—there is an evident commitment to quality which goes beyond the functionality of the transit routes. Portland is walkable: sidewalks have been widened and many street amenities and art added. The overall result is that the square is integrated into everything around it.

Transit facilities are carefully integrated into the overall design. Columns and ledges under a glass canopy form the waiting area for light rail. MAX’s stop on the square is heavily used; in fact, it has the highest ridership of any MAX stop, with 2,500 daily boardings. Pioneer Square also features infrastructure that allows it to be used for a wide variety of events and activities. Because of sloping topography, the square features a series of crescent-shaped steps which form a natural amphitheater. The square is the site of hundreds of small and large events each year, many of which have already become Portland traditions, such as the following:

- The nation’s tallest Christmas tree with 8,000 lights and 12,000 carolers;
- Peanut Butter & Jam lunchtime jazz concerts;
- Festival of Flowers, an artist’s design constructed in flowers;
- Series of children’s hands-on activities “Kid-sational”; and
- Festa Italiana and other ethnic food and music festivals.

Tucked under the amphitheaters are the Tri-Met information center, restrooms, a travel bookstore, and the management offices for the square. Above, there is a pavilion structure with a successful cafe. A small area is devoted to pushcart vendors. These businesses bring income to offset the management of the square and encourage activity on a regular basis even when events are not underway.

Finally, architectural elements symbolizing history and themes of Portland abound in the square, including the original gates from the Portland Hotel, plaques about the history of Portland, and a column with the “rose city” motif. These elements add to the special character of the square.

Management Program. The nonprofit corporation that manages the square has contributed significantly to its success. A paid staff, including a full director and staff

assistants, works under the direction of a board composed of community members, business leaders, and a commissioner from the Parks Department. The management coordinates its own events and issues permits for events by others; oversees maintenance and security, including hiring of its own security guards; supervises vending and retail tenants; raises funds for the square; and handles public relations, including promotional activities and a monthly newsletter.

FUNDING

The square was built with a variety of funds. The total project cost was \$6.8 million, with financing provided by the Portland Development Commission, Tax Increment Funds; federal grants from the Urban Mass Transportation Administration (now the Federal Transit Administration) and the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Services (now defunct); the city of Portland; and the adjacent local department store.

Another key source of funds was the community itself. When the construction of the square was threatened by a lack of money, the Friends of Pioneer Courthouse Square, a nonprofit advocacy group, took on the challenge of raising the needed \$1.7 million. In order to raise the money, some 60,000 paving bricks for the square were imprinted with sponsor names ("Bake Your Name in Brick"). The 200 volunteers who sold the bricks not only successfully raised funds, but also helped create a built-in constituency for the square. A second campaign to "sell" design elements in the square (from the amphitheater to drinking fountains) yielded more than \$1 million. One indication of the community support amassed for the project: architects, artists, and volunteers arrived unannounced and painted a full-scale plan of the square over the parking lot asphalt, even covering the attendant shack and an abandoned 1960 Ford sedan.

The annual budget for the management of the square is about \$623,000. Funds are contributed by the city (\$240,000); fees, membership, and fundraising (\$60,000); and income from retail businesses makes up about one-third of the budget. The remaining funds come from sponsored events and rental charges. The management organization is currently conducting a fundraising campaign for square repairs, soliciting government, private, and foundation donations to complete a \$1 million repair and restoration project.

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

After the winning design was selected from the competition, it almost was not built. The design was

criticized, particularly by a downtown business group that wanted the square to be covered. The group suggested rejecting federal funds and starting over. Covering the square reflected more than just climactic concerns; the main question was whether or not the square would become a haven for anti-social activities. To address this issue, the Pioneer Square Management Advisory Committee was established to review the design. In the committee's debates, it became clear that the issue was not the design itself, but the activities that would take place in the square. The committee's report—critical to the success of Pioneer Square—outlined the management program for the square to establish a mechanism for overseeing activities and events, provide maintenance and security, and ensure the square lived up to its potential.

There was also a lack of funding to complete the square as designed. It took the coordinated participation of the transit agency and the community itself to make the square possible. As G. B. Arrington, Director of Strategic Planning for Tri-Met, has stated, "Pioneer Square is a wonderful example of what you get when you think of a transportation investment first as the means to the end of a livable community. By turning over our station budget, we helped make the square real and got a station in Portland's living room. Pioneer Square is the most important block in the state because it's where everything comes together, it's a symbol of our revitalized downtown, it's the first place you take out-of-town guests, and it's the centerpiece of our bus and rail system."

IMPACT AND ASSESSMENT

Portland's transit programs and the square are considered success stories both locally and nationally. The square attracts thousands of people downtown for its events and activities. As a focal point for community celebration, this generates a great deal of positive publicity for downtown as radio, TV, and newspapers cover the activities. The square has become the primary retail location downtown as buildings have been refurbished and new businesses opened. It is heavily used by tourists and residents.

There is a strong symbiotic relationship between the square and transit. The square gives a visible center to transit, makes the events and activities accessible and convenient, and increases ridership on the buses and light rail. A survey of transit users and businesses around the square conducted in 1995 by the research team showed generally positive ratings about the design of the transit stop, except for the amount of seating, safety during the evening, and the number of telephones. Businesses said that while the stop was

“somewhat important” to their own businesses, it was “important” or “very important” to the overall area as a place to do business.

Fears that the square would be the scene for anti-social activities never materialized, although there have been problems about which businesses and transit users are still concerned. Still, the management organization is ever-vigilant in addressing security issues as they arise. This has benefits for transit as well: Tri-Met users surveyed in 1994 reported that “personal safety when waiting for the bus or MAX” was one of the most important factors in deciding whether to use the system.

The investment in transit and public improvements downtown, which was based on the 1972 plan, has revitalized the downtown. There has been an increase in downtown jobs from 50,000 in 1975 to over 86,000 today. Air quality has actually improved and traffic congestion has not increased because nearly 40% of the downtown work trips are on public transit. A 1984 study estimated that without transit, six 42-story parking structures would have to be built and two more lanes to every highway coming downtown would need to be added. Development near the square itself has included a new shopping center, Pioneer Place, as well as many new retail stores and shops.

Why has it worked here? Portland’s citizenry have a sense of common purpose, a commitment to quality and a perseverance that keeps Portlandites anchored to their city. People who developed the original vision are still around to see it from a different perspective. As one commentator put it: “Portland may well depart from the norm in metropolitan growth. The sense of common purpose, the easy communication among the area’s leaders, and the long-standing conviction that Oregonians should conserve the good life, even at the sacrifice of some self-interest, point toward an outcome at variance with that in Los Angeles and most other American cities.” [2]

CONCLUSIONS

Pioneer Courthouse Square, with its transit activities, is the product of a visionary process and is now a symbol of the city’s livability. The process of creating the square—the public debates, the fundraising process, the grand opening—all worked to involve the broader community. Transit provided key funding and continues to bring people to the square and downtown as a whole. Building on the positive start, with an effective management organization running it, the square has become the city’s place of pride and a focal point for all kinds of community activities. The revitalization of the downtown is testimony to the square’s profound impact on the livability of Portland.

ENDNOTES

1. G. B. Arrington, “Beyond the Field of Dreams: Light Rail and Growth Management in Portland,” *Tri-Met* (March 1995) p.8.
2. Philip Langdon, “How Portland Does It,” *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1992) p.141.

Case Study 4-2

Woodbridge Station, NJ: Creating a Sense of Place at a Commuter Rail Station

When is a railroad station not a railroad station? When it is in Woodbridge, because it becomes a very important part of the community . . .

—NJ DOT Commissioner Frank J. Wilson

This train station is about the public, is about our citizens; it is about using our train station to attract people to our downtown community.

—James McGreevey, Mayor, Woodbridge Township

What we did differently with this project, for openers, was to look at this station as a part of the community and most, if not all, of the effort was to try to create more of a sense of place here, a sense of community, and a sense of location.

We also tried to tie the station into the surrounding areas . . . and to broaden out the reach of the station . . .

—Rick Richmond, Assistant Executive Director, NJ Transit Department of Engineering

SUMMARY

The 1995 renovation of the commuter train station in Woodbridge, New Jersey, provided New Jersey Transit (NJ Transit) with the opportunity to do more than just routine physical improvements to a station building. NJ Transit viewed the project as an opportunity to use transit to make a significant difference in the community. Woodbridge was sorely in need of work: the “train station” was nothing but a graffiti-filled, dimly lit tunnel in the side of a railroad viaduct overgrown with weeds. Here was also the chance to try out a broader approach to station improvement; the Mayor of Woodbridge Township and other local leaders were eager to try to integrate the station into the town.

The project, one of five pilot projects of *NJ Transit’s Station Renewal* program (see Case Study 10-3), involved the renovation of existing facilities, the construction of a new entrance to the train station and the addition of amenities to better serve NJ Transit users. More significant, however, was the planners’ effort to enhance the role and visibility of the station in the town, while improving pedestrian access from Main

Street, thereby creating a sense of place at the station where previously there had been none. In addition, the station project complemented a streetscape and downtown revitalization project underway in Woodbridge.

PLANNING PROCESS

Although the renovation of the deteriorated train station was a major goal of the Woodbridge renewal project, L. Richard Mariani, Manager of Passenger Facilities of NJ Transit and the Project Director, sought to build a stronger connection between the station and the downtown area in order to efficiently expedite the project as well as build alliances with the township and local businesses.

The Woodbridge Train Station is located a few blocks from the heart of downtown Woodbridge, New Jersey. Woodbridge is the fifth largest city in New Jersey with a population of about 93,000 inhabitants, and it is the oldest original township in the state. The station's intermodal role is ensured because it is also within a few hundred yards of the New Jersey Turnpike (Interstate 95) and is served by several bus routes. The station serves a major commuter line: the North Jersey Coast Line. Before the recent improvements were made, approximately 1200 commuters passed through the station every weekday. Most riders commute into New York City, about a 40-min ride. Many passengers arriving at Woodbridge transfer to buses to reach a popular destination, the Woodbridge Center Mall, one of the largest indoor shopping malls on the East Coast.

The station building at Woodbridge is at the far end of an elevated viaduct and had little visibility either

from the street or from the adjacent downtown area (i.e., the station cannot be seen from Main Street). This was deemed detrimental to NJ Transit's ability to attract additional riders, and to efforts on the part of Woodbridge businesses to attract train passengers to stop and shop on their way to or from the station. The platform and station building are reached by a tunnel and stairway at the north end—serving as the main entrance and providing access from Pearl and Poillon Streets—and by a stairway from Green Street at the south end. Before the improvements, the only visible presence of the station at the street-level main entrance was two enormous advertising billboards flanking the gaping hole of the tunnel. The minimal design of the station and its total lack of presence compelled one passenger to remark before the renovation, "You can't even tell you're at a train station."

Information was collected through surveys of passengers, NJ Transit employees and adjacent retailers regarding their concerns about the station and suggestions for improving its design and function. Parking, circulation, seating placement, station upkeep and patterns of use at the station throughout the day were also observed. A series of recommendations for design improvements was developed based on this input.

Transit users and local retailers who were questioned expressed a need for additional retail services at the station and in the surrounding area. Thus, retail opportunities were included in the new design in the form of two kiosks flanking the Pearl Street entrance to be leased by NJ Transit to local businesses for use as newsstands, concessions or other businesses.

While planning work was underway, the Downtown Woodbridge Merchants Association was creating a special improvement district to implement a



Figures 4-9 and 4-10. Case Study 4-2. The goal of the Woodbridge Station Renewal project, shown here before and after renovation of the facility, was to create a "sense of place" for the station and to make it more appealing to and function better for transit passengers. (Credit: Project for Public Spaces, Inc.)

streetscape project along Main Street and to help organize downtown events. The streetscape enhancements included brick-paver sidewalks and the installation of historic light fixtures and benches along Main Street to Pearl Street. As part of the planning process, NJ Transit worked with the township to select the same light fixtures to be installed at the train station. In addition, the brick pavers, which were to end at Main and Pearl Streets, were continued along Pearl to the entrance of the train station.

STRATEGY

Partnerships. Creating a new identity for the station, and undertaking a major renovation in an era of budget cuts and personnel shortages, relied on forging a new relationship with the surrounding community. Mr. Mariani stretched the funding further and got the job done faster because he orchestrated a partnership between NJ Transit, the township, the Downtown Woodbridge Merchants Association and other organizations. These partnerships gave the community a new stake in its train station that had never before existed.

Using funds from NJ Transit, the Township agreed to take control of the street-level portion of the construction project. While NJ Transit retained responsibility for the overall design and policy, Woodbridge Township took over the implementation of the design, preparing final design and construction documents and managing the construction process. NJ Transit used state rail crews and its own contractors to implement the improvements to the platform level, and had the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) repair the three commuter parking lots. The township also worked with NJ Transit to improve parking at the station.

Design Strategies. Design focused on elements that would enhance the presence of the station and link it to the surrounding area. To create a strong presence at Woodbridge Station, canopies were constructed to extend out over the tunnel entrances. The primary entrance was flanked by two small buildings designed for lease to local entrepreneurs, the sidewalk area was enlarged, and a canopy was added to the Poillon Street entrance. New amenities introduced at the entrance included historic-style benches, new trash receptacles, a historic-style clock, telephones, bike racks, and new cases that display both schedule and community information. On the platform, New Jersey Transit added new benches, information kiosks, telephones, and trash receptacles. The platform station building was renovated, air conditioning was added, and the restrooms were refurbished. The parking lots were cleaned, repaved, and restriped; the

trees were thinned out between the platform and the parking lot to provide better visibility to the elevated platform from the street.

Clear directional signage was added at the exits to Pearl and Poillon Streets and a local artist created a station map showing transit, business, and cultural information. NJ Transit painted “Welcome to Woodbridge” on the trestle over Main Street to match the merchants association’s typeface and colors. This sign also directs people to the station and its parking lots.

Passenger safety was enhanced by improving access paths, parking lots, and lighting around the station, and by improving the Main Street crosswalk. Trees and vegetation were pruned throughout the station area to improve sightlines. A closed-circuit television (CCTV) system records activity at the station on video tape. New vendors will also contribute to passenger comfort and security.

While the township agreed to repave Poillon Street, NJ Transit strengthened linkages to the surrounding streets and parking lots. All paths and sidewalks were repaved, including those leading to Main Street, with the same brick pavers used downtown. Along the walkway running parallel to the elevated railroad viaduct, a landscaped strip was planted with climbing vines and lined with the same historic-style lamp-posts used on Main Street.

Parking Lots. Two NJ Transit lots were in disrepair and dimly lit. One was located some distance away on the other side of Main Street from the station. At the same time, township vehicles were parked in a township lot next to an historic park adjacent to the station and employees walked across Main Street to the Town Hall. This created friction between the township and civic groups who desired to use the park for events.

The solution was simple: swap the two lots. Convenience for transit customers and township employees was enhanced and 250 fewer pedestrians cross busy Main Street each day. This also freed the township lot for evening and weekend events when transit customers typically vacate the lot.

FUNDING

NJ Transit and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation each contributed \$50,000 toward the station renewal program, which covered all the costs of the planning studies, completed by Project for Public Spaces, for the five pilot station projects, and which helped to leverage project funds. To implement the Woodbridge project, NJ Transit applied for and received its first Transportation Enhancement Project grant under ISTEA, which provides funding for transportation

projects not previously targeted for federal support. ISTEA provided \$463,000 and NJ Transit added \$503,000 in New Jersey Transportation Trust Funds for the work at grade level. NJ Transit added an additional \$200,000 in state Transportation Trust Funds, which were used for the platform-level and parking lot improvements and for benches, trash receptacles, lighting, display cases, new restrooms, and repainting.

The township had the time to facilitate the project but lacked the funding. Empowering local officials with greater influence gained commitment to the project's success. In December 1993, NJ Transit executed an agreement with Woodbridge Township committing \$966,000 for the final design, engineering, and construction of the grade-level improvements. This included \$463,000 in FTA Enhancement funds and \$503,000 in New Jersey Transportation Trust Funds.

NJ Transit also used innovative ways to ensure a higher standard of maintenance at the station: parking fees collected by the Downtown Woodbridge Merchants Association from the commuter lots will be dedicated to station maintenance, with a small amount going to help the downtown. In addition, a local restaurateur, interested in converting an old freight house next to the parking lot into a micro-brewery, agreed to maintain a 180-ft-long strip of landscaping in return for use of a small number of the parking spaces for his customers in the evenings, after commuting hours, and on weekends.

By contracting with the NJDOT to perform the parking lot improvements, rather than by going through the usual procurement process, NJ Transit was able to reduce its cost for this part of the project by 70 percent and complete the parking lots in a fraction of the time, minimizing disruption to transit users.

IMPACT AND ASSESSMENT

Commuters and townspeople surveyed in 1995 about their newly renovated station were clearly pleased with the changes. They believe that their NJ Transit station is a much more handsome and comfortable facility: 87 percent of the passengers questioned rated their overall impression of the station as either good or excellent, whereas only 45 percent had described it as good before the renewal. Passengers no longer complain about the poor maintenance, graffiti, and vandalism in and around the station. They said that the station is cleaner, better managed, and much safer than it was before. The improvements and amenities that commuters said they would like to see, such as more seating, better lighting, more telephones, and improved signage and schedule information have been provided. A shortage of parking

continues to be an issue, despite the addition of more spaces. Now that the station's image has improved, more people from surrounding towns appear to be driving to Woodbridge to take the train. Many commuters may also be taking advantage of the free parking, since New Jersey Transit has not yet imposed parking fees.

NJ Transit is negotiating with potential retailers to rent the two kiosks flanking the entrance to the station. Most commuters expressed the desire to have a convenient place to buy coffee and newspapers in the morning. A retail presence will help provide a greater sense of security and activate Pearl Street, perhaps attracting customers for neighboring merchants while providing a needed service for commuters.

Despite the effort to make the station accessible from Main Street, and vice versa, downtown retailers have not seen an increase in customers on their way to or from the station. (Most businesses are not open early or late enough to accommodate commuters.) The overall impression of the station has improved, however, and it is clearly seen as an asset to the town. The station has gained some attention outside Woodbridge as well: the Woodbridge Renovation Project received a 1995 Excellence in Downtown Development award from Downtown New Jersey, Inc., and one of "America's 25 Best Enhancement Projects" at the 1996 National Transportation Enhancements Conference. The project was also a catalyst in shifting NJ Transit toward an organizational culture that produces more projects of this kind. A recent memo from the Chief Engineer of Engineering & Constructing emphasized how critical it is to understand how a facility works at all hours of the day and night, how people approach and leave the station, and how they behave while there. This directive, in effect, implements the vision embodied by ISTEA.

NJ Transit now views the transit ride as only part of the customer's total experience and has developed a new and broader vision for the improvement of its station facilities. As Mr. Mariani describes it, "The quality of the whole experience is made up of the sum of all transportation segments. If any one segment is bad enough, customers may abandon the whole experience, causing ridership to suffer on all the segments."

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

As part of the Station Renewal Program process, project planners had recommended community meetings for NJ Transit that would provide a better opportunity for both professionals and citizens to collaborate before design alternatives were developed. This approach was not incorporated into the planning

process for the Woodbridge improvements because of a lack of interest on the part of the Township at the time. Indeed, Mr. Mariani now believes that more community meetings would have helped to build trust and to show the community that NJ Transit was “on their side.” Obtaining more community support from the very beginning, he believes, would have helped streamline the implementation of the project and the approvals process, resulting in a better project.

CONCLUSIONS

To a community, a train station can be more than just a building or a place to wait before leaving town. If conceived in an appropriate manner, it can be as important to a community’s livability as a library, a city hall, or a town square. When this larger purpose is realized, people become proud of and care for these stations, and the beneficiaries are transit, passengers, community residents, and local businesses.

The Woodbridge Station Renewal project illustrates that in order to make long-lasting and effective improvements to a transit facility, a project must focus on more than a just the building and its amenities. Attention must be given to enhancing the facility’s connections to its surrounding area and to developing innovative ways to manage and maintain both the station and its environs. In Woodbridge, NJ Transit was able to form partnerships within the Township Merchants Association, which enabled the transit agency and its facility to play a larger role in the community while gaining needed assistance in the implementation of the project. Woodbridge Station now has a valued presence in the community.

Case Study 4-3
Shady Grove Metro Station, MD: KidStop Child Care Center Helps Make a Community “Family-Friendly”

SUMMARY

In an attempt to make mass transit commuting more convenient, attractive and “family-friendly,” transit agencies have begun partnerships with cities to develop a creative solution: locating child care centers at transit terminals. This allows working parents to drive straight to the station, park their cars at a park-and-ride lot, drop off their kids at the child care center and take the train to work. Picking up their kids at the end of the day is equally easy. One such center—KidStop Child

Care Center—opened in September 1993 at the Shady Grove Metrorail station in Montgomery County, Maryland. The day care center now serves both transit riders and community residents and is one of the most sought after facilities in the area.

PLANNING PROCESS

The establishment of the KidStop Child Care Center involved a unique public-private partnership involving the transit operator (Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority [WMATA]), Montgomery County government, and a group of corporate sponsors. These interests formed the Foundation for Working Families, a nonprofit organization devoted to helping private employers fund facilities for child and elder care on behalf of their employees. Board members include representatives of local businesses and public agencies.

The concept of combining child care centers and public transportation began when a 1987 task force identified commuters’ side trips for child care as a major barrier to the use of public transit by working parents. In response to the task force recommendations, the county began to research a pilot location for a transit-related child care center. After identifying Shady Grove as an ideal location, the county approached the foundation to begin the process of raising funds for the facility.

In 1991, the Board of Directors of WMATA approved a demonstration program that encouraged the establishment of child care centers at other Metro facilities and extended invitations to each of the local governments in the Washington, DC, region to submit proposals for establishing child care centers at Metro facilities. Montgomery County was the first to take advantage of this opportunity. WMATA agreed to lease the land to the county government for a period of 30 years at a FTA, which had endorsed the program. (Land acquired with federal funds may ordinarily only be used “for transit purposes.”) Under an agreement with the county, the foundation assembled funds and supervised the development of the design and construction of the center. After the facility was completed, the foundation donated the building to the county government. Construction began in August 1994 and the center opened May 15, 1995.

STRATEGY

The center is a free-standing building of approximately 20,000 sq ft situated within a 3-min walking distance of the Shady Grove Metro-Rail station. It is a state-of-the-art facility, with an outdoor play area and

modern playground equipment. The center has capacity for 106 children, ranging in age from 6 weeks through school age, and provides care for mildly sick children. Children's Discovery Centers of America, Inc., was selected to operate the child care center. The company, founded in 1983, operates 215 centers around the country and is one of the nation's largest providers of child care services.

FUNDING

The cost of construction totaled approximately \$1.5 million. The state of Maryland agreed to match contributions up to \$750,000, including \$20,000 of in-kind contributions. The city of Gaithersburg and area businesses, led by IBM and L'Oreal, contributed \$438,000, and the county government granted \$288,700 toward the match. Forty-two spaces were sold in advance to corporate employers whose contributions were used to pay for the facility's construction, and priority enrollment period extends to 10 years. At least half of the center's spaces are available to the public. Parents pay market rate tuition fees established by the operator.

IMPACT AND ASSESSMENT

The center is currently operating at full capacity and has a waiting list that extends into summer 1996. While there are several other day care centers in the vicinity, KidStop, because of its physical facilities and excellent staff, remains one of the most sought-after centers in the area.

The child care center fulfills multiple objectives. The transit authority benefits because the center helps to attract new transit users. Approximately 25 percent of the Center's patrons commute by Metro daily and another 15 percent use the Metro occasionally. The remaining 60 percent work in the Shady Grove area.

The county benefits because each transit trip means one fewer car in the peak period on Rockville Pike, the most congested arterial corridor in lower Montgomery County. But the biggest beneficiaries are the commuters. Instead of having to drive their children to day care centers near their homes and then continue their trips to work by automobile, they now drop off their children at KidStop, park at the station parking lot and take the train to work.

CONCLUSIONS

For parents who rely on mass transit to get to work, dropping their children off at an out-of-the-way child care center and stopping on the way home to pick them up can make commuting seem like a full-time job. Child care is often cited as a major reason that commuters are unable to take transit to work. The KidStop Child Center addresses the livability of the Rockville area by combining two services needed by many families: child care and public transit. This results in a simpler and faster trip. KidStop's location at the transit station also means that children are never more than a 30-min train ride from the parents' downtown offices, a consideration that also weighs heavily in parents' choice of a day-care location.