Opportunities to Support TOD through the MPO Planning Process

Transit-oriented development (TOD) is typically defined as compact development within easy walking distance of transit stations (typically a half mile) that contains a mix of uses such as housing, jobs, shops, restaurants, and entertainment. TOD offers a wide array of potential benefits, such as economic vitality, shift to healthier, more efficient, and less-polluting modes of transportation, and greater choice and accessibility for residents.

The benefits of successful TOD are regional, extending far beyond the immediate site area. Furthermore, TOD can only be successful if it is part of a larger regional strategy to coordinate land use and transportation. The local Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), as the body responsible for coordinating transportation planning activities for the region, can act as a venue for a regional conversation about TOD. Although MPOs do not usually have direct land development decision-making authority, there are nonetheless many opportunities for MPOs to build consensus and support TOD through the metropolitan planning process.

This paper outlines some of the MPO products, processes, and activities that may be leveraged to support TOD.

Federally Required Planning Products

Long-Range Metropolitan Transportation Plan (MTP)
- Focus future investments on designated TOD growth areas and corridors.
- Choose project prioritization criteria that favor transit and multimodal investments, particularly in areas where TOD is planned.
- Develop TOD-supportive goals, objectives, and policies.
- Lay out a broad vision for transportation and land use in the region.
- Provide a foundation for establishing performance targets that encourage TOD.

Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
- Develop project selection criteria that favor TOD-supportive projects.
- Program funds for transit investments serving existing and potential TOD neighborhoods.
- Encourage local jurisdictions and State DOTs to take advantage of flexible funding (e.g. CMAQ, STP) opportunities to support transit investments.
- Provide incentives for TOD-supportive projects through formula or competitive funding programs.

Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP)
- Provide planning funding for local jurisdictions and transit agencies to perform land use and transportation planning efforts supportive of TOD.
- Program TOD-supportive planning studies such as corridor plans, station area plans, and regional land use and transportation studies.
Congestion Management Process (CMP)
- Recommend transit and TOD as strategies to reduce congestion.

Air Quality Conformity Analysis & State Implementation Plan (SIP)
- Analyze TOD scenarios to identify ways to improve regional air quality.

Federal Planning Factors
- MPOs are required to consider the eight planning factors as part of the planning process. Many of these factors relate to and support TOD, for example:
  - Economic Vitality (#1) – TOD improves land values and development around transit;
  - Safety (#2) – TOD encourages slower vehicle speeds and a shift to safer modes such as transit, biking, and walking;
  - Accessibility & Mobility (#4) – TOD offers more transportation and destination choices, especially for non-drivers;
  - Environment & Energy (#5) – TOD reduces VMT, pollution, and GHG emissions; and
  - Integration & Connectivity (#6) – TOD provides multimodal connections and a rich mix of land uses.

Processes & Activities

Public Involvement
- Develop a regional consensus around future transportation and land use patterns.
- Facilitate discussion of different development types and strategies, educating the public and decision-makers about TOD.
- Use charettes and visualization tools to provide a venue for public input into the planning process.

Performance Measures
- MAP-21 lays out a national baseline for performance-based planning that does not include TOD, but MPOs are encouraged to go beyond the minimum and develop their own measures.
- Some examples of TOD performance measures: number of jobs located near transit, combined housing + transportation cost, % of households with transit access, VMT per capita, etc.

Inter-Agency Consultation, Collaboration, and Coordination
- Work with and get buy-in from other agencies and local jurisdictions, since the MPO does not have control over the land use component of TOD.
- Act as an incubator for a multi-agency TOD working group or steering committee to spearhead a collaborative planning process.

Scenario Planning
- A regional visioning process can build public support and enthusiasm for TOD highlighting its benefits in an engaging and comprehensible way.
- Analyze a variety of TOD and non-TOD scenarios to show public and decision-makers the tradeoffs and benefits of different land use and transportation choices.
• Identify housing/employment growth areas and support integrated regional planning.

**MPO Staff Activities & Technical Assistance**
• Provide technical capacity and staff assistance to member jurisdictions in support of TOD.
• Hold events for training, information sharing, and best practices exchange.
• “Plan the Plan”— do groundwork such as an inventory of relevant local plans.

**MPO Organizational Structure**
• Align the MPO with a Council of Governments (COG) or other regional land use planning agency.
• Organize a committee to study and implement TOD, such as a land use committee or a TOD committee.