

6.3.5 Costs and Benefits

Experience has shown that there is no single tool that will provide all the necessary strategic and financial assistance for the successful implementation of Transit Oriented Development, or for the protection of a stable area. Therefore, successful realization of the City's objectives will require a complex combination of tools that maximizes their individual potential impacts. The toolbox available to the City for planning or influencing change in Urban Corridors is big, and suitable for the task at hand.

Like any "CARROT" or "STICK", these agents of change typically come at a cost for any benefit received. A cost-benefit analysis that takes into consideration which party benefits and which party (public and private) bears the costs has to be undertaken to fully assess the relevant contribution of the tools selected. The externalities of urban sprawl and the benefits of compact urban form are not always fully measured, suggesting that some of the redistribution of costs might be validated if these externalities were properly assessed.

While a strong effort to change the urban structure will likely come with short and mid-term restructuring costs, there are a host of long-term economic spin-off benefits associated with successful Urban Corridors development, many of which are not always fully considered. Increased competitiveness, less congestion, less pollution and an overall improvement in the quality of life are all benefits of a more compact urban form in Houston.

A continuation of political will is required to maintain the effectiveness of these tools. Many of the tools suggested take years to implement, and perhaps over several changes of government. A committed and well communicated effort to support Urban Corridor development is essential to convince the private sector, including developers, landlords, users and residents, of the benefits of significant investment in these areas.

The tools presented provide a suite of approaches that can be considered to encourage higher intensity development in Urban Corridors. These tools are presented in order of importance within each category. The types of tools most likely to have the greatest stimulative impact in terms of facilitating corridor development are the actual construction of the transit facility, but also public buildings and pedestrian realm improvements.

The level of commitment shown by the public sector will be an important signal to the public and the development industry of the desire for this change in the currently established urban structure. Ensuring that any new planning regime not only removes any restrictions to Transit Oriented Development, but also encourages and provides incentives for this type of growth will also be important.

Another very important tool will be the use of financial incentives, especially in the early years of new Urban Corridor development. It is clear that some incentives may be required to reduce the risk for the private sector pioneers.

Importantly, a suite of tools will be required to achieve measurable success. Any of the tools on their own will not be sufficient to achieve the type of Urban Corridor development envisaged for City of Houston. The funding and financing for these tools, and the political will to implement them, will be of paramount importance.