

Recommendations 1-2

6.4.1 Recommendations and Responsibilities - Who Does What

The following are the 17 primary recommendations for implementation:

1 Build, Operate, Maintain and Expand the Transit System

Responsibility: METRO
Expand the Transit System

Quite simply, a planned transit facility has only speculative effects on the development industry. It is absolutely critical that the transit facilities are built to the highest standards, and are operating efficiently in order to reap the stimulative impact of the transit investment through significant private sector investment. The private sector will respond to public sector actions.

Further, the development of the facility is not a one time investment. It is important that the system evolve to maintain any kind of lasting development impact. A commitment to an ongoing program of transit system improvement must be METRO's principle mandate.

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2 Establish a Transit Oriented Development Team

Responsibility: City
Reduce the risks of approval process

The City needs to establish a Transit Oriented Development Team, comprised of key staff members from throughout the City Administration to reinforce the political will and create the administrative culture to activate and promote the policies and regulations that will promote Transit Oriented Development in the Urban Corridors. The role of the Team will be twofold: 1) to lead strategic decision making with regards to public sector investment (i.e. new civic buildings and capital improvements) and 2) to facilitate Transit Oriented Development.

One of the Team's main objectives will be to expedite planning approvals. This, in itself, is considered a key incentive, and crucial in the ultimate achievement of Transit Oriented Development. A second objective will be to solve ongoing problems within City Hall with respect to overlapping and conflicting jurisdictions that may combine to frustrate implementation.

Equally important, the Team needs to change the inherent culture of negativity that focuses on problems, and in turn take on a positive approach that focuses on solutions to problems.

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3

Amend Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan

Responsibility: City
Establish the environment for change

Amending the City's Major Thoroughfare and Freeway Plan by identifying and designating Transit Streets and Transit Stations is an important step in establishing the character and function of a Transit Street.

Designating Transit Streets will give the City the ability to implement - utilizing a new Transit Oriented Development Ordinance and complementary engineering standards - alternative development standards (i.e. lane widths, utility placement, etc.), slower design speeds, access restrictions and pedestrian realm enhancements to ensure that the character and function of Transit Streets are achieved.

The primary objective of the Transit Street designation must be to balance the needs of vehicles, pedestrian and transit.

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Prepare a Transit Oriented Development Ordinance

Responsibility: City
Establish the environment for change, reduce the risks of the approval process, reduce the costs of development

A Transit Oriented Development supportive Ordinance must be prepared by the City. It should be established as a parallel chapter to chapter 42, and should be available for use by development interests along the Urban Corridors, within the identified Development Opportunity Areas. The new chapter should include key planning concepts related to parking requirements, compensating parkland and building setbacks, height and density.

In addition, complimentary urban engineering standards already exist in Houston, as applied in Downtown Houston. These urban engineering standards should apply on the streets where transit facilities are located, and on the pedestrian-oriented streets that feed the transit system.

When complete, the new Transit Oriented Development Ordinance shall be applied as follows:

- On all properties that abut a designated Transit Street, and that are within approximately 1/4 of a mile of a Transit Station, the application of the Transit Oriented Development Ordinance shall be mandatory.
- On all other properties that are within approximately 1/4 of a mile of a Transit Street, the application of the Transit Oriented Development Ordinance shall be optional, subject to the satisfaction of the Planning Commission that the following criteria are met:

1. the development of a Transit Oriented Development will not have any undue adverse impact on the neighboring residential properties and/or the inherent stability of the neighborhood; and,
2. the site can be adequately provided with municipal service infrastructure.

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Recommendation 5

5 Support Incremental Change

Responsibility: City
Establish the environment for change

Recognizing that development will proceed incrementally, over a long period of time in direct response to market conditions, it is appropriate that some development may proceed that does not achieve all of the articulated Transit Oriented Development objectives.

Where a development proposal does not achieve all of the desired development potential, the City shall require the preparation of a Development Concept Report and Phasing Plan that provides for the logical progression of development from its initial phase to a mature state reflecting the desired Transit Oriented Development objectives, and achieving certain minimum development objectives.

The Development Concept Report will provide a detailed description of the proposed development, and will include details of the following:

- Phasing of development from the initial form of construction to its 'mature state'.
- Achievement of the 15 foot pedestrian zone and streetscape objectives of the City.
- How the development is integrated with other sites in the vicinity to achieve the objectives of this planning strategy.
- Proposed height and massing of buildings - both from the initial form of construction to its 'mature state'.
- Relationship between streets and buildings, including how the proposed development and subsequent phases address the build-within zones.
- Location, dimensions and character of the publicly accessible urban squares and any additional pedestrian routes, showing their continuity and complementary relationship to adjacent public spaces, pedestrian routes and streets.
- General location, size and treatment of parking facilities and vehicular access points, including the potential for shared parking and access and identification of streetscape improvements and relationship to public sidewalks, transit facilities and pedestrian and bicycle routes.
- Location of street-related uses and principle pedestrian entrances to buildings and the relationship to street frontages, and how the role of the public street and pedestrian movement along the street are supported.
- Signage, streetscape amenity elements, lighting and site furnishings.
- Assessment of proposed servicing strategies related to sewer, water and storm water management facilities.
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Recommendations 6-7

6

Support and Improve the School District

Responsibility: School District/City
Establish the environment for change

It has been identified on many occasions that the quality and image of the local school district is a major deterrent to attracting new families to downtown Houston – a significant and important market segment. The school district needs to be supported in any efforts to improve their image and to enhance the quality of their programs so that the inner city schools can offer at least as good an educational experience as the suburban counterparts.

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Establish/Expand TIRZ, PIDs and MMDs

Responsibility: City
Establish the environment for change, reduce the risks of the approval process, reduce the costs of development

The City should actively establish or expand existing TIRZ, PIDs and MMDs in all of the Urban Corridors. These mechanisms provide key management structures and funding capacity to augment City infrastructure building and to provide opportunities for enhanced pedestrian realm improvements and maintenance, redevelopment projects, economic development and marketing.

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Build/Enhance/Maintain Pedestrian Realm

Responsibility: City, METRO, TIRZ, PIDs + MMDs
Establish the environment for change, reduce the cost of development

The City through its Capital Investment Plan, together with TIRZ, PIDs and MMDs must commit to building and maintain an enhanced pedestrian realm. A high quality pedestrian realm is a critical element in promoting transit ridership, and at the same time can have considerable economic benefits for an area. Therefore, investments in the public realm must be made to ensure the long term sustainability of the Urban Corridors.

The City and METRO must commit capital funding to establish functional improvements such as connected sidewalks, utility corridors and trees, while investments in capital and maintenance for aesthetic enhancements should be provided through TIRZ, PIDs, MMDs and the private sector.

These pedestrian realm investments effectively reduce overall costs to developers as the full cost of pedestrian improvements are augmented through the City's capital funds and shared among other landowners located in the TIRZ, PIDs and MMDs.

Tools:
 Chapter 380 Agreements
 Civic Art Program
 Adopt-an-Esplanade Program
 Adopt-a-Monument Program

A relatively consistent building edge is important to provide spatial definition and containment to the street. Build-within zones are recommended for all Transit Oriented Developments, requiring buildings to locate their front and exterior side walls within a defined zone on the lot - measured from the back of the curb, rather than from the property line/street right-of-way line.

The build-within zones essentially set both a minimum and maximum setback. It is anticipated that, due to varying street right-of-way widths and pavement/transit facility requirements that the build-within zone may incorporate public land, and/or private lands from the abutting development block or lot.

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Build Affordable Housing

Responsibility: City
Establish the environment for change

It is logical that the Urban Corridors should include opportunities for the development of affordable housing. This is based on both the idea that due to increased density and smaller dwelling units, more affordable housing can be delivered, as well as the intention that transit service itself be an available and convenient mode of travel for lower income households.

The City as the primary implementing agency for a number of state and national affordable housing programs (in addition to its own programs) should actively invest affordable housing funds and work with non-profit community partners to develop and rehabilitate affordable housing within the Urban Corridors.

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Tools:

- Community Development Block Grant
- Affordable Rental Housing Program
- Neighborhood Empowerment Zone
- Low Income Housing Tax Credit
- Homebuyers Assistance Program
- Multifamily Bond Program
- Housing Tax Credit
- Emergency/Critical Home Repair
- HOME Investment Partnership Act
- Houston Hope Areas

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Build Public Parking

Responsibility: City + METRO
Reduce the cost of development

Empower the City's Parking Commission to build public parking facilities throughout the Urban Corridors to augment the overall supply of parking, and to, ultimately, reduce the cost of providing parking to the private sector. Strategically located public parking facilities are seen as a potential market stimulator.

METRO should continue to pursue locations for commuter parking facilities at key stations throughout the transit system.

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Tools:
 Capital Improvement Plan

Recommendation 11-12

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Build Infrastructure

Responsibility: City + TIRZ
Establish the environment for change, reduce the cost of development

The City must use the Capital Investment Plan process to anticipate and facilitate Transit Oriented Development within the six Urban Corridors. In addition to investment already intended for the development of high order transit, the City, together with an Urban Corridor TIRZ, needs to invest in infrastructure to anticipate higher density development.

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Tools:
 Capital Improvement Plan
 Developer Participation Contract

Build new Civic Buildings

Responsibility: City
Establish the environment for change, reduce the cost of development

Signalling a commitment to continued public investment and transit, the City should, where feasible, build new civic buildings within the Urban Corridors. In addition to associated infrastructure investments, new civic buildings within the Urban Corridors will increase transit accessibility to public services.

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Tools:
 Capital Improvement Plan

Recommendations 13-14

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Build a Demonstration Project

Responsibility: City + METRO
Establish the environment for change

The City and METRO should lead the way for development along the Urban Corridors by building a demonstration project that exhibits a functional Transit Oriented Development. By becoming landowners and active developers within the Urban Corridors, the City and METRO will effectively influence the rate and form of change.

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Tools:
 METRO Joint Development
 Capital Improvement Plan

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Establish Private/Public Partnerships

Responsibility: METRO + City with Private Sector Partners
Establish the environment for change

The City and METRO should actively pursue partnerships with private land developers and other public agencies to develop Transit Oriented Development within the Urban Corridors to foster development and ensure the long term sustainability of the Urban Corridors.

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Tools:
 METRO Joint Development
 Chapter 380 Agreements
 Developer Participation Contract

Recommendation 15-17

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Provide Financial Relief for Brownfield Site Remediation

Responsibility: City together with Federal + State Partners
Establish the environment for change, reduce the cost of development

Brownfield remediation and redevelopment is a critical component in the intensification of the Urban Corridors over the short and long term. The City, together with private sector partners and Federal and State level funding sources must provide financial relief for brownfield remediation to increase the feasibility of redeveloping these sites for future use and specifically Transit Oriented Development.

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Tools:
 Brownfields Economic Development Initiative
 Brownfield Grants
 Brownfield Tax Incentive
 Expedited Permit Process

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Provide Financial Incentives

Responsibility: City together with Federal + State Partners
Reduce the costs of development

The intent of the incentives is three-fold - first to entice the development industry to build Transit Oriented Development, second, to encourage Transit Oriented Development to be built in appropriate locations, without an actual geographic definition; and, third, to ensure that Transit Oriented Development is not facilitated in inappropriate locations.

The incentive programs need to be tied to the need for a reduction in the gap between the cost of development and the achievable rent/price in a particular location. The fiscal gap in the East Corridor is between \$50,000 and \$100,000, which is substantial. Parking standard reductions and speedy approvals are not expected to effectively close the gap, and the City may need to establish a per unit development incentive to stimulate Transit Oriented Development along Harrisburg Boulevard in the short-term. If appropriate, the City will need to establish secure funding sources and clear qualification criteria for away financial incentives programs.

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Promote Economic Development

Responsibility: TIRZ, MMDs and PIDs together with local business owners and landowners
Establish the environment for change

The establishment and/or expansion of TIRZ, MMDs and PIDs must function collaboratively to advance economic development and promotion within the Urban Corridors. While capital investments are critical to the development of the Urban Corridors, business promotion, job creation and other economic development initiatives are also an essential element to the vibrancy of the Urban Corridors.

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Tools:
 Economic Adjustment Assistance
 Tax Abatement Program
 Chapter 380 Agreements