



# GREAT PLACES WITH TRANSIT

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## Use of Transit Is Up

For the first time since World War II, growth in U.S. transit use is outpacing increases in driving, according to the Surface Transportation Policy Project. In the past five years, transit use has grown by 21 percent, while driving has increased by only 11 percent. This statistic counters trends in the early 1990s, when driving increased steadily and transit use plummeted 11.8 percent.

## Correction to SVM Map

In the premiere issue of *Great Places With Transit*, the Center City segment of the map of the proposed Schuylkill Valley Metro line was incorrect. It did not reflect the Locally Preferred Alternative's Metro Rail alignment.

## About This Newsletter

Opportunities for developing great places with transit abound in the Philadelphia region. Because our system of buses, trains, trolleys and subways is large and diverse, the locales are varied. On the regional rail system lie older towns such as Conshohocken and Norristown, as well as relatively undeveloped suburban stops, including Whitford and Woodbourne. In this issue, we will focus on a former rail yard in Paoli with clean-up issues and its surrounding neighborhood on SEPTA's R5 line (p. 1) as well as a redevelopment site on the R6 line in Miquon (p. 3).

The key to all of these sites is unlocking the intrinsic value that access to transit affords. Employers seek access to a workforce. Retail shops seek customers. Homebuyers and tenants want transportation options offering good access to jobs and services. In a best-case scenario, a station area is a vibrant mix of residences, retail services and offices. On page 3, G.B. Arrington reveals insights into transit-oriented development (TOD) learned from his career specializing in the practice: Critical factors include planning for the pedestrian and market demand. In addition, basic design principles of TOD are summarized on page 4.

With regard to market demand, the market preference for highway locations is being challenged by rampant sprawl and congestion. For example, when the Simpson Paper plant closed at the Miquon train station, savvy developer Michael O'Neill of Preferred Real Estate Investments, Inc. snatched it up for redevelopment as an office park. Today, nearly 900 employees work at the site, with an estimated 10 to 15 percent commuting via transit. Take a ride on the R6 to Norristown

during the morning commute and see for yourself the dozens of employees who disembark at Miquon and at Spring Mill, the site of another Michael O'Neill development.

As great as Michael O'Neill's developments are, they are out of the ordinary, representing a development "niche." Making TOD "normal" market behavior requires knocking down some barriers to TOD and adding a few incentives. A legislative remedy, the Transit Revitalization Investment District, is outlined on page 5.

Before long, with the right public policies in place, development around transit will happen because it just makes dollars and sense. And the benefits — a vibrant place, increased mobility, less congestion, reduced air pollution and enhanced safety for pedestrians — will accrue to communities throughout the region.

— Patrick Starr  
PEC Regional Director

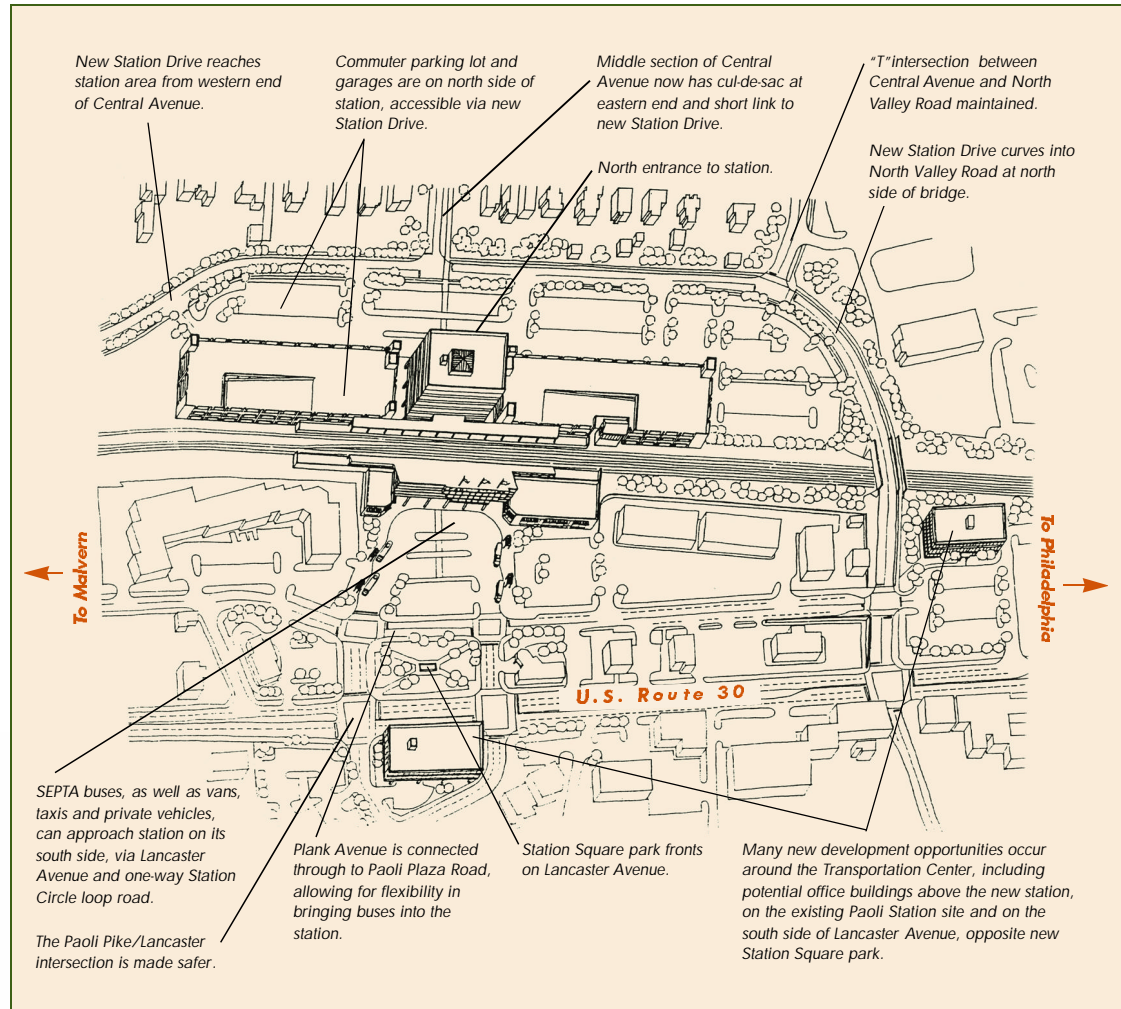
## Paoli: Future Transit-Friendly Development Site?

The Paoli Station, located in fast-growing Chester County, is the most heavily used Regional Rail station in Philadelphia's western suburbs and is one of the few stations beyond Center City to offer intercity Amtrak service. However, the facility itself is small, unattractive and lacking in amenities; the park-and-ride lots are insufficient for the number of commuters; and vehicular and pedestrian access to the station is inconvenient and unsafe. What's more, the area around the station — including a 30-acre Superfund site — is in need of revitalization.

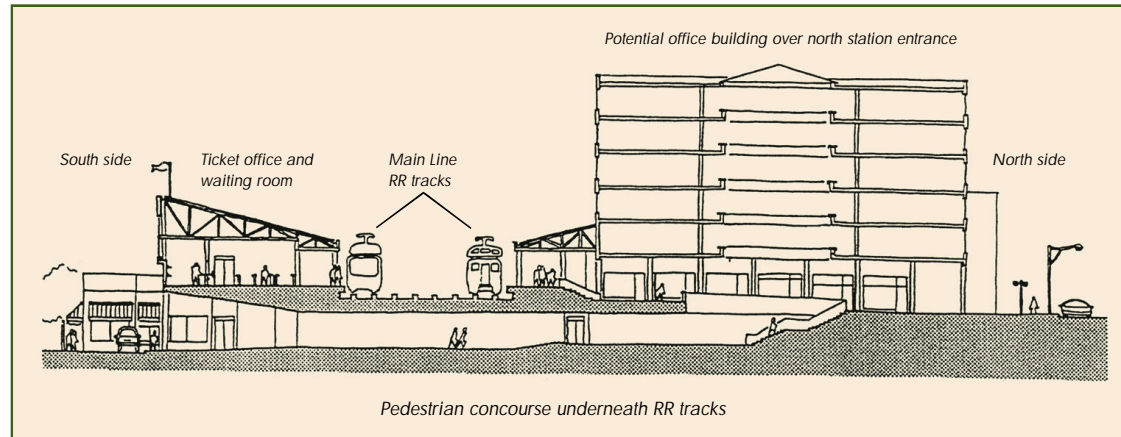
(Paoli, continued from page 1)

To address these concerns, Chester County, Amtrak (owner of the site), SEPTA, Tredyffrin Township, Willistown Township and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) came together to conduct a study of the station area to plan for a new intermodal transit facility that would improve traffic congestion, enhance the area's economy and encourage transit usage. The EPA, PA DEP and PENNDOT are also involved in planning efforts, since road improvements and remediation of the Superfund site are included in the overall station plan. The area included in the plan is bounded by the current train station to the east, West Central Avenue to the north, Route 30 to the south and Paoli depot shops to the west. Philadelphia-based Norman Day Associates led a consultant team that performed the study.

At the heart of the station area plan is an intermodal transportation center that would be fully accessible by pedestrians, cars, taxis and vans. SEPTA buses and the R5 and Amtrak trains would serve the new station, which would be equipped with ticket offices, retail shops, a waiting area and expanded parking. According to Stephen Aichele, Tredyffrin Township's representative and chair of the task force (an ad hoc committee of people with an interest in the Paoli project), "An intermodal facility would cut down on traffic and suburban sprawl. If we could get people to comfortably ride public transit, more people would probably use it. People won't get out of their cars if you don't offer something better; maybe an intermodal facility is the way to do it."



A proposed plan of the Paoli Rail Yards and Transportation Center. (Courtesy of Norman Day Associates.)



A cross-section of the proposed Paoli Transportation Center. (Courtesy of Norman Day Associates.)

However, the plan doesn't stop with the transit facility. Proposed improvements around the new Paoli Station include a small park, improved roads, retail and office development and possibly housing.

Although a developer has not yet been secured and a start date for the project is not set, Aichele says he is encouraged by the fact that the various involved parties seem to be working together toward a common goal: "The EPA and DEP want to see something

happen on an old Superfund site. Tredyffrin and Willistown would like to see the station area of Paoli revitalized. SEPTA wants a new station. Amtrak can make money from the project. There's something for everyone."

Aichele hopes to see the project move forward in the near future but notes that the development would most likely take "years, not months" to complete. He adds, "We've got to get a serious private-side player to say what will work in this market." ■

## The Miquon Station: A Transit-Adjacent Development

About a half-hour from downtown Philadelphia on SEPTA's R6 line to Norristown are River Park 1 and River Park 2 at the Miquon train station in Whitmarsh Township. The buildings make up a transit-adjacent office complex completed in 1999 by developer Michael O'Neill of Preferred Real Estate Investments, Inc. While the complex does not follow common TOD design principles, it is a good example of how an existing train station can be incorporated into a new development to encourage transit usage.

Located amid rocky bluffs and leafy trees overlooking the Schuylkill River, the attractive brick, stone, cement and glass complex consists of both new construction and a historic former industrial structure. A parking lot, some of which is leased to SEPTA for commuter parking, surrounds both River Parks and is softened by landscaping. Across the tracks from the complex, the Philadelphia-Valley Forge Bike Trail runs parallel to the river.

About 870 employees work at River Parks 1 and 2. Eight businesses, including Preferred Real Estate Investments, Villanova Capital and a day care center, are tenants. An estimated 10 to 15 percent of employees and an unknown number of visitors to the complex use the train. According to Alex Handago, Asset Manager at Preferred Real Estate Investments, some River Park employees use the Philadelphia-Valley Forge Bike Trail for jogging and walking over their lunch hour.



**Top:** River Park 1 at the Miquon R6 train station, part of a transit-adjacent development completed in 1999 by Michael O'Neill of Preferred Real Estate Investments, Inc. **Bottom:** River Park 2.

Preferred Real Estate Investments considers the complex to be a great success. The facility is fully leased, and an important part of the project was the R6 station. Tenants and visitors appreciate the option to take the train, and employees enjoy working in a scenic location where they can get outdoors during breaks. Leo Bagley of the Montgomery County Planning Commission adds that he is "pleased that businesses can locate next to train stations and generate fewer car trips." ■

## TOD Expert Arrington Addresses SVM Station Planning Workshop

"Design around the pedestrian," was a key point made by international TOD expert G.B. Arrington when he addressed a workshop for the Schuylkill Valley Metro (SVM) Corridor Station Area Planning and Implementation Study. The workshop, held on April 17th in the Upper Merion Township Building, brought together planners, engineers, township officials, environmentalists, consultants and lay people to learn more about transit-friendly design and to brainstorm ideas for TODs at four of the stations on the proposed SVM line.

Arrington, who works for Parsons Brinckerhoff in Portland, Oregon, stressed the importance of the pedestrian in TOD: "The challenge is, once

you get there, can you walk? If you have the choice to walk once you get to a TOD, it works." Allowing people to walk more — and drive less — is one of the benefits of TOD. Arrington listed other benefits as an overall improved quality of life (because of increased walking, more housing choices and potentially decreased traffic congestion); regional tax savings (due to compact development and thus less new infrastructure); improved regional air quality; more preserved land; and enhanced economic development.

According to Arrington, we are experiencing a "TOD renaissance" in the United States. One reason is that worsening traffic congestion across the nation and rising land values in most parts of the country — especially around the higher-growth cities — are making people reconsider traditional automobile-dependent forms of development. Also, more people have been moving back to urban areas, especially empty-nesters and young professionals — groups likely to prefer smaller homes with less land to the typical single-family suburban home on an acre lot. Additionally, lessons have been learned from areas in which transit systems were built or expanded without TOD: Those systems were not as successful as ones that incorporated TOD. Finally, the general public is becoming more aware of — and more concerned about — sprawl, and there is growing support for strategies encouraging smart growth. However, Arrington cautioned that "trends are like hemlines — what's up today may be down tomorrow."

According to Arrington, the most important factor in successful TOD is a supportive real estate market: Transit won't create a new market, although it may alter or redistribute an existing one. Also crucial are a good transit system design, community partnerships, thoughtful planning for smart growth, and incentives. Arrington stressed the importance of



**At the April SVM workshop, SEPTA's Dave Fogel (right) listens as Dale Mehle, TriCounty Chamber of Commerce, makes a point about the Pottstown station area.**

(Continued on page 4)

(Arrington, continued from page 3)

considering the automobile in transit-friendly design: "All good TOD also benefits from good auto access — you need a balance." TOD is meant to reduce — not replace — the use of cars, and any development that doesn't take that into consideration will not be successful.

Surprisingly, Arrington noted that pollution and traffic congestion may become worse in and around transit-friendly developments, but lessened in nearby areas; however he does not necessarily see this as a problem. "I'd argue that like with cholesterol, there is good and bad congestion," he said. "If you create places where people want to be, congestion is a good thing. If congestion is from poor land use — where people have no other options — that's a bad thing."

Arrington used his home city of Portland as an example of how a community can come together to build good TODs. Portland, called an "urban mecca showing the nation's cities how to guide growth" by the *Wall Street Journal*, is the home of Orenco Station, a TOD considered by many to be the most important of its kind. Although Portland is by no means perfect when it comes to transit, land use and affordability issues, it is doing better than most American cities. Arrington pointed out that much of its success has come from partnerships and good planning.

Arrington concluded with some lessons the rest of the country can learn from Portland regarding building TODs:

- Design for the pedestrian
- Have a long-term view and begin planning early
- Use a regional approach

- Ensure the community has a significant role
- Bring many players to the table
- Make sure there is a strong real estate market to support development
- Make sure there is a well-designed transit system planned or in place
- Use the existing design of the community as a basis for design of the TOD ■

## Basic Design Principles of TOD

The concept of TOD is not new, but it is an idea that many communities and developers shelved following World War II in favor of what is sometimes called traditional suburban development or sprawl development.

Today, with sprawl consuming open space and causing traffic nightmares in communities across the United States, TOD has been rediscovered as one "smart growth" alternative.

The central idea of TOD is to enable people to drive their cars less by making use of public transit, walking, biking and other alternatives to the car convenient and easy. This goal is accomplished through attractive mixed-use development in close proximity to a public transit station or stop, as well as enhanced auto, pedestrian and bicycle connections. Local examples of the types of communities

(Continued on page 5)



*Orenco Station near Portland, Oregon, is often cited as the best example of a mixed-use TOD and embodies all of the basic TOD design elements. Top: The more commercial areas of Orenco have pedestrian-oriented and -scaled mixed-use buildings, crosswalks, bike lanes and landscaping. Bottom: The more residential areas feature homes on small yet attractive lots, many of which include porches, less-prominent garages and sidewalks.*

## Who's Who in the SVM Corridor Station Area Planning and Implementation Study

The SVM Corridor Station Area Planning and Implementation Study involves a Program Management Team (PMT) and Community Task Forces from Douglassville, Phoenixville, Port Kennedy, Pottstown and 52nd Street in Philadelphia.

The PMT includes staff from the Berks, Chester, Montgomery and Philadelphia County governments; the Delaware Valley Community Reinvestment Fund; the Pennsylvania Environmental Council (PEC); BARTA; SEPTA; DVRPC; Wallace Roberts & Todd; and Beach Advertising. DVRPC is the coordinator of the PMT, administers contracts and provides data and technical support.

The Berks, Chester and Montgomery County Planning Commissions and the City of Philadelphia (Mayor's Office of Transportation and City Planning Commission) are leading the coordination and implementation of station area planning. Community Task Forces and public information and education activities in their respective jurisdictions.

The role of BARTA and SEPTA is to support station area planning, implementation and information activities; final station area conceptual design work; and region-wide and corridor-wide TOD public information and education programs.

The Reinvestment Fund is working to implement a location-efficient mortgage product. The role of PEC is to lead the implementation of region-wide TOD public information and education programs, with ongoing support from McCormick, Taylor & Associates, Inc. ■

(Design Principles, continued from page 4)

TODs emulate include Narberth, Ardmore, Swarthmore and Chestnut Hill. Orenco Station near Portland, Oregon, is a prime national example of successful TOD. Visit their website at [www.orencostation.com](http://www.orencostation.com) for more information.

The following are some of the important design elements of TOD:

- **TOD is mixed-use in character:** Depending on size, TOD may combine residential, retail and commercial uses with public open spaces. This adds to the convenience of TODs, making it easy to run errands, socialize and meet basic needs without driving.
- **TOD is compact and centered around a train, bus or other transit stop:** Lot sizes are smaller than those in suburban-type development, and often apartments or offices are located above retail spaces. Usually, all parts of the development are no more than a half-mile from the transit stop (about a 10- to 15-minute walk). Secondary areas of less compact homes and low-intensity businesses may lie outside the compact half-mile radius of a TOD, up to one mile from the transit stop — an easy bike ride.
- **TOD is designed to be people-friendly:** Proper lighting, safety and aesthetics are incorporated into the design to make people feel comfortable walking between the transit station, residences and commercial areas. Ideally, buildings are pedestrian in scale, rather than high-rise.
- **TOD incorporates public open spaces whenever possible:** Some TODs contain a central park or

public square; smaller TODs include attractive landscaping.

- **TOD utilizes a grid street pattern and incorporates bike lanes:** A grid-like pattern makes it easier for cars, bikes and pedestrians to access the transit facility. Streets should include bike lanes separate from pedestrian and car lanes where possible. ■

## Transit Revitalization Investment Districts: A Template for TOD in Pennsylvania

Promoting great places with transit as an alternative to suburban sprawl has long been a priority of PEC. In January 1999, funded by a grant from DVRPC, PEC issued a report outlining the barriers to TOD following three years of research and discussion.

Guided by an advisory panel of planners and transit and development experts, the report outlined 17 barriers to TOD in southeastern Pennsylvania. Key barriers included:

- Difficulty coordinating actions by municipalities, transit authorities and developers
- Lack of community understanding and support
- Lack of supportive zoning and land use policies
- Scarcity of land and transit station inaccessibility
- Lack of funds for capital improvements and facility maintenance
- Market skepticism about demand for TOD

### Overcoming Barriers

In an attempt to create an "easy-bake recipe" for others to follow, DVRPC, PEC and 10,000 Friends of Pennsylvania have initiated a concept for state legislation that provides a template for the formation of Transit Revitalization Investment Districts (TRIDs). The concept draws on extensive experience with community development and because time is money, places the primary burden of "pre-development" costs on the public sector. In turn, the developer builds the TOD, delivering both transit riders and new tax rate-ables. In exchange, tax payments from future development help to pay down infrastructure

investments by the public sector, and the transit authority shares in the tax revenues generated to help reinvest in local capital improvements and maintenance.

### Partnerships Are Key

The TRID concept defines a partnership among a municipality, a transit authority and a developer. Borrowing from the Commonwealth's development process, the local government would be in the driver's seat. It would designate a TRID area up to a half-mile radius around a transit station or stop. Unlike the development process, TRID designation would come without the negative connotations of blight certification. Through a public process of planning and discussion, community education would be conducted and community support for TOD generated.

### Supportive Land Use Policies, Accessibility and Land Assembly

Once the TRID is established, several barriers to TOD can be tackled in short order. First, the local government assesses the existing zoning and development ordinances, with necessary revisions to accommodate the desired development. Second, the municipality and transit authority coordinate capital investments in the transit infrastructure and enhance access to the station for all travel modes. Auto, bicycle and pedestrian connections to the station and adjacent development parcels are enhanced. Third, the transit authority, or redevelopment authority, is empowered to assemble land for both transit use and transit-related development. In some circumstances, if warranted, eminent domain could be exercised to assemble the station and TOD site.

### Public Amenities and Enhanced Financing

Because transit stations will serve, in effect, as the "front door" to private development, public amenities and maintenance must be of the highest quality. Parking facilities, bike storage, station facilities, landscaping and public open space must meet high standards to create a safe, attractive environment that draws people.

Traditionally, funding such improvements, especially transit facility improvements, has been tough. Through a "value capture mechanism" enabled in the TRID proposal, tax revenues from future development could be dedicated to paying for these improvements, thereby creating a funding stream to amortize capital debt and future maintenance needs.

(Continued on page 6)



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*(TRIDs, continued from page 5)*

**Market Skepticism**

Without a doubt, TOD has to be in line with market dynamics. As part of the TRID designation and planning process, market demand analysis could be performed as a part of the local planning process. Additionally, at the time that a prepared site is put out to bid, prospective developers could perform their own market research. However, location is still the key to market demand. Fortunately, transit-accessible locations are increasingly popular, and similar actions have resulted in extraordinary development in areas as disparate as suburban Washington D.C., downtown Atlanta and ex-urban Portland, Oregon.

With SEPTA's extensive transit infrastructure, the development potential in southeastern Pennsylvania is enormous. The TRID concept is the key to unlocking this treasure trove of

development opportunity. Introduction of the TRID proposal in the Pennsylvania General Assembly is being pursued, and progress will be reported here. ■

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DVRPC is an interstate, inter-county and inter-city agency that provides continuing, comprehensive and coordinated planning for the orderly growth and development of the Delaware Valley region. It serves the southeastern Pennsylvania counties of Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia and the southern New Jersey counties of Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and Mercer.

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