

GREAT PLACES WITH TRANSIT

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Bad News From MIT on Traffic

People's insatiable appetite for mobility is causing the world's transportation systems to head toward unsustainable gridlock and environmental degradation, according to a report on worldwide mobility at the end of the 20th Century by Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) researchers and Charles River Associates. The report is the first phase of a three-year study commissioned by the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

The study warns that unless manufacturers and municipalities can improve the fuel economy of cars and trucks and curb traffic growth, greenhouse gas emissions from transport in the developing world will exceed those in the industrialized world by 2015. Grand challenges to that end include reinventing public transport and creating a portfolio of mobility options for people and freight. The MIT report can be found at <http://lfee.mit.edu/>.

About This Newsletter

One of the more surprising revelations following the September 11th tragedy was the role of public transportation in providing mobility alternatives to the embattled City of New York. Following the Twin Tower attacks, NJ TRANSIT and Amtrak played a major role, partnering with New York City's transit system, to get people around safely and on schedule. Once again, circumstances underscore that modal choice is critically important – even in our auto-besotted nation.

In this issue of *Great Places with Transit*, we delve more deeply into making transit-friendly development happen. We examine how some communities and companies are making it happen *for their own reasons*, and how one transit agency has worked to make it commonplace.

First, we look at how NJ TRANSIT – eager to increase ridership and make maximum use of the public investment in it – has institutionalized direct assistance to communities to promote transit-friendly development (page 1). Communities compete, and many have responded. NJ TRANSIT's program is a good model for how southeastern Pennsylvania could get a lot of projects going quickly.

We also tell the stories of several Philadelphia-area suburban neighborhoods that have "seized the moment" to build – or rebuild – in a transit-friendly way to provide community services and build tax rateables. Cheltenham Township is a great case study of leveraging transit access to renew a town center (Glenside), attract business and build retail "energy" (page 2). The short piece about the nearby Keswick Theater illustrates how relatively small changes can have a big impact (page 3).

On a dramatically larger scale outside of our region, we highlight BellSouth's ambitious plan to consolidate its operations into three new business centers adjacent to transit stations in Atlanta. The outcome will maximize modal options for its thousands of employees and reduce time wasted sitting in congestion on highways (page 4).

Finally, in our piece focusing on the Schuylkill Valley Metro, we review a market analysis of real estate development potential at five proposed station sites: 52nd Street in Philadelphia; Port Kennedy (Upper Merion Township) and Pottstown in Montgomery County; Phoenixville in Chester County; and Douglassville (Amity Township) in Berks County (page 5). ■

— Patrick Starr
PEC Vice President, Southeast PA

NJ TRANSIT's TOD Program: A Model to Emulate

One need look no further than NJ TRANSIT to find an excellent institutional framework for facilitating transit-friendly development. NJ TRANSIT's program was launched in June 1994 and has matured in subsequent years. As in Pennsylvania, land use decision-making in New Jersey is vested in municipalities; therefore, partnerships and incentives have been the *modus operandi* to achieve implementation from the beginning.

The first outreach effort was the publication and distribution of *Planning for Transit-Friendly*

(Continued on page 2)

(NJ TRANSIT, continued from page 1)

Land Use: A Handbook for New Jersey Communities. This transit-oriented development (TOD) recipe book was designed primarily for municipal officials. (The PA Environmental Council [PEC], under contract to the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission [DVRPC], produced a similar TOD handbook tailored to southeastern PA in 1997.) This initiative was in support of the NJ State Plan, which called for more focused development around existing infrastructure and designated urban centers.

After a few years of low-level interest, the burgeoning real estate market and growing congestion provided a “wake-up call” to developers and municipalities, who started contacting NJ TRANSIT for more help. The response was to obtain federal funding (a Transportation and Community and System Preservation Grant) for technical assistance. Partners with NJ TRANSIT included New Jersey Futures, the Regional Plan Association, the Project for Public



Transit- and pedestrian-friendly development in South Orange Village, NJ (courtesy of NJ TRANSIT).

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Artist's rendering of a transit-friendly development near the Morristown NJ TRANSIT station (courtesy of NJ TRANSIT).

Spaces, Rutgers University and other non-profits. An RFP to interested communities was distributed, and 38 municipalities responded; of these, 11 were selected. “Essentially, our goal was to help communities develop their own visions for TOD,” says Vivian A. Baker, Program Manager, “by rounding up stakeholders, educating partners and developing needed tools.”

Concurrently, the NJ Department of Transportation and NJ TRANSIT jointly announced the Transit Village Program, designed to acknowledge and promote good transit/land use planning. “This is a ‘branding program,’” according to Kenneth Snapp, NJ TRANSIT’s Director of Passenger Facility Planning, “meant to recognize and support those communities that are on the cutting edge of TOD.” The communities selected included Rutherford, South Orange, South Amboy, Morristown and Pleasantville (a bus TOD).

In response to increasing demands for assistance from both developers and communities, NJ TRANSIT created an “on-call” technical assistance program. Private consultants under contract to NJ TRANSIT are available to provide community planning services within walking distance of NJ TRANSIT stations to develop a vision of what should be and to move projects along in accord with that. Of \$1 million in assistance authorized by NJ TRANSIT’s board, more than \$600,000 has been committed thus far to seven projects. The consultants selected for this service include Looney, Ricks, Kiss and a joint venture of Clark, Caton and Hintz with Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut and Kuhn.

These programs have resulted in numerous projects blossoming across NJ TRANSIT’s service area. Between the three programs, more than 30 municipalities are receiving assistance. Asked what this means to NJ TRANSIT, Executive Director Jeffrey A. Warsh says, “We’ve become more important partners with the communities we serve, and we’ve demonstrated in concrete terms that transit can bring new tax rateables, jobs and residents to New Jersey’s designated growth centers.”

NJ TRANSIT’s TOD program has tremendous relevance to southeastern PA. Prior to initiating these efforts, NJ TRANSIT had seen limited interest from municipalities and developers in transit-friendly planning or development, and NJ and PA have similar land use decision-making conditions and historic commuter rail systems. Thus, the lessons should be easily transferable.

For more information about NJ TRANSIT’s TOD program, contact Ken Snapp at 973-491-7817 or Vivian Baker at 973-491-7822. ■

Cheltenham Township: Enhancing Commerce with Transit

Many communities in southeastern Pennsylvania grew up around transit. Often, these areas developed as “main streets” named for a train station stop. Hence, Cheltenham Township, which lies adjacent to Philadelphia to the north along SEPTA’s R-1, R-2, R-3 and R-5 lines, contains the neighborhoods of Glenside and Elkins Park, among others.

Cheltenham Township has been pursuing transit-friendly development as part of a community revitalization plan. Rather than broader regional purposes of increasing transit ridership, lowering automobile air emissions or decreasing congestion on nearby Route 309, the Township’s goals are grounded in real needs. “The Commissioners and staff saw the plan as a means to boost

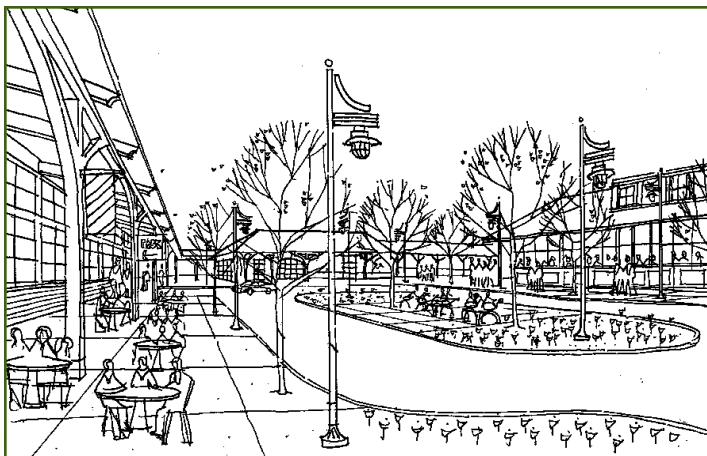
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(Cheltenham Township, continued from page 2)

commercial areas and help to create tax rateables. We've become concerned about relying too much on our residential tax base," says David G. Kravnik, Township Manager. Another objective of the plan includes providing an enhanced quality of life for township residents.

The Township's commitment was such that it obligated general revenues to hire a consultant team led by Carter van Dyke Associates (CVDA), a planning and landscape architecture consulting firm based in Doylestown. Together with Urban Partners (economic planners), Gannett Fleming (transportation planners) and Runyan & Associates (architects), the team brings extensive experience in crafting sensitive town plans with a strong slant toward pedestrian-friendly neo-traditional design.

Five areas in the Township were studied – Glenside, Elkins Park East and West, Cheltenham Village and Cheltenham Avenue. For each, the planning team held three public meetings to develop "community goals."



A town green, farmers' market, parking structure and restaurants at Glenside Station (courtesy of CVDA/Runyan and Associates, Architects).

Of these, the Glenside recommendations are the most ambitious, including:

- Creating commercial destinations that meet community needs;
- Reducing residential taxes by expanding commercial uses;
- Reinvesting in infrastructure – streets, sidewalks, trees, lighting;
- Slowing traffic and creating safer streets; and
- Creating places for people to meet, walk, bike and access transit.

The actual conditions in Glenside were essentially the opposite of these goals – too few commercial destinations, a lack of tax-base appreciation, an aging infrastructure, fast-moving traffic and the lack of a clear focal point.

To make the station area a focal point again, a critical step is to develop SEPTA's surface parking lot back into a town green. The key to achieving this goal is constructing a 450-car parking structure with ground floor retail to provide more spaces in a "shared" facility behind the station. This would free land for the erection of a large restaurant on the Easton Road side, a farmers' market, and an attractive "kiss & ride" drop-off between the restaurant and the station. The market would benefit from the high-visibility location and the flow of passengers into and out of the station.

Other interventions are proposed for the commercial corridor along Easton Road, including façade enhancements and reconfiguring of on- and off-street parking to increase capacity and improve access. Most importantly, traffic lanes would be narrowed slightly, intersection curb bump-outs would be installed, textured crosswalks would act as "rumble strips," and planted medians would be introduced to slow traffic and enhance the pedestrian environment. These measures take advantage of the latest know-how about slowing cars through physical design – a practice known as traffic calming.

Keswick Revitalization

Transit-friendly development can include subtle streetscape and traffic flow improvements to existing communities. Carter van Dyke Associates (CVDA) redesigned the area around the Keswick Theater, which is located three blocks from the Glenside SEPTA Regional Rail station, served by the R1, R2 and R5 lines, to make it more pedestrian-friendly and aesthetically pleasing. The popular Keswick can be easily accessed via train or bus. ■



Before (top) and after (bottom) improvements (courtesy of CVDA).

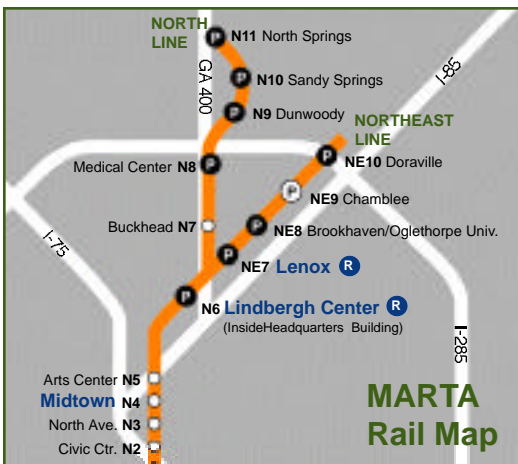
The study prompted Cheltenham to approach SEPTA regarding the construction of a mixed-use parking structure. Following a determination of parking demand, SEPTA has agreed. Now, the Township, Montgomery County and SEPTA are each contributing to a \$45,000 feasibility assessment to determine the actual size, operation, retail mix, management entity and funding for the facility, with the intention of pursuing federal dollars.

"I think that our plan and community commitment has driven the other players and has unlocked resources we would never have otherwise obtained," says Kravnik. "From the beginning, we saw our expenditure of general revenues for the plan as an investment in our future. We are already seeing returns." ■

BellSouth's Metro Plan: Good for Bottom Line and Rail Line

In January 1999, BellSouth, an Atlanta-based telecommunications corporation and that region's second-largest employer, announced that the company would close its scattered suburban offices and consolidate its workforce at three locations along MARTA, Atlanta's metro rail system. Although the decision was made primarily for business reasons, BellSouth's transit-friendly "Metro Plan" has been hailed as an example of a company watching the bottom line while helping to fight suburban sprawl in its community.

In 1999, metro Atlanta was leading the nation in job growth and absorbing more newcomers than any region except Los Angeles. An acre of land was being consumed for every two people who moved to the area, and new developments were auto-dependent rather than transit-oriented. People in the Atlanta



Northern section of system map for MARTA's rail lines.

area drove more miles per day per person (34) than residents of any other major U.S. metro area.

While many Atlanta-area businesses had been locating in the suburbs, BellSouth decided to build its three new complexes within city limits and adjacent or very near to MARTA rail stations. BellSouth expects a third of its employees to use MARTA and another share to use van and carpool services as a result of company incentives.

The three business centers will provide parking for only about half the workforce and will charge \$60 per month for each parking space. Many employees using MARTA will be able to reserve a free or subsidized parking space at one of the secure garages being built at four outlying stations. The company also will subsidize MARTA passes. "We're getting some grouching about the parking and inability for everyone to have their own car now," says BellSouth spokesman Joe Chandler. "But we believe that as time goes on, the ability to have a more predictable trip to work will come to be seen as an advantage to the workers and to the company in the form of better productivity."

Previously, about 6,500 of BellSouth's roughly 18,000 metro area employees worked in the city of Atlanta; by 2004, up to 17,000 are expected to be located there. The locations of the new business centers were chosen based on where employees live: Although they commute from every direction, many live to the north of downtown Atlanta.

Sites outside the city to the north were ruled out because of traffic congestion, lack of transit and the realization that the young, highly skilled workers the company hopes to attract from around the country prefer an urban environment.

Each of the business center sites – Lenox Park, Midtown and Lindbergh Center – presented a different context and various challenges. The Lenox site is furthest along, with both buildings complete and occupied. Located a mile away from the train station, the Lenox site presented the greatest challenge to creating a transit- and pedestrian-friendly environment, as employees are not likely to walk to MARTA or nearby businesses. Thus, BellSouth and area businesses plan to operate a shuttle.



The BellSouth business center at Lindbergh (courtesy of CVDA).

The Midtown site sits in a densely developed downtown area and is surrounded by a grid of streets, large office buildings and cultural attractions. The two Midtown buildings should be completed by early 2003. The tall towers will be set back with smaller-scale façades to avoid overshadowing pedestrians and will abut a pocket park and plaza.

The Lindbergh site, at MARTA's second-busiest station, developed in a traditional suburban way. By late 2002, BellSouth will become the prime tenant in a TOD that had already been planned there on a parking lot and MARTA-owned property. This TOD, with Carter & Associates as the lead developer, was originally designed with offices and apartments over ground-floor retail in medium-rise buildings along a "main street." However, when BellSouth came in as a super-tenant, it needed more parking and two taller towers rather than mid-rises. In light of neighborhood fears that more parking would add to existing road congestion, MARTA and the developer agreed to reduce the parking and make streetscape and traffic calming improvements.

BellSouth's planned presence at Lindbergh also has spawned other redevelopment efforts nearby. Plans are in the works to further extend the urban village grid with shopping, housing and offices.

Since BellSouth's announcement, a number of other employers have renewed or expanded their commitment to locating jobs at transit-accessible locations, but no other company has yet matched BellSouth in scale. BellSouth is providing a great example of how good business can also benefit employees, the environment and the community as a whole. ■

Real Estate Development Potential in SVM Corridor

What would construction of the Schuylkill Valley Metro (SVM) mean for the southeast PA real estate market? A two-year study led by DVRPC is exploring how SEPTA and BARTA's proposed 62-mile SVM might affect development in certain municipalities along its route. As part of the study, Hammer, Siler, George Associates (HSGA) prepared a market analysis of real estate development potential at five proposed station sites along the SVM corridor: 52nd Street in Philadelphia; Port Kennedy (Upper Merion Township) and Pottstown in Montgomery County; Phoenixville in Chester County; and Douglassville (Amity Township) in Berks County.

The analysis for real estate potential along the electric-powered MetroRail passenger rail line that would run between Philadelphia and the Reading area in Berks County was prepared for DVRPC and Wallace Roberts & Todd (WRT), the Philadelphia-based planning and urban design firm evaluating the proposed station areas. The real estate study projected population and job growth to 2025 with two different sets of assumptions: a "Trends Scenario," which assumed current trends would continue from 2000 to 2025, and an "Opportunities Scenario," which predicted growth from 2007 (the planned operational date for the SVM) to 2025 assuming that transit-friendly improvements were made to boost each area's appeal to real estate investors.

The Opportunities Scenario painted a brighter picture for the proposed SVM station areas – a reflection of the benefits that new or improved transit service can provide. This scenario showed that by 2025, the five station areas could attract a total of about 2 million square feet (SF) of office space, 615,000 SF of retail space, 1,550 residential units and 1,200 hotel/lodging rooms.

Although it is located in an economically depressed area, the 52nd Street station boasts proximity to Fairmount Park and the Mann Music Center — both of which already attract many visitors. The SVM station, with other existing and proposed transit service,

relatively strong demand for office and retail space here, which could include redevelopment of the Mrs. Smith's Pie complex.

Because of its distance from Philadelphia and Reading, problems with the current configuration of U.S. 422 and the fact that most development in the area is of low density, the potential Douglassville station has more limited development potential in the short term. However, due to the extensive available land around the station area, this location has promise. New residential and commercial development that would support a revitalized "main street" has been proposed; however, these plans are dependent on the rerouting of

POTENTIAL NEW DEVELOPMENT IN COMMUNITIES ALONG PROPOSED SVM

Station Area	Office Space (SF)	Retail Space (SF)	Residential Units	Hotel/Lodging Rooms
Douglassville (Berks Co.)	100,000	150,000	100	150
52nd Street (Phila. Co.)	140,000	120,000	200	150
Phoenixville (Chester Co.)	500,000	250,000	300	300
Port Kennedy (Mont. Co.)	1,100,000	45,000	800	400
Pottstown (Mont. Co.)	170,000	50,000	150	200
TOTALS	2,010,000	615,000	1,550	1,200

Data from Opportunities Scenario for 2007-2025 in Real Estate Development Potentials: Selected Proposed Transit Station Areas, Schuylkill Valley Metro Corridor, by HSGA for DVRPC, 2001.

could create a hub of activity supporting a proposed retail center as well as additional commercial and residential development.

The Port Kennedy station is located in the busy King of Prussia area, near I-76 and I-276, U.S. 422, PA 23 and PA 363. If the SVM station were built and improvements were made to pedestrian access, this site could support new office, hotel and residential space, linked by a riverside path to Valley Forge Park.

In Phoenixville, a redevelopment master plan has been approved for a large area that includes the proposed SVM station. An office/retail complex, which is proposed next to the station and would provide parking for both SVM and building users, has the potential to create a "town center" for the new development.

In the Pottstown station area, a planned expansion of Montgomery County Community College and the potential reuse of the former Reading Railroad station would help attract more development while being served by the SVM. The market analysis showed a

U.S. 422 to improve local access to the station area and Douglassville's historic district.

According to Richard Bickel, DVRPC's study project manager, "The real estate market study shows the potential benefits of the SVM to attract additional development around the stations and along the corridor. This development can help to generate additional tax revenue and jobs for local communities, while also helping to generate ridership to support the new rail line." ■

SVM Station Area Web Site Up and Running!

A web site was launched this fall to enable the partners of the SVM Station Area Planning and Implementation Study and the public to follow the project's progress. The site offers Study background, information on each of the five proposed SVM station areas, downloadable copies of *Great Places with Transit* and a comments page. Through the web site, visitors can give station-specific feedback that will be incorporated into ongoing work on the Study.

To access the web page, go to the DVRPC home page at www.dvrpc.org and click on the SVM icon at the bottom right. ■



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Erratum

In the Summer/Fall 2001 issue of *Great Places With Transit*, in the WMATA article, the first bullet point on page 3 said that it is estimated that Metro system ridership increased to 100,000 passengers a day due to TOD. In fact, the Metro system carries nearly 600,000 riders daily. The phrase should have stated that TOD policies had resulted in an *increase in ridership* of 15 percent (amounting to 100,000 new riders per day). ■

GREAT PLACES WITH TRANSIT

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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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