The historical context and developed planning techniques for modern TODs

According to Dittmar and Ohland in their book, *The new Transit Town*, the term and idea “Transit Oriented Development” is a newer phenomenon; the idea has struggled because of a lack of precedent. They look at the TOD from many different vantage points, from the historical context to the future of “transit oriented developments”. Looking into the past, evidence that there was a relationship between development and transit is evident. In the early 1900s developers and private investors built transit, [eg. street cars], in their developments and to urban job centers without the help of the public; they included the idea for basic needs into the system by placing small retail clusters around the stops. This represents one of the first uses of what we now, [and with more complexity and regulation], call “transit oriented developments”.

After the war era was over, the fundamental ideas of a transit oriented development were still in place in big cities but didn’t resonate in the minds of smaller metropolis or smaller city locations; transit went by the wayside and people were all about taking buses.

Soon after, buses became unreliable and people realized that they were using the same congested right-of-way as the other automobiles and it was just as frustrating to get around. Due to the overwhelming congestion problems in cities such as San Francisco, Atlanta, and Washington DC, they decided to build new rail transit systems; these were some of the first examples of intercity rail transit outside of New York and Chicago. Even though their ancestors were onto something, these cities didn’t design and build their regional transit systems with any idea of later development; leaving almost no easy opportunities for transit oriented development later down the line. The idea behind their design was, as stated before, to relieve congestion. The designers and officials worked with this idea by putting mass amounts of parking around the stations that went directly downtown; providing alternative places for people to drive to.
It is said that in today’s world, the planning of “transit oriented developments” was an accident. Officials were overwhelmed by the amount of money it cost to construct a light rail system and decided to sell adjacent properties to offset some of the costs. This method didn’t pay for the rail in full, but it made the people feel like they weren’t spending as much for the rail projects. Although this type of development seems like it is the fundamental definition of a modern TOD, it isn’t. This type of design has a weak relationship between transit and developers; making it easy for the developer to do whatever they want instead of making decisions that will benefit the region. Each project was looked at in a financial standpoint by each developer, giving them the idea that a profit is worth more than connectivity to the neighborhood; they will soon be proved wrong when there as less people that use their prestigious developments than expected.

The scope of transit oriented development changes with the amount of government assistance provided. The local, state, and or federal government through grants and other agencies subsidizes most modern TODs; this is where the previous type of developments start to play a better community role. The governmental agencies mandate how their money should be spend and what qualifies a project to receive any. Particularly, projects that are subsidized will have a bigger emphasis on a commercial melting pot and a broad range on income in their residential sections; these normally focus on lower-income households or the more luxury units for the new young professionals.

The biggest problem in today’s standards for transit oriented developments is that they fall short; these are comically re-coined as “transit relative developments”. The ideas and goals for a true TOD are set high, making it harder to achieve them. Due to mainly financial constraints, but also contributed to time and effort, some planned TODs fail before they are even finished; this is because developers seem to shy away from spending the money necessary to make a TOD meet the high standards set.

Mockingbird Station as a case study for transit oriented development in Cincinnati

Dallas Texas is a hotbed for new transit oriented developments over the past fifteen to twenty years; it is also similar in many ways to Cincinnati. The DART (Dallas
Area Regional Transit) system was started in 1996 and had twenty miles of light rail by 2002. By 2003 it had opened an additional twenty-four miles of rail in the suburbs, mostly concentrated in the northern section where there are multitudes of telecom jobs.

By 2001 it was evident that the DART system was a good investment and opportunity for the people of Dallas and surrounding areas; more that $1 Billion in new development had been constructed around the system with many more plans in process. A study was done by the University of north Texas that showed that Land value doubled around DART as compared to other controlled areas.
Some communities resisted the idea of light rail when it was planned in the 1990s. These same communities were fighting for inclusion in 2003 after seeing what the development had done for its neighbors. Although on four of the thirty-four stations were located in the suburbs, these platforms did major business. The new transit oriented development located in Plano Texas had people flocking from all over to find residency. The enormous amount of telecommunications jobs in the area helped to bring in more outsiders than Texans; even though some major companies like Boeing decided to locate there headquarters in Chicago over Dallas because of the better lifestyle choices. Robert Shaw the developer of the Plano TOD, said “Transit is an essential part of telling the story of these developments. And it’s been my experience that if you can tell a good story, and if you can get control of the land, you can always attract capital. That is, as long as you’re not stuck with unrealistic rents or infrastructure costs.” (Dittmar and Ohland pg. 159) This is the basis behind development near transit for Dallas area investors.

Mockingbird station is transit oriented development four miles north of downtown Dallas that resembles the want and need of Cincinnati. It is a unique development because the designer and developer, Ken Hughes, didn’t use government subsidies; he found financing from private investors and other means, citing that he wanted to avoid the hoops that he would have had to jump through if he would have got the project subsidized. Mockingbird Station was a Suburban development with an urban feel and design. With most of the parking underground, the development was an adaptive reuse project that encompassed residential, retail, office space, and other commercial spaces. The project has an interesting dilemma providing the right mix of business in the development due to the restrictions from the already developed sub-urban neighborhood. Mockingbird station is a $105 million “urban village” with all the amenities that one could possibly need. It consisted of 221 loft apartments, 150,000 square feet of office space, 183,000 square feet of retail six restaurants, an eight-screen independent film theatre, a full service grocery store, a bank, a drycleaner, 1440 parking space, and ninety other shops within walking distance. After is opening in the already affluent part of Dallas, it gained an immediate reputation as being a hip place to go; allowing big stores such as Urban Outfitters and a Virgin Mega-store to go in.
The complex site that the development is situated on is a perfect size; it has been said that if the site were fifty feet closer to the highway, it never would have worked. One unusual fact about the site is that it didn’t have to be rezoned for a mixed-use program. The site had an existing building that was built in 1940 and used for telephone manufacturing throughout its lifespan, which would later have five stories added and turned into above market rate loft apartments; this would be the start of the development which would later be expanded on.

After its completion in 2000, it had a residential density of twenty-four units per acre. Its parking capacity was one space per bedroom and 3.23 spaces per 1,000 gross square feet of retail. These numbers are comparable to other transit oriented developments around the nation and don’t stray from the norm.

The Mockingbird Station transit oriented development is configured very similarly to Camp Washington in Cincinnati’s rail corridor. It is situated as an island, next to a major freeway, a submerged light rail that almost immediately goes underground and heads towards downtown, and it is on a major east-west corridor. This makes Mockingbird Station as well as Camp Washington a prime location for a transit oriented development. The use of multi-modal transportation is a key aspect of a TOD, connection automobiles, buses, and rail transit all in one place, while providing basic amenities and living conditions to a multitude of people.
Mockingbird station was developed on a piece of land that many people didn’t want. It changed the entire aspect of the neighborhood and what you could do there, creating both jobs and residents which ultimately leads to tax revenue for the community. This is the basis for Camp Washington as a case study. Many ideas that the Camp Washington neighborhood have dreamed of are being realized at Mockingbird Stations; the need to boulevard the major access roads, landscaping to promote a clean and inviting community, and providing a connection to nearby universities.

Mockingbird Station is also in close relation to Cincinnati due to the reliance on automobile traffic. In design and development, Hughes wanted to eliminate the number of parking spaces need by code because he claimed that the rail would make up for it. Seeing how there was no direct case study at the time and being a suburban neighborhood, the governmental officials didn’t go for it, leaving the site to house 1440 parking spaces. After the development was completed, it has been show statistically that the number of parking spaces, in fact, could have been reduced.
It is a very successful TOD with a very interesting and unusual background. Cincinnati and Camp Washington can use this as a persuasive technique to convince the people and developers that this is a worthwhile investment. The similarities between the two are paramount and can be considered one in the same as far as the effects would be.

References


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