

DOMESTIC SCAN TOUR REPORT – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Land Use and Transportation Coordination:

Lessons Learned from Domestic Scan Tour II

Prepared for the Office of Planning
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B A C K G R O U N D

Transportation infrastructure and land use guidelines create the framework within which communities evolve, and influence urban and rural development, economic prosperity, environmental quality, and social equity. In many states, however, transportation and land use policies are often considered separately, a disassociation that can lead to inefficient resource use and adverse environmental and community impacts.

To more closely examine local efforts to integrate transportation and land use policies, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is sponsoring a program of domestic scan tours. Initiated in the fall of 2002, the domestic scan tours are designed to obtain, highlight, and share successful processes, methodologies, and practices concerning the integration of local and regional transportation and land use planning.

The domestic scan tour teams have included FHWA staff members from Headquarters and Division field offices, local, regional, and state-level planning professionals, Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) representatives, and staff members from the Volpe National Transportation Systems Center. While visiting projects within communities, the domestic scan tour teams have interviewed local elected officials and staff, regional, and state-level planners, MPO representatives, and transportation consultants and contractors. The results of these tours are compiled and presented as a useful tool for planning practitioners around the United States working to design livable communities.

The first domestic scan tour took place in the fall of 2002. It focused on projects in high-growth areas of the western United States aimed at reducing inefficient development patterns and preserving existing infrastructure and environmental and community assets. The first domestic scan tour team visited projects in Denver, Colorado, Salt Lake City, Utah, and Teton County, Wyoming.

The second scan tour took place in the fall of 2003. It focused on communities in three southeastern states: Florida, North Carolina, and Tennessee. The second domestic scan tour emphasized the redesign, redevelopment, and retrofitting of roadway corridors to include new design and planning elements intended to enhance the livability of each community. The scan tour team reviewed visioning processes that considered the interrelationships among transportation, land use decision-making, quality-of-life, and economic vitality issues.

PROJECTS VISITED

This report will highlight the transportation and land use integration efforts of five communities in the southeastern United States:

- ◆ Downtown revitalization projects in Lake Worth, Delray Beach, and Fort Pierce, Florida;
- ◆ South End and First Ward redevelopment projects, as well as the comprehensive, city-wide planning approach in Charlotte, North Carolina; and
- ◆ A 21st Century Waterfront Plan in Chattanooga, Tennessee.

LAKE WORTH, DELRAY BEACH, FORT PIERCE, FLORIDA

The downtown retrofitting projects in Lake Worth, Delray Beach, and Fort Pierce demonstrate how traditional traffic engineering problems can present an opportunity to promote a community vision and local economic revitalization. The cities of Lake Worth, Delray Beach, and Fort Pierce have partnered with the Treasure Coast Regional Planning Commission (TCRPC)¹ to design and implement their innovative local revitalization initiatives. Additionally, the Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) has contributed vital financial support and partnership in each of the endeavors.

Lake Worth – What initially began as a safety project due to a high crash rate in the city of Lake Worth was gradually expanded to become a major downtown revitalization effort. FDOT proposed corridor safety enhancements to the main streets of downtown. Lake Worth planning staff, city officials, and community members responded with a broader vision of redevelopment for their downtown area through a citizens' design charrette in 1992. Lake Worth enhanced pedestrian safety and bicycle access on the two major downtown thoroughfares of Lake and Lucerne Avenues (a one-way pair) by reducing each three-lane speedway to a two-lane roadway. The former lanes provided space for on-street parking on both sides of the road, as well as a wider sidewalk for outdoor café spaces on Lake Avenue and the addition of a bicycle lane on Lucerne Avenue. Additionally, Lake Worth reduced the Lake and Lucerne Avenue lane widths from 12 and 14 feet to 10 feet, built concrete pavers and large corner bulbouts to shorten crosswalk distances, and added trash cans, street lamps, benches, trees, and planters to beautify the area. As a result, the formerly declining downtown experienced a reduction in retail vacancies, an increase in assessed property values, and increased pedestrian safety.

Delray Beach – The city of Delray Beach has demonstrated its commitment to revitalization by simultaneously slowing traffic in key corridors and restoring aging and abandoned buildings within the heart of its downtown. The city's revitalization efforts

¹ The TCRPC is a not-for-profit organization, created by Florida Statute and agreements between local governments to provide planning and technical assistance services to Indian River, St. Lucie, Martin, and Palm Beach Counties.

began and have been sustained by critical visioning processes that date back to 1988. Delray Beach worked with FDOT to find an alternative to FDOT's proposal of widening Atlantic Avenue, a main street through the downtown lined by small restaurants and retail shops. The city traded its responsibilities for two local streets that run parallel to Atlantic Avenue with FDOT in exchange for assuming all maintenance responsibilities for FDOT's Atlantic Avenue. FDOT then converted the parallel local streets into a downtown bypass system. Atlantic Avenue has since been transformed into a pedestrian-friendly corridor lined with outdoor cafes, shops, and other smaller-scale businesses. The transformation was done through the widening of sidewalks, installation of paver brick walkways and artistic lighting, and landscaping.

Fort Pierce – The city of Fort Pierce is on the northern border of St. Lucie County. The city has focused on enhancing existing assets in its downtown revitalization efforts. The downtown revitalization plan resulted from a public design charrette in 1995. The plan concentrates on constructing and redesigning key public buildings and refurbishing old buildings to preserve the old town feel of the city, as well as to promote commercial vitality. The redevelopment is complemented by design changes made to roadways, including the conversion of one-way streets to two-way streets, widening of sidewalks, and enhancement of landscaping. State roads that were formerly a bastion for speeders have been transformed into walkable public spaces. For instance, Fort Pierce partnered with FDOT to create an attractive roundabout along Avenue A, a state-maintained roadway. The roundabout functions as both a traffic-calming device and a gateway into the downtown commercial corridor.

Two Transportation and Community and System Preservation Pilot Program grants have been used to develop alternative transportation and land use plans to address non-motorized travel, traffic congestion, and land use in St. Lucie County – where the city of Fort Pierce is located – and the wider Treasure Coast Region. One grant to the county involved teenagers in the planning process. The other grant, awarded to the TCRPC, funded a Regional Land Use Study that resulted in a regional master plan and community center demonstration project for the city of Port St. Lucie.

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA

The city of Charlotte has undertaken a city-wide approach to redevelopment. In 1994, the city endorsed the Centers and Corridors Program to provide a comprehensive guide for future development and redevelopment along five major transportation corridors. The program focuses on increasing in-fill and redevelopment along the corridors and in the center of the city for compact, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly development near transit station areas.

As part of its city-wide redevelopment approach, Charlotte is revising its city street standards and guidelines to support new development and redevelopment goals for the city rather than taking a piecemeal, ad hoc approach to street redesign. For instance, transportation planners in Charlotte have expanded their idea of “roads,” which primarily serve cars, to “streets,” which serve the broader community of cars, pedestrians,

bicyclists, and businesses alike. Charlotte is also adopting specific land use guidelines for parcels near the expected highway interchanges to direct future development patterns resulting from the completed construction of the I-485 Outer Loop highway encircling the city.

The city of Charlotte has institutionalized processes to integrate the planning of transportation systems and land use patterns within the organization's decision-making strategy to facilitate the multimodal, smart growth vision for the region. The city espouses a corporate vision and commitment to internal communication, whether vertically within an agency, or horizontally, across various agencies. City agencies have also built strong relationships with the development community by following through with stated plans. This commitment has bred trust from the business community and fostered investment. The South End and First Ward projects are two built projects that illustrate Charlotte's innovative planning practices.

South End – The South End district, located just south of Charlotte's city center, includes a state highway corridor that has been redeveloped incrementally over the years. As part of the business corridor revitalization efforts, a variety of streetscape improvements occurred in the 1980s. The improvements of road resurfacing, landscaping, widening sidewalks, adding medians, trees, and decorative lighting were intended to encourage business development and to improve the appearance of the gateway. Most recently, a vintage trolley line has been restored to improve access to the center of Charlotte's downtown. By 2007, Charlotte's first light rail line will open for service through the South End, sharing tracks with the vintage trolley line. The redevelopment efforts have also spurred new residential and mixed-use developments.

First Ward – First Ward is one of Charlotte's four downtown wards. A decayed public housing project in the area qualified First Ward for Housing and Urban Development Hope VI funding to create a new, mixed-income residential neighborhood. A variety of housing options were created, including apartments, townhomes, condominiums, single-family homes, and mixed residential complexes. The area also boasts a newly constructed school and close proximity to transit options. As redevelopment occurred, private developers worked with the city to redesign the street network to improve mobility for vehicles, enhance connectivity for pedestrians, and create a sense of place. The city redesigned intersections and reconstructed a four-lane road into a two-lane boulevard. Charlotte also widened sidewalks and added medians, landscaping, and signs to strategic sections of First Ward.

CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

The city of Chattanooga made a firm commitment to reconnect the downtown to the riverfront as a vital component of its revitalization efforts. The resulting 21st Century Waterfront Plan includes the expansion of the Tennessee Aquarium and Hunter Museum, the restoration of the Walnut Street Bridge, and the reconstruction of the Riverfront Parkway and Coolidge Park. Chattanooga improved connectivity between disparate portions of the downtown by eliminating concrete barriers and improving

walkways and roadways. For instance, the Riverfront Parkway had isolated the Hunter Museum from the rest of downtown. The city of Chattanooga sought to reconnect the tourist attraction to the downtown by implementing innovative transportation efforts, such as the First Street “incline” project and a pedestrian bridge. The increased accessibility now allows both the casual stroller and the driver to arrive at the heart of the downtown.

A crucial element of revitalization has been Chattanooga’s reclamation of the Riverfront Parkway from the State of Tennessee. Formerly, this route along the river was a freeway that allowed limited access into the downtown. Riverfront Parkway is currently being reduced from four lanes to two lanes to slow traffic, making it more pedestrian friendly, and increasing accessibility to the waterfront. Chattanooga is also adding four new intersections to create more “options” for motorists to access the downtown. Traditionally, Chattanooga traffic was funneled onto a few principal arteries rather than dispersing traffic throughout the entire street network. The city is improving the image of Riverfront Parkway from merely a thoroughfare for high-speed vehicles to a more pedestrian-friendly atmosphere along the river.

OBSERVATIONS

- ◆ **A holistic plan for the redevelopment of a corridor or an entire city requires a bold vision.** The vision for redevelopment provides a context for how separate project elements fit into a larger picture of community development, including the larger impact of streetscape initiatives on the image of an area. Retrofitting a roadway corridor can address the dual purpose of enhancing mobility and calming traffic, as well as encouraging economic development. Many of the communities visited by the scan tour team expressed a need to expand traditional transportation concepts not only to consider automobile-oriented perspectives, but also those of pedestrians, bicyclists, and businesses. Most of the communities also used an extensive and lengthy visioning process to involve a diverse pool of citizens in articulating a new vision for the city. The technical expertise and visualization tools (e.g., artistic renderings and photographs) used within the public meetings were a crucial component to the public outreach efforts.
- ◆ **Strong, committed leaders are essential to translating visionary plans into implemented projects.** The visited communities exhibited strong city leadership. Often, city mayors and other key officials demonstrated political commitment to a redevelopment project that integrated transportation and land use. These city officials not only supported the projects, but became the political champions for them.
- ◆ **A unified effort across multiple levels of government, the private sector, and the public is vital to actualizing a community-wide vision.** Consensus should be reached across agencies at key stages of the development process. Subsequently, private developers often are willing to support an engaging, creative, and common

vision forwarded by the city. Partnership and follow-through builds trust and credibility, improving stability and predictability of the economic climate for private developers. Community participation dramatically increases support from the citizenry and political leadership, and ultimately, the success of the project. Each stage of the visioning, planning, and implementation process should be as transparent as possible to the public.

- ◆ **Change requires persistence, flexibility, and a long-term commitment to action.** Each of the visited cities pooled the necessary talent and resources to achieve their vision. Once the goal was defined, these communities focused on being solution-oriented in the face of challenges, making pragmatic choices and explicit tradeoffs throughout the process. It is important to take action first, and adjust as needed to sustain momentum. Wherever necessary, learn from the experience of others and encourage changes to policies that may be outdated.
- ◆ **It is important to create an environment for coordinated effort and collaborative planning.** Transportation planning, land use planning, and housing and economic development can be facilitated to induce cross-fertilization of ideas and perspectives within and among agencies at the city, regional, and state levels. In Florida, the cities actively partnered with FDOT and the regional planning council to create and implement innovative strategies for state corridors. The city of Charlotte institutionalized its coordination processes to help foster more collaboration between otherwise separate and independent city departments.

FINAL REPORT

The executive summary will be incorporated into a final report, which will be available in hardcopy and online in spring 2004. For more information, contact Robin Smith (Robin.Smith@fhwa.dot.gov) or Felicia Young (Felicia.Young@fhwa.dot.gov).