

Appendix A: Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Potential

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One of the tasks for this study was to consider opportunities for Transit Oriented Development (TOD) in four discreet locations within the corridor:

- I-Park in Wilton
- Wilton Center
- Branchville
- Georgetown

A fundamental quality of TOD is that it offers a human-scale environment that is people focused as opposed to automobile focused. It achieves this, in large part, with convenient, safe, and inviting access to a train station (or fixed-guideway busway station) and connections to the station by walking, bicycling, bus, and automobile.

The focus of the analysis for this study was on whether this form of development could and *should* be encouraged for these locations. There is or will be a rail station in all but one of the studied TOD locations and upgrades to the Danbury Branch Line rail service are in the planning stages. If an increase in the number of rail commuters can be expected along Route 7, is there an opportunity to strengthen the economic base, walkability, and community fabric in these locales with TOD? To answer this question, a targeted study of TOD potential was conducted. It considered:

- Fundamental conditions needed for TOD to happen and the feasibility of that for each location – TOD sustainability criteria
- Whether TOD will be beneficial for these locations
- What infrastructure and other changes would be necessary to implement TOD

TOD Sustainability Criteria

TOD requires more than transit service to be sustainable. TOD is most successful when physical, market and institutional factors, both at a transit station and within the broader community, are present. These factors include::

Developable acreage	There must be vacant or underutilized <i>developable</i> land within close proximity to the station. There needs to be opportunity to change the character of development to that which is less auto-oriented over time - and this means land for development, redevelopment, and infill.
Mixed use permitted	A core element of successful TOD is a mix of uses. Thus, zoning within the station area (generally ¼ to 1/3 mile of the station itself) must allow mixed uses, preferable in a single building.
Limited number of property owners	It is easier to accomplish TOD when the land needed to create the TOD has one or a few property owners. When there are multiple owners, the task of land assembly can inhibit the ability to create a suitable TOD development site. The impetus for TOD to occur is when developers see the opportunity to successfully aggregate parcels and create a planned, unified, integrated design for a mixed-use development with linkages to the transit station or hub.
Market demand	The real estate market near the station must support any development that occurs within the TOD. Note that there may be a market for one type of development at a station, e.g., housing, while another type (e.g., office) may not be viable.
Higher densities allowed	To truly support transit, TOD should be built at medium to high densities. The research indicates that residential densities of at least 8-12 units per acres are necessary to support transit. Employment densities should be close to 50 employees per acre for rail transit ¹ .

Walkability	A fundamental goal of TOD is to provide opportunities for people to undertake daily tasks without using an automobile. An inviting pedestrian environment that includes sidewalks, good lighting, landscaping, and street furniture, and in which pedestrians feel safe, is essential to a successful TOD. The TOD must also be within comfortable walking distance of the transit station.
Multimodal transit access	TOD is most successful where there are several transportation options. Multimodal transit access will provide more opportunities for those living or working in the TOD to limit use of auto travel, and will allow for reductions in on-site parking requirements, thus freeing up more land for the TOD itself.
Existing community resources	TODs benefit from proximity to community activity centers, such as schools, libraries, senior centers, and arts centers. These types of uses help provide daytime and evening activity that can help the TOD remain vibrant even during hours of reduced transit service. They also provide destinations for transit users when located within walking distance of a transit station, and can help create a critical mass of clientele for commercial uses in the TOD.
Train station	TOD is most successful when sited near a physical station building along a fixed-guideway transit corridor. TOD means a situation where development and transit ridership are mutually supportive. The permanence of a station building and fixed-guideway corridor make a potential TOD site more sustainable than a site located along a bus route, where a change in routing can eliminate service to the TOD.
Utilities	Sites served by water and sewer are necessary to accommodate the densities that support TOD.

Local government receptiveness	TODs represent a development type that may not be familiar to a community. Higher densities, mixed uses, and reductions in parking requirements are just a few of the characteristics of successful TODs that may require strong support from local leaders in order to sell the concept to the public. Further, it is easier for developers to build single-use projects. TODs will have more success in communities where government officials are willing to adopt regulations that require TOD characteristics such as mixed uses, and where officials work with developers to facilitate TOD.
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- 1 Cervero, Robert, et. al., Transit-Oriented Development in the United States: Experience, Challenges, and Prospects, TCRP Report 102, Transit Cooperative Research Program Transportation Research Board, 2004. http://onlinepubs.trb.org/onlinepubs/tcrp/tcrp_rpt_102.pdf

While not every TOD encompasses all of these factors, the more that are present, the more likely the TOD will succeed.

The factors described above are most characteristic of more traditional urban TODs. In more suburban or rural corridors, such as the Route 7 corridor, traditional TOD densities are not appropriate. However, development in the vicinity of transit stations can still be designed to support transit and create a sustainable, mixed use environment. Condominium and townhouse development near a station does not need to be built at urban densities to encourage walking and transit use. Keys to success in more rural settings include encouraging a mix of uses within walking distance of each other and the train station, allowing residents, employees and visitors to walk to different destinations without depending on an automobile. Careful design and pedestrian amenities that knit the station area together, creating a sense of place will provide an environment that will support sustainable, transit supportive development, while respecting the existing character of the village.

Of the TOD-supportive characteristics listed above, market demand is the only factor over which a community has limited control. All of the other factors can be enhanced with local government efforts (e.g., zoning changes to allow higher densities and mixed uses, creating design standards, siting of community resources) and/or developer initiative (e.g., land assembly, designing for walkability.)

Findings and Conclusions

The four TOD sites analyzed for this study were evaluated based on each of the factors described above. The following table summarizes this analysis. The Route 7 corridor is characterized by rural areas punctuated by commercial nodes. Public participation and meetings with community leaders revealed that the towns along the corridor wish to protect their rural areas, as well as environmental resources such as the Norwalk River and its watershed. The corridor does not lend itself to high densities, which would be out of character for the villages along the rail line. Instead, the emphasis of TOD in the corridor should be on design – creating a pedestrian environment that includes linkages to the train station, safe pedestrian access along and crossing Route 7, and design requirements encouraging ground floor retail, allowing second story residential, zero setbacks, and parking to the rear of buildings. The TOD evaluation for each station is discussed in the following table.

TOD Features	I-Park	Wilton Center	Georgetown	Branchville
Mixed-use permitted	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Max density allowed	Up to 25,000 SF without Special Permit; 3 units/acre	30,000 SF– # residential units not specified	Max density aligned with redevelopment plans	6,0000 SF bldg or 1 house/acre
Market Demand	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Local government receptiveness	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Developable Acreage	None- one underutilized site – 300,000 SF	Yes – west of Old Danbury Rd	Existing 52-acre redevelopment plan	Very limited
Walkable	Auto-oriented	Yes	Yes	Auto-oriented
Existing community resources	No	Yes – Library	Planned community space	Yes - Elementary school
Multimodal Access	Some bus service	Yes – lacks connectivity	Yes	Yes
# Property owners	Numerous	Numerous	Limited	Numerous
Train Station	No	Yes	Planned	Yes
Utilities	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

I-Park in Wilton

The I-Park site demonstrates market demand that would support TOD-type uses. The site is most appropriate for commercial development, abuts the existing rail line, and existing allowable commercial densities are sufficient to support and be supported by transit. The Norwalk Transit District and the Town of Wilton support TOD. However, there are several impediments to TOD at this site. There is no current train station at the site, and none is planned. The closest train station is only 1/2 mile away near the interchange of Route 7 and Route 15. Given this, it is very unlikely that another train station will be warranted or practical in terms of added rail service so close to the existing heavily used station. The Danbury Branch Line study is not recommending a new station in this location. The pedestrian environment between the Merritt 7 station and I-Park is poor. The current environment is entirely auto-oriented and largely built-out with suburban strip commercial development. There are no vacant lots at I-Park, although there is some redevelopment potential on the site. Parcels around I-Park are in multiple ownerships. No community resources are present. Overall, the area does not lend itself to successful TOD. TOD should not be pursued further in this location.

Wilton Center

Wilton Center possesses many of the necessary characteristics for successful TOD. In fact, Wilton Center has already developed with a mix of uses that are transit-supportive. The rail station is being upgraded and new space for small retail uses will be available at the station. The Town is interested in retaining and promoting the transit-conducive mix and density of uses that currently exist in the town center. The one TOD element currently missing in Wilton Center is safe, attractive and convenient pedestrian access between the train station and the town center. Improvement of pedestrian access could increase the viability of both rail service and the businesses in Wilton Center. Efforts to enhance connectivity and in particular, to create a pedestrian walkway that would connect the station to the town center, preferably via a pedestrian bridge across the Norwalk River, should be the focus of new TOD efforts in Wilton Center.

Georgetown

The analysis revealed that the Georgetown station area possesses all of the necessary factors for sustainable TOD, except an existing train station. However,

a new station is planned to open Georgetown within the next ten years as part of the redevelopment of the Gilbert and Bennett wire factory. This overall redevelopment plan is a TOD concept in the early construction stages. It will include 416 residential units, 300,000 square feet of commercial space (offices, restaurants and shops as well as light manufacturing), a performing arts center, a health club, a bed and breakfast, and a parking structure. The development is within a short walk (10 minutes or less) of the proposed new train station in Georgetown. Because this project design is a TOD concept and is moving forward, no further analysis or recommendations for TOD in this location are warranted.

Branchville

Branchville is a unique village area in Ridgefield and along Route 7 that currently has some qualities that are supportive of TOD including a train station, market demand, local government supportiveness, and community resources. It is important that the vision for the Route 7 corridor includes strengthening the cohesiveness and sustainability of Branchville as a village, regardless of any TOD initiatives.

The assessment for Branchville uncovered several deficiencies that could hinder TOD, but also revealed intriguing opportunities to bolster transit-supportive development in the vicinity of the train station and along Route 7. Current zoning does not allow densities that would support TOD, particularly for residential uses, and mixed uses are not allowed. However, town officials are supportive of changes that would make the zoning more conducive to transit-oriented development. There are limited vacant sites for new development, but there are opportunities for redevelopment and infill along Route 7. The self-storage facility located just north of the station, for example, is not the highest and best use of this land. This parcel provides a strong opportunity for redevelopment into higher density townhouse development that could provide workforce housing in close proximity to the train. While parking at the station currently reaches maximum capacity on a regular basis, there are opportunities to reorganize parking at the station and expand parking opportunities at new facilities within walking distance of the station, thus creating development potential at the station for small mixed-use (office and retail) projects. In addition, commuter parking demand is not expected to grow significantly in the future, following implementation of the Danbury Branch Line upgrades. Seventy-one added spaces are projected to be needed, based on ridership estimates for the enhanced Danbury Branch Line service. This suggests that future parking

demand by commuters driving to the station will not conflict with or undermine opportunities for pedestrian-focused activity at or near the station.

One issue at Branchville is the lack of utilities to support development. Currently, Branchville does not have municipal sewer and water service. A limited increase in density in Branchville is proposed with the concept plan presented in the following section of this report. Consequently, the tipping point at which the village will need water and sewer service is unknown. Nonetheless, there may be an opportunity to connect to the system at Georgetown and this is an option that can be explored in the future.

Another major issue hindering transit-supportive development in Branchville is walkability. Currently, there are no sidewalks along Route 7 in this area, and traffic congestion and volumes make crossing this roadway difficult. The current development pattern features surface parking lots in front of existing buildings, or between buildings, creating a gap-toothed development pattern that is not pedestrian-friendly. Further, there are not good pedestrian connections between the station and Route 7. These deficiencies can be addressed. The existing station can be redesigned to include pedestrian pathways from the station to Route 7. The adoption of zoning and design standards for infill and new or redevelopment along Route 7 can incorporate requirements for sidewalks and pedestrian amenities. Strategies to create a pedestrian-friendly environment could include:

- Prohibiting surface lots in front of buildings,
- Creating open space and sidewalks along route 7,
- Encouraging infill development,
- Requiring ground floor retail in new development, and allowing residential uses above
- Installing traffic signals that include a walk cycle,
- Adopting mixed-use zoning, and
- Initiating a streetscape program to enhance the pedestrian experience.

Overall, the Branchville station area provides an opportunity to enhance the existing development node with a stronger transit connection. By better connecting the station to the existing uses, encouraging some higher density workforce housing, and creating a better pedestrian environment along Route 7, the station can be better integrated into the community. This represents a non-

traditional TOD opportunity where community design is supportive of transit usage and conversely, transit access can advance the goals for village vitality and sustainability.

It should be noted that the Ridgefield Planning and Zoning Commission has studied the recommended expansion of surface parking at the Branchville Station and views this location as not suitable for parking lot development. The Commission's views are based upon its opinion that the parcel's characteristics as a flood plain in a narrow valley provide a riparian plant community and a needed small forest enclave within a dense village that should not be compromised. Further environmental study is recommended to explore this parking lot expansion. In addition, Norwalk River quality should be a top priority when considering all the recommended enhancements in the Branchville area.