



FALL 2020

CHAPTER 4

PROFILES IN TOD/TOM 1

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INTRODUCTION

The approval of Sound Transit 3 by Washington State voters in November of 2016 further advanced the conversation around transit development in the Puget Sound region. The proposed \$53.8 billion Sound Transit 3 plan, “provided fresh funds through new taxes to fully regionalize over time the commuter and light rail system to Tacoma, Everett, and other key urban centers” (Dierwechter, 2017, p. 95). The expansion of the light rail system sparked debate between planners in Seattle and the rest of the Puget Sound region on how best to expand the transportation infrastructure including the “Link” light rail to serve and accommodate the greatest breadth of the total population. Currently, the majority of the conversation in the region revolves around the concept of an “urban center” or “village” where transit hubs are a central focal point around walkable communities with dense housing and ample commercial spaces serving as the foundation of development.



INTRODUCTION (CONTINUED)

This traditional version of Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) has proven beneficial both economically and environmentally, but has struggled to ensure equitable outcomes for more vulnerable members of local communities. Furthermore, traditional TOD fails to recognize the industrial and manufacturing roots of the Puget Sound region and how much of the current transportation system is built around what local planners refer to as “irreplaceable infrastructure” such as deep-water ports, rail hubs, and airfields. It is in an effort to preserve irreplaceable infrastructure and advocate for the most vulnerable community members that an alternative to traditional TOD must be considered (Puget Sound Regional Council, 2015).

The concept of Transit-Oriented Manufacturing (TOM) provides a possible alternative to traditional TOD, where a green sustainable industry becomes part of the Urban Center and thus provides communities with steady and stable employment and housing. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) advocates for and believes that “aligning and coordinating transportation and utility infrastructure planning and policies at the local, regional, and state levels are key to an effective strategy” (Puget Sound Regional Council, 2015, p.11). For the majority of U.S. cities, manufacturing and industry continues to be a vital contributor to the urban economy. According to Lester, Kaza, and Kirk “despite the long-term deindustrialization of urban areas, central cities still maintain a large number of manufacturing firms and a large inventory of industrial land” (Lester, et al., 2013, p.4). Much of the industrial land-use is not for heavy manufacturing, but for smaller mid-sized operations whose environmental impacts are much less concerning.

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Furthermore, manufacturing continues to offer average annual wages that are 22.9% greater than the average private sector jobs and manufacturing jobs normally offer these wages without requiring an advanced degree. This is attractive for urban areas struggling with high unemployment among lower-skilled workers (Lester, et al., 2013, p.4). The industrial sector can also provide “the mainstay of middle-income jobs to individuals without higher education” (Seattle Planning Commission, 2007, p. 14).

RESEARCH OVERVIEW

The economic make-up of today's cities is focused on commercial development to attract upscale jobs, and real-estate investment; this often results in the displacement of industrial areas in favor of urban renewal projects. (Progressive Planners, 2012).

As city planners accept to “some of the dominant paradigms of regenerative city building such as attracting the creative class or smart growth and see little need for industrial uses within cities” (Lester, et al., 2013, p. 4), urban industrial space are increasingly threatened.

Key contributors in this regard are transit oriented development projects that seek to improve urban density and walkability. According to the research conducted by Jamme, Rodriguez, Bahl, and Banerjee (2019), TOD projects typically entail a mixed-use community with a core commercial, residential, office space, and retail area within a 10-minute walking distance from a transit hub. A true TOD must also be centered on community life in a planned station area with self-contained housing. What the research connected with TOD literature has found is a focus in either “the economic benefits of land development or on the market demand for TOD living, so as to facilitate the financing and implementation of TOD” (Jamme, et al., 2019, p. 417). Thus, TOD has become much narrower in its approach and has increasingly favored a market-driven approach toward development rather than an approach more centered on the needs of the community (Jamme, et al., 2019).

The enhanced accessibility that TOD possesses may attract new residents to the area and the process of constructing a new transit station and related infrastructure presents the possibility of new public investments. While such investment is desirable, it also places new pressures on existing residents and businesses, often resulting in displacement. Therefore, planners should consider the presence of TOD in relation to the opportunities it can provide for the existing community members in respect to job growth, affordable housing and policies to protect residents. This knowledge can be used

to advocate for policies that safeguard housing affordability, sustain industry, and slow the effect of gentrification (Chapple, 2019).

The increased cost of living continues to drive people further away from employment centers. By maintaining industrial and manufacturing spaces, cities like Seattle and Tacoma can provide an increase in living wage jobs, thereby preventing displacement and possible homelessness. For the planning community to continue to conflict with the idea of industry as a viable option and a desirable possibility for the future of cities, they risk a socio-economic decline of the working class. Another challenge for planners to rethink what the “D” (development) in TOD could mean for cities like Tacoma is to enable communities to “rethink urban development strategies that can pragmatically confront both social and economic polarization” (Dierwechter and Pendras, 2019, p. 8). To discuss TOM as a viable alternative for a city like Tacoma and elsewhere in the Puget Sound region, it is imperative, as transit development in the region extends to other communities outside King County, that we imagine alternative futures for what these transit stations could look like, who they serve, and what impact they have on existing residents. Thus, cities and planners must recognize that traditional TOD, no matter how successful, is not universal and should cater to the existing community.

Our methodology was to interview six planners in the Puget Sound region who are actually doing the planning. The six planners which we interviewed were: Diane Wiatr, the Department of Transportation Planner for the City of Seattle; Jim Holmes, the Industrial Planner for the City of Seattle; Lauren Flemister, Community Development Manager working with Sound Transit, for the City of Seattle; Ben Bakkenta, Director of Regional Development for the Puget Sound Regional Council; Stephen Atkinson, Long Range Planner for the City of Tacoma; and Pat Beard, the Economic Development Coordinator for the City of Tacoma, especially development in the industrial and Port of Tacoma areas.

RESEARCH OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

Through our readings and academic review of Transit-Oriented Development across the U.S., and the blind spot of industrial planning in relationship to TOD, we formulated the following questions:

1. Tell us about your work with Transit-Oriented Development and transit planning more generally?
2. Aside from assuring affordable housing, what do you see as the most pressing challenges associated with transit planning in the Puget Sound region?
3. In your experience, have industrial lands been included in conversations about transit planning and local and regional transit projects?
4. When industrial lands are included, what kinds of problems emerge between transit planning and industrial space?
5. One of the lessons we have learned from urban scholarship about Transit-Oriented Development is that TODs typically focus attention on residential and commercial development but less so on industrial space. Does that fit with your experience here in the Puget Sound?
6. Do you see a place for industry and manufacturing in TOD projects? Would you consider TOD and manufacturing to be compatible or incompatible in the Puget Sound region?

FINDINGS

Our findings in interviewing the above-named six people shed much light on how the Puget Sound (mainly King County and Seattle) have formed their Transit-Oriented Development.

We will develop three key themes which we think are important to the discussion:

- 1) Ridership Density – are there enough riders to make public transportation work in industrial areas?*
- 2) Industrial Displacement – will there be businesses having to close down or move to undesirable locations far away?*
- 3) The creation of innovation zones - the idea of “multi-use rezoning” of industrial spaces to create buffers between industry, transit, housing and commercial development.*

These three themes were consistently reiterated throughout our interviews and have the greatest impact and influence on the entire group project.

Ben Bakkenta, who has been with the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) for 21 years and has worked on the overall transportation plan for the region said that there were no concrete plans to develop major transit stops specifically around an industrial area in the greater Seattle area (Bakkenta, 2020). However, in response to PSRC’s 2050 long range growth plan, as the Puget Sound is projected to grow in population by 65% with a 75% increase in employment growth, it is only recently that the city of Seattle began to work with Sound Transit and King County Metro Transit to formulate definitive plans around four stops within close proximity to industrial areas in greater Seattle. According to Bakkenta, “the development of an integrated transportation network has been a really important aspect of our work for many years” (Bakkenta, 2020). However, this does not mean that they are necessarily thinking about Transit-Oriented Manufacturing, or another kind of transportation development centered around industry and manufacturing. For him and several other planners we spoke to, there simply is just not

enough demand. The overall problem will still be one of ridership density; there is ultimately little demand for it.

One major hurdle pointed out by a majority of planners we spoke to, is the great majority of people who work in industrial jobs, commute from all areas spread throughout Puget Sound. According to Diane Wiatr from the City of Seattle transportation planning office, “they are coming from all over the region, folks are coming to work from Burien, Tukwila, Shoreline and other counties. There simply isn’t enough concentration of riders to justify transit going out to them” (Wiatr, 2020). Another key factor hindering ridership to and from manufacturing and industrial jobs is the high cost of living in the Puget Sound area which has priced the labor force out to areas unfavorable or too impractical to be supported by transit. Most industrial and manufacturing workers can’t afford to live close to where they work and are forced further out by high rent and living costs.

Pedestrian safety is another substantial concern where industrial spaces are concerned in relation to ridership. Transit stations should be accessible and most importantly walkable and be able to support patrons who commute via bicycle. According to the majority of planners we interviewed, most of the industrial and manufacturing spaces lack the kind of infrastructure to support safe pedestrian movement. Both Lauren Flemister, a city of Seattle planning manager and Diane Wiatr indicated to the difficulty in getting riders to these kinds of transit stops. These spaces are typically not well lit and are riddled with heavy freight traffic. The amount of redevelopment investment and tax dollars required to transform these areas to support heavy pedestrian traffic is high. Furthermore, scarcity of ridership makes for an even trickier sell to investors and taxpayers.

The notion of the “last mile” to connect a transit patron within walking distance to their homes or final destination is a sizable facet to consider in

FINDINGS (CONTINUED)

respect to transportation planning and industrial spaces. In addition, the lack of close accessible housing in proximity to industrial spaces, as well as pedestrian safety are further barriers to building ridership. Furthermore, workers are reluctant to take a long route, which does not guarantee a good connection to their final destination and has the potential for untold safety hazards in the form of semi-trucks and other industrial traffic. With the amount of trucks moving through an industrial area, the usual pedestrian atmosphere would be hard to endure in an environment that favors heavy freight traffic. When people get off a light rail or bus, one of the normal modes to get to a place of work is by walking. When there are major trucking intersections, and dangerous places in industrial areas, most people will choose to drive their own private cars to those places of work (Flemister, 2020; Wiatr, 2020). So, again we see rider demand as a drawback to Industrial-TOD.

To strengthen this argument, Steve Atkinson, a long range planner from the city of Tacoma, also remarked that there are some people who get out of jail or a recent recovery program, find a job, take public transportation – but then find that the transportation routes are not compatible or are too far away to make the routine a normal route to their place of work. To make this viable, workers would have to live closer to work – and the last mile of their trip would have to be accessible and easier (Atkinson, 2020). As it stands right now, most do not have housing close to transit stops, and the last mile is problematic, as stated above. One of the most viable solutions are shuttles that go from a transit stop to an industrial or large commercial center. Microsoft does this in Redmond, and this works well with their MERGE platform. Would this work at the Port of Tacoma? Would there be enough ridership to justify the cost? Should this be a public or private venture, like Uber or Lyft? There are still problems to be worked on, but these are definitely things to think about.

As Tacoma receives the next two major Link transit stops, linking Federal Way to the downtown core,

it is important that the next two major themes are not lost in the shuffle. Patricia Beard stated that transit should be right next to the workplace, or at least very close – so that workers find that public transportation will work for them. As Transit-Oriented Development starts to take shape around these two stops, it will be imperative to remember that manufacturing is an important part of the ecosystem of the greater Tacoma Dome subarea, and that manufacturing needs to have an important role in Transit-Oriented Development. Beard also mentioned that industrial displacement is a major worry for her, in that there seems to be a movement within Sound Transit to develop the Tacoma Dome transit stop and lose some existing business. Some of these businesses have told her that they would permanently shut down or that they would move to other areas of the country – which will ultimately hurt the Puget Sound economy (Beard, 2020).

As ridership increases, then everyone wins – the manufacturing and industrial complex, the retail and commercial spaces, and the residential and housing developments. A synergy would be developed – echoing what Jacobs famously called the “ballet of the city sidewalk” (Jacobs, 1961, p. 51).

Land values in the Puget Sound play a significant role in potential industrial displacement as well. Diane Wiatr offered a perfect example of this problem when she mentioned the Seattle’s Georgetown Brewery near the SODO transit station. The brewery’s business has grown significantly over the past few years and Georgetown Brewery will soon need to expand its operation. The problem is, because of high land values in Georgetown and the lack of available space to grow in their existing space, the notion of expanding the brewery from its present location is expensive and implausible (Wiatr, 2020). As a result, the brewery may be forced to move its operation to where land is more abundant

and affordable but out of the reach of public transit investments. This creates a problem with not only the displacement of an innovation industry but with creating concentrated ridership as well.

Conversion of industrial lands to accommodate traditional TOD displaces not only industrial and manufacturing jobs but people as well. As the Puget Sound continues to face a homeless crisis, current land zoned as industrial is one of the only places that tolerate the unhoused. According to Diane Wiatr, several of the greater Seattle area industrial spaces are home to “tiny house villages” and “tent cities” that house a large percentage of the region’s homeless population (Wiatr, 2020). Sadly, these populations are not tolerated in areas zoned for residential and commercial spaces. Any efforts by the city to rezone these spaces and change the make-up of them will cause the displacement of a vulnerable community. This is an unfortunate reality faced by planners who are seeking to accommodate employment and population growth around a changing transportation infrastructure.

The difficult balance between maintaining industrial spaces near transit stations and accommodating the pressures from powerful development players such as Sound Transit, T-Mobile Park, Century Link Field in Seattle and Puyallup Tribe in Tacoma create significant challenges for planners vying for equitable spaces near transit. Diane Wiatr offered yet another stark example of the invested interest of both T-Mobile Park and Century Link Field. According to Wiatr, those representing the stadiums would like to see the zoning conversion which favors more retail, restaurants and hotels for their patrons (Wiatr, 2020). Since the land in and around the stadiums are currently zoned industrial, zone conversion would certainly result in industrial displacement.

The other socio-economic link identified by Patricia Beard and others was that if Transit-Oriented Development is built around a transit stop, then the best buffer between heavy industry (the Port of Tacoma) and housing, would be green manufacturing (Beard, 2020). Manufacturing of this sort would be something made and

developed on site with low noise emission and no smoke particulates; and then also sold on-site with a front-facing retail shop. One example is the RAD Power Bikes electric bicycle shop and manufacturing showroom in Seattle. Not only do they design, manufacture, and build their bikes on site, but then they also have a front-facing retail store in which they sell to local customers. This type of small to medium-sized manufacturing with retail is an excellent buffer between housing and heavy industry. Other types of manufacturing that currently work well in Seattle are breweries and CBD manufacturing. Both are low-noise and low-emitting on the product end, and both of these types of manufacturing have to be away from K-12 schools and other institutions. There are currently 72 different CBD manufacturers in King County, all producing different types of products (Holmes). Small manufacturing companies of between 10-50 people will thrive in an environment where TOM will be put into place on purpose.

The final theme to spotlight is the opportunity to write zoning code now for the future. As Tacoma prepares for its future, planners have already begun to write code for a more comprehensive city, putting manufacturing, industrial, retail, commercial, and housing development near a transit station. They are doing this by using a zoning method which adjusts the allotted Floor Area Ratios (FAR’s) to new innovation zones to create spaces that contain sustainable green industries which are compatible with other land uses such as housing and retail (Wiatr, 2020). If planned correctly, the density of manufacturing on the first two levels of a high rise with residents living above would be excellent as a live/workspace buffer to industrial. Also, as the Port of Tacoma considers adding density to their production and facilities, then this could definitely be what is needed for Sound Transit. As ridership increases, then everyone wins – the manufacturing and industrial complex, the retail and commercial spaces, and the residential and housing developments. A synergy would be developed – echoing what Jacobs famously called the “ballet of the city sidewalk” (Jacobs, 1961, p. 51).

CONCLUSION

Local and regional planners across Puget Sound have their work cut out for them as they look to the implementation of Sound Transit 3 and Link light rail expansion. In our quest to seek out how planners are thinking about industry and manufacturing in relation to Puget Sound's transportation infrastructure expansion we found the answer both refreshing and eye opening. Not only were planners thinking about industry's role in transit expansion, they had already adopted alternative concepts increasingly in vogue like "Equitable" and "Industrial" TOD. Planners we spoke to offered current progress and challenges they face as they struggle to find a balance between transportation development and industrial and manufacturing growth and retention.

The regional planners we interviewed are cautiously optimistic in their approach to finding an equitable equilibrium between transit development and manufacturing. Lauren Flemister noted that, "it would be groundbreaking if we could figure out an ecosystem where transit and industrial space would

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be successful; the problem is there are not a lot of examples of it here in Puget Sound" (Flemister, 2020). For many planners in this region, the answer lays in different ways we see industry and manufacturing. Much of our time in our interviews with planners concluded that with sustainable and innovative industries being the bridge between transit and residential development in order to make a glimmer of Transit- Oriented Manufacturing possible in Puget Sound. If that is true, then sustainable and innovative industries are the key to the puzzle, and planners must ensure residents and community members have equal footing in the development process.

