

The Land Use Connection to Commuter Rail in South Jersey

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Good morning. I'm very honored to be a contributor to this panel in the company of the three most significant figures in South Jersey Commuter rail, John Mathuessen from DRPA, Al Fazio from Bombardier and our moderator Rich Amodei with STV.

As a geographic researcher and planner, the main contribution that I can bring to this discussion is the importance of land use in transportation planning. The interrelation of how land use coordinates with transportation, or more specifically, how land use coordinates with itself through transportation, is key for designing future commuter rail systems in South Jersey that are successful. Transportation systems must be designed to make land use functional and likewise, land use must be designed to make transportation successful.

So while this conference is on the future of transportation in South Jersey, it is implicitly also about the future of land use and development. Because land use patterns will determine whether or not certain modes of transportation are even feasible.

Looking at the most recent trends of land development in South Jersey, there is both good news and bad news as for the implications of commuter transit potential. Let's start with the bad news.

Land development research conducted by myself and Dr. Richard Lathrop at Rutgers, which will be released in the next couple of weeks, will reveal how New Jersey development has become significantly more sprawling over the past decade. Large lot rural residential housing is consuming substantial amounts of farmland. Statewide, New Jersey lost 55,500 acres of agricultural land between 1995 and 2002. This rate of farmland loss is the equivalent of losing all the farmland in Gloucester County every seven years.

The rate of forest loss has also risen, increasing 38% from the previous decade. At this rate, by August of this year, the amount of developed land in the state will surpass the amount of forest in total coverage. At this point New Jersey will have more developed land than any other category and be more developed than any other state.

Focusing specifically on the implications for transportation, the patterns of sprawl development not only consumed acres of open space, but became significantly more dispersed and more fragmented. In other words, development became more sprawling. There is only one transportation system option with this scattered pattern of development, the automobile.

No walking, no bicycling, no transit can serve as a viable component of moving people with such a dispersed arrangement of housing.

Now I have spent a considerable amount of my career trying to develop ways of analyzing sprawl largely through the use of computer mapping. In fact I wrote my dissertation on measuring sprawl and smart growth. However, on a trip to Atlanta a few years back to visit my brother and his family during Halloween, I stumbled on a slightly less scientific but perhaps more effective measure of sprawl that I've dubbed the "trick or treat" sprawl factor. It goes something like this:

If you're living in a neighborhood in which you have to drive your kids (or my case my nephews) from house to house in order to trick or treat, you're probably living in sprawl.

Looking at development in Gloucester County during the period of 1995-2002 61% of the land consumed for residential housing failed the trick or treat test. If a house fails the trick or treat test, it also fails the public transit test. Trains or even busses are not viable for this low density of land use development. If South Jersey continues to develop in an ever increasing sprawling pattern, then this conference should only be discussing automobile transportation infrastructure. To paraphrase the wisdom of the great American philosopher Kevin Kostner, who I understand, failed as a transportation planner "if you build it, they won't come". Even if you build a world-class transit system, if the land use density is too sprawling, they won't come. At least not enough will come to make it worth the investment.

OK, so that was the bad transit news for South Jersey. Now the good news. Gas will probably be over \$4 a gallon this summer and the sub-prime lending crisis has caused the housing market to crash in South Jersey. OK, maybe that's not really such good news. But it does have a silver lining for helping to shift development patterns away from sprawl and toward a more sustainable land use pattern and thus making commuter rail once again viable.

The good news of commuter rail potential actually comes in two flavors, Old good news and New good news. First the old good news. A movement to create Transit Oriented Development has emerged in the U.S. over the past several decades. The concept is for high-density, mixed use settlement patterns centered around a transit station. The old news is that T.O.D. is not new. Many of South Jersey's older towns originated as settlements around train stops. To this day they are relatively dense, mixed use and have a unique and charming identity. For example towns such as Pitman epitomize such TOD. The only thing missing today is the "transit". There is great potential to revitalize these towns to once again become vibrant town centers through the return of commuter rail.

The second piece of good news is the new good news. A number of new development projects and redevelopments underway in South Jersey are going against the decades-long

trends of suburban sprawl. Rowan Boulevard here in Glassboro is scheduled to break ground this year. This exciting project which has been in the planning stage for over 5 years will bring people and businesses back to this historic town in a project that is the poster child of smart growth redevelopment. In fact, the Rowan Boulevard project is a US Green Building Council pilot project for their new LEED Neighborhood Development rating system. When all is said and done, Rowan Boulevard will be one of the first certified Green-rated smart growth projects in New Jersey and in fact one of the first in the nation.

Richwood Town Center, just west of Route 55 will bring a brand new mixed-use town center to Harrison Township, including a Main Street, mixed use buildings, a wide range of housing types, a new municipal building as well as a new school. This type of development epitomizes the concept of smart growth for new construction. And finally, Woolwich town center near Swedesboro is slated to be one of Gloucester County's first Transfer of Development Rights programs where smart growth results in saving significant tracts of open space by transferring development rights to the new high-density town center.

Each one of these projects mentioned holds great promise for bringing in a new era of smart growth development and redevelopment in South Jersey. Each of these projects also present an excellent opportunity for creating or reviving Transit Oriented Development because the population density and the variety of destinations provided by these mixed use developments, are the necessary ingredients to make commuter rail and other forms of public transit viable.

In the face of rising energy costs and the inevitable changes that will be necessary to address climate change, these smart growth projects offer models of development that will require significantly less driving for day to day activities and offer the very real possibility of commuter transit service.

If we are going to make future commuter transit possible in South Jersey, we have to coordinate it with Land Use. We have to move away from suburban sprawl development and toward a model of growth built on the principles of smart growth and sustainability. We can and should demand more creative thinking in designing the future of South Jersey where older towns and new smart growth neighborhood developments are connected to each other and to the greater metropolitan area through commuter transit. It is my hope that this conference is the beginning of planning that future landscape and a world class transportation network in South Jersey.

Thank you.