



INCREASING ACCESS, MOBILITY, AND SHELTER OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS: AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENTS

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Project Objective

- What are the barriers to including affordable housing for low-income, minority, and disadvantaged groups in communities that are already served by rail transit?
- How flexible are local land use policies and development regulations in facilitating the development of affordable, mixed-use, and mixed-income housing in the TOD context?
- What are the options available to and used by local governments to pursue infill development in the TOD context? In addition, what is the role of regional and state agencies in addressing barriers to infill development?

Problem Statement

This study is located in the confluence of three critical public policy concerns in California: reduction of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission through sustainable development and reduction in Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT); the lingering problems of income inequality, social equity, and environmental justice; and the growing crisis in housing affordability. In particular, this study is framed against the background of the current policy interest at the state and local level in increasing the stock of affordable housing in the station areas of the expanding mass transportation network in the Los Angeles area. Labeled as TODs, or Transit-Oriented Developments, comprising an area of one-half mile radius with the train station at the center, these station areas offer strategic opportunities for new higher-density and mixed-use residential developments with housing for low-income transit-served households. Given this, the study explores barriers and opportunities for the development of affordable housing in selected station areas in Los Angeles and Orange counties.



Map of Transit Stations - Case Study Areas

Research Methodology

The research design integrates a mixed-method approach involving multiple-case study of ten station areas, analysis of socio-economic and land use data, TOD Specific Plans and jurisdictions’ Housing Elements, as well as in-depth interviews with city planners, housing developers (developers of affordable housing and market-rate housing), representatives of financial institutions, and public officials at relevant state agencies.

Results

The findings of the study can be grouped in three categories: (a) TOD and the Affordable Housing Landscape; (b) Planning and Policy Tools – Housing Elements, Specific Plans and the Planners’ Perspectives; and (c) The Production Experience: Developers’ Perspectives.

Specific conclusions under the first category include such topics as the nature and extent of overwhelming housing crisis in California, historically weak nexus of transit and development given the low-density urban sprawl, risks of gentrification, and spatial mismatch in investments.

Topics under the second and third categories include several issues that continue to act as a barrier to development: the lack of funding for affordable housing at the state and local levels; differences in affordable housing production resulting from variable local civil society activism and advocacy; state housing policies like RHNA not always grounded in reality (see Table below); ineffective Specific Plans and Housing Elements in pursuing affordable housing production; and community opposition such as NIMBYism (Not in My Backyard).

Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) Shortfall by Case Study Jurisdiction (5th Cycle)

Jurisdiction	Very Low-Income			Low-Income			Moderate Income			Above Moderate Income		
	RHNA	Permits	Gap	RHNA	Permits	Gap	RHNA	Permits	Gap	RHNA	Permits	Gap
Los Angeles	20,427	4,265	-79%	12,435	2,588	-79%	13,728	430	-97%	35,412	73,387	100%
Uninc. LA County	7,417	618	-92%	4,287	122	-97%	4,938	19	-99%	10,844	4,107	-62%
Azusa	198	0	-100%	118	6	-95%	127	861	578%	336	0	-100%
Baldwin Park	142	47	-67%	83	17	-80%	90	2	-98%	242	213	-12%
Anaheim	1,256	71	-94%	907	22	-98%	1,038	49	-95%	2,501	6,234	150%
Fullerton	411	264	-36%	299	133	-56%	337	3	-99%	794	843	6%
Santa Ana	45	241	435%	32	440	1275%	37	41	11%	90	1,565	1639%

Source: HCD Annual Progress Report 2020

The report concludes with some concrete recommendation for improving affordable housing production in the TOD areas. The following are the recommendations: (1) Emulate Abridged Versions of City of Los Angeles’ Transit Oriented Communities Guidelines; (2) Adopt Inclusionary Housing Policies Advancing Equitable-Development Goals in Transit Station Areas; (3) Improve Planning Tools to Better Steward Affordable Housing Opportunities; (4) Streamline Commercial Use Conversion to Residential, By-Right, as is done in the City of Los Angeles; (5) Reinstate Tax Increment Financing to Promote Affordable Housing in Transit Station Areas; (6) Strengthen Institutional Capacity for Regional Collaboration & Implementation; (7) Convert Park and Ride Lots in the TOD Areas to Affordable Housing and other Community Oriented Uses; (8) Minimize Time-Consuming Permit Process for Housing Development in the TOD areas; and (9) Develop Urban Design Principles for Specific Plans.