LAND USE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

BLUE LINE TRANSIT ORIENTED DISTRICTS STUDY

SEPTEMBER 1997

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1.0 Introduction

In early 1996, the Community Studies Section of the Department of Regional Planning embarked on a two year program to develop and implement Transit Oriented Districts surrounding four Blue Line Stations in the unincorporated communities of Florence-Firestone and Willowbrook in South-Central Los Angeles. The project areas include all land within approximately one-quarter mile of the Slauson, Florence, Firestone and Imperial Blue Line stations.

Transit Oriented Districts (TODs) are plans which encourage transit supportive development such as mixed uses, greater pedestrian orientation as well as improved pedestrian-transit linkages. The goal of TOD development is an overall reduction in congestion through increased rail and transit ridership as well as decreased dependence on the automobile.

The first product of the TOD program is the Land Use and Economic Strategies Report. This report was developed in conjunction with the TOD Advisory Committee, which is representative of the Florence-Firestone and Willowbrook communities. Staff, with input from the Committee at several meetings, formulated land use and economic development strategies for the four station areas. Additionally, goals and objectives for the future improvement of the station areas were defined and included in the report.

The Land Use and Economic Development report will form the basis for the implementation phase of the TOD program. Specific recommendations will be developed as part of the implementation phase in order to carry out the goals and strategies described in this report. The end result of the implementation phase will be a set of zoning ordinances which will guide development in a manner consistent with TOD goals and strategies.

2.0 Land Use Issues and Strategies

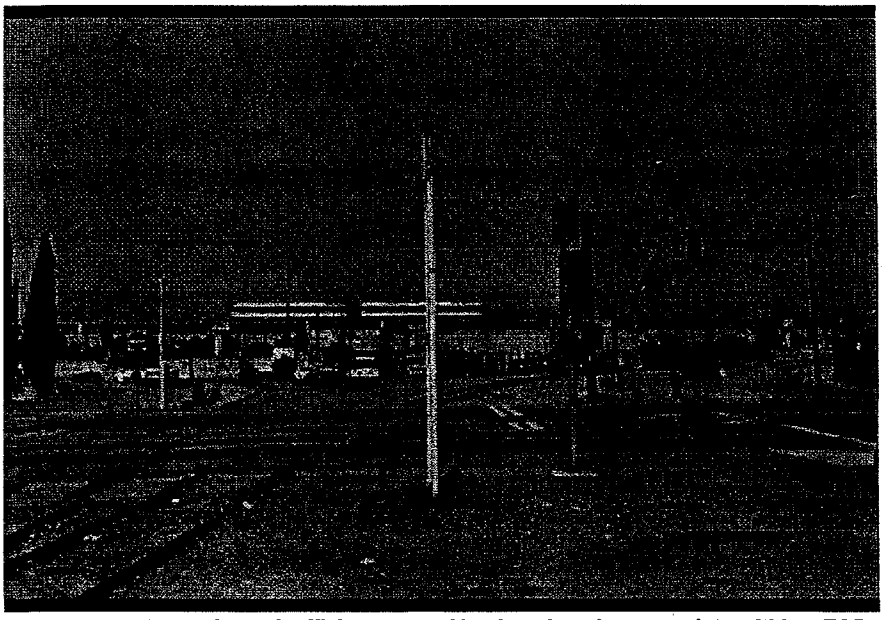
2.1 General Land Use

Goals:

- *Encourage appropriate land uses and densities to create a safe, viable Transit-Oriented District (TOD).*
- *Provide for physical and aesthetic improvement of properties to enhance function and appearance.*
- *Establish location within the community to serve as a focus for civic events and function as community center.*

Issue 2.1.1 Too much of the wrong land uses in TOD areas.

Much of the study area is composed of auto yards, excess rail land, underutilized industrial land and vacant parcels. These uses do not promote pedestrianism or transit use, and are inconsistent with TOD fundamentals. Land uses which are encouraged in TODs include



Large, vacant parcels are inefficient uses of land, and are inappropriate within a TOD.

higher density residential mixed with neighborhood-serving commercial and office, small pocket parks and transit facilities. The following strategies can help facilitate development of appropriate land uses in the TOD study areas.

Strategy 2.1.1.1 Contact landowners to discuss interest in relocating and/or moving their businesses.

2.1.1.2 Ascertain whether a relocation assistance program would encourage businesses to move.

2.1.1.3 Create disincentives for continuation of undesirable land uses within TOD areas.

2.1.1.4 Encourage transit-oriented uses adjacent to Blue Line stations.

2.1.1.5 Develop a list of needed/desirable land uses to be encouraged in TOD areas to serve the community.

2.1.1.6 Process amendments to the General Plan and community plans, as well as the Zoning Ordinance, to promote desirable and consistent uses in TOD areas..

2.1.1.7 Assist in moving undesirable activities, and marketing of vacant property.

Issue 2.1.2 Long-term property ownership without maintenance/improvements.

Some properties endure many years of degradation due to lack of maintenance or improvements by the property owner or manager. Unmaintained property contributes to a poorer quality, unsafe neighborhood which is not pedestrian friendly and discourages new development and investment by outside interests. These strategies can encourage property maintenance and upkeep.

Unmaintained vacant land is unsightly and can become a dumping ground.

Strategy 2.1.2.1 Establish incentives for ongoing maintenance and improvements.

2.1.2.2 Tie new development and intensification to requirements for property maintenance and upkeep.

2.1.2.3 Create community beautification programs, volunteer and privately-funded.

2.1.2.4 Establish concentrated code enforcement programs.

Issue 2.1.3 Low residential density surrounding transit stations.

Low density residential development dominates much of the study area, but exclusively low density development is not desirable within a TOD. A mix of medium and high density residential development better promotes transit usage and provides a customer base for neighborhood retail. The following strategies are methods which can be used to encourage increased residential density while maintaining or improving neighborhood quality.

Residential development nearest the transit station should be medium and high density to maximize ridership, not the single-family residential seen above.

Strategy **2.1.3.1** Encourage the development and expedite the approval of residential projects conforming to the densities permitted in TOD plans.

2.1.3.2 Provide opportunities, where appropriate, for higher residential densities in TOD areas.

2.1.3.3 Allow second units (senior citizen, mother-in-law, etc.) on single-family lots.

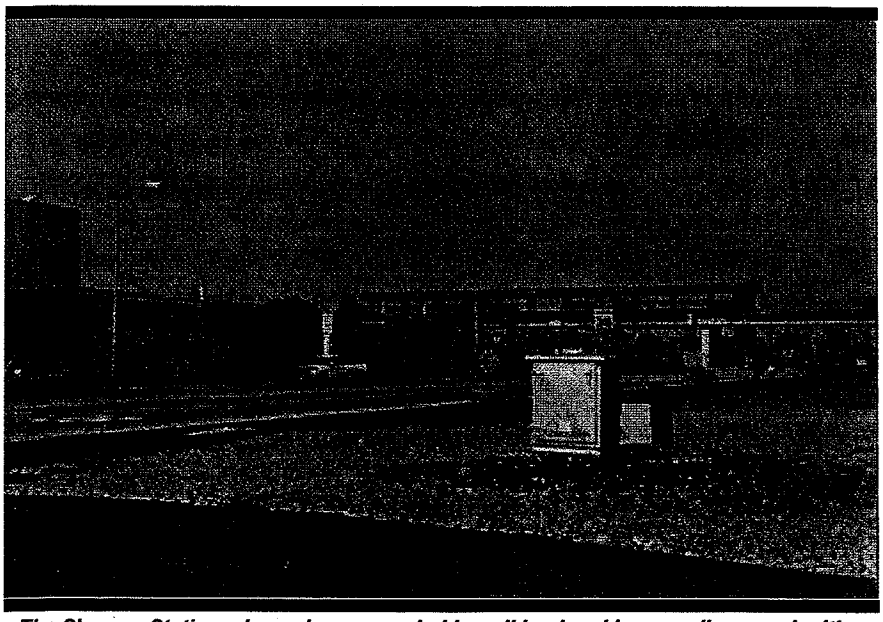
2.1.3.4 Provide financing opportunities for the construction of second dwelling units.

2.1.3.5 Adopt appropriate changes to the General Plan, Community Plan and Zoning Ordinance to achieve slightly higher residential densities.

2.1.3.6 Promote new residential mixed use development where appropriate.

Issue 2.1.4 Blue Line stations do not blend with adjacent land uses.

Areas surrounding transit stations should be pedestrian-friendly and aesthetically pleasing. There are a number of cases where land uses around some of the study area stations do not make the most efficient use of this very important space. Examples of such inefficient uses include vast storage areas, large lot developments, physical barriers to pedestrian access and other non-transit friendly land uses. The land uses surrounding transit stations should provide a transition into the community and include small, pedestrian oriented retail and eating establishments, mixed use and office. The key is to provide numerous pedestrian walkways and connections from one land use and development to another.



The Slauson Station, above, is surrounded by rail land and large walls, an uninviting atmosphere for pedestrians. This area is neither pedestrian-friendly nor attractive.

Strategy 2.1.4.1 Develop design standards to address neighborhood transition.

2.1.4.2 Determine if land uses adjacent to Blue Line stations are appropriate.

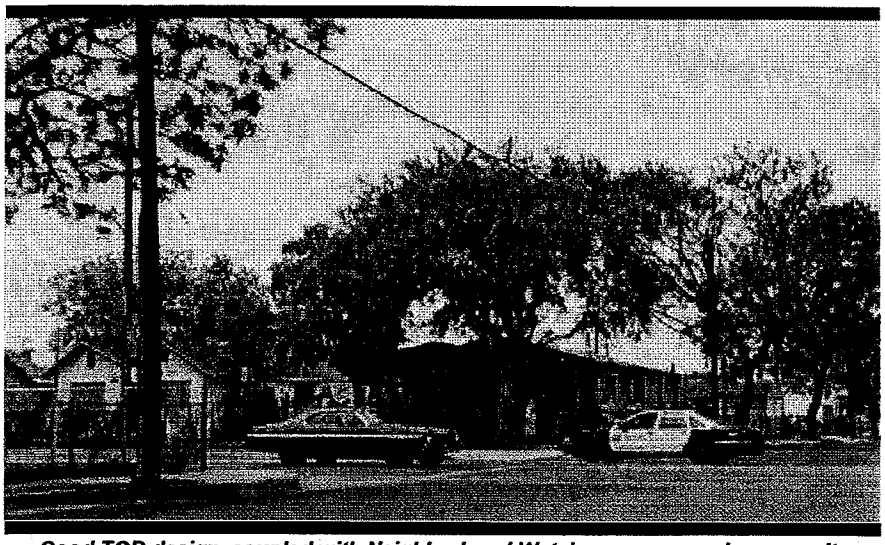
2.1.4.3 Develop transitional uses/standards and encourage their implementation adjacent to transit stops.

2.1.4.4 Encourage the involvement of MTA with the implementation of transitional uses.

2.1.4.5 Encourage station adjacent development to identify with the stations.

Issue 2.1.5 Unsafe living and working environments (crime).

Places which are not very safe to live or work certainly are not very safe for pedestrians, either. One of the important components of transit-oriented districts is the inclusion of a combination of land use/design elements (lighted walkways, shorter walls and landscaping, mixed use projects) and police components (neighborhood watch, community policing, etc.) to increase overall neighborhood safety.



Good TOD design, coupled with Neighborhood Watch programs and community policing, should reduce crime.

Strategy **2.1.5.1** Develop standards with incentives for establishing defensible space and other safety measures.

2.1.5.2 Explore the feasibility of integrating police substation and other crime-reducing programs such as parking police vehicles in neighborhoods overnight, with TOD development.

2.1.5.3 Establish and expand neighborhood watch programs.

2.1.5.4 Develop activity nodes as part of TODs to deter criminal activity.

2.1.5.5 Provide for senior citizen developments which can help deter crime.

2.1.5.6 Improve physical development standards for street lighting and other streetscape.

2.1.5.7 Increase staffing of Sheriff substations.

Issue 2.1.6 Unattractive and unkept appearance of buildings and structures.

Buildings and properties which are not maintained contribute to the degradation of neighborhoods. Overgrown landscaping, garbage left in vacant lots, graffiti left on walls and structures which fall into disrepair are all examples of problems which detract from neighborhood quality and make streets pedestrian unfriendly. There are a number of possible solutions to this issue, some directed at the property owner and others at the neighborhood in general.

Unmaintained buildings become an eyesore and do not enhance pedestrian activity.

Strategy 2.1.6.1 Establish incentives for ongoing maintenance and improvements.

2.1.6.2 Tie new development and intensification to requirements for property maintenance and upkeep.

2.1.6.3 Create community beautification programs, volunteer and privately-funded.

2.1.6.4 Establish concentrated code enforcement programs.

2.1.6.5 Contact property owners and solicit their cooperation in improving the appearance of their properties.

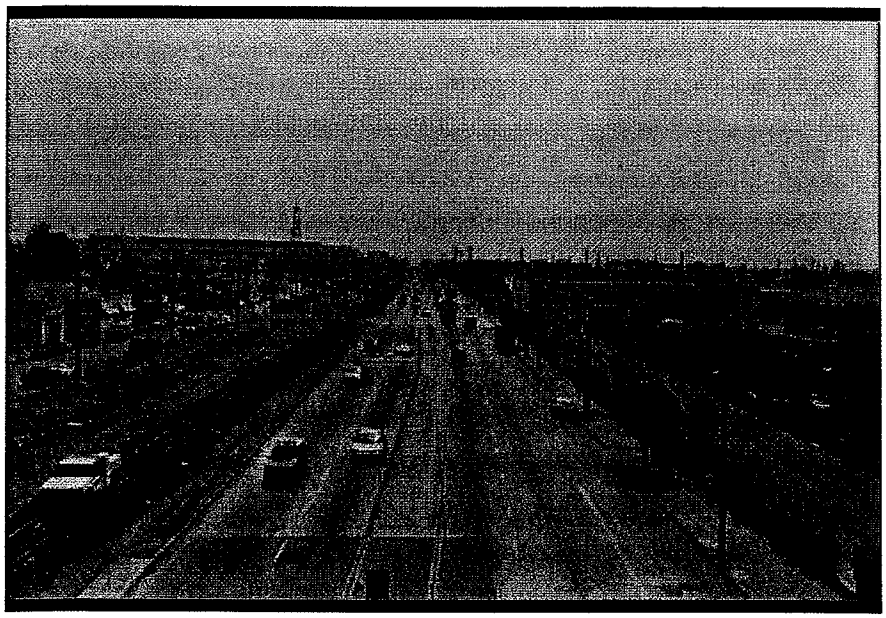
2.1.6.6 Assist with neighborhood pride/cleanup/reach-out programs.

2.1.6.7 Establish a CBR program to provide funding for aesthetic improvements.

2.1.6.8 Explore the feasibility of improvement districts and redevelopment project areas.

Issue 2.1.7 Lack of neighborhood services including markets, pharmacies and child care centers, etc.

An important element of transit-oriented districts is the inclusion of developments which provide neighborhood goods and services which residents and office workers need on a day-to-day basis. The goal is to reduce dependency on automobiles, so the inclusion of a variety of shops and services should lessen the necessity for making vehicle trips out of the neighborhood for convenience items and daily needs. These developments should generally be of a scale only necessary to support the neighborhood and not so large as to draw traffic from outside the neighborhood or district.



This street, adjacent to a transit station, provides no neighborhood services.

Strategy 2.1.7.1 Incorporate the list of desirable/appropriate uses as the types of TOD development permitted "by-right".

2.1.7.2 Develop incentives to encourage the private development of a variety of neighborhood services.

2.1.7.3 Initiate changes to General Plan/Community Plan/Zoning Ordinance to permit neighborhood service developments where they are not currently permitted.

2.1.7.4 Provide information about development opportunities in TODs to realtors, property owners, developers, lenders and other interested parties.

Issue 2.1.8 No center or focus to combine civic or cultural uses.

The community center (or "town square") provides an important function in transit-oriented districts by establishing a place for the community to meet, enjoy social functions, increase the presence of

Large parks like the one above are nice for recreation but an inefficient use of TOD area land. A smaller park with civic or community buildings could be a better community center.

people (thereby decreasing the threat of crime) and generally contribute to better neighborhood relations. The developed nature of the study areas makes it difficult to create a neighborhood center, but other options do exist. For example, the community might decide to designate an existing building or area as the neighborhood center and then provide design and landscaping enhancements which help the site fulfill this role.

Strategy 2.1.8.1 Provide civic or cultural facilities related to new or improved development.

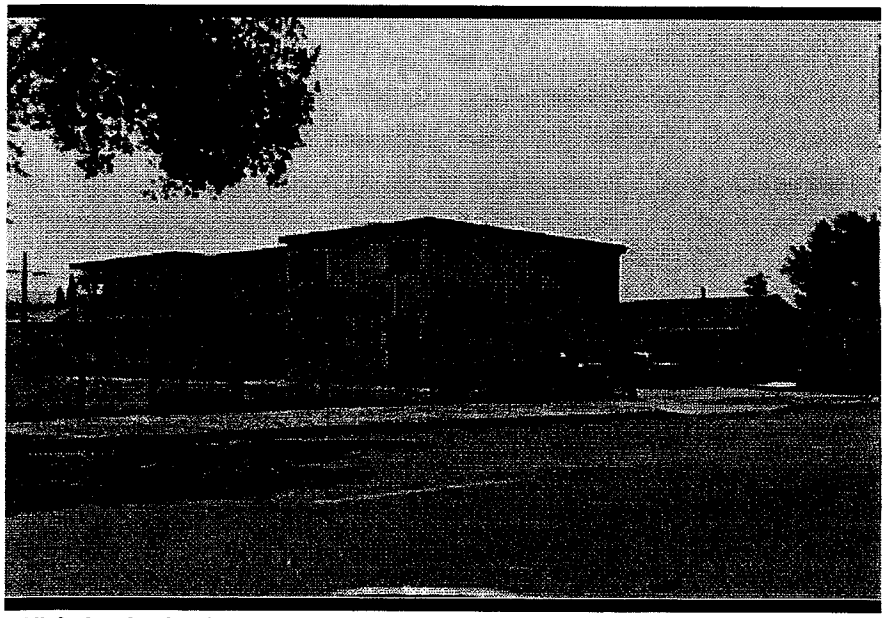
2.1.8.2 Work with neighborhoods to determine the type of civic uses which would enhance the community.

2.1.8.3 Promote County or other public facilities to locate in station areas.

2.1.8.4 Require developments to provide civic space through credits, development standards, etc.

Issue 2.1.9 Higher density brings about change which may not be perceived as progress.

Often, public perception of high density development is very negative. Neighborhoods full of run-down apartments with inadequate parking, no parks or playgrounds and with crime running rampant have fueled this negative perception. However, higher densities can and have been developed in very high-quality neighborhoods. The proper mix of dwelling types, application of good architectural design and pedestrian/street orientation all contribute to higher density which works. Also, the medium and high density residential development is necessary to support (provide sufficient business for) the neighborhood convenience uses.



High-density development, such as the apartment above, often connotes a negative image in people's minds. Good design can make a tremendous difference, however.

Strategy 2.1.9.1 Public education/work with residents and businesses on TOD advantages.

2.1.9.2 Ensure that higher density development is attractive, well-designed and blends with the surrounding neighborhood.

2.1.9.3 Coordinate new developments with service and physical improvements associated with the higher densities.

2.2 Circulation Related

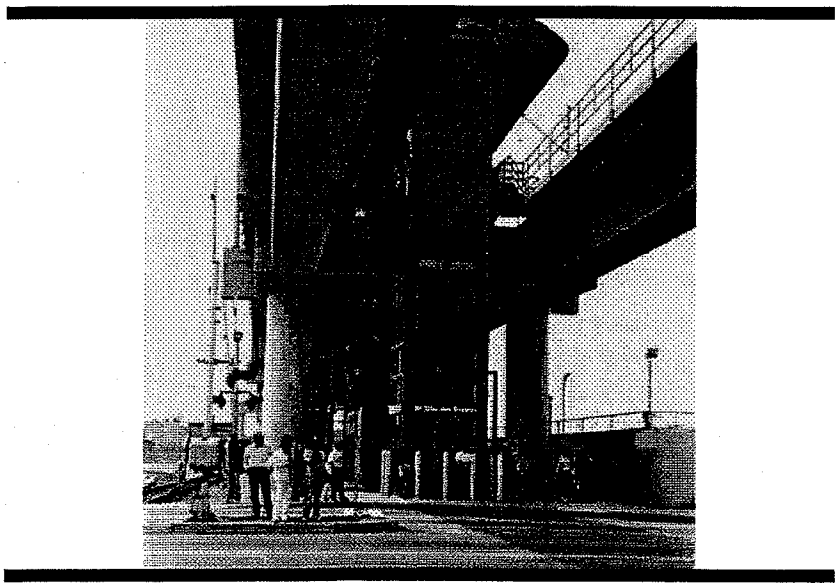
Goals:

- *Encourage the proper transition between station areas and adjacent properties.*

- *Encourage design and development applicable to specific stations.*
- *Create an attractive system of streets and pedestrian areas to support development and improvements.*
- *Support development and circulation patterns promoting transit use.*

Issue 2.2.1 Lack of a connection or coordination between transportation and land use.

The link between transportation and land use is imperative in order for transit-oriented districts to function properly. As mentioned previously, residents and workers should not have to go far out of their way when traveling from one land use to another, and transit linkages (eg. connections between the Blue Line and buses) should be sited conveniently within the district. Also, this issue addresses the importance of having appropriate land uses which encourage and support the TOD concept rather than land uses which detract from the pedestrian-orientation of the district.



Pedestrians leaving this station must cross several lanes of busy traffic to arrive at their destination.

Strategy 2.2.1.1 TOD standards should address the linkage:
-Pedestrian-friendly transit stops
-Transit stops at appropriate locations, especially near places of employment and high density housing.

2.2.1.2 Consult publications or files regarding linking transportation and land use planning.

2.2.1.3 Contact landowners to discuss interest in relocating and/or moving their businesses.

2.2.1.4 Ascertain whether a relocation assistance program would encourage businesses to move.

2.2.1.5 Create disincentives for continuation of undesirable land uses within TOD areas.

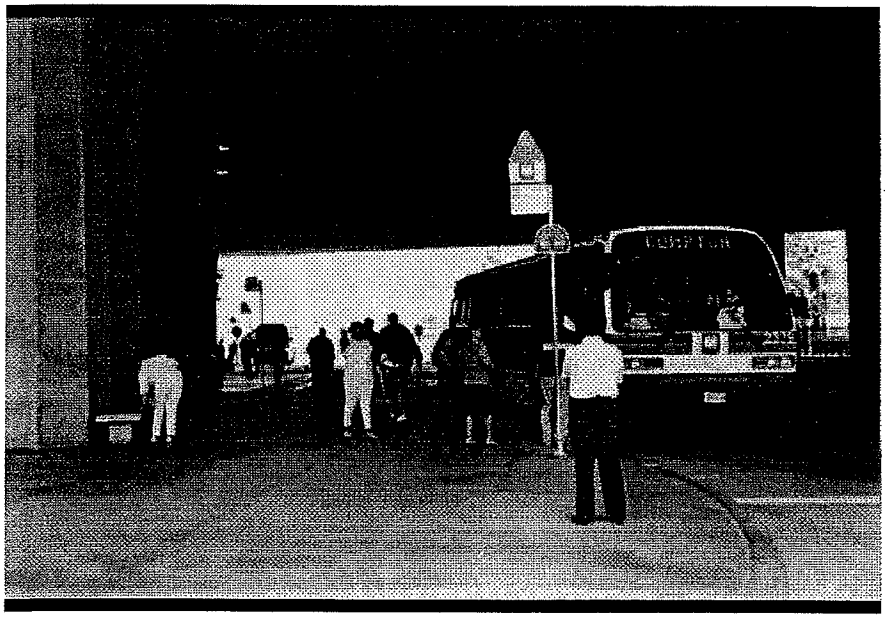
2.2.1.6 Encourage transit-oriented uses adjacent to Blue Line stations.

2.2.1.7 Develop a list of needed/desirable land uses to be encouraged in TOD areas.

2.2.1.8 Adopt amendments to the General Plan/Community Plan/Zoning Ordinance to better coordinate land use with transportation.

Issue 2.2.2 Lack of identity/image in station areas.

The creation of an identity or image within each station area contributes to that area's vitality and distinction from other station areas. The more unique an area can become, the greater the chance that area has for overall success. Station area identity, when studied and established by the area's



This station is surrounded by concrete, uninviting and unsafe. Good station design should provide a unique identity and blend with the adjacent neighborhood.

constituents, contributes to neighborhood pride and increases the potential desire to take good care of streets and properties.

Strategy 2.2.2.1 Consider developing a public art program.

2.2.2.2 Work with each neighborhood to see what kind of identity they would like for their area.

2.2.2.3 Work with MTA to determine potential for station improvements or changes in station design, signage, etc.

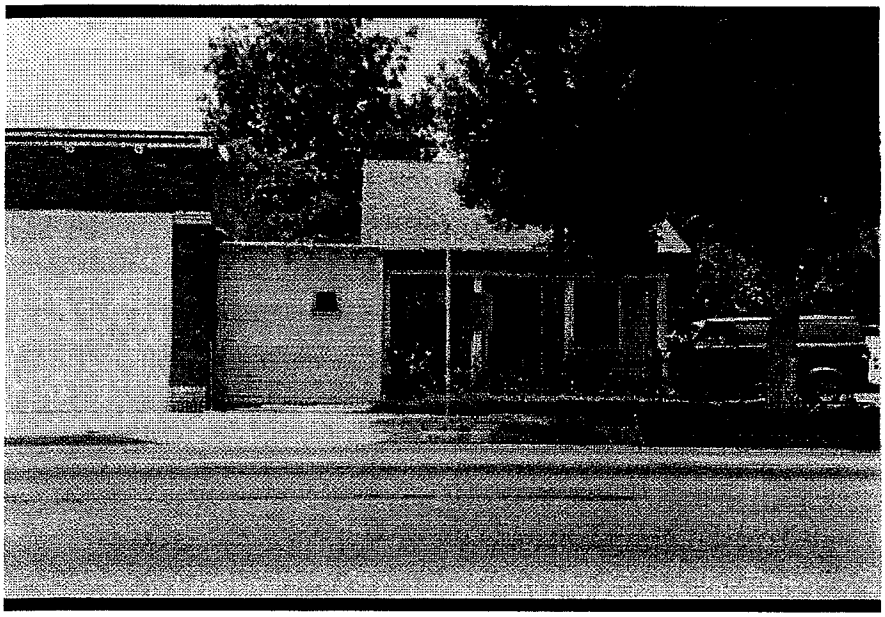
2.2.2.4 Enhance transit-adjacent areas through planting, new facades, signage, etc.

2.3 Housing Related

Goals:

- *Encourage and support development of affordable and senior housing.*
- *Provide a diversity of housing types with a range of densities.*

Issue 2.3.1 Need for affordable residential development.
Affordable housing increases resident ownership and the desire for the owner to care for the property. A neighborhood full of absentee-owned properties is less likely to succeed than one in which owners live on-site. There is less transition in neighborhoods of this type, and greater overall stability.



This converted garage demonstrates overcrowding and a need for affordable housing.

Strategy 2.3.1.1 Package all types of housing—affordable, rental, etc.—in new development projects, and mix with regular units.

2.3.1.2 Develop strategies to prevent ghettoization associated with strictly low-income/affordable districts.

2.3.1.3 Utilize Zoning Ordinance, CDC programs to encourage development of affordable housing.

2.3.1.4 Assist the Community Development Commission to develop affordable housing projects.

2.3.1.5 Design for transportation-dependent seniors.

Issue 2.3.2 Overcrowding.

In neighborhoods where overcrowding is an issue, residents experience problems such as inadequate parking, insufficient recreation space and landscaping. All of these factors can be remedied with proper planning and design, resulting in a more inviting neighborhood and one in which residents are more apt to care for and defend.

Strategy **2.3.2.1** Provide additional housing at affordable rates to lessen pressure on existing households.

2.3.2.2 Provide slightly higher density, owner occupied housing where appropriate.

2.3.2.3 Require useable open space in new residential development and appropriate levels of park facilities in each community.

2.3.2.4 Establish a concentrated Code Enforcement program.

Issue 2.3.3 Lack of senior citizen housing.

Senior citizens are an important part of good TOD composition because TODs are well suited to their needs. Seniors are often dependent on transit, and need goods and services which are close to home. These needs are fulfilled in a well-planned TOD including, most importantly, sufficient senior citizen housing. Senior housing can range from granny units (second, smaller unit on the same property) to senior apartments.

Strategy **2.3.3.1** Encourage senior citizen housing by making it a standard for TODs.

2.3.3.2 Appropriate housing type for TOD concept, since goods and services are conveniently located close to residences and transit.

2.3.3.3 Contact developers of senior housing to determine level of interest for projects like this with easy or minimal case processing in a TOD for a senior project.

2.3.3.4 Encourage the formation of public/private partnerships for the purpose of developing senior citizen housing.

2.3.3.5 Initiate changes to General Plan/Community Plan/Zoning Ordinance to permit senior citizen developments where they are not currently permitted.

2.3.3.6 Provide senior-friendly services and amenities within TOD areas.

The granny unit depicted above is an example of senior-friendly higher density.

3.0 Economic Development Issues and Strategies

Goals:

- *Assist financial institution interaction with employers and developers (community and financial networking).*
- *Encourage appropriate T.O.D. development which generates economic activity.*

Issue 3.1 Lack of financing/capital for new construction and rehabilitation.

Lack of financing for new development is a perennial problem within the study areas. There are a number of potential solutions, but most likely a combination of strategies will be needed to resolve this issue.

Strategy 3.1.1 Work with banks and lending institutions.

3.1.2 Develop consortium of people who can assist with financing, etc. (financing networking)

3.1.3 Encourage local churches to assist with funding.

3.1.4 Develop a pilot project or incubator.

3.1.5 Concentrate on working with Fidelity and other lending institutions who have expressed an interest in funding projects in TOD areas.

Lack of capital to rehabilitate existing or construct new development is a problem. However, creative financing and community networking can be solutions.

3.1.6 Involve the Community Development Commission in providing federal, state and local monies for new construction and rehabilitation.

3.1.7 Provide information to the Community Development Commission about land suitable for development.

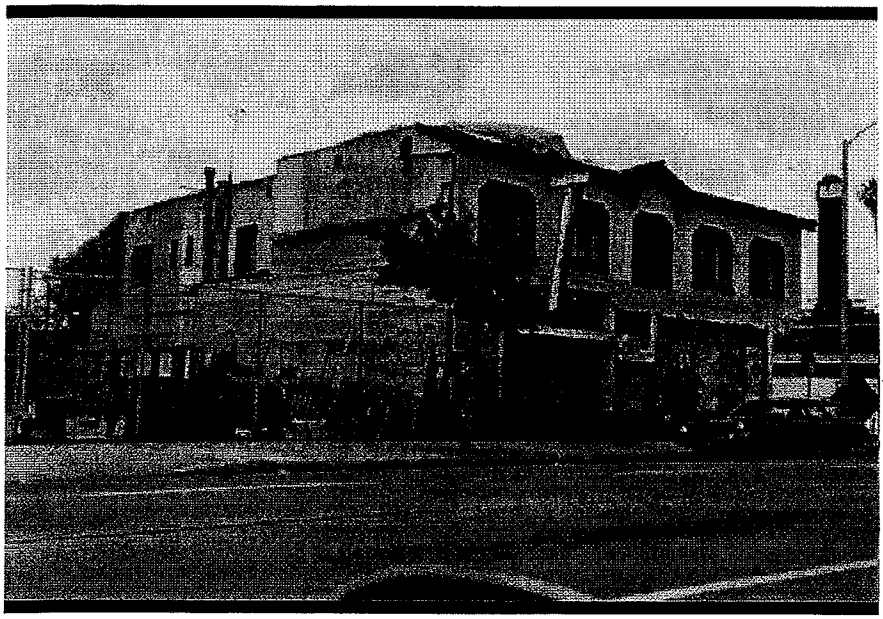
Issue 3.2 Lack of interest on the part of businesses to locate and operate in TOD areas.

The lack of interest to develop in the TOD study areas is one of the primary reasons why financing is so difficult to come by. One of the most significant solutions is to educate those in the lending community to help them understand that TODs can be very viable communities with a high quality of life. The lack of experience on the part of lenders in developing TOD projects, and observing how successful they can be, contributes to the trepidation by lenders. One or two good projects and examples can help make TOD developments desirable and more likely to be financed.

Strategy 3.2.1 A consortium or economic development group should be formed to address this issue.

3.2.2 Establish development incentives which may persuade businesses to relocate in TODs.

3.2.3 Provide and offer incentives to encourage businesses to locate in TODs.



Commercial and mixed use structures like the one above can become viable developments again if the right businesses are attracted.

3.2.4 Create flexible zoning requirements to stimulate private and public investment.

3.2.5 Financing networking.

3.2.6 Encourage local government to finance infrastructure improvements through public sector tax increment financing.

3.2.7 Encourage local government to reduce development financing costs through tax exempt financing.

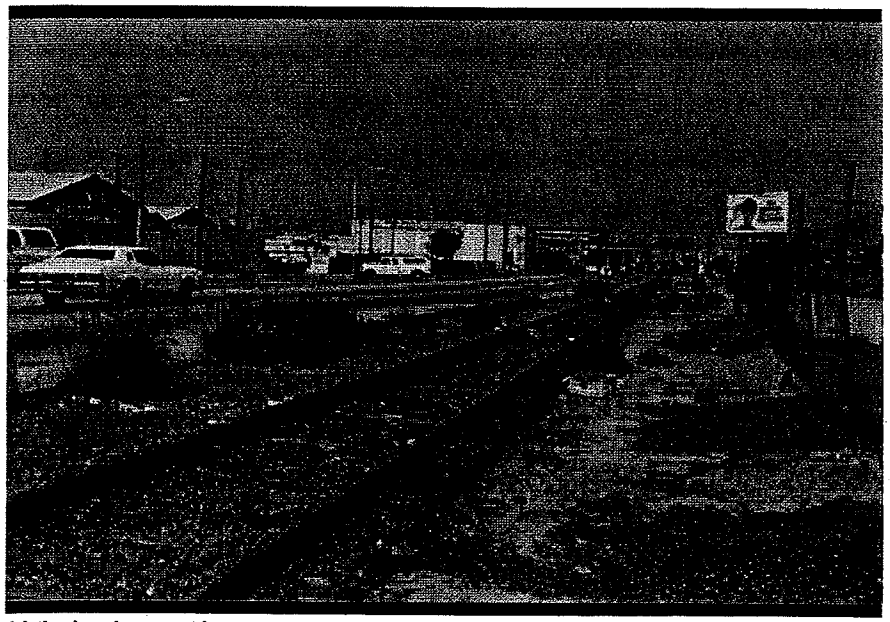
3.2.8 Encourage local government to serve as guarantor of loans made to private sector developers.

3.2.9 Explore local government's participation as an equity partner in development projects.

3.2.10 Support organizations representing business with local interests.

Issue 3.3 Modest building activity since 1950.

The lack of building activity is a direct result of Issues 3.1 and 3.2. Strategies employed to resolve some of the economic issues, when combined with the land use strategies, will increase development opportunities and, consequently, building activity.



Little development has occurred since the 1950's, due to a combination of factors. New development of the proper types of land uses must take place in order for the TODs to succeed.

Strategy **3.3.1** Encourage development opportunities by making development easier on the regulatory side and bringing together potential lenders.

3.3.2 Prepare master environmental documentation to expedite the environmental review process.

3.3.3 Encourage "by right" development for desirable land uses in lieu of discretionary processes.

3.3.4 Create flexible zoning requirements to stimulate investment.

3.3.5 Encourage the development of vacant or underutilized properties to uses desired by the community.

3.3.6 Produce some attractive prototypes of transit-based housing and mixed use developments which developers can mimic and learn from.

3.3.7 MTA station incentives and incentives to adjacent property owners.

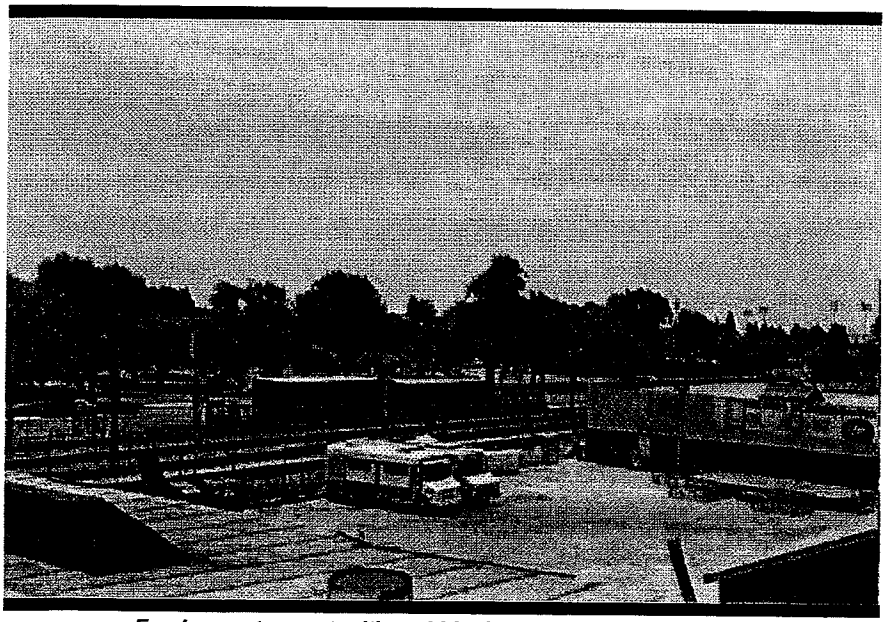
3.3.8 Networking and network financing.

3.3.9 Establish incentives for attracting new desirable activities with specific provisions for strategic neighborhood services, e.g. markets, pharmacies and child care.

3.3.10 Promote new residential projects with mixed uses.

Issue 3.4 Lack of employment opportunities in TOD areas.

Lack of employment opportunities goes hand-in-hand with the poor economic growth and modest building activity. An increase in a variety of employment opportunities is a byproduct of good TOD planning and implementation. Because one of the primary goals of a TOD is to develop mixed use projects and places of employment adjacent to transit stations and close to homes, an increase in employment prospects should be one of the many positive results of the TOD concept.



Employment opportunities within the study areas are limited.

Strategy 3.4.1 Consider developing a kiosk or other public information system which maintains employment listings for TOD areas and areas around other Blue Line stations.

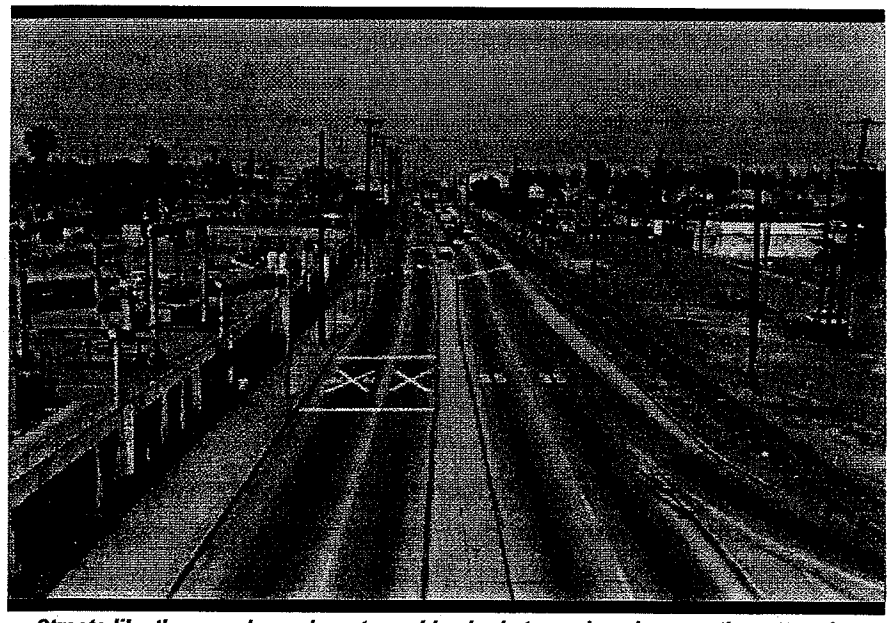
3.4.2 Encourage appropriate development in TOD areas so that more employment opportunities will occur in concert with the additional office and commercial development space.

3.4.3 Develop employment assistance programs and employment networking.

3.4.4 Develop a directory of community services.

Issue 3.5 Although heavily used, streets do not provide an interesting or attractive system of routes.

Streets should provide an inviting place for pedestrians to walk, shop and socialize by encouraging pedestrian-friendly businesses and employing good design. A pedestrian-friendly atmosphere will draw more people to shops and public areas, people will want to stay longer and will be encouraged to walk to transit stations rather than drive. The presence of people on sidewalks and in public areas for more hours of the day will help reduce crime and make neighborhoods more lively and robust.



Streets like the one above do not provide shade trees, benches or other attractive features, discouraging pedestrian use of the street.

Strategy 3.5.1 Encourage urban tree programs especially in proximity to transit stations.

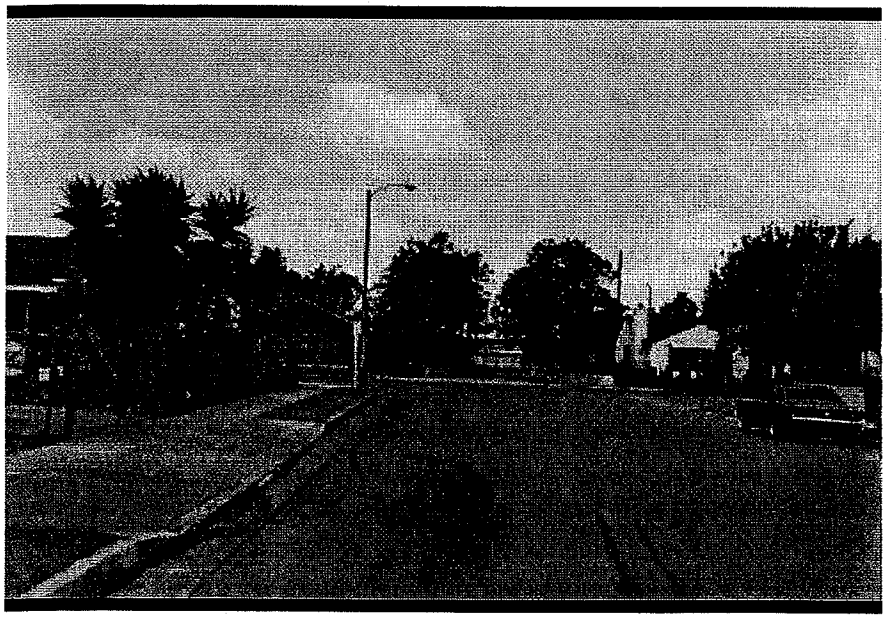
3.5.2 Explore the feasibility of initiating revitalization programs for streetscape, facade and pedestrian improvements.

3.5.3 Concentrate on enforcement efforts for blights such as illegal window advertising, billboards and other signage.

3.5.4 Provide for clean and safe pedestrian areas and walkways.

Issue 3.6 Promote increased use of transit facilities.

A key component of the entire TOD concept is to encourage residents and employees in the TOD areas to utilize the available transit facilities more readily. The incorporation of various land use and design elements described in this report should encourage transit facility usage by making these facilities more convenient, safer and more functional, as well as making the use of transit facilities a pleasant experience. Usage of transit facilities by residents is imperative in order for the TODs to succeed.



Station-adjacent streets, like the one above, should provide safe, convenient connections to the transit station to encourage residents to utilize the facilities.

Strategy 3.6.1 Provide educational programs explaining the benefits of transit use.

3.6.2 Make transit facilities more accessible.

3.6.3 Work with employers and apartment owners to develop bulletin boards and information kiosks to encourage transit use.

3.6.4 Enhance neighborhood aesthetics and safety.

4.0 Tools and Mechanisms to Use for Implementing Land Use/Economic Strategies

4.1 TOD Ordinance

4.2 Design/Development Standards

4.3 Conformance to CMP guidelines

4.4 Expedited environmental & permit processing

4.5 By-right approvals

4.6 Density bonuses/FAR bonuses

4.7 Reduced permit fees

4.8 Pedestrian-oriented regulations

4.9 Block Grants and low-interest loans

4.10 Tax abatements, tax credits, increment and low market rate financing

4.11 List of desirable land uses to be encouraged in TOD areas

4.12 Relaxation of zoning requirements

4.13 MTA "Call for Projects" funding