

**ULI Land Use Policy Forum Report**

# **Smart Growth Transportation for Suburban Greenfields**

**Prepared by  
Douglas Porter**

**Washington, D.C.  
October 8, 2002**



**Urban Land  
Institute**

## About ULI

ULI—the Urban Land Institute is a nonprofit education and research institute that is supported by its members. Its mission is to provide responsible leadership in the use of land to enhance the total environment. ULI sponsors education programs and forums to encourage an open, international exchange of ideas and sharing of experiences; initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues and documents best practices; proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development. Established in 1936, ULI has more than 17,000 members in 60 countries representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines.

Richard M. Rosan  
*President*

**ULI Land Use Policy Forum Reports.** ULI is in the forefront of national discussion and debate on the leading land use policy issues of the day. To encourage and enrich that dialogue, the Institute holds land use policy forums at which leading experts gather to discuss topics of interest to the land use and real estate community. The findings of these forums serve to guide and enhance ULI's program of work. The Institute produces summaries of these forums in its Land Use Policy Forum Reports series, which are available on ULI's Web site at [www.policypapers.uli.org](http://www.policypapers.uli.org). By holding these forums and publishing summaries of the discussion, the Institute hopes to increase the body of knowledge that contributes to the quality of land use policy and real estate development practice throughout the country.

## Acknowledgments

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# Introduction

In October 2002, ULI—the Urban Land Institute convened a panel of 14 experts in Washington, D.C., to discuss the topic “smart growth transportation for suburban greenfields.” The purpose of the forum was to stimulate a dialogue on the question of how the smart growth principle of expanding travel choices can be applied in emerging growth areas on the fringes of metropolitan development. Typically, these areas are developed in ways that depend almost exclusively on highways and cars as the chief means of transportation. The major question before the panel was whether and how greenfield development could be adapted to make use of other travel choices more feasible.

A diverse group of real estate professionals participated, such as developers, real estate advisers, financiers, and land use planning practitioners, as well as representatives of federal, state, and regional transportation agencies and organizations. They considered the following questions:

- How are local decision makers encouraged to make smart growth land use decisions that protect the capacity of transportation facilities?
- How is new road capacity designed and implemented without providing support for sprawl?
- How can new transportation facilities be financed such that costs are more fairly allocated?
- How are large-scale master-planned communities designed and developed within a context of effective transportation planning?
- How can property owners be motivated to collaborate in the process of land use and transportation planning?
- How are the real transit options identified in any given community?

## Forum Summary

The day began with a welcome from the chair of the forum, James M. DeFrancia, president of Lowe Enterprises Community Development, Inc. A series of sessions on aspects of greenfield development and transportation choices, including two case studies, led to an exchange of viewpoints among forum participants. The forum concluded with a moderated discussion of ideas that emerged during the forum and a summary of the factors working

for and against the realization of smart growth transportation goals in greenfields.

## Greenfields and Smart Transportation

Robert Dunphy, ULI’s senior resident fellow for transportation, led off by describing smart transportation. Transportation systems become smart when they offer residents and workers an increased range of travel options that lessen traffic congestion. In particular, smart transportation means expanding access to travel by transit, paratransit (such as vanpools and carpools), walking, and biking. He pointed out that widening travel choices is dependent on implementing smart growth principles of development that encourage the use of several travel modes. Currently, conventional development in greenfields makes transit expensive and underused, renders carpooling ineffective, and discourages walking and biking. The following are principles of smart growth:

- compact, multiuse development;
- conservation of open space;
- expanded mobility;
- enhanced livability;
- managed infrastructure; and
- infill and redevelopment.

Yet, a substantial share of the nation’s future development will take place in suburban greenfields. Despite the highly publicized “return to the cities” of retirees, empty nesters, and young professionals, which is transforming older neighborhoods and business centers in many cities, experts believe that this trend will capture only a relatively small proportion of future development. One of the leaders in prescribing new forms of development, Andrés Duany, predicts that 95 percent of future growth will occur in greenfields. Portland, Oregon’s metropolitan regional plan assumes that, even with the region’s well-recognized growth management efforts, some 70 percent of future growth will be in greenfields rather than in builtup areas. Some experts predict that about 90 percent of California’s metropolitan growth is expected to occur in greenfields.

The challenge, therefore, is to find ways to promote greenfield development patterns that can support greater use of transit, walking, and biking, and/or make better use of highway and street systems to avoid congestion. The scope of the challenge is shown in how we travel today:

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**SHARED U.S. DAILY TRAVEL TRIPS BY MODE,  
1990/2001 (IN MILLIONS)**

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- 87.1/86.4 automobile trips
  - 2.0/1.6 public transit trips
  - 7.2/8.6 walking trips
  - 0.7/0.9 bicycle trips
  - 3.0/5.4 other (school bus, taxi, ferry, airplane) trips
- 

Dunphy then described the conditions necessary to promote increased use of transit, walking, and biking. Walking and biking are easy solutions if destinations are relatively nearby and attractive, serve significant needs, and are connected by convenient pathways. Compact, multiuse forms of development appeal most to walkers and bikers. Encouraging greater use of transit is a tougher challenge, he said. Transit works best in areas that were built around transit service—typically, densely developed older cities with high-priced parking. Studies have shown that densities of seven to 15 dwelling units per acre generate substantial bus and rail ridership (although express bus and commuter-rail transit can attract riders who drive from low-density residential areas).

Across the nation, however, most growth is occurring in Sunbelt suburbs that lack the density and other attributes that support transit service. Shaping greenfield development to support transit requires consideration of transit-friendly design and density from the start, preferably by making transit a central organizing theme of a development.

Implementation of such policies can be extremely difficult, however, because the local jurisdictions where most greenfield development occurs are opposed to higher-density development, even if the developer wants to provide it. In areas lacking any immediate prospect of transit service, it is even more challenging to promote a high-density, transit-served plan. Compromises made at this early stage in the process to reduce development, which often constitute the path of least resistance for the developer, can preclude transit-oriented options for good. Supporting public policies early on is critical.

Aside from the alternatives to travel by car, greenfield development can be designed to expand auto mobility and better manage almost inevitable congestion. Transportation demand management (TDM) programs that offer incentives for car- and vanpooling can reduce increases in the numbers of cars on the road. Designing

interconnected street systems that allow for optional travel patterns and shorter trips provides another solution, especially if supplemented by traffic-calming devices within residential neighborhoods. There is a growing consensus that charging fees for premium driving conditions, as on State Road 91 in California, can significantly lessen congestion.

Parking is another aspect of car travel that can be improved by reducing the large acreages used for parking in suburban development. Shared parking saves space, structured parking saves land, and priced parking begins to make other travel choices more attractive.

Finally, creative financing approaches to support transportation services can affect developers' willingness to expand mobility options. Examples are innovative public/private funding of selected transportation improvements and spreading the base of transit funding to clusters of communities and entire regions that will benefit from improved transit service.

## **Smart Mobility for Puget Sound: The Case of I-405**

Michael Cummings, environmental and systems director of the Urban Corridors Office of the Washington State Department of Transportation (DOT), described the approach and results of the major study undertaken from 2000 to 2002 for the I-405 corridor in the Puget Sound region around Seattle. Interstate 405 runs parallel to and east of I-5, the north-south spine of the region's highway system for generations. Some of the major growing suburban cities in Puget Sound, such as Bellevue, Renton, and Kent, lie along the I-405 corridor. The corridor is already experiencing high levels of congestion—up to 12 hours per day in some areas. Growth projections for 2030 indicate that the regional population will increase by almost 50 percent, from 3.2 million to 4.7 million, and that the number of trips per day will rise by 60 percent, from 10 million to 16 million. Much of this growth will take place along the I-405 corridor, which passes through two counties, nine suburban communities, six urban centers, and at least 14 business and housing activity centers.

Adopted in 1990, the state growth management act is intended to reduce sprawl and ensure efficient provision of services and facilities, including transportation. Pursuant to the law, all cities in the Puget Sound area have established growth management boundaries and

identified activity centers in which to focus development. Most growth actually is taking place within the boundaries and a number of communities have successfully promoted activity center development with multiple uses and walkable streets. In addition, the region has aggressively promoted TDM programs with 200 miles of high-occupancy vehicle (HOV) lanes, the nation's largest public vanpool fleet, and a commute-trip reduction program. Nonetheless, travel demand in the corridor was predicted to grow by 56 percent from 1995 to 2020.

Responding to these concerns, the Washington State DOT organized a corridor program in 1999, involving 35 agencies, 24 other organizations, five colead agencies for the environmental study, and four legislative representatives. The primary framework for the study was the state-required environmental impact statement. Over the two-and-a-half-year life of the study, more than 80 committee meetings and nine public meetings were held; newsletters and a Web site were used; and 100 print, radio, and TV stories were published or broadcast. In late 2001, the I-405 executive committee adopted a multimodal plan calling for 150 projects and programs, focused on the following recommended improvements:

- increasing the number of vanpools;
- completing a series of ramps to improve access to HOV lanes;
- expanding transit service by up to 75 percent, using a bus rapid transit (BRT) system for most north-south transit travel;
- connecting activity centers and urban centers by BRT, express/commuter, and bus feeder service routes;
- building transit centers and park-and-ride lots in activity and urban centers;
- adding at least two lanes in each direction to the I-405 roadway and improving freeway and arterial road connections;
- improving bicycle and pedestrian access by providing eight safe crossings of I-405 and completing ten missing regional trail connections; and
- integrating these transportation improvements with environmental (water, visual, noise) abatement measures.

This program is estimated to cost almost \$11 billion.

## Smart Development for the I-35 Coalition

Robert Benke, principal of Community Resource Partnerships, Inc., described the multijurisdictional study of the I-35 west corridor in the northwest section of the Minneapolis–St. Paul metropolitan area. In 1995, seven contiguous cities along the corridor formed a coalition to achieve an integrated approach to planning for future growth. Benke cited three motivations for this collaborative venture: a recognition that individual communities were not “islands unto themselves”; a wish to define the area's own vision of what it should become; and the provision of a substantive framework to guide future decision making. The 83-square-mile area has 156,000 residents and 85,000 jobs, and more residents and jobs arrive every day, drawn in large part by the accessibility conferred by I-35 west and its interchange with I-694. By 2020, the area's population will increase by 60,000 to 70,000 and 40,000 new jobs are projected.

The first step in the study was to establish an areawide geographic information database, which ultimately was able to provide information at the area, block-cluster, and individual property levels. Demographic trends demonstrated that the population was aging, raising issues of school impacts and changes in community character. Also, continued growth as predicted would begin to “build out” the available land supply over the next 20 years.

Two subregional growth scenarios were analyzed. One followed conventional suburban development patterns, while the other (the “coalition growth scenario”) applied transit-oriented development principles that emphasize development of walkable, mixed-use centers and multimodal transportation. In the latter scenario, a significant proportion of growth was focused in about a dozen such centers. Transportation impacts of the two growth scenarios were analyzed with a subarea transportation forecasting model designed to function within the parameters of the regional transportation model. The first run of the model assumed identical transportation improvements for both land use scenarios: new transit service, widening of segments of I-35 west and I-694, and additions to the county and local roadway network. The second model run added bridges over I-35 west to better connect the county and local road network and expanded the express and local transit network with \$7 million of improvements.

Findings indicated that both scenarios would result in increased traffic congestion on both regional and minor

arterial roads—which is not surprising, given the region’s high rate of congestion growth. However, the coalition growth scenario shows a more efficient pattern of trip-making: decreasing trip lengths within the coalition sub-area, increasing the number of walking and transit trips, reducing the number of vehicle miles traveled, and slowing the increase in trip generation. Clustering substantial growth in mixed-use centers and increasing the development of housing near transit by 10 percent appeared to effect greater travel efficiency.

The model’s capability for calculating walking trips and demographic variations within the study area generated significant results. It demonstrated that 25 percent more housing units could be built while generating only 6 percent more auto trips. The drop in car trips came from a 33 percent increase in transit trips and a 23 percent increase in walking trips. In addition, because clustering reduces land consumption, the coalition growth scenario provided land capacity to allow an increase in projected jobs and housing in the subarea.

The study concluded with recommendations for promoting development of mixed-use centers, greater collaboration among the cities and the two counties, and efforts at the regional and state levels to coordinate transportation improvements.

## Issues in Applying Smart Transportation in Greenfields

DeFrancia framed the discussion by asking two questions:

- Will greenfields remain the primary location for future community development and thus a key to solving transportation issues?
- To what extent are cars an indispensable aspect of modern life, or how realistic is it to expect people to use forms of transportation other than automobiles?

With regard to the first question, H. Pike Oliver commented that a paper by Don Priest, a real estate consultant and former ULI research director, and staff vice president makes a strong case that most future growth will continue to occur in greenfields, in part because of the difficulties of redirecting growth into builtup areas. Not only are desirable sites hard to find, he says, but also neighborhood “NIMBYism” opposes the development of compact, mixed-use projects intended to achieve smart growth goals.

Oliver also cited the sources referenced by Dunphy in his introductory talk, which predicted that 90 to 95 percent

of new development would take place in greenfields. Even in the highly regulated Portland, Oregon, region, said Dunphy, 70 percent of growth is expected to happen in greenfields. In general discussion, participants agreed that it was unlikely that more than 10 or 20 percent of future development will occur in builtup areas, if only because the amount of projected growth across the United States is too great to be accommodated in existing urban areas.

Still, panelists recognized that applying smart growth principles to promote smart transportation in greenfield development faces several obstacles. Steven Kellenberg said that developers of greenfield projects too often fail to perceive their projects as candidates for smart growth. Mary Lynn Tischer said that local governments on the edge of developing greenfields allow development to proceed and expect transportation services to catch up somehow, which often does not happen. “Small communities,” she said, “have little understanding of the pros and cons of development” and are not prone to work with developers to promote smart growth forms of development. Harrison Rue noted that the county in his planning district is willing to promote compact development but has no interest in supporting transit. Rue said that local governments and developers are still in mind-sets to promote development that requires residents to depend on cars. He suggested the notion of a “transit-ready community,” which incorporates transit from the initial planning stage. And Ray H. D’Ardenne added a financier’s perspective, saying that it is difficult to realize attractive, long-term returns from the commercial component of traditional or greenfield developments when there are few barriers to enlarging the supply of developable land. The willingness of local governments to zone for commercial and business expansion means that competitive sites are continuously available, reducing the value of developed business centers.

The forum participants then considered the second question: is it possible to change this mind-set? Kellenberg commented that development in greenfields can satisfy smart growth principles while serving the market. Project designers, he said, “are starting to figure out how to develop and preserve environmental values at the same time, especially in master-planned communities.” He added that designers know how to get 60 percent of the housing in such communities close to transit facilities. Other panelists seconded this notion, affirming that master-planned communities (MPCs) are designed to provide sustainable living environments that encourage walking, biking, and

transit use. Developers of MPCs have the time and the space to plan carefully for multiuse development that is pedestrian- and transit-friendly. The general consensus was that MPCs can offer a market-feasible solution to providing multimodal travel choices in greenfield locations, although not all MPCs are currently designed to fulfill that goal.

Some panelists pointed out, however, that MPCs are considerably more common in some regions such as the West and the Southeast, where large landholdings are available or easily assembled for development, than in other regions such as the Midwest and the Northeast. Oliver noted that MPCs are also more feasible in fast-growing areas, where the market can absorb large-scale developments. And even in areas where many MPCs are being developed, a significant amount of development takes place on smaller sites. Small developments typically are built out quickly and seldom stray very far from immediate market opportunities that favor low-density development dependent on travel by car.

Douglas Porter added that large-scale developments in greenfields can create opportunities for appealing to a variety of markets over time, including more compact, mixed-use types of development that may not be feasible at the outset but that may become possible as the market matures. MPC developers, he observed, understand that extensive retail and office development usually must await production of residential “rooftops,” which generate retail demand and a labor force for employment. MPCs can also plan to phase in some type of transit service as development builds a ridership base. Small-scale developers, however, cannot expect these opportunities to evolve during the usual short project construction period. This raises a concern about whether and how local governments might guide incremental developments to realize smart growth goals, especially in the transportation arena.

Cummings noted the usefulness of carpools and vanpools in suburban settings. For example, in Bellevue, Washington, he said, some 60 percent of commuter trips were made using these modes. Carpools and vanpools provide a travel choice more flexible than rail transit for trips to a variety of uses and locations, including shopping and schools as well as employment centers. They also can provide interim service prior to the advent of bus or rail transit service when development reaches a level that supports transit. Kellenberg cited the experience in a recent development where this kind of “gap

transit” was being proposed at a monthly cost of only \$4 per household. Just as important, the early availability of this travel mode helps to identify the new development as transit-friendly. Kellenberg also pointed out that innovative modes of transit are offering possibilities for lowering costs and thereby allowing earlier service. Bus rapid transit (BRT), for example, costs only about \$250,000 per mile, and software is available that gives buses priority at intersections. Such capabilities permit a 30 percent increase in overall speed and have stimulated a 40 percent increase in ridership. Another innovation is the Civis BRT system in Eugene, Oregon. For a fraction of the cost of rail, it operates much like a trolley but on exclusive highway lanes or guideways. Since it has stations and platform heights similar to those in train stations, it can be converted to rail as ridership warrants.

## The Role of Transportation Agencies

David L. Winstead, former secretary of transportation for the state of Maryland, moderated this session. He said that Maryland’s DOT was responsible for all travel modes, from highways to transit, airports, and seaports, which allowed the administration to weigh priorities for funding among the modes and thus choose to promote smart growth travel choices. But, he noted, the metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) responsible for transportation planning would be more effective if they placed more emphasis on achieving regional rather than local goals for growth.

Tischer added that in the “culture of transportation providers” there is constant tension between MPOs and local governments. That and the tensions among local governments competing for transportation dollars mean that it is difficult to coordinate regional transportation plans. Also, she said, transit providers typically have very restricted budgets, leaving them without the resources to expand service into developing areas even if developers desire it. And without resources, transit agencies have no motivation to work with developers to generate transit-friendly development.

Cummings suggested that developers build relationships with the transportation agencies. “Political influence counts,” he said. Developers should also strive to understand how transportation systems work to recognize, for example, that new highway bridges along future transit corridors should be built to allow later construction of transit lines. Benke raised the issue of access management, observing that the regional need for an effective highway

network can be undercut by zoning and other actions of local governments. Reserving access is a regional and sometimes a state responsibility that ought to be imposed before development overwhelms highway capacity.

## Summary of Key Points

From the presentations and ensuing discussions, forum participants drew the following conclusions:

### Greenfields Will Remain the Primary Location for Future Development

While infill and redevelopment sites are playing increasingly significant roles in accommodating community growth and change, development within urbanized areas will account for only a minor portion of projected growth. Clearly, smart growth goals—particularly the goal of widening choices of travel—cannot be met without adapting and changing conventional forms of greenfield development.

### Increasing Use of Transit, Walking, and Biking in Greenfield Development Is an Uphill Battle

Many developers operating in greenfields are uninterested in or unaware of smart growth principles, especially those that encourage travel by means other than cars. The main exception to this generalization seems to be developers of MPCs, many of which are being designed as walkable communities that can support transit service. However, developers of small projects who must satisfy an immediate market demand will find it difficult to incorporate smart growth principles into those projects without significant public incentives to do so.

Local governments continue to adopt policies and regulations for greenfield areas that encourage conventional forms of development dependent on travel by car, although funding for improving highway capacity to meet increased travel demand is generally inadequate. Also, transit agencies lack resources to extend service to newly developing greenfields and therefore seldom seek to work with developers to produce development patterns supportive of transit service.

Except in a few central cities, the general public prefers to drive everywhere and usually regards transit as a travel

mode most suitable for people who cannot afford cars, and walking and biking as impractical. To overcome these difficulties, forum participants identified three approaches that may help to broaden choices of travel in greenfield development:

### Problem/Solution Education

Educate the public and the major players—developers, highway and transit agencies, and local governments—about the critical need to widen the range of travel choices in greenfield development. A compelling argument must be developed, based on “good science,” to demonstrate both the nature of the problem and the opportunities for feasible solutions.

### Transit-Ready Design

Acknowledging that most greenfield development may not be immediately serviceable by transit, Rue came up with the phrase “transit-ready” to describe projects designed and built to accommodate future transit service. A transit-ready community would incorporate a variety of features that would promote eventual transit service but also add to a community’s livability, such as walkability, mixed uses, place-making attributes, and integration of open space with development. Panelists identified a number of approaches to development planning and design that would characterize transit readiness:

- define appropriate future transit routes and centers integrated with roadway design;
- plan around transit routes and centers a mix of uses at densities and with designs that support transit use, including the integration of big-box stores into the mix;
- design a connected grid of streets and associated walking and biking pathways that provide more direct routes and convenient pedestrian access throughout the development;
- develop clusters of public facilities that can function as transit “targets”;
- stage development so that the mix of uses and densities evolves as the market matures;
- provide for shared parking and eventual conversion of surface parking to structured parking where and when feasible;

- put in place public incentives for developing with future transit service in mind, including establishing a plan for transit system development that offers a predictable, realistic target date for future service; and
- subsidize transit in the early years while ridership is developing.

## Collaboration

Build collaborative relationships with local governments, transit and transportation agencies, and the development community. In particular, create “development-ready” transit agencies that proactively seek to plan and predictably extend service to developing greenfields.

Transportation agencies can best support expanding travel choices by:

- considering multimodal travel choices in planning, financing, and designing new and improved facilities;
- structuring opportunities for citizens to participate in major decisions affecting transportation and land use, which require hard questions to be addressed;
- developing a common regional approach to financing improvements;
- becoming involved in the decision-making process for community development; and
- working with MPOs to broaden the regional vision for future development, secure local “buy-in” on decisions, and communicate local and regional goals to state DOTs.

## A Final Word

Forum participants were very aware of the difficulties of promoting smart transportation in greenfields, not the least of which is the allocation of responsibility that charges local governments with land use and development while regional and state agencies plan and fund major transportation improvements. The actions recommended are intended to effect a better understanding of opportunities for promoting forms of development that increase travel choices over time. It is hoped that such an understanding will build the case for more collaboration among governments, agencies, and the development community.

# Forum Agenda

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2002**

- 9:00 a.m.            **Welcome and Introductions**  
James M. DeFrancia, *Forum Chair, President, Lowe Enterprises Community Development, Inc.*
- 9:15 a.m.            **Greenfields and Smart Transportation**  
Robert Dunphy, *Senior Resident Fellow, Transportation and Infrastructure, ULI*
- 9:30 a.m.            **I-405: Smart Mobility for Puget Sound**  
*Case Study*  
Michael Cummings, *Environmental and Systems Director, Washington State Department of Transportation*
- 9:50 a.m.            **Discussion**
- 10:30 a.m.           **Break**
- 10:45 a.m.           **I-35 Coalition: Smart Growth Development**  
Robert Benke, *Principal, Community Resource Partnerships, Inc.*
- 11:00 a.m.           **Issues in Development and Transportation at the Edge**  
*Discussion*
- 12:15 p.m.           **Lunch**
- 1:15 p.m.            **Discussion (continued)**
- 2:15 p.m.            **Key Issues and Actions: Transportation Agencies**  
David L. Winstead, *Moderator; Partner, Holland & Knight*
- 2:45 p.m.            **Key Issues and Actions: Land Use and Development**  
H. Pike Oliver, *Principal, the Presidio Group–INTERRA*
- 3:15 p.m.            **Break**
- 3:30 p.m.            **Summary**  
James M. DeFrancia
- 4:00 p.m.            **Adjourn**

# Forum Participants

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