The first in a 3-part series on how expanded transportation choices can strengthen communities and increase opportunity for the people and businesses of BR/NO.
This booklet is the first in a three-part series of policy briefs that explore the opportunity for New Orleans and Baton Rouge to develop an integrated, regional transportation network that supports strong communities and improves opportunity for the region's residents and businesses.

With funding from the Surdna Foundation, this project was commissioned by CONNECT, a coalition that works across the New Orleans and Baton Rouge regions to advocate for expanded mobility choices that offer improved access to affordable homes, job centers and equitable economic opportunity. The CONNECT Coalition is made up of a diverse group of public and private sector organizations from Baton Rouge, New Orleans and the communities in between.

CONNECT is a project of the Center for Planning Excellence (CPEX). CPEX helps create highly functional, equitable communities throughout Louisiana that capitalize on their unique qualities through community-driven planning and implementation. We provide best-practice planning models, innovative policy ideas, and technical assistance to individual communities that wish to create and enact master plans dealing with transportation and infrastructure needs, equitable housing opportunities, environmental issues, and quality design for the built environment. CPEX brings community members and leaders together and provides guidance as they work toward a shared vision for future growth and development.

For more information on this report or the CONNECT Coalition, contact CPEX at connect@cpex.org or visit connect.cpex.org

This report was prepared by Reconnecting America, a national nonprofit that is helping to transform promising ideas into thriving communities – where transportation choices make it easy to get from place to place, where businesses flourish, and where people from all walks of life can afford to live, work and visit.

www.reconnectingamerica.org
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What does the future look like in greater Baton Rouge/New Orleans?

The New Orleans and Baton Rouge regions are known to their residents as desirable places to live – with a distinct sense of cultural identity, a population of creative and resilient people, and a rich network of neighborhoods that people are proud to call home. But Louisiana’s two largest cities also face some challenges. Only a small portion of residents live near high-quality public transit, many of the regions’ neighborhoods need revitalization and traffic congestion threatens to dampen the quality-of-life and economic prosperity of communities.

Many regions around the United States face similar challenges and are responding with plans for “Sustainable Regional Development.” Sustainable Regional Development means growing in a way that preserves and strengthens the region’s existing neighborhoods, improves job access and economic opportunity for individuals and businesses, and ensures that all residents have access to quality public transportation.

The Baton Rouge and New Orleans regions (BR/NO) are at an important crossroads. Hurricanes Katrina led to major shifts in population within the region and left many neighborhoods in shambles. For this reason, in 2007 the Center for Planning Excellence and the Louisiana Recovery Authority published the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan, a long-term vision for growth and recovery following the storms. Based on input from over 27,000 residents, the Plan calls on the region to “grow smarter,” by building diverse communities with a range of housing and transportation options, and to “think regionally” when it comes to policies and investments. The Louisiana Speaks Plan lays the foundation for a regional conversation about the link between growth, transportation, economic development and coastal restoration.

Although challenging, this level of coordination is critical, as no single city or parish alone can secure the long-term prosperity of the region’s communities and economy. This series of policy briefs is part of that continued conversation. Sustainable Regional Development requires a great deal of coordination – between the many state, city, parish and other governmental agencies whose work impacts the region; with an array of citizens, elected leaders, businesses, developers and nonprofit organizations; and between plans for growth, transit, housing and economic development. Although challenging, this level of coordination is critical, as no single city or parish alone can secure the long-term prosperity of the region’s communities and economy.

Central to achieving a sustainable future in BR/NO will be building an integrated transit network that both connects the state’s largest cities and eases travel within cities. Expanded transit options were a central priority identified through the Louisiana Speaks process and in recent local comprehensive planning in Baton Rouge and New Orleans. As more and more U.S. regions race to build high-quality transit networks, it is clear that places like Baton Rouge and New Orleans need to reinforce and expand their transit networks in order to stay competitive.

Now is the time for the metropolitan areas around New Orleans and Baton Rouge – or the BR/NO ‘super region’ - to plan for the investments that will set southeast Louisiana on a path to expanded prosperity throughout the 21st century. The case for sustainable development is strong and this brief outlines the key players and strategies needed to realize BR/NO’s potential as a thriving, sustainable super region.

Learn more about Louisiana Speaks at: cpex.org/work/louisiana-speaks
What is a “Super Region?”

As Baton Rouge and New Orleans continue to grow, the boundaries between them continue to blur. Overlapping commuting patterns, an interwoven social culture and a shared ecology mean that transportation and community investments and policy must be coordinated at a new geographical scale. The combined metropolitan areas of Baton Rouge and New Orleans represent roughly half the state’s population, jobs and gross domestic product. Planning for transportation and development at the super regional scale will primarily require the involvement of the metro centers of East Baton Rouge and Orleans Parishes, though it will be essential to coordinate on some issues with the Jefferson, Ascension, St. Charles, St. John, St. James Parishes and nearby parishes.

Similar super regional planning efforts are happening in other places around the country. For example, in Florida, a super regional planning effort is underway on the 85-mile corridor between Tampa and Orlando. This effort is being led by The Central Florida Partnership and the Tampa Bay Partnership, both nonprofit consortia of public and private organizations dedicated to strengthening the businesses of Central Florida. In 2010, catalyzed by the plans to build high-speed rail between Tampa and Orlando, the groups held a Super Regional Leadership conference for business and elected leaders to discuss the potential advantages of coast-to-coast connectivity and to develop a super regional strategy for transportation and land use, economic and workforce development, environmental sustainability and quality-of-life issues. In early 2011, the groups launched “Forward Florida: The Voice of Florida’s Super Region,” a monthly magazine that discusses the role of transportation, connectivity and sustainability in securing the global competitiveness of Central Florida.
Building a Sustainable Super Region in BR/NO will require three key ingredients:

1. Improved Connections Between the State’s Largest Metro Areas

Over 27,000 Louisiana residents participated in the Louisiana Speaks planning effort, which prioritized the need for an intercity commuter rail link between the Baton Rouge and New Orleans metro areas. By connecting the two largest metro areas in the state, this new rail line would allow the state’s largest job centers to function as a single economic unit. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the state’s jobs are located along this corridor and more than eighty eight percent (88%) of the ridership on the route is expected to come from work-related trips. Improving the flow of people and ideas along the corridor would give companies access to a larger labor pool, give employees more choices in where to live, and make the region more attractive for business expansion. The proposed service, which would make the trip between Baton Rouge and New Orleans in about 90 minutes, is also a segment on the future high-speed rail corridor from Houston to New Orleans to Atlanta. With the potential for both local and high-speed passenger trains operating along this corridor in the future, the BR/NO super region is poised to be a premier national destination for business relocation and retention, job growth and economic development.

In addition to providing new economic growth in the super region, the intercity connection will provide a critical additional evacuation route and provide low-income communities greater access to job centers. As shown in the chart above, both New Orleans and Baton Rouge regions have lower car ownership rates compared to the national average. This fact makes these cities prime candidates for expanded regional transit networks but also leaves a vast population of residents vulnerable during a natural disaster. The resiliency of New Orleans and Baton Rouge is dependent upon improving and diversifying the region’s evacuation routes.

![Household Vehicle Availability](image)

A 2010 poll\(^2\) shows that 75 percent of residents along the proposed intercity corridor support the Baton Rouge to New Orleans passenger rail line.

2. Improved Transit Within Parishes

In addition to the need to connect the two largest cities in the state, BR/NO needs improved transit connectivity within each city – between the central business districts, the surrounding neighborhoods, smaller job centers along the corridor, and to the coastal areas. While New Orleans is actively pursuing new streetcar lines and has preliminary plans for a rapid transit link between downtown and the airport, transit in Baton Rouge is limited to local bus service. Transit is simply not available in most of the region’s rural communities like Gonzales.

A quality urban transit network is an integrated system that typically includes rapid transit (i.e. streetcars, light rail, bus-rapid transit or other high-frequency bus service) on busy corridors and a network of local buses serving neighborhoods and lower-density places. A quality urban transit network has the power to transform a region – providing a backbone around which regional growth and development can occur, giving residents an affordable and low-stress way to travel, and securing the identity of a region as a forward-thinking urban center where talented people will be attracted to live. But to deliver these benefits at a meaningful scale, the transit network has to provide a high level of service to a broad geography and has to be integrated with other modes of transportation, like walking, biking, inter-city rail and the automobile.

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1 Baton Rouge-New Orleans Intercity Passenger Rail Service Development Plan, Burke-Kleinpeter, 2010
2 Regional poll of residents in parishes intersected by the proposed intercity rail corridor from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. Conducted in November 2010 and commissioned by the National Association of Realtors with the Center for Planning Excellence
3 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2005-2009, for the cities of Baton Rouge and New Orleans
Fixed-guideway transit systems (those that run in their own right-of-way such as light rail and streetcars) have the greatest potential to attract riders and encourage investment along transit corridors. At the same time, it is important to note that a high-quality regional transit network typically includes both fixed-guideway transit and a supporting network of local buses. In BR/NO, reliable local bus service will be particularly critical to increasing job access and mobility for people living in rural communities and lower-income neighborhoods, where vehicle ownership rates are especially low.

Research from 2009 by the Center for Transit Oriented Development (CTOD) shows that transit corridors linking multiple regional destinations, such as employment centers, are the most likely to achieve promised ridership and economic returns. The table below shows the relationship between ridership and the number of jobs located near new light rail stations in six U.S. transit regions.

Building transit is only half the battle. In order to secure a long-term future for the system and for the communities and businesses that depend on it, an ongoing, stable revenue source must be identified to support transit operations. Sales taxes and property taxes are among the most common dedicated local sources of transit operations funding. Currently a sales tax in New Orleans and a portion of property taxes in Jefferson Parish are dedicated to transit operations. In Baton Rouge there is not a dedicated source of funding for transit operations. Facing budget shortfalls and unstable revenues, cities and regions around the U.S. are increasingly looking for creative ways to generate transit operating revenues. For example, in Florida, Broward County collects an assessment on new development called a “transit concurrency fee.” The fee revenues are used for transit projects in the district where they are collected and have been used in some cases to support transit operations. In another example, there is a proposal to raise operating funds for a streetcar route in Colombus, Ohio by charging a surcharge on parking and tickets to concerts and sporting events located near the transit line.

### 3. Affordable, Walkable, Transit Oriented Communities

Affordable, walkable communities with high-quality public transit and a mixture of uses allow residents and workers to drive less and own fewer cars, while still accessing jobs, education, services and economic opportunity, thus generating significant benefits for individuals, commuters, businesses, the neighborhood, the city and the region as a whole. Communities with these characteristics are referred to as transit oriented development (TOD). TOD is not a one-size-fits-all solution – the density and mix of uses (residential, retail, office, etc.) will vary depending on the character of the surrounding community.

Estimates by CTOD indicate that demand for walkable “urban-style” places will represent at least one third of the U.S. housing market by 2030. Much of this demand will come from aging baby boomers and young professionals. CTOD estimates for the New Orleans region show that though there were 31,685 households near transit in 2000, demand for housing near transit will more than double to over 64,000 households by 2030 (estimates are not available for Baton Rouge). In particular, the growing population of senior citizens in BR/NO will need access to affordable housing in transit rich neighborhoods with services and amenities located nearby. East Baton Rouge’s population of seniors (people older than 65) is projected to grow from eleven percent (11%) to seventeen percent (17%) from 2005 to 2025. In Orleans Parish, seniors will represent twenty percent (20%) of the population in 2025, up from twelve percent (12%) in 2005.5

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### Jobs and Ridership on Recently Constructed Light Rail Lines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Light Rail System</th>
<th>Jobs 1/2 mile from transit stops</th>
<th>Transit Trips/Day (2007)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Houston Red Line</td>
<td>221,431</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denver SE Corridor</td>
<td>220,254</td>
<td>36,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minneapolis Hiawatha</td>
<td>177,453</td>
<td>30,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Diego Green</td>
<td>133,157</td>
<td>26,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Los Angeles Gold</td>
<td>120,441</td>
<td>22,231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland Yellow Line</td>
<td>100,434</td>
<td>13,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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5 U.S. Census Bureau 1970-1979 Intercensal County Estimates by Age, Sex, Race; 2005-2009 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates; Louisiana State Census Data Center Population Projections
Thriving transit-oriented development supports increased pedestrian travel, as people who live within a half mile of transit are five times more likely to access transit by foot. The increase in pedestrian activity on the street creates active, dynamic neighborhoods, and the additional “foot traffic” helps support local businesses. What’s more, walking matters to the people of Baton Rouge and New Orleans. In the 2010 regional poll, more than three-quarters of surveyed residents said it is important to live in neighborhoods with sidewalks so they can walk to work or to visit friends.

Another benefit of walkable, transit-oriented communities is the opportunity to reduce transportation expenses for households located near transit. Though it is common to define “affordability” only in terms of housing costs, transportation expenses can make up more than a quarter of the household budget in auto-dependent locations. A key component of reducing transportation costs is lessening auto dependence: when residents and workers have the choice to walk, bike, or take transit when commuting or doing other errands, they have the choice to drive less or own fewer cars. The potential savings could be meaningful in the BR/NO super region, as households spend an estimated 24 percent (New Orleans) and 27 percent (Baton Rouge) of their household budget on transportation.6

What is Transit-Oriented Development (TOD)?

Transit-oriented development is a mixture of housing, retail and/or commercial development and amenities integrated into a walkable neighborhood and located within a half-mile of quality public transportation. Some of the benefits of TOD include:

» Reduced vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and thereby lowered regional congestion, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions
» Walkable communities that accommodate more healthy and active lifestyles
» Increased transit ridership and fare revenue
» Potential for added value created through increased and/or sustained property values where transit investments have occurred
» Improved access to job centers and economic opportunity for low-income people and working families
» Expanded mobility choices that reduce dependence on the automobile, reduce transportation costs and free up household income for other purposes

TOD is not only about new development, it is also about making targeted investments that improve walkability, quality-of-life, transit and housing access in a region’s existing neighborhoods and job centers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Annual Cost of Car Ownership per Household6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Baton Rouge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6 Housing and Transportation Affordability Index, Center for Transit-Oriented Development and Center for Neighborhood Technology, www.htaindex.org
People travel and make decisions about where to live, shop and work at a regional scale. Building a regional network of transit-oriented communities gives more people access to the jobs, housing, education, shopping and entertainment located near transit, amplifying the potential for each place to thrive.

When neighboring jurisdictions compete for jobs and development, or plan transportation systems that aren’t complementary, they perpetuate a cycle of regional traffic congestion and wasteful spending. Similarly, local land use policies can’t exist in isolation in metropolitan regions. For example, if only one community has a policy that requires private developers to provide certain community amenities like sidewalks, then some developers may move their projects to neighboring communities where those regulations are not in place. Working across jurisdictional boundaries and coordinating plans at the regional (and in some cases super regional) scale is critical to avoid a piecemeal investment approach.

Why Work Together?
Because No One City or Parish Can Do it Alone

When neighboring jurisdictions compete for jobs and development, or plan transportation systems that aren’t complementary, they perpetuate a cycle of regional congestion, traffic and wasteful spending.

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7 CTOD Housing + Transportation Affordability Index, 2004 Bureau of Labor Statistics

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Estimated Household Expenditures in Three Locations with the Same Cost of Housing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transit Rich Neighborhood</th>
<th>Average American Family</th>
<th>Auto Dependent Neighborhood</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>59% Other Expenses</td>
<td>43% Other Expenses</td>
<td>32% Other Expenses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32% Housing</td>
<td>32% Housing</td>
<td>32% Housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9% Transportation</td>
<td>11% Insurance</td>
<td>23% Transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13% Food</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4% Apparel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6% Entertainment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5% Healthcare</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9% Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Three Benefits of Regional Coordination Between Transportation and Community Development Issues

1. Improved Access and Reduced Congestion

Congestion threatens quality-of-life and can act as a chokehold on economic growth when crowded freeways are the only way to reach jobs and other destinations. The 2010 regional poll found that 3 in 4 residents are concerned about traffic and congestion, and 4 in 10 are very concerned. Furthermore, a recent study by the Texas Transportation Institute found that the Baton Rouge metro area has the nation’s worst traffic among mid-sized cities, with commuters spending 37 hours each year in traffic. New Orleans scored better in the report, ranking 29th out of 31 mid-sized cities for traffic. Yet, New Orleans drivers still spend 31 hours per year mired in traffic.8

Reduced traffic is an important benefit of sustainable development, but it is most apparent over the long term at the area-wide or regional scale. A regional transit network that connects major job centers offers commuters alternatives to driving, increasing the number of workers that can access employment centers without exponentially adding to the number of cars on the road. For instance, BART, the subway system in the San Francisco Bay Area, provides access that has enabled job growth to continue in San Francisco’s financial district in spite of severe traffic congestion on the bridges into the city.

2. Greater Opportunity for Regional Economic Growth

By reducing travel times, lowering transportation costs, improving job access, and creating distinct, walkable places, transit and TOD can support a strong regional economy. Research shows that transit facilitates greater job density, knowledge agglomeration and the exchange of ideas – which can spur innovation. Studies also show that walkable places with urban character attract younger “knowledge talent,” and that jobs near transit are more accessible to the growing population of people in their twenties who are “transit dependent by choice.” Increasingly, ease of access, cost of living and quality of life are among the factors that firms look for when deciding where to locate or expand their businesses. According to Jay Biggins, executive managing director of the corporate site selection firm Biggins Shapire & Co., firms today want “more mixed-use developments, more work and play environments. Companies like transit hubs for office locations.”9 Thriving urban centers with transportation choices can attract new industry and improve existing job bases such as tourism, education and health care.

Employers also benefit when workers can commute without fighting congestion. Quality transportation alternatives have been shown to reduce tardiness and absenteeism, and give employers a competitive advantage in the search for high-quality employees. Employees taking transit are less affected by the grind of driving to work in daily traffic, appreciate the predictability and reliability of transit, and are able to spend more time with their families not sitting in highway congestion. The extent of the regional economic benefit realized from sustainable development will depend on the scale and quality of the transit network and will multiply as more of the region’s communities become walkable, transit-oriented districts.

Investing in walkable, transit-rich neighborhoods can also support local economic development, through increased property values and sales tax revenue from local shops and restaurants.

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8 “2009 Annual Urban Mobility Report,” Texas Transportation Institute, http://mobility.tamu.edu
9 “After the fall: Opportunities and Strategies for Real Estate Investing in the Coming Decade,” Steve Bergsman, 2009
This increased value and revenue varies place to place, but studies have shown that property values along the Southeast light rail line in Denver increased four percent (4%) while regionwide, values declined by seven and a half percent (7.5%), and property values near the streetcar route in Tampa have increased four hundred percent (400%).

Another study found that, in Dallas, property values along the light rail system increased fifty percent (50%) from 2005 to 2007 and that existing and planned development near stations would bring in an additional $127 million in tax revenues per year. The extent of the increase in value depends on a range of factors, including the availability of developable or underutilized land, the frequency of transit service, real estate market conditions and disincentives to driving (congestion, high gas prices). Value Capture strategies allow communities to ensure that a portion of increased revenues are re-invested into the transit system or the surrounding community. Value Capture and the economic benefits of walkable, transit-rich neighborhoods will be explored further in a subsequent brief.

3. A Unified Approach to Equity and Accessible Housing

As discussed above, living near transit allows households to reduce their transportation expenses. For this reason, it is important that people earning a range of incomes have the opportunity to live near transit. While many home buyers “drive till you qualify” for lower-cost housing at the edge of the urban area, additional transportation and commuting costs can counteract lower housing costs. A 2005 study reported that for every dollar saved on cheaper housing in the suburbs, households spend 77 cents more on transportation. Regional employers benefit from mixed-income, transit oriented housing by gaining access to an expanded workforce, and there is potential for greater regional congestion relief if people of all incomes can afford to live near transit. A regional approach to transit-oriented development means that cities and parishes share the responsibility of planning for and building housing that is located near transit stops and accommodates workers at all wage levels.

10 “Value Capture and Tax-Increment Financing Options for Streetcar Construction,” The Brookings Institute, HDR, Reconnecting America and RCLCO, 2009
12 “A Heavy Load,” Center for Housing Policy, 2008
**Five Key Strategies for Sustainable Regional Development**

This report offers five strategies that have helped other U.S. regions coordinate housing, growth and transportation planning at the regional level. These steps are not meant to be linear; planning for Sustainable Regional Development is a continual process and some of these strategies, such as Education and Outreach, must be an ongoing part of the region’s work. In many cases, there is already work underway in the BR/NO super region that supports the strategies discussed below.

1. **Identify Champions and Key Stakeholders**

   In regions around the U.S., the combination of a catalytic issue and a key champion has created the synergy needed to meaningfully advance sustainable regional development. A catalytic issue might be transit construction, a funding crisis, or an influx of federal funding. A champion might be a mayor or team of mayors, a consortium of business leaders, or an influential community leader. For example, during the development of an extensive new regional transit system in Denver, Mayor John Hickenlooper was a steady and vocal supporter of building communities around the transit system. Similar leadership around this issue has already been demonstrated in BR/NO through the collaboration of Baton Rouge and New Orleans’ Mayors taking steps to form the Rail Compact, the municipal authority that would oversee the implementation of the proposed intercity rail line linking Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

   Efforts to advance sustainable regional development are not always led by elected leaders. For example, in Pittsburgh, a collaborative of community development corporations (CDCs) formed a working group with the goal of elevating TOD planning on the regional agenda. In addition to key champions, the graphic to the right shows the many different “actors” who have a role in sustainable regional development.

2. **Conduct Education and Outreach**

   One of the biggest challenges to creating programs and policies that encourage mobility choices and walkable, transit-rich neighborhoods is that area leaders and residents often do not understand why or how sustainable regional development can benefit their communities. Seminars and workshops can help stakeholders understand the potential benefits of quality transit, and can give them the vocabulary they need to make the case for sustainable regional development to their own constituents or communities. For example, in the Tri-State Region of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, the Regional Plan Association and its Mayors’ Institute on Community Design held a multi-day work session on “transit-centered design” with the goal of inspiring and mobilizing elected officials in Long Island.

   The CONNECT Coalition was formed to help provide education and outreach on transportation and land use issues that affect the Baton Rouge and New Orleans super region.

   For more information about CONNECT, visit: [connect.cpex.org](http://connect.cpex.org)
3. Coordinate Planning Efforts

Often, plans for transportation, long-range growth, housing and economic development are created at different levels of government and in isolation from one another. For example, while significant transportation investments are often planned at the state or regional level, land use authority resides at the local level.

One example of integrated planning is underway in the greater Cleveland region of Ohio, where 21 public and private sector organizations (including four metropolitan planning organizations) are partnering to develop a cooperative regional sustainability plan addressing equitable housing, land use, transportation, community development, water and sewer infrastructure, and economic development issues for a 12 county planning area.

The Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan was a critical step toward linking transportation, growth, economic development and coastal planning in southeast Louisiana. A recent example at the parish level is East Baton Rouge’s Comprehensive Plan, FUTUREBR, which is being developed through a highly interactive public process which uses future growth scenarios to show the relationship between the street network, transit, bicycle and pedestrian travel ways, and future jobs, housing and other growth.

4. Adopt Policies that Encourage Sustainable Development

Policies that support sustainable regional development are designed to remove barriers, supplement development costs, or create incentives for growth near transit stations. States can adopt such policies, as in Maryland where the 2010 Sustainable Communities Act expands the state historic structures grant program to include non-historic structures located near transit. Similarly, the Illinois Business Location Efficiency Act provides tax credits to businesses selecting sites within one mile of transit and affordable housing. Transit agencies also have an important role to play in this arena. For example, they can adopt urban design guidelines for transit station areas or joint development policies that create a framework for transit agency participation in redevelopment efforts along transit corridors.

In 2010, Reconnecting America conducted a national scan of programs and policies from around the U.S. that provide grants, loans and tax credits to support transit-oriented development. The study reviewed 42 programs at the state, regional, transit agency and local levels, and made recommendations on how to develop programs that meet the specific needs of a region.

Read this report at www.reconnectingamerica.org

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1. APTA 2010 Public Transportation Fact Book; seattlestreetcar.org; Federal Transit Administration

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Cleveland, OH (photo by Dave Plenzke/Stickware)
5. Align Resources and Create a Financing Strategy

Identifying the necessary resources can be the most challenging step in implementing a regional vision for sustainable development, and every U.S. region takes a different approach. When it comes to building transit, a combination of funding sources is common.

In addition to funding transit, additional revenue is needed for station-area planning, infrastructure and other community improvements. Along the Central Corridor in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, a recent CTOD report estimates that, in addition to the $1 billion in transit investment, an average of $300 million in additional public investment will be needed to implement the community-based plans for the corridor, which call for street improvements, parks, utilities and other infrastructure projects. The transit investment, however, is anticipated to unlock $6.5 billion in private investment in the area.

Some financing strategies that have been used around the country to support transit-oriented development include:

- **Regional Grant programs for station area plans:** For example, the metropolitan planning organization in the Atlanta region provides planning and capital grants for transit station areas through its Livable Centers Initiative.

- **Business Improvement Districts for station area improvements:** For example, in 1992 businesses in downtown Denver voted to create a Business Improvement District, where an annual assessment is used to maintain and improve the 16th Street pedestrian and transit mall.

- **Tax Allocation District for large-scale redevelopment:** For example, the Atlanta Beltline Initiative is a $2.8 billion redevelopment project along a 22-mile historic rail corridor circling downtown Atlanta. The Beltline Plan includes launching rail transit service and building trails, affordable housing and other improvements in adjacent neighborhoods. The project will be funded in part by a tax allocation district, which means that increases in property tax revenue collected from the district will be dedicated to redevelopment projects in the area.

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13 Central Corridor TOD Investment Framework, CTOD, Bonestroo and Springsted, 2010
Case Studies

This section provides case studies of two regions that are using transit to transform patterns of growth and development at the regional scale. The Minneapolis-Saint Paul region is included as a model for how several jurisdictions can work together to link plans for commuter rail, urban transit and economic development. The Denver region offers lessons on undertaking an aggressive transit-expansion program and using that new transit to redefine how the region grows.

Light Rail, Commuter Rail and TOD in the Twin Cities

In the Minneapolis-Saint Paul region, economic development and congestion relief are the driving forces behind the construction of a regional transit system that includes three light rail corridors, a 40-mile commuter rail line, a bus rapid transit line and other local bus improvements. The capital for the transit projects is coming in part from increased sales taxes and a fee on auto sales approved by voters in five Twin Cities counties. Alongside the transit investment, the region is seeking to encourage development and reinvestment and to improve equitable access to jobs. The first light rail line to be constructed, the Hiawatha Line, opened in 2004 and connects a number of important regional destinations, including downtown Minneapolis, MSP Airport, the Mall of America, the Metrodome and the new Minneapolis Twins’ ballpark, sited downtown after the construction of the transit line. The City of Minneapolis has engaged the community in a series of station area planning and rezoning efforts for six of the neighborhood station areas, hoping to use this process to improve local zoning and support for transit-oriented development, and also to respond to neighborhood concerns regarding the future development vision for these emerging transit zones. The 11 mile Central Corridor, which will connect downtown Minneapolis to Saint Paul, is currently under construction and is expected to open in 2014. The Metropolitan Council (the region’s metropolitan planning organization, which also operates the transit service) estimated in 2010 that 11,500 housing units have already been built along the Central Corridor in anticipation of the system opening.

Community-based and philanthropic organizations have been critical partners in creating the long-term visions for development along the Twin Cities light rail corridors. The Central Corridor Funders Collaborative is a formal partnership of 11 local and national foundations committed to work with community-based organizations and public sector stakeholders to guide residential and business development along the emerging transit corridor.15

In addition to the light rail corridors, the Northstar Commuter Line opened in 2009 connecting downtown Minneapolis to the Twin Cities’ northern suburbs. The Northstar Line connects directly to the Hiawatha Line, providing a seamless link to downtown Minneapolis and, once the Central Corridor opens, Saint Paul. Service began in late 2009, and in 2010 the Metropolitan Council estimates that on an average weekday about 3,400 riders take advantage of the system’s twelve daily trips. The Northstar Line has not seen much private investment along the corridor because of the lower frequency trips, stations surrounded by park-and-ride lots, and resistance from surrounding communities to development. It does, however, contribute significantly to regional goals of reducing household transportation costs and regional congestion.

In addition to these transportation outcomes, transit planning and construction have provided a focus for stakeholders from all sectors, including public officials, real estate developers and advocates for affordable housing, transportation and environmental issues to collaborate around maximizing the benefit of the investment and building a region that will remain economically competitive.

CTOD and other regional partners have gathered more information on transit and TOD in the Twin Cities at www.twincitiestodtoolkit.com

15 Learn more about the Central Corridor Funders Collaborative at www.centralcorridor-funders.org
FasTracks in the Denver Region

Facing an estimated population increase of fifty five percent (55%) over the next 30 years, the Denver region is undertaking one of the nation’s most aggressive transit expansion programs. Managed by Denver’s Regional Transit District, FasTracks is the region’s plan to construct 122 miles of light rail and commuter rail lines, 57 new transit stations and 18 miles of bus-rapid transit in twelve years. In 2004, Denver area voters approved a regional sales tax increase for FasTracks, and later approved an additional increase to make up a budget shortfall. In addition to sales tax revenues, the FasTracks plan is being funded by federal and local contributions. The estimated cost for completion of the project is $6.8 billion.

In addition to providing new transportation options, FasTracks provides an opportunity to enhance the market for transit-oriented development along high frequency bus corridors and at rail stations. Recognizing this opportunity, in 2006 the City and County of Denver adopted the TOD Strategic Plan, which outlines short, medium, and long-term actions needed to maximize the potential for TOD at each station. The plan helps the city allocate resources so that stations with near-term potential are able to move forward under current market conditions, while long-term development opportunities are preserved at those stations where market conditions are weak.

A key part of the Strategic Plan is the adoption of a Station Area Typology, a set of place “types” that define the desired mix of uses, scale, function and transit facilities at each station and reflect both market feasibility and how communities see themselves evolving over time.

Since the adoption of the TOD Strategic Plan, the City and County of Denver have completed station area plans for 8 stations, conducted a regional market study, adopted transit supportive zoning and allocated $6.8 million in bond dollars for infrastructure improvements at station areas. Recognizing that increased property values along transit lines can spur gentrification and that many subsidized affordable housing units near transit were about to convert to market-rate, Denver also created the Transit-Oriented Development Fund, a $25 million loan fund that will provide financing to preserve and create affordable housing units near transit.

Learn more about Denver FasTracks:
www.rtd-fastracks.com
and
www.denvergov.org/tod
Conclusion

A confluence of national and regional issues, including the devastation of neighborhoods by the hurricanes, volatile gas prices, the foreclosure crisis and the growing population of seniors who need better transportation choices, indicates the need for a new approach to transportation and growth in the BR/NO super region. A world-class transit network has the power to serve as the foundation to the super region’s successful and sustainable growth and expansion.

Realizing this important vision will not be easy. It will require decisive leadership and an unprecedented level of coordination and investment from the public sector, private sector and the broader community. Other regions, however, are actively working to craft innovative plans that set the stage for long-term economic prosperity and competitiveness. There is momentum at the federal level, with the Department of Transportation (DOT), the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) all expected to continue supporting sustainable planning efforts in 2011. In short, there is a national call for a renewed approach to how our regions grow and develop, and how we improve access for all people to jobs, housing and opportunity. This is a pivotal opportunity for the New Orleans and Baton Rouge regions to get on board.

The good news is that the BR/NO super region has already laid a foundation for sustainable, regional development. The residents have indicated a desire for improved transportation choices, and the Louisiana Speaks Regional Plan outlines a number of strategies for further coordination of transportation and land use issues. Not insignificant is the fact that some of the region’s established neighborhoods already have many of the features of transit-oriented development: compact buildings, walkable streets, and retail nodes integrated with larger residential development. The many benefits discussed in this report are not out of reach for the BR/NO super region.

The CONNECT Coalition will work with communities to keep these issues at the forefront of the public dialogue. The next brief in this series, to be released in spring 2011, will give more detail on the economic benefits of regional planning for sustainable development. The third brief will share strategies and next steps in advancing a regional transportation and community development vision.

To learn more, visit the CONNECT website at:

connect.cpex.org