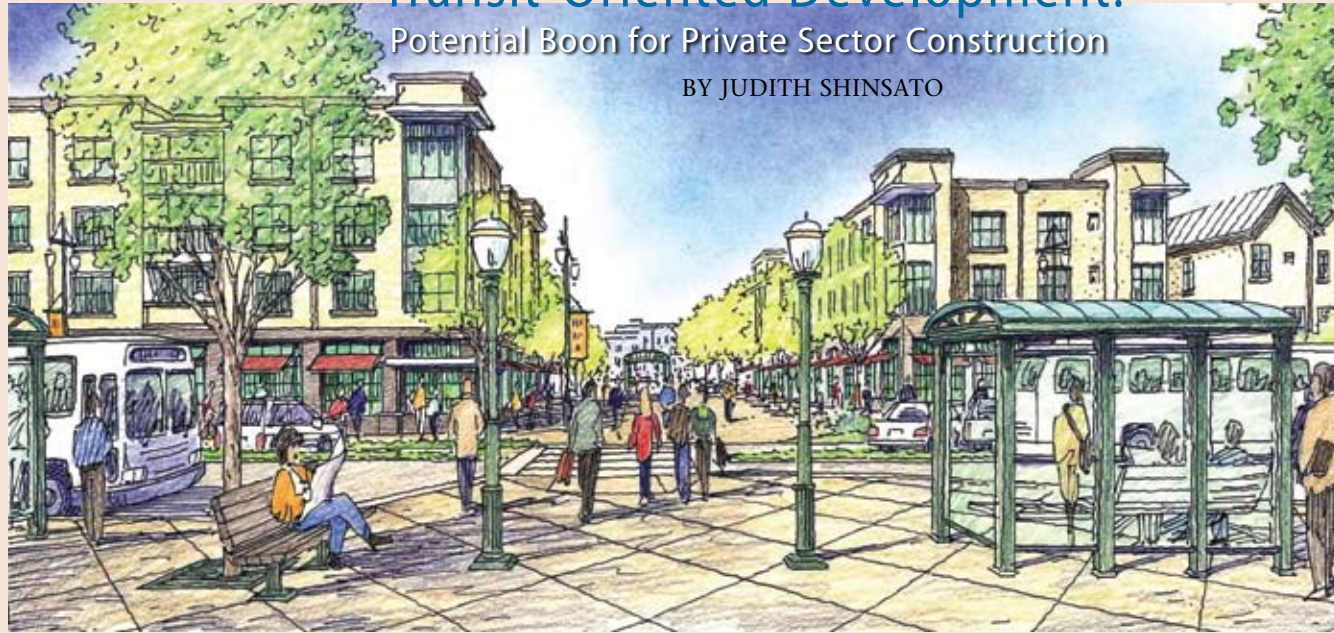


# Transit-Oriented Development:

## Potential Boon for Private Sector Construction

BY JUDITH SHINSATO



TOD is intended to facilitate the development of live-work-play communities.

While there's no denying that the Honolulu High-Capacity Transit Corridor project, colloquially known as rail or rail transit, will change the landscape of Oahu, the transit-oriented development (TOD) that is potentially slated to sprout up also will alter unequivocally the communities we see today. TOD refers to the creation of compact, walkable communities usually centered within a quarter and half mile around transit stations.

With the rail project scheduled to break ground before the end of the year, what is the City and County of Honolulu doing to gear up for TOD? What are some of the incentives for developers being considered? What are the benefits of TOD? Climb aboard and find out.

### Publicly Enabled

In 2006, the City and County of Honolulu began formulating a program to maximize the benefits of TOD, including providing incentives for developers, and in May this year, Mayor Mufi Hannemann signed Bill 10 into law, creating Ordinance 09-04.

"(It) provides directions from the City Council on what it will support as good TOD projects," explains David Tanoue, director of the city's Department of Planning and Permitting (DPP), which heads the TOD program. "If we present ... proposals that comply with (the councilmembers') requirements, we should receive their support on the necessary plans and zoning regulations."

Explaining further, Kathy Sokugawa, chief of the planning division of DPP, says, "Ordinance

09-04 sets the strategy for TOD planning and implementation. It's more of a framework for planning and zoning, rather than the planning and zoning themselves. ... It identifies issues to examine, such as affordable housing potential, reduced parking, urban design, multimodal circulation patterns, etc."

However, a significant aspect of TOD to consider is that, while TOD will be publicly enabled, the city also is relying on the private sector to do its part. "Our responsibility is to maximize the benefits of TOD through neighborhood planning and zoning," explains Sokugawa. "These plans will outline what we want to see in TOD, and zoning will provide regulatory incentives and requirements. It is important for everyone

to understand that the city will not be playing 'master developer.' The city owns no significant amount of land near transit stations that have significant TOD potential; nor is the city planning to condemn land for purposes of developing TOD projects of its own. The city will partner with the private sector, under public-private partnerships."

Tanoue adds, "From a developer's perspective, there will be active, tangible city support for good TOD projects. The obvious benefit (for developers) will be lowered parking requirements, a major construction cost item, higher height limits, assistance with infrastructure costs and other financial incentives."

As a spokesperson for the developers' perspective, Shane Peters,



Rendering of the transit plaza at the Mokuola station, part of the Waipahu TOD draft plan

president of the Hawaii Developers' Council, says, "Effective mass transit has amenities and conveniences within walking distance of transit stops, including shopping, parking and housing. This creates real estate development opportunities in these areas. Hopefully, if executed well, everyone will benefit from TOD. However, we'll need to hear more details from city planners about their vision for TOD and how they intend to foster its development. Specifically, many of us have been interested in learning more about the incentives and conditions for including tax benefits, zoning details, affordable housing requirements, density, etc."

### Benefits of TOD

- an opportunity to reshape our communities with neighborhood reinvestment
- increased possibilities for employing smart growth principles; reduced incentive to sprawl.
- higher quality of life (resulting from having more "free time" instead of driving long commutes)
- cleaner air because of reduced vehicular traffic
- healthier lifestyle because of increased walking since TOD creates pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods where daily needs are often just a short walk away
- reduced household transportation costs
- increased foot traffic and customers for area businesses
- reduced dependence on foreign oil

(as compiled from personal interviews and Internet research)

### Moving Along

To date, two neighborhoods are in the process of establishing a TOD plan: Waipahu and East Kapolei.

The first draft of the Waipahu TOD plan has been completed and the deadline for submitting public comment has passed. "We are (now) analyzing the recommendations – how to take (the plan) to the next step, which would be specific changes to our zoning code, the Land Use Ordinance," says Sokugawa. "Perhaps some modifications to the recommendations also are in order, based on received feedback."

Currently, explains Sokugawa, "The Waipahu TOD Plan respects previous community planning work and supports the plantation era architectural principles, encouraging a low-rise, 'old town' feel to the Waipahu Station (Mokuola) area. It advocates taller, more residential, office and retail uses at the West Loch (Leoku Street) Station. For both stations, improvements to the circulation patterns are recommended, especially for pedestrians. More parks also are recommended as well as opening up visual access to Pearl Harbor and considering current channelized streams as amenities rather than just public works projects. A broad range of housing is also recommended – market, workforce and assisted housing."

A PDF of the Waipahu plan can be viewed on the department's web site: [www.honolulu.dpp.org/planning/](http://www.honolulu.dpp.org/planning/).

"The East Kapolei TOD plan is still in the early stage," continues Sokugawa, "but a popular concept is to have the three transit stations (that are included in this plan) connected by a greenway that could include pedestrian and bike paths. The Hoopili station may actually not be on a road but in a mid-block area, which would make it unique. There is a desire to heavily link visually, as well as physically, the University of Hawaii, West Oahu Station with the campus.

"We are about halfway through the neighborhood planning process. Initial ideas have been circulated with the public." (The third station is the East Kapolei Station.)

"Every community that is hosting a transit station will eventually have a neighborhood TOD plan, but they

will not write their own plan," says Sokugawa. "DPP, with our consultants, will actually draft the plans. Community input will be gathered at well-publicized open meetings, and typically, we will use an advisory committee whose members represent residents, businesses, community organizations and government agencies."

The DPP hopes to start the planning process for the three stations included in the Aiea-Pearl City neighborhood area before the end of this year and start with the Kalihi and downtown stations early next year.

### Great Expectations

The one thing to keep in mind with TOD is that it is long term. While it will undoubtedly provide a multitude of construction opportunities, it is not a quick fix to the current economic crisis and TOD-related projects probably will not start as soon as many would like.

"In the next few months, there may be little activity," says Tanoue. "From the experience of other cities, we know that local landowners and developers are often hesitant to support TOD until the train is actually being constructed or even running. At that point, the potential benefits of being close to a train station are finally realized, and the private sector moves quickly to respond. That's why it's important that the city has its TOD program ready and is able to respond under a coordinated, public-private partnership. (And as for the building industry), Every TOD project is a construction job, whether it is constructing new city roads and blocks in East Kapolei, redeveloping an entire downtown block or renovating an existing office building into an affordable housing project; there will be many jobs created."

"I'm hopeful that with responsible planning for transit, we'll see an influx of capital and investment to Oahu to fund TOD," comments Peters. "That will mean a healthier economy and more employment over the near-term. Over the long term, the goal is to see robust ridership with less people using cars and more people walking, riding their bikes and using transit, thereby benefiting our environment." **BI**