

Transportation challenges; The regional perspective

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After more than half a century of spread city development and an auto centric highway approach to transportation planning, it is time to change direction and promote transit options. An overarching theme for the future is the greater concern now and in the longer term for more compact development that also encourage more use of transit and less reliance on automobiles and highways. Promoting transit oriented development and smart growth that places emphasis on more dense, mixed use development and encourages walking, biking, use of bus and rail are clearly seen as viable alternatives to the wasted time spent in automobiles on congested highways.

For more than 45 years, the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA) has represented the collective vision for the cities of Stamford and Norwalk and

the towns of Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Weston, Westport and Wilton. The 2006 plan of Conservation and Development's major principle, which also guided the 1995 Plan, is the concept of "centrality" which involves directing development to those places with the infrastructure available to support growth while at the same time restricting development in rural and environmentally sensitive areas. Here are three transportation approaches that SWRPA is taking to promote "centrality"

(1) Promoting Transit Oriented Development (TOD)

State DOT has \$5 million as pilot funding to promote TOD, more compact and mixed use development within a five to ten minute walk of a transit hub which usually means a train station along the coastal corridor and even for those communities just to the north.

State DOT, SWRPA and its municipalities have been meeting to promote TOD's throughout the region. The two major TOD's



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currently underway are Antares in Stamford and Georgetown in Wilton and Redding.

(2) Advancing Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)

The bus is the most often used form of transit because of its affordability. Since the bus

uses the same streets as the automobile and truck, unfortunately it is all too often stuck in traffic. BRT seeks to speed the bus trip through local areas by providing preferential green signals, skip-stops, among other proposed treatments.

Currently SWRPA has initiated a BRT study along the heavily trafficked Route 1 corridor between Greenwich and Norwalk. If this study has positive results, efforts would be made to extend BRT along the coastal corridor to Westport and east into the Greater Bridgeport region. The feasibility of north-south routes would also be explored.

(3) Promoting Congestion Pricing

The New York Times recently reported that when I-95 opened on January 2, 1958 it was viewed as "a ribbon of hope". Few, if any traveling this route during

the peak journey to work hours would share this view. Because of the love affair with the car, we have constructed so many highways, they are land locked. Congestion pricing offers a way to reduce automobile traffic, promote transit and cleaner air and provide an innovative revenue source along the way.

South Western has been a leading advocate of this approach because we cannot build our way out of congestion. Time of day pricing is the fastest and least costly way of dealing with the problem of congestion.

In summary, by promoting TOD, BRT and Congestion Pricing, SWRPA's regional planning goal of "centrality" will be promoted as the population becomes more transit conscious, environmentally friendly with a more favorable business outlook through the new mobility of promoting more