

Touro College Jacob D. Fuchsberg Law Center

From the Selected Works of Michael E Lewyn

October 30, 2018

Introduction to Transit-Oriented Development

Michael Lewyn



Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/lewyn/171/>

Traditionally, train stations in outer suburbs looked like Central Islip's train station- a giant, desolate park-and-ride surrounded by almost nothing but parking and more parking. But in recent years, the idea of transit-oriented development (or TOD) has become more popular.

What is TOD? TOD is development that places housing and offices within walking distance of train stations, so that people can actually walk to stations from their homes and jobs. TOD is not new: in closer-in suburbs like Great Neck and Cedarhurst, it is common to have housing near stations. But historically this has been less true for suburbs in eastern Nassau and Suffolk Counties. However, TOD is becoming more popular in outer suburbs, and today's speeches will provide us with numerous examples.

What are the advantages of TOD? First of all, TOD creates less pollution and carbon emissions than typical suburban development, because commuters are walking to the train station instead of driving

Second, where TOD supplements rather than substituting for other suburban development, regional housing supply increases, keeping rents down. Suppose that a new apartment building in downtown Mineola houses 100 people. That's 100 fewer people who are renting apartments elsewhere in the region, which means 100 more housing spaces available for everyone else.

Third, TOD makes suburbs more attractive to people who want to live in walkable communities, thus reducing the Long Island "brain drain" that other speeches here have discussed.

Does TOD make a difference in people's commuting habits? It does seem that zip codes near the most walkable LIRR stations have different commuting patterns than nearby zip codes that do not include the stations. For example, in zip code 11021 (which includes downtown Great Neck) 36 percent of people either take transit to work or walk to work, while in zip 11020 next door the comparable percentage is 25 percent. And in zip code 11742 (the Levittown zip code, most of which is two or three miles from the nearest train) only 12 percent of residents walk or take transit to work. So clearly TOD affects, or at least correlates with, high levels of transit use.

Finally, I'd like to discuss what sort of zoning makes sense for TOD? Generally, any zoning that facilitates walking rather than driving to a station. For example, typical suburban zoning requires housing and stores to be set back at least 25 feet from the street, requiring pedestrians to walk through a parking lot and dodge cars. By contrast, TOD zoning usually encourages shops and apartments to be in front of the streets. Other relevant factors include density and street design: more households that live near a transit station means more people who can use transit, and narrower streets are easier for pedestrians to cross than wide streets.

Our other speakers will discuss specific new examples of TOD in Long Island.