

PLANNING AND ZONING SERVICES

Blue Line – Bus Rapid Transit
Indianapolis Public Transportation Corporation

Problem Statement

October 2019



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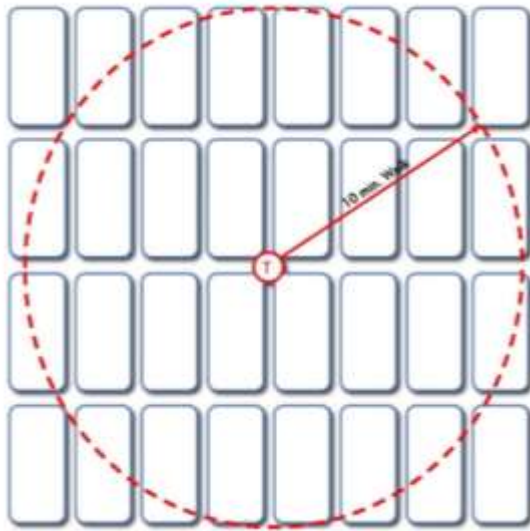
INTRODUCTION

The investment being made in transit in Indianapolis and Marion County is significant and creates the potential to support positive changes in the community. To protect and capitalize on the community's collective investments, particularly those made in the bus rapid transit (BRT) system, it is important to locate, plan and design development with transit in mind. The policies and regulations that guide development must enable and anticipate projects that reinforce and sustain the transit system. This type of development and investment is referred to as "transit-oriented development" ("TOD"). As noted in the Policy Evaluation Report and the Regulatory Conformance Report, the development and investment policies of the City and County align with the tenets of transit-oriented development. However, the regulations and codes that implement development do not align as well as they should with adopted TOD policies. This Problem Statement summarizes the issues with the Indianapolis / Marion County Consolidated Zoning Code, and its capacity to ensure transit-oriented development in support of recent and future transit investments.

WHAT IS TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Transit-oriented development is a departure from more recent development and community building practices, particularly in less-dense, dispersed communities designed primarily to accommodate the automobile. However, transit-oriented development is not necessarily a new practice. In fact, it represents the way places and cities were built for centuries; compact, connected, and diverse. These types of places already exist in Indianapolis and Marion County, and they remain some of the most popular neighborhoods in the community. Areas easily served by transit have the following attributes:

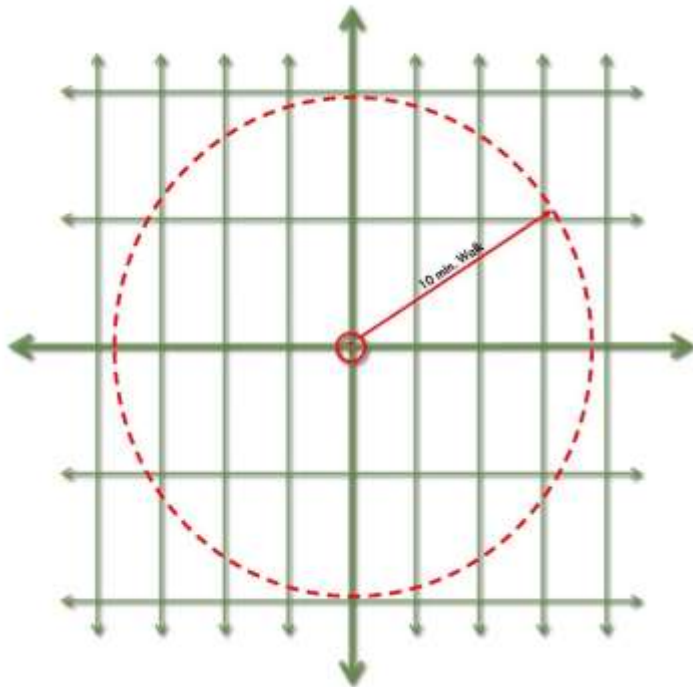
- I. Compact – compact places have a concentration of destinations within a 10-minute walk.



compact

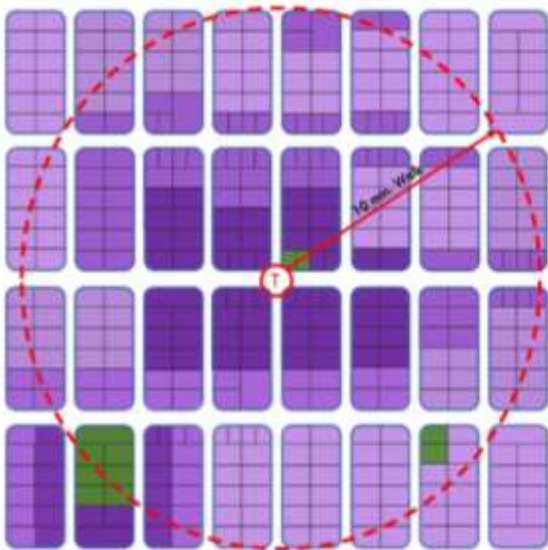
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- II. Connected – greater connectivity provides more and shorter routes within a place; it improves access between different places; and it increases transportation choices including options for transit, biking, and walking.



connected

- III. Diverse – diverse places provide a wide variety of reasons for people to be there, including living, working, and playing.



diverse

These attributes are the essence of creating places that support the existing and future transit system.

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WHY TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

The benefits of transit-oriented development to a community are numerous. Policies adopted by the city/county recognize the physical, social and economic impacts. Areas developed in transit-oriented patterns have the following additional benefits:

- I. Access – building a local and regional multimodal network supports mobility and gives people within the community access to jobs, education, housing, and essential services, such as health care.
- II. Placemaking – designing and building places that are memorable, inviting and comfortable for people ensures that places remain vital and reflect local lifestyles and needs.
- III. Value – developing in a pattern that leverages public investments and infrastructure maximizes the physical, social and economic value to people and the community.

These benefits are maximized when we locate, plan and design development with transit in mind.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

STATEMENT

The Indianapolis / Marion County Consolidated Zoning Code presents two primary problems that can undermine investment in transit-oriented development patterns: (1) there is a lack of urban design standards that ensure the development of human-scale places; and (2) the development standards do not require a pattern of uses and buildings that result in compact, diverse and well-integrated places. While the standards could be interpreted to allow some of these important attributes, in many cases they do not require, or emphasize it, and are as likely to promote development patterns that undermine or compete with these investments where they do occur. Additionally, because the regulations are structured with most standards keyed to a zoning district, and coupled with a lack of design and scale standards, there is less ability to make meaningful distinctions between different types of places, between different contexts within a place, and between different types of projects that contribute to a vital and fine-grained block or street. These strategies – addressing the design and scale of projects; and accommodating the nuanced distinctions between the many different projects that make up complex and vibrant mixed-use areas – are essential to implementing transit-oriented development more easily and effectively.

These problems are exposed through four topics that are deficient or missing in the Zoning Code – public space, urban form, the mixing of uses, and housing diversity. The transit-oriented development policies adopted in city/county plans, including the Blue Line Strategic plan, focus on these issues (see Policy Evaluation Report). Each topic is summarized below, and a detailed analysis of the gaps or deficiencies in the regulations is included in the Regulatory Conformance Report.

- I. **Public Space** – Public spaces include streets, parks, open and civic spaces that contribute to people's experience and their perception of the community. Public space is important to a community because it connects people and places, it supports development, and it expresses the values and priorities of the community through its design. The current regulations

lack public space design standards that ensure active and usable spaces, and that distinguish between the many types of spaces necessary to support development in the varied contexts along the Blue Line Corridor.

Without these standards, quality public spaces and well-designed, multi-modal streets are not emphasized as the fundamental determinant of context for development. As a result, we lose expectations for appropriate development patterns that shape these spaces and capitalize on transit investments.

- II. Urban Form** – Urban form defines the scale, orientation, and relationship of development to public space. These elements can be prescribed to shape comfortable, human-scaled public spaces that attract people. A few, simple urban design patterns create these relationships and can be adjusted to support different contexts. The current regulations begin to address urban form, but lack clear and consistent standards or well-defined approaches that emphasize these relationships where they are most important, and where distinctions may be necessary for the varied contexts within transit-served areas and throughout the Blue Line Corridor.

Without explicit and more refined urban form standards, there are fewer expectations for how buildings create a compact, walkable development patterns and shape the public spaces.

- III. Mix of Uses** - The range of different uses define the experience and vitality of a place. Mixing uses within a district – including retail, services, housing or lodging, and institutional needs – and arranging these uses in compact and mutually supportive patterns creates valuable and unique destinations that are more easily served by transit. The current regulations permit different uses in some districts, but lack standards that promote the intentional concentration of compatible uses.

Without standards that address not just the use, but that promote a more vital concentration of uses – including the scale and formats that integrate these uses in compatible patterns, transit served areas will remain susceptible to investments that undermine the benefits from compact, walkable development patterns.

- IV. Housing Diversity** – Neighborhood design has a significant impact on travel patterns. Neighborhoods that are compact, walkable and have a wide variety of housing options - meeting different demographic trends, different price points, and different building formats - create stronger neighborhoods that support local businesses. They also capitalize on investments in more robust, multi-modal transportation networks that accommodate walking, biking and transit. The current regulations account for housing in many different formats among the many zoning districts, however very few of the zoning districts anticipate different housing options integrated into a well-designed neighborhood. The regulations also lack crucial neighborhood design standards that ensure walkable patterns or compatible design when different housing types do mix.

Without standards for better human-scale and mixed-density neighborhoods, housing investments that achieve transit-supportive densities will be steered to larger-scale projects that do not easily integrate into walkable neighborhood patterns.

SUMMARY

Transit oriented development requires compact, connected, and diverse places. Regulations that promote these patterns of development need to accommodate a greater capacity for development, while simultaneously focusing on the small-scale, fine-grained details that bring many different projects together. While the current regulations accommodate the capacity and range of uses that can contribute to these types of places, it is just as likely that development could be implemented in ways that undermine transit-supportive development

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patterns. The regulations lack design and scale standards that can integrate many different projects into varied contexts throughout the Blue Line Corridor. This starts with a lack of design standards addressing public spaces – the streetscapes and civic spaces that set the context for development but is further reflected in a lack of scale and design standards to determine how projects relate to and shape these spaces. While many of these topics are addressed in various places in the regulations, it is often through complicated or abstract formulas or through district-wide standards that lack the specificity needed to achieve the design objectives in a flexible or context-sensitive way. This leads to uncertainty for property owners, developers, neighborhoods and the city. To create the types of projects and places identified in the planning policies and strategies for the Blue Line Transit route, the regulations need to be refined and updated to address the following: specific designs for different types of streets and civic spaces; the scale, integration, and format of a robust mix of uses; building form and design that relates specifically to public spaces based on context; and a better path to a wide variety of housing types that support compact, walkable and mixed-density neighborhoods.

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