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Transit Can Inspire Neighborhood Revitalization

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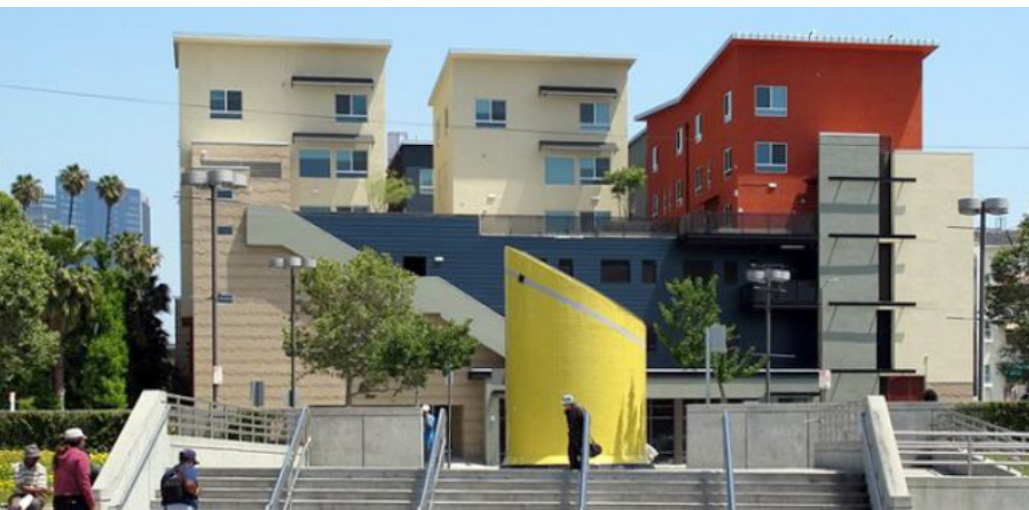
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TRANSIT CAN INSPIRE NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION

In-depth case studies explore how transit-oriented development can revitalize neighborhoods without displacing low-income residents.

The Issue

Historically, large-scale transportation infrastructure projects have had devastating outcomes in communities of color. With twentieth-century urban renewal efforts often came the dislocation of underprivileged communities, the loss of low-income neighborhoods and their replacement with affluent housing and freeways. NITC research from the University of Oregon examines two transit-oriented development projects in California which seem to offer a different trajectory.

Transit-oriented development, or TOD, refers to a high-density mixed-use residential and commercial area built around a transit stop or station. TODs are designed so that those who live and work within a quarter to a half mile of the transit stop have easy access to public transit. In MacArthur Park, Los Angeles, and Fruitvale, Oakland, the majority of residents are recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America, many of whom have significantly lower incomes and rely heavily on public transportation. In the last few decades, both sites have seen TOD serve as a catalyst for neighborhood revitalization, and gained national and international attention.

The Research

Researcher Gerardo Sandoval of the University of Oregon put together detailed case studies of the MacArthur Park Metro Station and the Fruitvale Transit Village. Using a comprehensive, “thick description” approach, he sought to answer the question, “How might low-income Latino communities benefit from large-scale TOD projects?”



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THE ISSUE

Two TODs measurably improved their neighborhoods and enriched their communities. NITC research details how this was achieved.

THE RESEARCH

Researchers identified three key factors to success:

- An asset-based approach which builds on existing neighborhood capital;
- Residents' involvement in the decision-making process;
- Greater access to social services.

IMPLICATIONS

If all three of these factors are taken into account, TOD stands to contribute significantly to neighborhood revitalization.

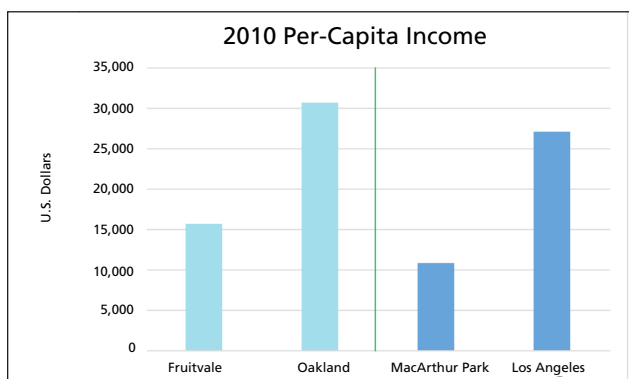
Photo: The MacArthur Park TOD in Los Angeles, California

Sandoval examined the political processes and decisions that surrounded the planning and implementation of both TOD projects. The MacArthur Park Metro Station was initially conceived as a top-down redevelopment project which did not take the local community into consideration. Original plans for the area included changing the demographics in the neighborhood by bringing in luxury condos and higher end retail. Community leaders, with the help of local Latino politicians, were able to create a more bottom-up TOD project that has contributed to community benefits. In Fruitvale, the TOD was achieved through a top-down process, but the project was guided by community-based organizations and had strong Latino leadership, so that the concerns of local residents were represented.

One of the most essential elements, according to the research, was affordable housing. In most instances, new development is likely to increase the value of the neighborhood. MacArthur Park is a case in point: although it now has many of the amenities that draw wealthy urbanists, the original community was not displaced because of the key role affordable housing played in its development. Other services also offer positive equity impacts: the Fruitvale TOD includes health care, child care, a city library, a senior center, and a charter high school.

Implications

Sandoval found that large-scale TODs are most likely to help serve as catalysts for improving low-income neighborhoods if planners pay attention to three factors. First, it takes an asset-based approach. This means building upon services and institutions that are already in place, as well as finding ways to enhance their accessibility by the greater community. In MacArthur Park, a non-profit organization, Mama's Hot Tamales, helped formalize the street vendors in the area. In Fruitvale, the Transit Village includes a pedestrian walkway that physically connects the small businesses along International Boulevard to the BART station.



Income disparities between Fruitvale, MacArthur Park and their cities

This graph shows the 2010 per capita income for the neighborhoods of Fruitvale and MacArthur Park contrasted with the per-capita income for the cities of Oakland and Los Angeles.

BART station.

Second, TOD efforts should encourage participatory forms of activism. If residents and community-based organizations are involved in the decision-making process, TOD stands a better chance of protecting the neighborhood for current residents and businesses.

Third, TOD projects should incorporate and support increased access to services such as regional public transportation, affordable housing, diverse local small business networks and social services provisions such as medical and educational facilities.

If all three of these factors are taken into account during the planning and implementation processes, TOD stands to contribute significantly to low-income neighborhood revitalization.

PROJECT INFORMATION

TITLE: Transit-Oriented Development and Equity in Latino Neighborhoods: A Comparative Case Study of MacArthur Park (Los Angeles) and Fruitvale (Oakland)

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MORE INFORMATION
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