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Transit

IS MY COMMUNITY READY FOR TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT?  
A TOOL FOR ASSESSING TOD READINESS

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Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is a comprehensive growth management strategy to accommodate population growth and provide access to jobs and other destinations without the negative effects associated with urban sprawl. While TOD is often associated with large metropolitan areas, it is also applicable to small and medium-sized communities and can provide transportation, environmental, and social benefits at a smaller scale. TODs in smaller communities may look very different from those in large cities, but the core components – compact development with a mix of uses, emphasizing walk access to a transit station and other destinations – remain the same. The differences lie in the scale of development and type of transit service.

Small and medium-sized communities may find it difficult to achieve TOD, especially in areas with largely sprawling auto-oriented suburban development patterns. There are a variety of factors that influence whether an area is “ready” for TOD. Readiness for TOD depends on governmental policies, market forces, physical infrastructure, and social elements. Achieving TOD is an evolutionary process, and cultivating an environment from which TOD can emerge requires diligent planning to address the variety of factors.

The Florida Department of Transportation developed a tool that assesses how ready an area is for TOD through an evaluation of 20 measures that reflect the various facets of TOD potential. Users can apply the tool to existing and potential future transit station areas. The tool uses readily available data for quantitative measures, and prompts the user to answer a series of questions for more qualitative policy measures.

The readiness evaluation identifies an area’s strengths and weaknesses. Planners and other stakeholders can use the tool to develop strategies to increase an area’s TOD readiness by building upon its strengths and addresses its weaknesses.

This presentation will first briefly introduce the concept of TOD Placetypes, which describe the ways in which TODs differ depending on levels of activity, accessibility, transit type, and community context. The main focus of the presentation will be an overview of the TOD Readiness Tool, which includes three components:

1. A User Guide, which provides instruction on how to use the tool, the purpose of each measure, and technical notes
2. An interactive Excel spreadsheet that performs the readiness assessment
3. A two-page summary template for clearly presenting the assessment results

This presentation will describe the purpose behind the tool, show attendees how to use the tool, and provide an example of an application of the tool to a medium-sized city in South Florida to complement the city’s economic development efforts.