

Platform

President's Corner

By JOHN ROBERT SMITH
PRESIDENT AND CEO

Reconnecting America recently completed *Are We There Yet?*, a project that established benchmarks against which regions across America can be measured. Allison Brooks offers an overview of the report and all that went into it.



Part of getting there – complete communities – involves our unique tools to help communities sort the implementation needs of transit communities. Abby Thorne-Lyman and Chris Yake explain this in “People + Places = Possibility.”

Much of this work would benefit from support in Congress. The transportation bill passed in June had positive points, but, by omission, some negatives. Sarah Kline explains the outcome of the wrangling in “What MAP-21 Means for Complete Communities.”

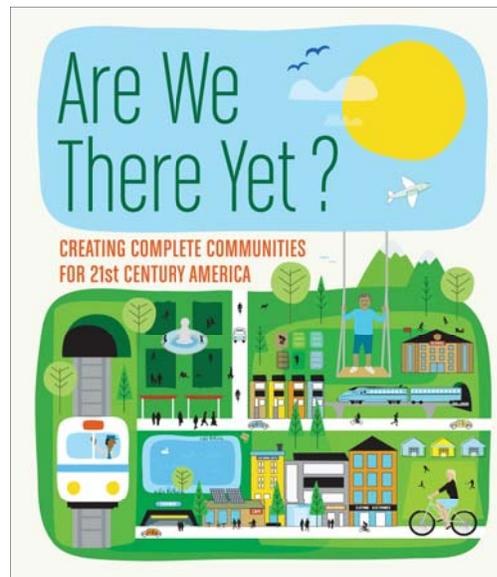
Complete Communities for the 21st Century

By ALLISON BROOKS
CHIEF OF STAFF

America is in a period of transition, pushed forward by changing demographics – a rapidly aging population, an increasing number of single-person and single-parent households – and a changing economy. If manifest destiny drove America’s ever-outward expansion, facilitated first by wagons and railroads and then by highways and suburban tracts of single-family homes in the last century, the younger generation and boomers alike are driven by a need to return to the city center in the 21st century, redeveloping older communities to make them more complete,

and making our economy more resilient and sustainable by doing things more efficiently across our regions.

To that end, we at Reconnecting America have launched a new report that calls for, and contributes to, the development of a national shared vision for creating complete communities and strong regional economies that are well positioned to succeed in the changing demands of the 21st century.



Are We There Yet? Creating Complete Communities for 21st Century America lays out some fundamentals of daily life – how we live, how we move,

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What MAP-21 Means for Complete Communities

BY SARAH KLINE
POLICY DIRECTOR

On July 6, 2012, President Obama signed the “Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century Act” (MAP-21) into law. MAP-21 authorizes funding and sets policy for the federal highway and transit programs for FY2013 and FY2014. Despite many calls for increased transportation funding and fundamental reform of the federal program, MAP-21 did neither. Funding was maintained at current levels.

Congress did not address long-term funding challenges, such as the declining purchasing power of the federal gas tax, which has not been increased for almost 20 years. Similarly, Congress did not take on a fundamental re-thinking of the transportation program. Concepts such as multimodalism, fix-it-first and accountability did not take significant strides forward in MAP-21; in some cases the new law moves backward, such as the elimination of dedicated funding for road and bridge repair. While it does include performance measures for the first time, MAP-21 does not articulate a new national vision for transportation, and, for the most part, states, MPOs and transit agencies will largely continue to do business as they have in the past. MAP-21 expires in only two years, which means that implementation of the new law will be occurring almost simultaneously with the next reauthorization debate.

Here are some of the key features of MAP-21 for communities looking to provide transportation choices and transit-oriented neighborhoods for their residents:

- The transit program will continue to receive its historical share of the federal gas tax under MAP-21. However, use of the federal

gas tax to support transit came under attack during development of MAP-21, and could be threatened again in the next reauthorization debate.

- MAP-21 retains the ability to flex highway program funds to transit purposes. Specifically, the Surface Transportation Program (STP), the Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Program (CMAQ) and the National Highway Performance Program (NHPP – formerly the NHS Program) all allow funds to be used for transit to a greater or lesser extent.
- While the ability to use a portion of federal highway dollars for bicycle and pedestrian projects and other local transportation needs was retained, 50 percent of this funding will now go to states, and 50 percent to MPOs and local communities. The portion of the “Transportation Alternatives” funding allocated to the state can still be used on local projects, but local leaders will need to make a strong case for these funds.
- The time it takes to move a transit project through the New Starts process should be reduced under MAP-21. The new law also expanded the types of projects eligible for New Starts to include capacity improvements on existing transit lines. However, MAP-21 did not increase funding for the program, which will lead to increased demand for what is already a very competitive program.
- A new competitive grant program for TOD planning, funded at \$10 million per year, provides an opportunity for communities to demonstrate interest in TOD and take proactive steps to achieve it. FTA will

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be soliciting applications from interested communities in the coming months.

- MAP-21 significantly reduces USDOT's ability to run competitive grant programs, and instead sends out most funding according to various formulas. This will increase the predictability of funding from year to year, but will reduce communities' ability to undertake projects such as construction of a transit center, introduction of a streetcar line, or renovation of a bus garage that require an infusion of funding over and above what the formulas provide in a particular year.
- In general, MAP-21 retained the prohibition against using federal transit funds to pay for operating expenses in areas over 200,000 in population, providing little help to communities facing transit fare increases and service cuts as a result of constrained local and state funding.
- Funding for low-interest loans under the Transportation Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act (TIFIA) program was greatly increased, from \$122 million annually to \$750 million in FY13 and \$1 billion in FY14. In addition, the share of a project's cost that can be covered by TIFIA was raised from 33% to 49%. However, MAP-21 also eliminated all evaluation criteria for projects, other than credit-worthiness. In other words, USDOT will no longer evaluate the merits of a project that is applying for TIFIA funds; they will consider only the likelihood that the TIFIA loan will be paid back. Applications for TIFIA will be received on a rolling basis at USDOT, and loans will be granted on a first-come, first-served basis.

With passage of the new law, the onus now shifts to the USDOT, states, cities, transit agencies and MPOs to use the programs described above and others within MAP-21 to help make our communities more complete, with transportation choices and neighborhoods that are accessible to everyone. ★



BILL SADLER



CHRIS YAKE

Reconnecting America Staffers Honored

Reconnecting America Program Associate Bill Sadler was recently named to the 2012 Next American Vanguard Class and Reconnecting America Project Director Chris Yake made Mass Transit magazine's Top 40 Under 40 list.

Sadler was one of 43 people selected from nearly 200 applications by Next American City for this year's class. According to the announcement at Americancity.org, Next American Vanguard Class members were chosen for their bright ideas for cities, experience in the field and ambition for the future.

Yake was nominated to Mass Transit magazine's Top 40 Under 40 List by his peers and judged on criteria that included job commitment, industry involvement and contribution, achievement in his position and innovation in his field.

Yake is the third Reconnecting America staffer to be honored by Mass Transit magazine. Last year, Reconnecting America Chief Cartographer and New Media Director Jeff Wood was named to the list, and the year before, Policy Director Sarah Kline made the Top 40 Under 40 for her work as director of policy and government relations for the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority. ★

People + Place

Sorting Out the Implementation

BY **ABIGAIL THORNE-LYMAN**
 DIRECTOR, CTOD
 AND **CHRIS YAKE**
 RECONNECTING AMERICA PROJECT DIRECTOR

Doing more with less. This is the new reality for cash strapped local and regional agencies across the country striving to provide high quality transit service while fostering more livable communities in the form of transit-oriented development (TOD). This same challenge presents an opportunity for cities and regions to refocus attention on existing transit infrastructure and established urban districts and neighborhoods.

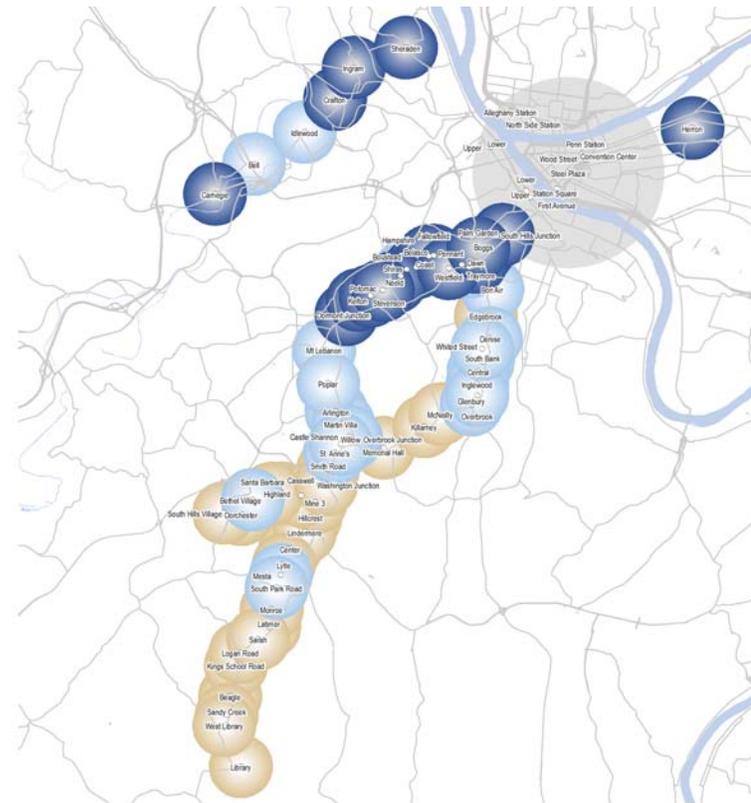
For nearly a decade, Reconnecting America and the Center for Transit-Oriented Development (CTOD) have been developing tools to help regional and local stakeholders more efficiently coordinate and optimize their TOD opportunities. Today, CTOD is working with partners in four regions – Seattle, WA; Pittsburgh, PA; Boston, MA; and Washington, DC – to test a new performance-based tool that can help TOD stakeholders coordinate infrastructure, market-based real estate, community development and affordable housing investments across an entire transit system. Our new innovative tool builds on work with partners in Portland, OR, and the Central Maryland (Baltimore) regions to create a quantitative approach with two components: Places – the built environment – and People – the social environment).

Behind Places and People is the understanding that successful TOD requires investments in both the built environment and those who inhabit it. We need to improve our urban form and catalyze investment in new development (Places) in order to increase access to viable transportation alternatives such as transit, walking, and biking. But simultaneously, we need to understand who lives

in our transit communities today (People) to ensure that investments in community engagement, workforce development and mixed-income housing production and preservation are improving the lives of local residents, and enabling them to continue to thrive in communities near transit. By combining Places with People, this approach can help advance regional economic, environmental and equity objectives through transit-centered communities that provide greater access to opportunity for all.

PLACES

CTOD’s Places approach measures the readiness of transit station areas and corridors to support transportation choices and catalytic development investments based on an evaluation of existing transit-orientation and market potential.



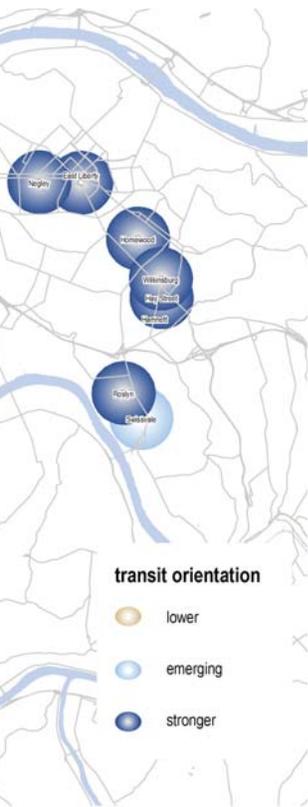
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n Needs of Transit Communities

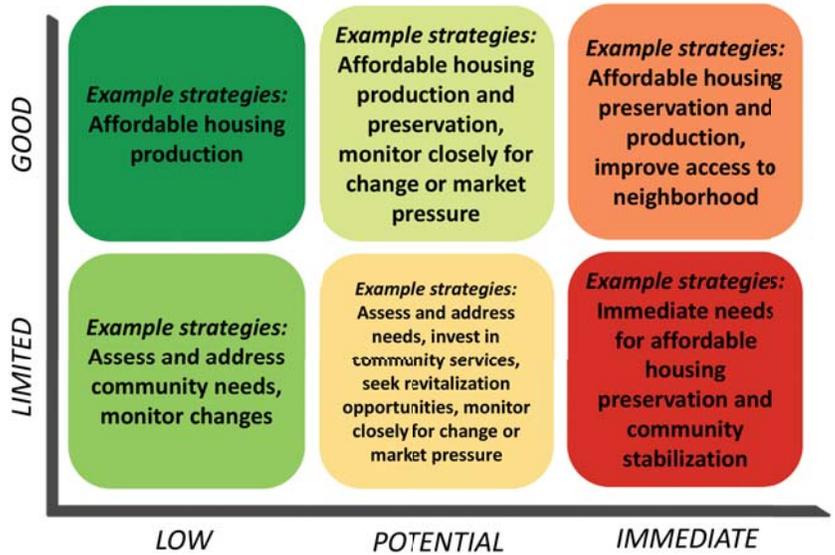
These two factors are overlaid on a grid to offer a comprehensive view of the physical context of station areas. When working in a transit system or region with 10, 20, or even 70 stations, this approach is a good way to quickly sort out the relative needs of different places. If a station area has a strong real estate market but urban form that is inadequate to support transit use, that station could be a high priority for implementation activities that leverage new development such as sidewalks, bikeways and walkable retail and services to enhance its transit orientation. In contrast, if a station area has a lukewarm

market but strong urban form, catalytic public investments should be targeted to help trigger the market to build more densely over time.

This quantitative model can include many variables. The transit orientation index combines variables that have a proven effect on reducing vehicle miles traveled: walkable blocks, high-density housing or jobs, mix of uses and proximity to job centers. The market potential index can combine any number of variables available locally: recent sales transactions, assessed land values or even - in the case of Pittsburgh - the capac-



SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE / ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY



CHANGE / DISPLACEMENT RISK

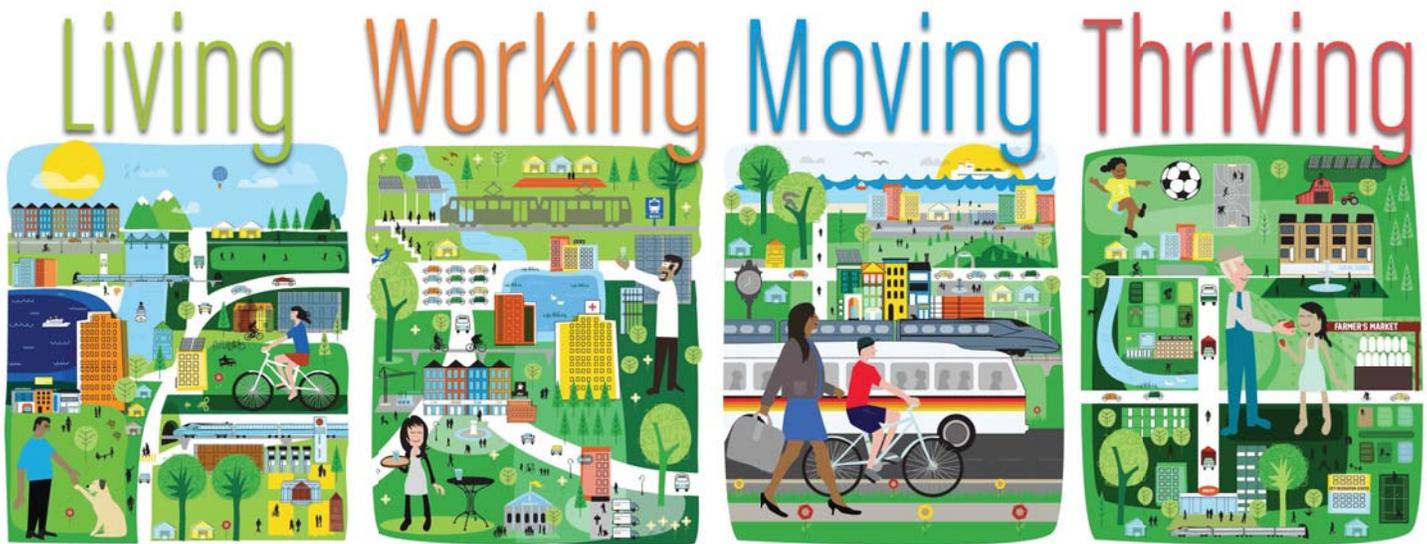
Growing Transit Communities and PSRC

ity of community-based organizations to secure financing through programs such as New Markets Tax Credits. CTOD has developed a flexible approach that can be tailored to the needs and data availability in each region.

PEOPLE

CTOD's People approach evaluates the susceptibility of neighborhoods to change over time, with an emphasis on identifying areas that could experience rapid gentrification or, conversely, increasing disinvestment. Based on Professor Karen Chapple's research at the University of California, Berkeley, Center for Community Innovation, the approach looks at both change over time using the 2000 to 2010 demographic data available in the CTOD database (toddata.cnt.org), and susceptibility to future change using variables such as tenure, incomes, educational attainment, household type and potential for

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Are We There Yet? . . .

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how we work and how we thrive as individuals, as families, and as a part of communities. We have collected and analyzed data to develop original metrics and studied those of others to come up with an analysis that can help leaders in cities and regions track how close they are to “there.”

At Reconnecting America we believe that when communities – urban, suburban or rural – offer what people need, we begin to get closer to “there.” We see higher high school graduation rates, reduced rates of obesity and diabetes, and reduced traffic congestion and cleaner air. We see more people walking, biking and engaging in their communities, and we see a reduction in crime. Our children live in safe and affordable housing, and we see citizens getting active in the democratic process and the creation of civic environments that foster more economic activity and jobs – all of which gives the U.S. an economic competitive advantage.

Some of these are measurable outcomes; some we only know when we experience them.

Are We There Yet? contains some key features

that we want to highlight:

First, we are introducing two new terms. We envision creating “complete communities” across the country, places where people can live, work, move and thrive in a healthier, more equitable, and more economically competitive way. We also write about “opportunity areas,” which are the places within our cities and regions where we can get a jump on this vision.

Second, Reconnecting America has collected data to help all of us understand the existing conditions of our regions and to track progress at the regional level in all 366 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) in the country. A lot of work is underway by different organizations to measure progress at the neighborhood or even development scale. We believe regional measures can be very useful in capturing and compiling the impact of neighborhood change on regional performance. Though complete communities exist on a neighborhood scale, the benefits of complete communities are regional, producing better air quality, less congestion, lower obesity rates, reduced poverty, job growth – the list continues. Ultimately, efforts to improve individual neighborhoods must “trickle up” to change regional performance, or

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we're not making a dent in the performance of our regions.

Third, we have graded each of the 366 metro areas based on how they measure up to our vision, with metro areas being graded on a curve against metro areas of a similar size. For instance, Altoona, Pennsylvania, is not measured against New York City, but against regions of similar size.

Finally, *Are We There Yet?* describes real-life examples we have collected — and in some instances that we have experienced first-hand — of leadership, innovation and collaboration occurring in all sorts of places and by all kinds of people. From Oklahoma City to Des Moines to Seattle, we have compiled stories that illustrate forward thinking with tangible outcomes — getting people to work, reducing obesity and engaging in a productive civic dialogue.

In our development of the metrics, we experienced ongoing challenges in accessing consistent and reliable data to measure progress across cities and regions. While we believe that the information presented in this report is the best that is available today, we also believe it would advance our efforts to build complete communities if we could work with other organizations to develop a shared national data set to track progress at the regional level and at other appropriate levels. By tracking this data over time, we can identify the best practices and strategies that help places improve their performance, and we can identify those sure-fire investments that produce better outcomes.

Reconnecting America will be distributing a limited amount of hard copies of the report at conferences and upon request. It can also be downloaded from our website, where you will also find more stories and more data than we could include in the report.

For more information, we encourage you to visit ReconnectingAmerica.org/arewethereyet.

Reconnecting America is thankful for the gen-

erous support we received from the American Public Transportation Association (APTA), the Ford Foundation and the Surdna Foundation to complete this report. 

People + Places . . .

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transit or other investments to change market strength. Whereas the Places approach combines its variables into an index, CTOD's People approach suggests evaluating each of these variables independently and seeing how they relate to one another in order to understand susceptibility to change.

In the Puget Sound region, the People approach also incorporates opportunity mapping completed by Ohio State University's Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity in support of the region's Growing Transit Communities HUD regional planning grant initiative. Puget Sound stakeholders will be able to overlay the information described above with measurements of the health, education and employment opportunities found in each community.

IMPLEMENTATION

Ultimately, this approach helps cities or regions strategically identify the broad implementation needs of a transit community, without breaking the bank on costly station area plans. This systemwide approach informs and sets the table for local planning and implementation efforts. It allows regions to “do more with less” by targeting funding for places that can truly benefit from investments; coordinating across the public, private and philanthropic sectors; and prioritizing activities that can best capture the untapped value of transit. In the long term, this systematic approach will foster critical conversations about the policy priorities and programmatic changes needed at the state, regional, citywide and community scales. 

Rail~Volution Sessions

Allison Brooks

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS: HOW DO YOU MEASURE A LIVABLE COMMUNITY?
TUESDAY, 10/16/2012 2 PM - 3:30 PM

“Livable” and “sustainable” are often used to describe qualities of a community or region, yet the terms can be vague. Learn how Denver, the Twin Cities, Boston and Reconnecting America are tackling the challenges of measuring sustainability and livability, particularly as they relate to improving equitable outcomes.

Abby Thorne-Lyman

ORANGE LINE SUSTAINABILITY TOUR
TUESDAY, 10/16/2012 10 AM - 3 PM

How is bus rapid transit greening LA in a historically auto-oriented area? Hop on bike and bus to experience the nation’s latest BRT innovation. Hear about planning, design, construction and operational elements that are making the corridor a model for livable communities.

SITE SELECTION AND PRESERVATION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING NEAR TRANSIT
WEDNESDAY, 10/17/2012 8 AM - 9:30 AM

Implementing affordable housing near transit can be a monumental task and preserving existing affordable housing near transit can be even more challenging. This session will give participants a full background of the complexities of building and preserving affordable housing around transit.

Chris Yake

ETOD: FOCUSING EMPLOYMENT NEAR TRANSIT
TUESDAY, 10/16/2012 4 PM - 5:30 PM

In today’s economy, employment-focused TOD — or ETOD — is gaining prominence. Creating employment opportunities near transit is taking on new significance. In addition, recent research suggests that employment clustered near transit has a greater impact on ridership than residential density. Hear how regions are targeting economic growth and better optimizing their systems.

Elizabeth Wampler

THE BRT ATTRACTION: HOW DO THEY DO IT?
TUESDAY, 10/16/2012 2 PM - 3:30 PM

In many areas across the country, bus rapid transit (BRT) is getting regions online faster than fixed rail. Learn how the game is changing with BRT as a major player!

Jeff Wood

BLOGOSPHERE: TRANSFORMING INFORMATION LANDSCAPE
TUESDAY, 10/16/2012 4 PM - 5:30 PM

From California’s high-speed rail to neighborhood bike lanes, blogs are popping up around every topic. Bloggers are moving livability discussions forward with background data and information. Hear how agencies and citizens are changing the local narrative by providing a wealth of knowledge.

Are We There Yet? Release Party

TUESDAY, 10/16/2012 7PM - 10PM

Boardner’s “Hollywood’s Best Kept Lil’ Secret” Bar, since 1942, 1652 No. Cherokee Avenue, Hollywood. Live music by “The Eduardo Show”

CTOD Partners

Sujata Srivastava

STRATEGIC ECONOMICS
ETOD: FOCUSING EMPLOYMENT NEAR TRANSIT
TUESDAY, 10/16/2012 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

Nadine Fogarty

STRATEGIC ECONOMICS
CARELESS BY CHOICE: NEW DEMOGRAPHICS FOR TOMORROW’S TOD MARKETPLACE
TUESDAY 10/16/2012 2:00 PM - 3:30 PM

Scott Bernstein

CENTER FOR NEIGHBORHOOD TECHNOLOGY
RAIL~VOLUTION 101
MONDAY 10/15/2012 10:00 AM-12:00 PM

NEW TOOLS TO BUILD YOUR FUNDING CASE
TUESDAY 10/16/2012 4:00 PM - 5:30 PM

