



Denver's TOD Collaboration

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The Denver region is emerging as an innovative leader in the effort to create healthy, affordable, and sustainable communities with a range of housing types and transportation options for everyone. In 2004, voters approved a sales tax increase to fund 122 miles of new rail and bus service. Since then cities along current and future transit lines have been making plans to address opportunities and challenges.

Communities hope to build a mix of housing, office, shopping and other community resources to create a unique sense of place and reduce the need to travel long distances by car to reach destinations. In other words, they want transit-oriented development (TOD).

Regions across the country are seeing the benefits of providing greater access to op-

portunities and better connections between housing, jobs and essential destinations. These benefits are especially important to households with lower incomes, who spend a greater proportion of their income on transportation and housing.

Ensuring that development near transit remains affordable to low-income households is an important principle of equitable TOD. However, it often requires a concerted effort by local and regional decisionmakers to craft policies and pool funding to attract this type of mixed-income development. In the San Francisco Bay Area, the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul, and New York City, achieving equitable TOD has required collaboration in advocating for policy change, creating land acquisition funds, and holding educational events

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about the importance of equitable TOD.

Reconnecting America's other work in the Denver region, including the recent West Corridor TOD Implementation Strategy, led it and several other nonprofit organizations to believe a similar collaborative could work in the Denver region. Despite significant momentum toward equitable TOD, there was still a lack of understanding about how it can benefit people in the region, especially low-income populations and people of color. Moreover, while the Denver region is fortunate to have many agencies and organizations working to accomplish equitable TOD, few of these had come together to share ideas and pool funding resources to put plans into action.

A major catalyst for bringing these resources together is the recent decision by the Ford Foundation to award Reconnecting America, along with three other nonprofit organizations and a group of local foundations, a \$500,000 one-year planning grant to explore the formation of a collaborative focused on regional equity. The grant is a part of the Ford Foundation's Metropolitan Opportunity work, which seeks to transform the way cities, suburbs and surrounding communities grow and plan for the future, promoting a new metropolitan approach that interweaves housing, transportation and land-use policy to foster economic growth for all.

Tentatively titled the Mile High Transit Opportunity Collaborative, the MHTOC will spend the next year engaging, educating, advocating, and providing technical assistance on a number of activities with the hope of establishing

a regional equity collaborative. Some of the activities the collaborative will do in this first year are:

- Create an atlas of the Denver region's demographics and opportunities, overlaid with the planned transit network, to demonstrate the importance of this infrastructure investment to the opportunities available to all Denver residents.
- Hold educational events for local and regional stakeholders to raise awareness about equitable TOD.
- Explore the expansion of the existing Denver TOD Fund, which finances land acquisition near transit stations, to a regional level.
- Develop criteria for site-specific work, with the goal of selecting several sites to focus on in coming years.
- Provide funding for community development corporations to support their work around equitable TOD across the region.

The Ford Foundation's investment, along with major investments from the federal government, are helping to catalyze a discussion among local and regional decisionmakers about why increased transportation options and affordable housing opportunities near transit are important to the health and vitality of the regional economy. The Denver region is already far ahead of many other regions, and along with the other existing collaboratives, the region is setting a precedent for how regions can invest to become more livable, sustainable, inclusive and affordable for everyone.

For more information on TOD and equity, see [Reconnecting America's website](#).

