



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION
FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

Livable
Communities Initiative

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1. Background

For those who lack access to an automobile, are unable to drive, or simply do not want to drive, options become more limited for us every day. Americans are now making more auto trips per day than ever before and the trips we are making are increasingly longer. In part, this phenomenon is due to the way we design our cities and suburbs. Regional shopping malls are surrounded and isolated by acres of paved parking, typically do not have transit service, and lack sidewalks to adjacent housing and to roadways where transit might be available. Further, other shopping, health care facilities, and social services tend to locate along highway arterials that likewise lack access for modes other than autos. Such designs oriented only around the automobile, whether conscious or not, discourage access by bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users.

However, design concepts are possible that can accommodate several transportation alternatives. Communities that are designed with a mix of employment, housing and shops nearby as well as within walking distance of transit stops can increase the number of trips made by mass transit, bicycles, and walking thereby decreasing single occupant auto trips. Such modal shifts can decrease congestion, reduce air and noise pollution, and improve the general mobility of our population.

Permitting higher density development around transit stops can lower the cost per housing unit thereby increasing the supply of affordable housing. Further, the location of housing near transit can decrease the need for the second or third vehicle. One study finds that a \$10 thousand car is equivalent to \$30 thousand in housing.

Adoption of proper design and land use guidelines and focusing development around transit stops can promote infilling and densification. Thus, the need to build over agricultural and natural lands is reduced thereby preserving more open space.

Properly designed communities can also help its citizens to not only be safer, but to feel safer. Many new communities are being built around a street network of cul de sacs. Rather than placing sidewalks along the streets that are lit at night and designed for lower speeds, the sidewalks are placed behind yards where they lack lighting, reasonable speed traffic and neighborhood activity. Such design causes many to drive rather than walk to their neighbors who might live just a few houses away.

While the transportation planning process has tended to involve greater numbers of people and interests, too many transportation projects are still designed and built for the urbanized area or the larger community. Listening to the neighbors of a transportation facility and designing that facility so that it is consistent with the needs and desires of the people results in a more beneficial project that can encourage increased use of alternative transportation modes. Such a facility serves the neighborhood rather than just moving people through the area. Proper participation in the planning and design process can help give a community identification rather than being a source of alienation.

Livable communities represent a holistic approach to how cities are planned, designed and built. By itself, a livable community will not eliminate congestion, reduce crime, or increase the supply of affordable housing. But paying proper attention to the involvement of people in the planning of neighborhoods, adopting appropriate planning principles, and designing buildings, streets and other transportation facilities with people in mind can certainly be part of the solution to many problems facing us today.

The economic downturn of the late 1980s and early 1990s slowed transit-oriented design and development. With the economy now on an upward trend and positive improvements in the real estate markets, local and State governments are now better able to encourage revitalization projects and new construction to adopt the principles of livable communities. Thus, the timing is appropriate for the Federal Transit Administration to propose a livable communities initiative in its FY 1995 Budget Submission to Congress. The initiative is designed to promote, not dictate, that local and State governments adopt the principles of livable communities in their planning and land use decisions.

2. Description of the Livable Communities Initiative

a. Purpose :

The FTA is launching a multifaceted "Livable Communities Initiative" to encourage active participation in planning and developing transit facilities and services that support community needs; to improve access to jobs, educational opportunities, health care, social services, and recreational facilities; to foster economic opportunity; and to promote a clean, safe and secure environment.

This initiative will demonstrate how transit facilities and services can be physically and functionally related to community needs when the community plays an active role in the local planning and design process for such facilities and services. Emphasis will be placed on improving access to community services and facilitating coordination of on-site community services like day care, health care, housing and commercial conveniences. Entities proposing projects to be considered for funding must demonstrate that the projects are transit related and promote the concept of a livable community in the area adjacent to the project.

b. Objectives:

The FTA Livable Communities Initiative has the following objectives:

- 1) to strengthen linkages between transit and community development planning including land use policies supportive of transit;**
- 2) to stimulate greater involvement in the local planning and design process by neighborhood and community organizations, small and minority businesses, persons with disabilities and other stakeholders who are not currently participants in the process;**
- 3) to increase access to or generate employment through high quality community-oriented transit services and facilities;** and
- 4) where appropriate, to serve as the transportation linkage to the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities Program.**

c. Characteristics of Livable Communities

Transit is an important element in successful "Livable Communities."

Characteristics of Livable Communities are as follows:

- o **Well planned and designed transit.** Livable communities involve careful coordination of transit planning with community development planning. Livable communities are neighborhoods where housing, schools, and parks are within easy walking distance of user-friendly transit opportunities that effectively link residents with local social and economic services and jobs. In livable communities, transit service reflects the diverse needs of the community.
- o **Transit, Pedestrian and Bicycle Access:** Land use planning, zoning and urban design encourage alternatives to automobile use. Such alternatives as walking, transit, and bike riding are designed and built into the community to ensure local mobility. In a livable community, use of the automobile is optional.
- o **Mixed-use neighborhoods:** Residential areas are complemented by the presence of office and commercial areas, recreation areas, and areas devoted to health, educational and social service. Communities are planned and built on a human scale that emphasizes ease of access and community spirit. Businesses feel that they are part of a neighborhood. Transit facilities are designed to include space for day care centers, dry cleaners, and other enterprises that are useful to transit passengers.
- o **Safe and Secure:** Streets are well lit and designed to accommodate transit vehicles and pedestrians. Transit facilities and pedestrian walkways are designed to take into account the safety expectations of all passengers, including persons with disabilities. Traffic calming techniques are used to provide safety to pedestrians and lower traffic speeds.

- o **Environmentally conscious:** Well planned transit maximizes air quality. Parking is carefully managed to save space and to ensure that buildings are accessible to pedestrians and transit, and not isolated by large parking lots. Livable communities also contain sufficient parks and greenbelts to ensure a high quality of life for the residents.
- o **Invite full community participation in the decisionmaking process:** Residents have a voice in the future of their neighborhoods. Livable communities are committed to a planning and management process that includes a high level of participation by neighborhood organizations, small and minority businesses, and individuals who may not otherwise be heard.

d. Eligible Recipient

Any public agency with authority to administer a Federal grant program is considered an eligible recipient for the purpose of a Section 3 grant. This would include local and State governments, transit agencies, and MPO's. Community organizations and other nonprofit organizations are eligible for Section 3 projects only as third party contractors to the public agencies. Therefore, they are encouraged to work with an eligible public agency when proposing Section 3 capital projects. Community organizations and other nonprofit organizations will be eligible for funding consideration through cooperative agreements for planning, research, human resources, and technical assistance projects under Section 26(b) of the Federal Transit Act as amended.

e. Categories Of Eligible Projects

Projects eligible for consideration will be of two primary types: a) capital projects and b) planning, research and technical assistance. The capital projects will include enhancements to existing facilities or facilities that are under development, and acquisition of vehicles and systems to improve community access. For facility enhancements, eligible costs may include property acquisition, demolition of existing structures, site preparation, utilities, building foundations, walkways, open space, and construction of components that are physically and functionally related to the mass transportation facility.

The other types of eligible projects include: 1) grants for community participation in the planning and project development process, 2) on-site technical assistance and training, 3) research and technical studies, and 4) demonstrations of model programs and methods.

The following list represents examples of the types of projects that FTA will consider for participation in the program:

1. Capital grants for enhancements to transit stations, park and ride lots, and transfer points incorporating community service facilities (child care, elder day care, health care and other social service centers); customer conveniences (retail services and banking services); other transit and pedestrian oriented mixed-use developments; safety elements (lighting, surveillance systems, community policing facilities and communication systems); site design improvements (sidewalks, skyways, and access roadways); and operational enhancements like marketing programs, pass programs, and customer information systems. Applicants are encouraged to consider enhancing projects already under development using funds available under Sections 3, 9, 16, and 18, Surface Transportation Program (STP) and Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ). Capital grants are also available for acquisition of vehicles and systems for dispatching vehicle location and passenger information.
2. Grants to generate community participation in planning and designing projects and in assessing their community social, economic, land use, urban design, zoning and environmental impacts on the community. Community participation could include individuals and such groups as neighborhood associations, schools and other community organizations.
3. Technical assistance for neighborhood residents and organizations including site visits, local seminars and training. Local seminars are encouraged to increase community participation in the decisionmaking process and to facilitate understanding and cooperation among community organizations, transit agencies, MPO's, governmental agencies and the business community.