



DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION  
FEDERAL TRANSIT ADMINISTRATION

Livable  
Communities Initiative

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## **1. Background**

Transportation options become more limited every day for those who lack access to an automobile, are unable to drive, or simply do not want to drive. 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. Resulting 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 \$10 thousand not spent on purchase of a 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 citizens to not only be safer, but to feel safer. Many new communities are being built around wide arterials and a street network of cul de sacs. Such design causes many to drive rather than walk to their neighbors who might live just a few houses away. Lighted sidewalks along streets designed for slower speeds will encourage walking, transit and bicycle trips and attract daytime and evening neighborhood activity.

The transportation planning process, in recent years, has involved greater numbers of people and interests. Still, 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 result 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 that adopt the principles of livable communities. Thus, the timing is appropriate for the Federal Transit Administration to launch a Livable Communities Initiative. The initiative is designed to encourage local and State governments to adopt the principles of livable communities in their transit planning and land use decisions.

## **2. Description of the Livable Communities Initiative**

### **a. Purpose :**

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) has recognized the need for a new emphasis in its programs to make communities and neighborhoods more livable. To meet this need, the FTA is initiating technical assistance activities to help communities understand the principles of the Livable Communities Initiative and introduce more community-oriented transit facilities and services. Concurrently, FTA will emphasize the livable communities principles in the planning, formula and discretionary grants assistance programs. Special recognition will be accorded grantees who join together with community leaders to understand the linkages between transit and community needs. In further support of this Initiative, the FTA has requested, in the FY 1995 Budget Submission to Congress, approval of a setaside of Section 3 discretionary funds for incentive grants that showcase model examples of livable community principles.

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.

### **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 and urban design standards 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 (EZ/EC) 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 lighted and designed to accommodate transit vehicles and pedestrians. Transit facilities and pedestrian walkways are designed to take into account the safety and security 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 decision-making 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**

A special technical assistance activity is directed to a broad range of community organizations and other nonprofit organizations in coordination with existing FTA grantees such as transit agencies, Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs) and municipal, State and regional governmental bodies. These organizations are eligible for funding consideration through cooperative agreements for planning, research, training, and technical assistance projects.

Grantees eligible for formula and discretionary grants are encouraged to incorporate livable communities principles in their plans and programs. Capital grants will be awarded to public bodies and administered through the normal Section 3 grant process. Community organizations and other nonprofit organizations may participate in the funding through third party contracts with public agencies and are encouraged to work with an eligible public agency when proposing Section 3 projects. Entities proposing projects for funding consideration must demonstrate that the projects are transit related and promote the concept of a livable community.

### **e. Categories Of Eligible Projects**

The livable communities principles and emphasis apply across the full range of FTA planning, research, technical assistance and capital programs. Special emphasis projects will be of two primary types: a) planning, research and technical assistance and b) capital projects.

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

1. Technical assistance for neighborhood residents and organizations, transit agencies and local governments including: site visits, local seminars and training. Local seminars are encouraged to increase community participation in the decision-making process and to facilitate understanding and cooperation among community organizations, transit agencies, MPO's, governmental agencies and the business community.
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. 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); safety elements (lighting, surveillance systems, community policing facilities and communication systems); site design improvements (sidewalks, pedestrian plaza, skyways, and access roadways); and operational enhancements like marketing programs, pass programs, customer information systems, vehicle acquisitions for enhanced community service, and advanced public transit systems for dispatching and locating vehicles. Applicants are encouraged to consider enhancing projects already under development using funds available under Sections 3, 9, 16, and 18; Surface Transportation Program (STP), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ).
4. Documentation and demonstration of best practices in the implementation of livable communities concepts.

**f. Project Funding:**

The FTA Livable Communities Initiative applies to FTA grants for use in any urban, suburban or rural area where there is a direct connection to public transportation. As such, it allows for broader based projects than those under the EZ/EC program which may only be targeted to areas of "...persasive poverty, unemployment, and general distress." Consistent with the eligibility and objectives of the program, it is expected that applicants will coordinate transit funds and services with other community planning and services.

Section 26(b) funds will support research, planning, and technical assistance activities, or special projects demonstrating the introduction of innovative techniques and methods.

Beyond the currently available capital funding sources, which may be used in support of the Livable Communities Initiative, the requested setaside of Section 3 discretionary grant funds, if approved, will also be available to support creative

local initiatives in coordination with traditional transit funding such as Sections 3, 9, 16, and 18; Interstate Transfers and the flexible funding provisions of the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act of 1991. Additionally, applicants are encouraged to coordinate funding under the FTA Livable Communities Initiative with funding from other Federal programs, such as those available for highways, education, crime, housing, labor and economic development. State, local public and private sources of funding should be considered. A local match of 20 percent is required for all grants under the livable communities emphasis area.