



Federal Transit  
Administration

# Livable Communities

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## Initiative

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Program Description

November 1994

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# Table of Contents

<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>PAGE</b>
1. Background.....	1
2. Description of Livable Communities Initiative .....	2
a. Purpose .....	2
b. Objectives .....	3
c. Characteristics of Livable Communities .....	3
d. Eligible Recipients .....	4
e. Categories of Eligible Projects .....	5
f. Project Funding .....	6
3. Project Development .....	7
a. Factors for Consideration .....	7
b. Capital Program Issues .....	8
c. Project Coordination .....	9



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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 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, the livable communities initiative can 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.

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 objectives of the FTA Livable Communities Initiative are to improve mobility and the quality of life in communities by:

1) strengthening the link between transit and community planning, including land use policies and urban design standards which support the use of transit; 2) promoting increased participation by neighborhood and community organizations, small and minority businesses, persons with disabilities and the elderly who currently participants in the planning and development process; 3) to increase access to or generate employment through high quality community-oriented transit services and facilities; and 4) serving, where appropriate, as the transportation component to the Department of 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:

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

- **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.
- **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.
- **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 Recipients**

A special technical assistance activity is directed to a broad range of community organizations and other non-profit 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 5309 (formerly Section 3) grant process. Community organizations and other non-profit 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 5309 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 emphases 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, MPOs, governmental agencies and the business community.
2. Grants to generate community participation in the planning and design phases of projects. Community participation could include individuals and such groups as neighborhood associations, schools and other community organizations. In addition, grants may be available for other implementation activities including the development of site plans and designs, and for conducting market and financial feasibility studies.
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 5309, 5336, 5310, and 5311 (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 including model urban design guidelines, transit-oriented land use policies, and parking management programs.

#### **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 "...pervasive 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 5314(a) (Section 26(b)) funds will support research, planning, and technical assistance activities, or special projects demonstrating the introduction of innovative techniques and methods.

Unearmarked Section 5309 (formerly Section 3) discretionary funding will be available in support of the Livable Communities Initiative capital projects. In addition, applicants are encouraged to use Section 5309 funds earmarked for new starts, rail modernization and bus projects, Section 5336 (formerly Section 9) Formula Program, Interstate Transfers and the flexible funding available under 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 are encouraged as well. A local match of 20 percent is required for all grants under the Livable Communities Initiative.

### 3. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

#### a. Factors for Consideration:

This section describes factors to be considered in project development. Efforts should be made to identify projects that are already part of a development process either in the Section 5309 (formerly Section 3) New Starts, Rail Modernization or Bus Programs, Section 5336 Program of Projects, a demonstration program, or in an EZ or EC proposal. For the purpose of Section 5313 (formerly Section 26) planning projects, applicants are advised to include the projects in the area's Unified Planning Work Program which is developed by the Metropolitan Planning Organization or the State in the case of rural areas. For capital projects, projects are to be contained in a Transportation Improvement Program which is also developed by the MPO or State.

Threshold factors will include evidence that the project:

Resulted from a community planning process and contains community endorsement,

Increases access to jobs, educational opportunities, or social services,

Incorporates community services or other transit and pedestrian-oriented mixed use developments, and

Provides opportunities for small or disadvantaged business participation in the planning, design, and implementation phases of the project.

In addition to the threshold factors, there are a number of specific measures worthy of consideration in developing projects. They are as follows:

Evidence of community involvement in the planning, design and implementation of the project,

Evidence that the transit project is contained in a comprehensive plan,

Degree to which transit ridership is increased and single occupant automobile trips are reduced,

Degree to which the projects responds to community needs through the inclusion of community services and customer conveniences,

Level of funding pledged by local and State agencies and other Federal programs,

Degree to which the enhancements improve the physical environment of the community, including safety and security,

Degree to which the project stimulates commercial and housing development around the subject transit facility,

Degree to which the project generates jobs for unemployed community residents,

Evidence of local ordinances reflecting supportive land use policies and business development initiatives,

Market feasibility of the relevant project elements,

Reasonableness of the financial plan to cover the local share of the capital costs and long term operations and maintenance costs of the relevant project elements.

If any of the issues and factors noted above is outstanding in a capital project proposal, the applicant is advised to conduct the necessary community planning and design work. Such activities could be eligible under this initiative.

### **b. Capital Program Issues**

Authority for livable community transit projects is contained in Sections 5309(a)(5) and (f) and Section 5309(a)(7) (Sections 3(a)(1)(D) and 3(a)(a)(F)). Sections 5309(a)(5) and (f) provide for coordinated planning and development of transit facilities and adjacent land in order to maximize the economic and social benefits of the public transit investment with the objective being to foster transit-oriented development that increases transit ridership. Section 5309(a)(7) allows for the development of corridors to support fixed guideway systems and non-vehicular improvements that increase transit ridership. A number of issues are typically encountered in developing livable communities capital projects under these authorities. They are as follows:

Establishing a physical and functional relationship between the livable community project and transit,

Assuring active and inclusive participation of the community in planning and design projects,

Coordinating the site and functional plans, particularly in relationship to transit facility operation and maintenance,

Designing transit and related services in an integrated manner,  
Determining the market and financial feasibility of the transit-related components,  
Addressing environmental and other potential cross-cutting Federal requirements,  
Acquiring and disposing of property obtained through Federal financial assistance,  
Producing supporting land use and zoning policies, and  
Allocating cost of a proposed transit-related component between the public and private partners.

**c. Project Coordination**

Potential applicants are encouraged to initially contact the FTA Regional Offices. The Regional Offices will work with potential applicants in developing project proposals and will seek headquarters technical assistance and procedural guidance as needed. Information on the FTA Regional Offices follows.

# FTA Regional Offices

Region/Address	Telephone No.	Region/Address	Telephone No.
Federal Transit Administration Region I Transportation Systems Center 55 Broadway, Suite 920 Cambridge, MA 02142	(617) 494-2055	Federal Transit Administration Region VII 6301 Rockhill Road, Suite 303 Kansas, City, MO 64131	(816) 523-0204
Federal Transit Administration Region II 26 Federal Plaza, Suite 2940 New York, NY 10278	(212) 264-8162	Federal Transit Administration Region VIII 216 Sixteenth Street, Suite 650 Denver, CO 80202	(303) 844-3242
Federal Transit Administration Region III 1760 Market Street, Suite 500 Philadelphia, PA 19103	(215) 656-6900	Federal Transit Administration Region IX 211 Main Street, Suite 1160 San Francisco, CA 94105	(415) 744-3133
Federal Transit Administration Region IV 1720 Peachtree Road, NW, Suite 400 Atlanta, GA 30309	(404) 347-3948	Federal Transit Administration Region X Jackson Federal Building 915 Second Avenue, Suite 3142 Seattle, WA 98174	(206) 220-7954
Federal Transit Administration Region V 55 E. Monroe Street, Suite 1415 Chicago, IL 60603	(312) 353-2789		
Federal Transit Administration Region VI 819 Taylor Street, Suite 9A32 Fort Worth, TX 76102	(817) 334-3787		



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