

Transit oriented developments have potential

By Colleen Coyne

CREATING a more compact urban form, with increased population density around transport nodes and activity centres is critical to the Queensland Government's South East Queensland Regional Plan.

Transit oriented developments (TODs) are integral to accommodating the projected growth of a million people in south east Queensland by 2026.

They will also enable the delivery of more viable public transport services.

Earlier this year, the Office of Urban Management (OUM) conducted a two-day conference, called Living Smarter: The Future for South East Queensland.

One of the major themes was TODs and how to ensure they are designed to deliver functional, vibrant mixed-use centres.

The keynote speaker was Gordon Price, the director of the City Program at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada, and until 2002 a long-serving city councillor.

The Vancouver region is unusual in the North American context because it has no freeway system.

Its outward expansion is significantly constrained by farmland, mountains and waterways and it has been widely recognised for its smart growth.

Mr Price said after 20 years of pursuing smart growth policies focused on investment in elevated rail rapid transit, downtown Vancouver now had 40,000 people living in mixed-use neighbourhoods with no one more than three blocks from a transit route.

He nominated good design as essential for the successful creation of TODs – for example a 25m separation of high-rise buildings to provide privacy and view corridors.

It is critical for TODs to have underground parking, so the public transport station can have direct proximity to adjoining communities as it promotes vibrant mixed-use environment which planners are seeking to achieve.

Podiums are another essential element of 'Vancouver-style high rises with a soft edge', with townhouses and retail uses providing active street frontages and cas-

ual surveillance of public open space that enhances pedestrian safety.

The outcome for Vancouver, according to Mr Price, has reduced commute times and fewer cars being purchased.

Another lesson discovered was Vancouver TODs attracted more families with children than planners expected, with the need for open space suited to differing age groups.

Reduced car dependence is one of the objectives of TODs, but achieving it relies on understanding two fundamental characteristics of well-planned TODs.

Firstly the public transport service, be it rail transit or bus, needs to be frequent, reliable and have sufficient capacity, with the station central to the TOD.

"Only when door-to-door trip time is better than driving, will people shift mode," said Barry Gyte, from Queensland's TransLink.

Secondly, TODs should be planned as a network of activity centres linked by transit.

Robert Cervero from the University of California, Berkeley, spoke of a network of TODs in a transit-oriented corridor in a transit-oriented region.

He referred to Copenhagen and Stockholm with their bi-directional travel flows between centres offering a balance of jobs, housing and retail services along their corridors.

With density reducing the public transport hub, the achievement of south east Queensland's population growth increases should not necessarily mean introduction of medium to high-density development throughout the suburbs.

According to Mr Cervero, well-designed TODs can result in reduced vehicle kilometres travelled every year, citing examples in Curitiba, Brazil; Zurich, Switzerland, and San Francisco, California.

However, he warned planners that such behavioural changes took time and it could take five to 15 years for the community benefits of smart-growth policies to be fully appreciated.

He also pointed to land value premiums of 30 per cent to 40 per cent along transit-oriented corridors.

• Colleen Coyne is the director of Colleen Coyne Property Research



Vancouver, in Canada, has been widely recognised for its smart growth

Alternate routes to link Coast

MEANWHILE, TransLink will make a critical decision in regard to the Gold Coast's proposed rapid-transit system between now and September.

It will recommend either light rail or buses and one of two alternative routes for the initial stage to run between Helensvale and Griffith University. One route would run via

Parkwood and the other along the Gold Coast Highway (Brisbane Road), with a transit station at Harbour Town.

TransLink will soon seek public consultation on potential routes between Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach.

For more information see www.translink.qld.gov.au/gc_rapidtransit

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