

Increasing Transit Ridership and Revitalizing Downtowns through Intermodal Transportation Centers

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Background

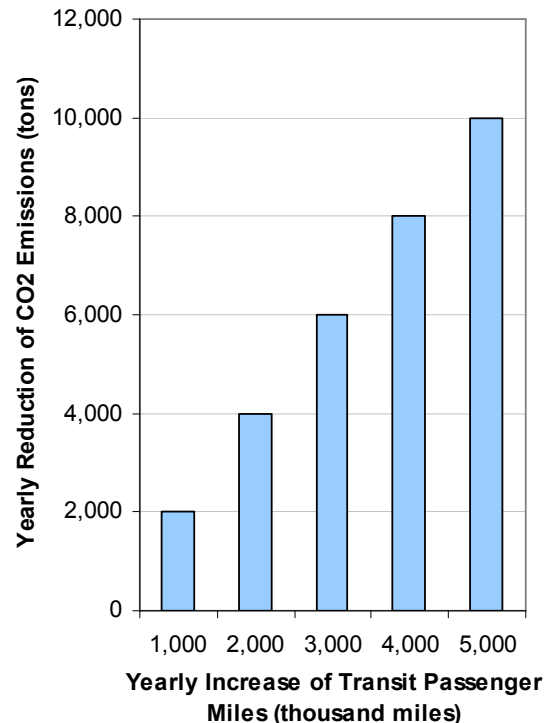
Intermodal transportation centers make taking transit more convenient for residents, thereby increasing ridership. These facilities not only help cities and towns reduce local greenhouse gas emissions by decreasing reliance on personal vehicles, but also can be combined with additional services to provide amenities to residents. Two New England communities along the Connecticut River Valley corridor – Greenfield, Massachusetts, and Brattleboro, Vermont, have constructed or are currently constructing intermodal transportation centers. While these communities already had transit service in place, both have built or are building intermodal transportation centers in order to centralize services, provide greater convenience and amenities to riders, and enhance their downtowns.

Carbon Dioxide Reduction Estimate

The average VMT reduction per transit passenger mile is around 3.5 miles². This means 2 kg of carbon dioxide (CO₂) reduction per passenger mile³. For example, if one million transit passenger

miles were increased every year from intermodal transportation center use, the CO₂ reduction would be 2000 tons annually (Figure 1).

Figure 1: CO₂ Reduction as Result of Transit Ridership Increase



Greenfield, MA

Strategy

In Greenfield, the Bank Row Urban Renewal Plan was approved in 2006 by the State, to invest in the downtown area, rehabilitate buildings, and improve the local economy. Identified as an integral part of the Renewal Plan, an intermodal transportation center has been planned and is being constructed (Figure 2).

The intermodal transportation center is primarily designed to provide better

Brattleboro Intermodal Transportation Center



Greenfield's Partnerships

- Greenfield-Montague Transportation Authority
- Franklin Regional Transit Authority
- Greenfield Citizens Advisory Committee
- Greenfield Redevelopment Authority
- Greenfield Planning Department

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services to bus passengers in Greenfield. Currently, bus passengers lack basic amenities: there are no restrooms, no easy pick-up and drop-off area, ticket booth, or bus shelters. The new transportation center will provide an indoor waiting area, restrooms, a ticketing area, and a taxi area. Adjacent to an old rail bed, the location of the new transportation center is consistent with regional plans to realign rail along the Interstate-91 corridor. With conceivable regional rail realignment and thus more frequent passenger rail services in the region, Greenfield's intermodal transportation center will also serve as a train station.

Challenges

While the intermodal transportation center is its own project, it is closely tied to the entire redevelopment area. Therefore, the city's challenge has been to deal with abandoned properties within the scope of the Renewal Plan. The city has dealt with absentee landlords of abandoned properties by encouraging them to sell to private parties. Through the Bank Row Urban Renewal Plan, the Greenfield Redevelopment Authority also has the power of eminent domain, which it has recently utilized for taking three buildings on Bank Row.

Successes

Greenfield's transportation center plan is the result of a participatory public process, implemented through the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC evaluated each aspect of the plan and submitted a summary report in support of the Bank Row Urban Renewal Plan. The CAC continues to offer input to the Greenfield Redevelopment Authority throughout implementation¹. The intermodal transportation center project has received a lot of public support, since current passenger amenities are very inadequate.

To date, the intermodal transportation center portion of Greenfield's downtown revitalization plan has gone smoothly; residents and city officials agreed it was needed and that the chosen location was ideal. There is nearly always opposition to rezoning, but while there was some initial resistance to it, concerns were successfully talked through and worked out.

Figure 2: Location of Greenfield's Proposed Intermodal Transportation Center (in Red Circle)



Source: maps.live.com

Brattleboro, VT

Strategy

In Brattleboro, parking in the downtown area had been difficult for visitors and residents, as parking space on the Main Street is very limited. In the meantime, a downtown Union Station Improvement Project (Figure 3) – a new bus turnaround, parking lot, lobby, awning, and façade – was in the design phase. As the construction of a new downtown parking lot was being considered, the Town of Brattleboro worked creatively to combine the two projects and turned what would have been simply a parking lot into an intermodal transportation center.

Brattleboro’s newly constructed intermodal transpor-

ation center, located two blocks away from the Union Station, provides ample parking spaces, and a waiting lobby for the three bus companies servicing the area. With the new transportation center, the town is removing traffic congestion from Main Street and encouraging visitors to walk around town once they arrive, rather than drive. The center also simplifies the transition between bus and rail travel. When the Union Station Improvement Project is completed, designated parking spaces at the intermodal transportation center will be allocated for train passengers who leave their cars and walk to the Union Station. A shuttle bus to transport passenger luggage between the transportation center and the train station will also be provided.

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Figure 3: Brattleboro Union Station Waterfront



Challenges

Brattleboro's main challenge was to make the investment decision – while other proposals in town were also discussed, it was difficult at the time to make the intermodal transportation center a priority. However, Brattleboro decided it was worth investing in the project since in the long run it would ease the difficult downtown parking situation.

Successes

Once the decision was made to build the intermodal transportation center, Brattleboro managed to obtain federal funding for the construction of the center, which cost \$8 million. The town also received financial assistance from the Windham Regional Commission and from the municipalities that receive bus services.

Brattleboro's project has gone according to plan. By accommodating parking needs within easy access to the town center, Brattleboro successfully encouraged

Lessons Learned

There are two important points to consider when planning a new intermodal transportation center:

First, as the example of Greenfield demonstrates, intermodal transportation centers can be planned as part of other local or regional transportation and community development plans. This integration is generally a good way to garner the support of residents and local, regional, state, and federal officials. In addition, as part of the Greenfield downtown revitalization plan, the Greenfield Redevelopment Authority was able to use the power of eminent domain to push the project forward. The transportation center can also potentially serve the adjacent rail system,

Sources

1. Environmental Notification Form for the Bank Row Urban Renewal Plan, submitted to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts' Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, MEPA Office, October 1999. <http://www.mass.gov/envir/mepa/pdf/files/enfs/011106em/13703.pdf>.
2. Puentes, Robert, 2007, 'Down by the Station: Exploring the Benefits of Rail Transit in the 21st Century', Transportation Forum, Bethlehem, PA, 16th January 2007, http://www.brookings.edu/metro/speeches/puentes20070116_lehigh.pdf
3. ICLEI's CACP software calculation

Brattleboro's Partnerships

- Town of Brattleboro
- One municipally owned bus carrier
- Two privately owned bus carriers

people to leave their cars at the new transportation center for the day and use their feet to get around town. The three bus carriers, with different stops previously, now share a common stop at the transportation center and coordinate with one another to make up services gaps when possible. The bus company that services Wilmington, VT, also coordinates its last pickup with the train schedule.

Additionally, the planned improvements between bus and train stations are expected to facilitate wider regional travel via Brattleboro. For example, a passenger could feasibly board an intercity train in New York City, arrive in Brattleboro, and board a shuttle bus service to Mount Snow ski resort.

which is consistent with the regional plans to realign rail along the Interstate-91 corridor.

Secondly, as shown by the case of Brattleboro, a large, centrally located parcel that already has a layout and infrastructure conducive to transit use, is essential for an intermodal transportation center to be successful. Brattleboro is very pedestrian-friendly; it has a densely developed downtown historic district, with everything located within a short walking distance. This convenient access to other services has made it much easier for people to take advantage of public transit, instead of driving.