

MARTA in Clayton County: An Opportunity for Equitable Transit-Oriented Development

INTRODUCTION

Amidst national anxiety surrounding the disappearance of low-cost housing within American cities, affordability advocates are beginning to champion improved transit services as a way to lower household costs. As central urban neighborhoods continue to attract upwardly-mobile income earners, affordable properties are increasingly relegated to the suburban margins, which often feature only minimal transit service.

The Atlanta region currently has an opportunity to intervene in these worsening patterns. With new transit service on the horizon for Clayton County, a coordinated housing and transportation plan could ensure that long-term affordable measures surround planned corridors. One potential intervention is equitable transit-oriented development, which champions locating housing near transit to address the ever-escalating costs, which keep low-income households in poverty.

To investigate the viability of these strategies in Clayton County, this study considers the national context of housing and transit planning. Observing patterns and factors that contributed to the success of equitable transit-oriented development projects, one common theme arises: regionalism. Guided by this framework, my paper assesses how the opportunities associated with the expansion of MARTA into Clayton County can

translate into expanded housing options for the whole Atlanta region. Reviewing planning literature, regional demographics, regional governance, and planning tools and policies, this study ultimately makes recommendations towards an equitable housing-transit strategy in Clayton County.

If housing and transit planning are considered simultaneously, this public investment offers the potential to positively impact the county's current and forthcoming residents, especially as the frontier of affordability in the Atlanta region continues moving southward. Equitable transit-oriented development in Clayton County represents an inclusive intervention in a process which engenders gentrification and displacement. Still, steps must be taken now, before rising property values prohibit this prospect entirely.

LOCAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

In November 2014, voters in Clayton County approved a ballot referendum supporting a 1-cent tax increase dedicated to the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA). The 73% landslide approval was a strong mandate for public transit in Clayton County and the product of extensive community organizing. With this vote, residents decried the loss of a former countywide bus service, C-TRAN, eliminated in 2010 in the face of post-recession budget cuts.

By opting into MARTA's service area, county residents now enjoy growing connectivity to an entire transit system. Launched in 2015, bus service in Clayton County currently connects riders to nearby employment hubs, such as Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, as well as MARTA's existing heavy-rail service. Clayton's new routes also operate within the county, connecting its major activity centers, including Clayton State University and Southlake Mall in Morrow.

Unique to Clayton County's transit expansion is the role a dedicated sales tax allocation will play in influencing long-range planning. While half of the one-cent tax funds the local bus service, the remaining half will be held in escrow and dedicated to expanding high-capacity transit in the county. High-capacity transit refers to moving of a high volume of passengers with large vehicles, such as articulated buses, and more frequent service. MARTA's Gold and Red lines are examples of high-capacity transit.

This stipulation makes transit planning in Clayton County unique, not only within the Atlanta region, but also nationally. High-capacity transit projects are generally financed through the receipt of significant federal funding, as such competitive grants are awarded. Examples of these federal programs include the Federal Transit Administration's New Starts and Small Starts. However, to become competitive for this shrinking grant money, localities often reserve a portion of sales tax explicitly to match these grants. By first designating a local funding source, Clayton County not only prioritizes its ambition to offer residents more robust commuter transit services, but also increases its competitiveness for federal transit funding through the Federal Transit Administration.

The likelihood of high-capacity projects moving forward in Clayton County is unique not only due to this funding mechanism, but also due to the county's demographics. Applications for federal transit grants often propose routes that link a city's highest revenue generators: downtown cores, edge city employment centers, convention centers, and stadiums. These destinations are employment hubs and deserving termini for transit. The greater challenge is connecting a critical mass of low-income riders to those destinations, especially in low-density land use areas like Clayton County.

Due to the competitiveness of national funding, localities strategically submit bids for routes that serve dense, already-developed areas, to ensure guaranteed ridership and relieve congestion on heavily-trafficked corridors. Such plans are often created in direct consultation with local business community leadership, which prizes infrastructure investments not only as a mobility solution but also a means towards generating higher property tax revenues.

A Unique Opportunity

The arrival of high-capacity transit in Clayton County will represent a significant departure from this national trend. Clayton County features low-density development, few large-scale employers or job hubs, and a high proportion of transit-dependent, African-American households. 53.1% of Clayton County students qualify for free or reduced-cost lunch (Orfield). Transit is needed in the County foremost as a service, not as an economic development driver.

Inevitably, these investments will change the shape of Clayton County, encouraging more infill development around future transit lines. In transit expansions elsewhere, such development implies displacement. Rising property values and corollary rents quickly place formerly low-cost housing out of reach for low and moderate-income households. Absent proactive policy and planning, Clayton County's future transit may significantly increase housing costs for many County residents.

While transit-oriented development is not a new concept, its potential to generate a more inclusive version of development is only recently gaining traction amongst national philanthropic organizations and regional-planning entities. According to national affordable housing developer Enterprise Community Partners, equitable transit oriented

development (ETOD) “...serves those who most stand to benefit and [ensures] that cost optimized for the public and non-profit institutions that serve users of public transportation” (Enterprise). Such aims are accomplished through siting low-income housing near transit stations, cross-subsidizing affordable housing through mixed-income development, and incorporating affordability mandates into special zoning provisions surrounding stations.

The expansion of transit into Clayton County is a novel opportunity, representing a unique chance to design a new transit service for individuals who need it most. This paper looks at how to maximize this opportunity, and how planning literature, community and economic development tools, and local organizing tactics can coalesce to inform an equitable approach to transit-oriented development in Clayton County.

METHODS AND DATA

To inform recommendations, my study focused on qualitative research with individuals whose experience focuses on organizing, affordable housing, or transportation planning in the Atlanta region. My primary method for gathering information was interviews. Between October, 2016 and March, 2017, I interviewed 13 individuals to deepen my understanding of local context and draw upon their expertise. To ensure that these interviews represented the cross-jurisdiction, cross-disciplinary approaches needed for ETOD, I began by interviewing two individuals, Susan Adams (Director of Research, Policy & Information, Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership) and Sarah Kirsch (Executive Director, Urban Land Institute), who were invaluable to this research for their own insight and willingness to make connections with other local professionals who could inform this work.

Below is a list of individuals and organizations interviewed for this project:

Susan Adams, Atlanta Neighborhood Development Partnership
Jeremy Stratton, Clayton County Chamber of Commerce
Ken Kimbrough, Habitat for Humanity - Southern Crescent
Akilah Ford, Clayton County - University of Georgia Extension
Sarah Kirsch, Urban Land Institute
Marissa Ghani, Atlanta Regional Commission
Dan Reuter, Reuter Strategy, LLC
Jarrett Terry, Clayton State University
Odetta MacLeish-White, Enterprise
Tracie Roberson, Janice Williams, Amanda Rhein MARTA
Deborah Scott, Georgia STAND-UP
Dwayne Patterson, Partnership for Southern Equity

Additionally, I surveyed planning literature to understand what trends underpin equitable transit-oriented development, as well as comparable national examples which could inform this planning in the Atlanta region. The following savings are o literature review summarizes this component of my study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To contextualize this study, it is important to introduce the ideas from literature and planning best practices which underpin the rise of equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD). Transportation infrastructure is generally lauded for its ability to support clusters

and agglomerations of industry, increase productivity by decreasing transit time, improve supply chain efficiency, and, above all, increase job access (Dowell).

Yet, as Clayton County finalizes feasibility studies for its initial phase of high-capacity transit, local economic development strategies should consider how MARTA's expansion will shape the future of its housing landscape. Real estate property values will surely rise, requiring a conscientious strategy to ensure that existing and future low-income residents see a share of those gains. Interviews with Clayton County's Chamber of Commerce leadership praise the role of this investment in job attraction and tax revenue generation, yet these understandings of economic development are short-sighted (Stratton). Additional attention should focus on what types of jobs the county can sustain to create better versions of economic opportunity for residents. More comprehensive, sustainable economic development strategies, focusing on much-needed school system improvements, affordable housing options, and workforce training programs, will enable all Clayton County residents to benefit from this growth.

To provide broader context for these issues, this section reviews factors related to affordability, including growing housing costs, transportation expenses, and increasing suburbanization, which exacerbates both challenges. Because the diffuse supply of affordable housing creates a limited, costly series of transportation choices, I review why automobile-focused, mobility approaches to transportation planning have led to this reality, then contrast that lens to emerging accessibility frameworks. Charting the traction of this alternative accessibility approach, I look at how policies can measure and reward transportation and housing development efforts which attempt to address the relationship between housing, transportation, land use, and affordability. Beyond policies, I investigate

ETOD's existence within this zeitgeist, both as a private-sector-driven real estate product and progressive housing solution. Finally, because these challenges refer to regional transit services, and housing and labor markets which spill beyond jurisdictional boundaries, I review regional approaches to equity planning.

Defining Transportation's Role in Affordability

According to the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), affordable housing is defined as "housing for which the occupant(s) is/are paying no more than 30 percent of his or her income for gross housing costs, including utilities" (Department of Housing and Urban Development). By this definition alone, many American households are already cost-burdened, paying more than this 30% rule-of thumb. Nonetheless, an exclusive focus on housing in affordability definitions overlooks other important expenses, such as transportation and childcare, which contribute significantly to the overall budget of cost-burdened households.

Recognizing the need for more reliable measures of household costs, in 2006, the Brookings Institute's New Markets Initiative released a tool which quantitatively describes the role of transportation costs in housing choice. To better demonstrate this share of transportation expenses, the Center for Neighborhood Technology developed the Housing and Transportation (H+T) Affordability Index. Utilizing the U.S. Census' American Community Survey data, H+T joins household and neighborhood characteristics with transportation profiles to calculate the share of housing and transportation as a share of overall household costs (Center for Neighborhood Technology).

According to this index, Clayton County residents, for example, pay an average of 47% of their monthly income on housing and transportation costs; 7.3% of County

residents lack a vehicle entirely (Center for Neighborhood Technology). The index also shows what share of households are extremely cost-burdened. While over 14% devote between 54-66% of their monthly income to these expenses, still 1% pay over two-thirds of their monthly costs in housing and transit expenses. By factoring in transportation costs, H+T provides a more accurate depiction of low-income spending, highlighting the need for additional affordability mechanisms beyond what a housing-focused snapshot prescribes.

Additionally, H+T reveals the importance of considering reliable transit access when siting affordable housing. As a readily-accessible data tool, H+T demonstrates how limited transit access continues to create costs for already-cost-burdened households. In response, planning should prioritize improved transit service in areas with high H+T index scores, or incentivizing affordable housing development sited near transit.

For example, states can treat transit access as a way to assess the quality of proposed affordable housing. When assessing applications for Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) allocations, some states reward projects which prioritize transit access. Connecticut offers 3 points for proposals located .5 miles from rail service, or within a ¼ mile walk from a local bus. Massachusetts projects sited a ½ mile from transit receive 6 points, while those located .75 miles away receive 3 points (Kresge). These criteria begin to re-connect transportation costs to household costs and deserve replication in other states.

A Shrinking and Diffuse Supply

Rising household costs are directly tied to the dwindling supply of affordable housing, especially in transit-rich areas. Many job centers and services remain clustered in the central cores of cities, yet land values in these areas prohibit homeownership for low to moderate income households and drive rental costs well beyond HUD's income thresholds

described above. This effectively locates affordable options far from the resources and opportunities of central cities, an illusion for individuals whose commutes become barriers to job access and retention. Furthermore, the process of suburbanization has created numerous edge cities and employment hubs beyond the historic cores and Central Business Districts. This dual dispersion increases the challenge of connecting low-income jobseekers to economic opportunities.

Though much national commentary focuses on the affordability crises in coastal cities, low-cost rental units are also disappearing across the southeast. In 2014, the percentage of households with incomes below \$35,000 reached 80 percent in 2014 in 8 of the Southeast's central cities (Immergluck). Further spatial analysis showed that this disappearance of affordable units is concentrated in neighborhoods with booming new construction, low poverty rates, and a high influx of young adults. Most importantly, this loss of physical affordable housing stock implies a higher proportion of households paying more than 30% of their income for housing.

Subsequently, housing increasingly means instability for individuals and families, evaluating on a yearly (or even month-to-month) leasing calendar whether to remain in their current place of residence. The implications here are serious for both workers seeking housing near their place of employment, as well as families seeking to raise children near quality schools (or keeping children in the same schools and school districts for the duration of their education). Matthew Desmond's 2016 *Evicted* lyrically depicts this version of volatility experienced by millions of households, ranging from families to elderly veterans, confronting the risk of eviction every year (Desmond).

This instability, stemming from housing's disproportionate share of overall household costs, also exacerbates the stress of other basic household costs, such as food and childcare (Joint Center for Housing Studies, 2015a). Here, limited transportation resources again create an additional layer of challenges. In the absence of reliable, subsidized public transportation services, low-income households often depend on vehicles with frequent, expensive maintenance charges, and even make up a high share of requests for on-demand service from transportation network companies like Uber and Lyft (Daus). As land costs and NIMBYism relegate affordable units to a metropolitan area's margins, car ownership becomes an apparent necessity, yet remains a financial liability.

Geography and Economic Immobility

Furthermore, transit offerings in areas where housing is affordable are often meager, as service planning prioritizes higher-density areas. Neighborhoods of suburbanized poverty also often fall outside the boundaries of transit service areas, whether due to census classifications of urbanized areas, limited political will to support transit in outlying counties, or both. This makes driving the de facto commuting choice for low-income suburban commuters. Among these households, 74 percent commute in single-occupancy vehicles, and another 12 percent carpool to and from work (Kneebone and Berube). Still, studies show that, when available, transit alternatives more rapidly reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) among low-income versus high-income populations (Murakami & Young, 1997). Read together, these pieces offer optimism that better transit service, if affordable, is likely to reduce the prevalence and costs of car commuting in low-income areas.

Therefore, conversations about "affordability" – and corresponding solutions -- are nebulous without a better understanding of how housing location impacts other household costs, and especially transportation costs. Fortunately, recent trends in housing thought emphasize the geography of opportunity, incorporating questions of how reliable transportation options and job access are critical components of maintaining affordability. Faced with persistent housing discrimination, and a corollary concentration of low-quality, low-rent housing, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) now mandates local housing plans to diversify the siting of affordable units through its Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule.

Building on over a decade of HUD-sponsored Moving to Opportunity (MTO) research data, further scholarship continues to influence HUD's provision of grants and programs, such as Choice Neighborhoods. For example, a team of Harvard economists, led by Raj Chetty, focused on the positive impact of neighborhood choice on educational attainment and future earnings among children raised in low-income households with housing choice vouchers, quantifying the increased eventual incomes for each additional year a child spends outside high-poverty areas (Chetty). Chetty stresses the benefits to both to voucher recipients and taxpayers, ultimately arguing that integrated housing improves economic opportunity while reducing social safety net costs.

Collectively, AFFH and MTO thought encourages housing plans that diversify the geographic distribution of affordable housing, pressuring localities to consider connections between housing assistance recipients and urban resources. Still, strapped by high construction costs in opportunity areas, affordable housing developers struggle to make projects in high-opportunity areas "pencil out" on any significant scale. Subsequently, most

affordable housing is still built far from urban cores and employment centers, which continues to contribute to transportation costs. Edsall draws attention to this phenomenon through an indictment of what he labels the "poverty housing industry," noting that an astounding 73% of LIHTC housing is built in high-poverty areas. This concentration of affordable housing in already low-income neighborhoods further builds the case for improving transit service in such areas, or siting these developments adjacent to transit.

Status Quo Mobility Frameworks

While affordable housing policy is beginning to incorporate transportation concerns, corollary criteria with transportation planning, especially as practiced, remain largely stagnant. Traditional transportation planning prioritizes mobility, a framework focused on the needs of automobile travel. Mobility solutions consider how to move as many cars through a metropolitan area as possible, and treat vehicles as the assumed mode of transportation. This framework's impact on the American landscape is apparent in our monumental, monstrous system of multi-lane highways. The illusive necessity of single-occupancy vehicles underscores Karel Martens' "social meaning" of transportation: freedom of movement and isolated, individualistic space. As Martens explains, "There can be no doubt that potential mobility has prevailed as an operational proxy of the social meaning of the transport good driving much of the practice of transportation planning over the past decades...because especially the private car is strongly associated with the values of freedom and autonomy (even though the freedom of the car is dependent on government provided infrastructure and services), this dominant social meaning has enabled governments to direct investment towards road building" (Martens).

This unchallenged emphasis on automobile travel has segregated access to opportunities in American cities. A focus on vehicle speeds overlooks how transportation networks effectively connect residents to job opportunities. The catchphrase “drive ‘till you qualify” summarizes the undelivered promise of mobility-focused solutions: increased travel times and higher commuting costs. Low-income households, relegated to affordable housing on the metropolitan margins, are most vulnerable to this truism of urban geography. As Reid Ewing puts it, “...the ability of some to travel far and fast does not translate into mobility for all. The young, old, poor, and handicapped are worse off now than they were before the automobile. In an automobile-centric society, they suffer from ‘deprivation of access” (Ewing).

From a standpoint of social equity, this nearly exclusive focus on automobile travel demands the greatest costs from households with the least ability to absorb them. Meanwhile, the lack of transportation choices also detracts from overall labor force productivity and economic growth. When workers are relegated to the unreliability of automobile dependency, employers struggle to maintain a workforce which is always susceptible to irrational traffic flows, unavoidable even with the best mobile apps.

Transportation as Accessibility

In sum, transportation planning with an exclusive mobility focus perpetuates and exacerbates existing spatial inequalities. However, a growing cadre of planners, researchers and advocates are calling for a reframing of transportation as accessibility. An accessibility framework remains concerned with reduced travel times, yet also measures access to transport and access to opportunities, as well as the quality of mobility. Perhaps most fundamental to this understanding of transportation as accessibility is how the

integration or transportation and land use planning impact urban affordability. As Christo Venter of the Brookings Institution explains,

The underlying goal of any regional transportation system is to connect people to economic opportunity, and accessibility is the umbrella concept to measure the ease of reaching a destination, whether it is a park in one's neighborhood or a job 20 miles away. Accessibility requires an integrated view of transportation and land use, since decisions made under each policy discipline will intrinsically affect the other. The accessibility concept...can integrate demographic and financial considerations—such as household income or pricing, for example—alongside traditional transportation outputs like travel time to enable a better understanding of how broader economic and social outcomes relate to local transportation design. (Venter)

Without a concerted focus on accessibility measures, the overwhelming skew towards travel time and congestion relief outshadow the potential impact of transportation on jobseekers. Nonetheless, nascent accessibility indicators have largely gone unnoticed by public transportation agencies and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). In a national survey of MPOs, the same Brookings study above found that only a quarter defined the success of proposed projects in terms of increasing job access, or other destinations within a certain travel time (Venter).

Nonetheless, accessibility criteria are becoming increasingly sophisticated, providing metrics which planners can utilize in practice. The University of Minnesota's Accessibility Observatory produces maps and data showing access to jobs via car, transit, and walking. Utilizing a common accessibility metric, this tool enables planners to highlight how an investment will impact jobseekers for riders across the service area, using the census block level as the unit of analysis. So far, this research effort has summarized 50 of the largest metropolitan areas, and will become a powerful tool for equity-minded planners to prioritize job access in the evaluation of proposed projects or services (Owen).

Armed with such tools, planners can propose methodical evaluation criteria related access measures for proposed transportation projects.

Emerging Policy Responses

The most immediate, actionable application of these considerations of accessibility are in the realm of transit service planning. Ensuring that transit options are frequent, reliable, and extensive ensures that riders can get to work on time and access ample employment opportunities by utilizing public transportation. Despite these goals, there remains little coordination on a federal level to incentivize or even document these efforts. Environmental justice and Civil Rights legislation largely exist to ensure that no minority or Limited-English Proficiency (LEP) populations are disparately impacted by a proposed project or serve. Though these compliance-focused measures are not direct measures of access, they still establish an important precedent. As Wachs and Kumgai hopefully project, such precedent would allow for a more systematic application of transportation-as-accessibility as these measures become increasingly sophisticated. (Wachs and Kumgai).

Outside the realm of service planning, transportation is increasingly considered as an aspect of affordability solutions. For example, beginning in 2013, the Federal Transportation Administration's (FTA) New Starts grants now consider affordability as part of its criteria for scoring transportation projects. As an example of the impacts of this grantmaking criteria, in Portland, FTA funding directly contributed towards site acquisition costs for an affordable development located near transit (Wise). As public transportation agencies and advocates play tug-of-war between "city-serving" versus "city-shaping" investments, equity concerns resonate throughout both arenas.

This project focuses on the latter, for its long-term horizons for affordability. Looking at the growth of the Atlanta region, speculation bids up central city land costs to an extent that makes affordable housing impossible to develop. These factors contribute to the visible dominance of high-end apartments; in Atlanta alone, 95% of new construction consisted of luxury apartments (Kusisto). Inclusionary zoning is one tool which seeks to redistribute the profits of such development, yet this policy faces serious questions of scalability due to frequent opportunities to opt-out with in lieu fees (Hertz).

Looking towards other solutions for financing affordable development, others praise the potential of mixed-income development to create affordable units in the form of a development attractive for higher-income renters. This product type becomes a means to cross-subsidize affordable units through the simultaneous development of market rate and affordable units. Profits from higher-end units cover losses for a proportion of units reserved for individuals and families making below a designated area median income (AMI). Additional public subsidies, such as New Markets Tax Credits, LIHTC, or HOME funds can also comprise parts of an often-complex capital stack to make such projects feasible (Hoving 2010).

Though unquestioned gospel to many housing agencies, mixed income development remains controversial in the planning literature. Vale and Shamsuddin survey a range of criticism surrounding mixed-income development, from displacement associated with HOPE VI projects to the model's inconclusive results in advancing economic opportunities for low-income residents. In spite of such criticisms, developer support for mixed-income housing remains, especially within Edsall's "poverty housing industry." Whether this product type meets its loftier equity goals is in some ways irrelevant; as long as mixed-

income development's status remains unchallenged, this perception will continue to enable the production of affordable housing.

Equitable Transit-Oriented Development: An Alternative

If mixed-income housing continues its reign, planners will likely play the role of championing its potential, while clarifying its limitations. Most directly for this project, housing around transportation is only viable with highly-proactive planning and focus on long-term, permanent affordability solutions. Even an incredibly forward-looking, proactive, efficient planning process will still confront the rapid rising costs of real estate around planning projects.

Demand for housing near transit is rising, and real estate costs for rental properties and homes alike are as well. According to a 2004 study by the Center for Transit-Oriented Development (CTOD), more than 14.8 million households will seek housing in areas within a one-half mile walkshed of the 27 existing lines and 15 projects slated for completion by 2025. This more than doubles the population living there by 2000 (Center for Transportation-Oriented Development). Despite the implication of rising costs on real estate, planners can creatively confront this challenge. The popular typology of mixed-income development, paired with a demand for housing near transportation creates a significant opportunity for planning to harness this version of market demand towards inclusive economic growth.

How then, can planning anticipate these trends in tandem with transit investments? At present, the vast majority of affordable housing developed near transit remains in what Zuk describes as "opportunity-void areas." Her study of existing LIHTC projects (and

particularly, programs incentivizing LIHTC development near transit) confirms many of Edsall's assertions that the siting of low-income housing keeps these households in poverty. Nonetheless, if transit service is reliable, convenient, and affordable, this promised connectivity represents a powerful expansion of opportunity.

Still, mode remains a factor in the viability of developing mixed income housing around planned transit corridors. As Zuk's survey of LIHTC housing reveals, fixed-guideway transit becomes an additional barrier to affordable development. Because mere speculation around rail can make land costs prohibitive, opening LIHTC projects are a near-impossibility once proposed rail alignments are announced. Therefore, any planning which uses infrastructure investments to galvanize affordable development should look preemptively and proactively zone, site, or incentivize any versions of low-cost housing, whether through preserving existing housing, land-banking for permanently affordable housing, or devising a request for proposals to develop a mixed-income community.

As a result, any financing will likely need to look beyond LIHTC's offerings for affordable development. Addressing this concern, other regions have established below-market debt funds to allow for the deeper versions of subsidy needed to build low-cost units. Two examples include the Bay Area's Transit-Oriented Affordable Housing fund and Denver's Transit Oriented Development fund, both of which operate on a regional scale to assist in financing affordable housing near transit. Demonstrating a model of collaboration between public, private, and non-profit development actors, these two funds show the potential for ETOD's ability to attract additional investment beyond conventional, shrinking streams of public support. With uncertain federal futures ahead for housing, a

strategy focused on market trends and feasible financing may become a region's best chance for creating and preserving affordability.

Regional Approaches to Equity

Unfortunately, the usefulness of tools like those developed at the University of Minnesota is still undermined by the jumble of jurisdictions their maps illustrate. The neat lines of cities, transit service areas, MPO boundaries, or Workforce Investment Boards, do not govern regional-scale job and housing markets. As the rising costs of central cities continue to disperse low-cost housing options to the margins, affordability must become a regional conversation. More significantly, local and regional actors must act cooperatively to devise solutions which reach widely enough to address the extent and reach of affordability concerns.

Planning's history of considering social equity, however, did not emerge within this context of regionalism. Most closely tied to Norm Krumholz's Cleveland planning department, equity planning emerged in the 1970s to prioritize the needs of those who had the least (Cleveland Planning Commission). Krumholz and his peers knew that, however masterful, even the most accurate models and projections would still overlook the voices of city residents overlooked or excluded by the planning process.

This emergence of equity planning directly confronted the purported objectivity of the field's foundation in rational planning, which was beginning to unravel in the wake of 1960s racial unrest and violence in American cities. As the prescriptions of rational planning proved exclusive and detrimental to low-income communities and communities of color, planners were ready to entertain alternatives. Subsequently, equity planning in the 1970s and 1980s intentionally focused on advocacy for the underrepresented in urban

development policies (Davidoff). Under this model, planners were a neutral conduit for the concerns of these residents.

Though this early incarnation of equity planning was a fierce intervention in established mid-century practice, its tactics do not translate directly to today's planning environment. This model operates under the assumption that planning processes can be influenced by the underrepresented, and that through a planner's advocacy, substantive goals of equity can be achieved. Unfortunately, this reliance upon process can overlook the extent of systemic inequities that planners need to address to achieve redistributive goals. Iris Marion Young's notion of a "politics of difference" shows how institutional context shapes who has a legitimate stake in decision-making, as well as the versions of distribution and opportunity under consideration. Given the subjectivity of this environment, process-focused planning will always overlook historic inequities. To prioritize equity concerns, planners must focus on outcomes and substantive goals. As Livia Brand explains, "Equity planning...must take into account how privileged democratic voices can support inequitable development agendas. This requires a more nuanced and fine-grain analysis of the role of racial inequality in the twenty-first century (and its historical and systemic roots)..." (Brand).

Current planning literature around regional equity frameworks warn that equity issues can become subsumed into a progrowth agenda. Regional economic development entities treat segregation and other intraregional disparities as a barrier to economic competitiveness. For example, national studies track the impact of segregation on metropolitan economic performance and productivity, measuring the costs of services and declines in labor productivity associated with high levels of race-based social stratification

(National Research Council, Bollens, Altshluer). Though this framework can create buy-in for the goals of equity-minded planners, more realistically, equity-minded planners must operate within this framework.

Global competition also prioritizes regional growth as the most significant unit of economic growth and cooperation. Cities draw their workforce from across regions, and recruit talent nationally and internationally. As such, international economic competitiveness increasingly focuses the attention of policy makers and investors on the urban economic region as the most appropriate scale for consideration. From a planning perspective, corresponding housing and labor markets are similarly unconstrained by municipal boundaries, even if their governance structures are. Accordingly, planners must work to build a case for cooperation and advocacy across jurisdictions, yet also be mindful of the limitations of what Manuel Pastor and Chris Benner refer to as the “equity-growth relationship” (Pastor and Benner).

Raising concerns that equity issues will become subsumed by a progrowth, business-dominated agenda, the nature of leadership and regional-scale organizing becomes an important question for advocacy around regional equity aims (Jonas & Pincetl, 2006). In short, mere collaboration has extreme limitations. According to Weir, Rongerude, and Ansell (2007), this collaboration often

... can do little more than promote new ideas and hope for the best. Horizontal collaboration in regions may help build consensus and alliances that can work in more powerful state and federal venues to promote regional capacity ... Whether such efforts are successful depends not only on the horizontal consensus building process but, more critically, on the power relationships – alliances, coalitions, enemies – that prevail in these alternative venues. (Weir et al.)

These prescriptions are not easy, requiring years of dedicated relationship-building, cooperation and leadership development among coalition members. Nonetheless, the realization of any equity goals rests on this critical groundwork.

Vehicles for Regional Equity

Regional alliances and collaborative efforts run the risk of becoming nominal without this orientation towards concurrent community organizing. Several reasons underpin this need. First, if regional-scale entities exist to better the lives of low-income people, those individuals should guide such efforts. The realities of grant-related funding cycles, or extant priorities of involved public or private actors, can cloud the direction of advocacy-focused planning. Community organizations, whose work is specifically defined by the organizing within impacted communities, should be a consistent force and voice in these planning processes to ensure that these projects address community-identified concerns.

Secondly, through consensus-building and goal-setting exercises function successfully in such venues, their application unfolds within much smaller spheres. If regional-level goals require local application, neighborhood-level community leadership must drive implementation, holding leaders accountable for the initiatives championed by advocates.

As Iris Marion Young explains, “regional governance is deeply democratic...only if combined with neighborhood and community-based participatory institutions” (Young). Regional-level dialogue and planning frequently operates outside the governing structures that must carry out identified goals. To select goals that remain central to existing residents, and to ensure that advocacy efforts hold local

leadership accountable, community organizing must underscore and carry out any regional-level equity planning aims.

The next section of my paper will discuss regional equity planning in Atlanta, to understand how this backdrop shapes the feasibility of a coordinated housing-transit strategy in Clayton County.

REGIONAL EQUITY IN ATLANTA

This contextual shift towards a more regional lens for equity planning, provides a highly-relevant framework for understanding MARTA's expansion into Clayton County, concurrent opportunities for affordable housing development, and the role of regional-scale alliances and local organizing in achieving these aims. In this section, I will highlight how and why Clayton County could become a national example for how equitable transit-oriented development can be planned and implemented.

Why is Clayton County Unique?

Clayton County's decision to join MARTA represents a major milestone for improving job access and economic development south of Interstate 20. South Atlanta and Clayton County are both long-neglected in their share of regional and federal infrastructure funding across the Atlanta region. These disparities are reflected even in a cursory demographic snapshot of historic regional development.

For example, though the decennial census displays 128% regional population growth between 1970 and 2000, population within the City of the Atlanta witnessed about a 16% decline. In the 1980s alone, 86% of regional population growth occurred in Cobb, Gwinnett and northern Fulton counties (Kruse). This inequality in growth and investment

is directly linked to patterns of racial segregation, now inherited as the accumulated decades of disinvestment that remain a barrier for economic development in these areas. These patterns also defined job growth; Atlanta's northern suburbs saw nearly four times as many new jobs as their southern counterparts in the 1990s (Bullard).

As northern suburbs grow and continue to attract industry and corporate relocations, southern Atlanta sees little activity. Formal and informal processes explain these disparities in regional development. For example, site selection firms may prize the existing industry and amenities in the northern suburbs, such as the emerging technology corridor along GA-400. Yet, in addition to the already-established viability of such places, the savviness of organized business and community leadership in these areas successfully advocate for additional infrastructure projects in these areas, through mechanisms such as community improvement districts.

Beyond official organizations, informal relationships between business leadership, and elected officials illustrates planning theory's concept of the "urban growth machine" (Molotch). The *a priori* importance of these areas in regional planning processes stems not from their abundant, pressing need for new infrastructure or services in such areas, but rather the tightly-woven, established network between such local jurisdictions, their real estate and development community, and regional-level planning entities.

Clayton County enjoys none of this unquestioned importance. The County represents the forefront of affordability in Atlanta as gentrification and rising central city real-estate values continue to push renters looking for low-cost options

southward. Put bluntly by Georgia STAND-UP 's Executive Director, Deb Scott, "the County has absorbed everybody else" (Scott).

Though prevailing sentiment notes the influence of projects like the Atlanta BeltLine and millennial resettlement of urban cores, these factors alone are not cause for southward retreat of Atlanta's regional affordability. Other interviews with county housing providers confirm the role of the 1996 Olympics in beginning the relocation of affordable housing, and specifically Section 8 recipients south to Clayton County (Kimbrough). As the City of Atlanta redeveloped central areas of the city for games, public housing gave way to athlete housing and sports facilities. For reasons of proximity, Clayton County became the neighborly next-door recipient of displaced former residents of public housing, relocating southwards following the receipt of Section 8 vouchers.

According to Kimbrough, this influx of individuals who qualified for housing assistance exacerbated existing class-based divisions in Clayton County. Many middle-income communities in Clayton County still identify as residents of Atlanta bedroom communities. The illusion of a (traffic-free) 20-minute commute allows many residents to conceive of suburban municipalities in the County as upwardly-mobile places, where Section 8 recipients triggered attitudes of NIMBYism. Low-density, single-family suburban homes dominate the County's housing landscape, with scattered examples of multi-family development. Nonetheless, the influx of Section 8 recipients flowing the 1996 games, combined with structural demographic changes, harped upon preexisting currents of race-based change. While the 1970s saw Clayton County as a mostly white area, populated by either extant rural

communities or newer white flight suburbs, by the late 90s, African-American residents were the county's racial majority. The county's proportion of black residents continues growing. In 2000, Clayton County was 51.6% black, while in 2010 that share grew to 66.1% (U.S. Census Bureau).

Though County demographics continued to change, leadership did not. "Immature" leadership did not prioritize services like transit to consider the needs of its increasing low-income population, nor was there any proactive housing strategy to consider the influx of individuals qualifying for public assistance (Kimbrough, Ford).

Such limited foresight ultimately affected 2008's housing foreclosure shocks, in which the County experienced the second highest foreclosure rates across the country (Wheatley). Amidst these class-based cleavages, tumultuous rates of foreclosures, and unconcerned local leadership, Clayton County became the backdrop for a hard-fought community organizing campaign for much-needed transit.

The uniqueness of this victory is unquestionably due to the role of local organizing. A predecessor transit service, CTRAN, was cut in 2010, due to its popularity amidst recession-era budget cuts (Matteucci). The success of 2014's "Power of the Penny" campaign rested largely in the outcry of many residents about local leadership's ambivalence toward the needs of its low-income residents. Supported by the national Partnership for Working Families, a coalition of grassroots community-based organization, Deb Scott's Georgia STAND-UP drove widescale participation in canvassing and rallies, drawing attention to the need and

opportunity for transit in the County. In a landslide victory, county voters elected 73% to 27% to join MARTA's service area for the price of an extra sales tax penny (Clayton County).

A MANDATE FOR OPPORTUNITY

As previously discussed, the most celebratory, nationally-lauded aspects of this vote stemmed from its demographic novelty and implicit opportunity for transit to become a focal point of the County's ongoing development. Often, jurisdictions joining transit areas do so as part of a transit development plan (TDP), which requires urbanizing areas (i.e. outlying suburbs which become part of an MSA) to provide a coordinated plan for transit. Elsewhere, cities or counties may elect to join a transit authority due to its ability to drive economic growth. Yet, the example of Clayton County, as a jurisdiction whose decision to join MARTA stemmed from community organizing, and a call for broadened opportunities by residents, represent an outlying sociopolitical dynamic in a nation which where the popular perception of transit is as an overly-expensive, excessively-subsidized, inefficient financial sinkhole.

Especially amidst prevailing fiscal conservatism common in southern municipalities, Clayton County's decision to join MARTA was discussed as both an oddity, outlier and an opportunity. Popular national journalism outlets, such as the Atlantic, highlighted Clayton County's decision to join MARTA as a victory against suburban poverty (Semeuls). National blog coverage widely discussed the uniqueness of Clayton County joining MARTA out of dissatisfaction with political leadership, and the dire need for transit as a means to increased job access and

opportunity in metropolitan Atlanta (Davis). Interviews with a Sierra Club organizer involved in the campaign described the novelty of Clayton County's MARTA referendum. "This isn't a situation where it's like 'let's throw up some transportation where everyone has a car and can afford a car and would be fine without it,'" she says. "This is make or break for some people. It's definitely an issue of equity, and people are watching with interest all across metro Atlanta, the state and even the country" (Dovey).

Now in the stages of planning for high-capacity and additional local transit service, Clayton County is on the cusp of a great opportunity to maximize this public investment. Nonetheless, the urgency of proactive planning will define whether the County can grasp this potential. While community organizing drove the victory to bring much-needed transit service, parallel involvement by community-based organizations will define whether equity concerns will matter to local leaders in the next phases of planning. Currently under consideration is the nature of transit service: mode, alignment, frequency, and span of service. Alongside such considerations, residents and advocates also have an opportunity to voice opinions about the type of development this new transit service can engender, especially whether affordable housing has a place in inevitable, forthcoming development.

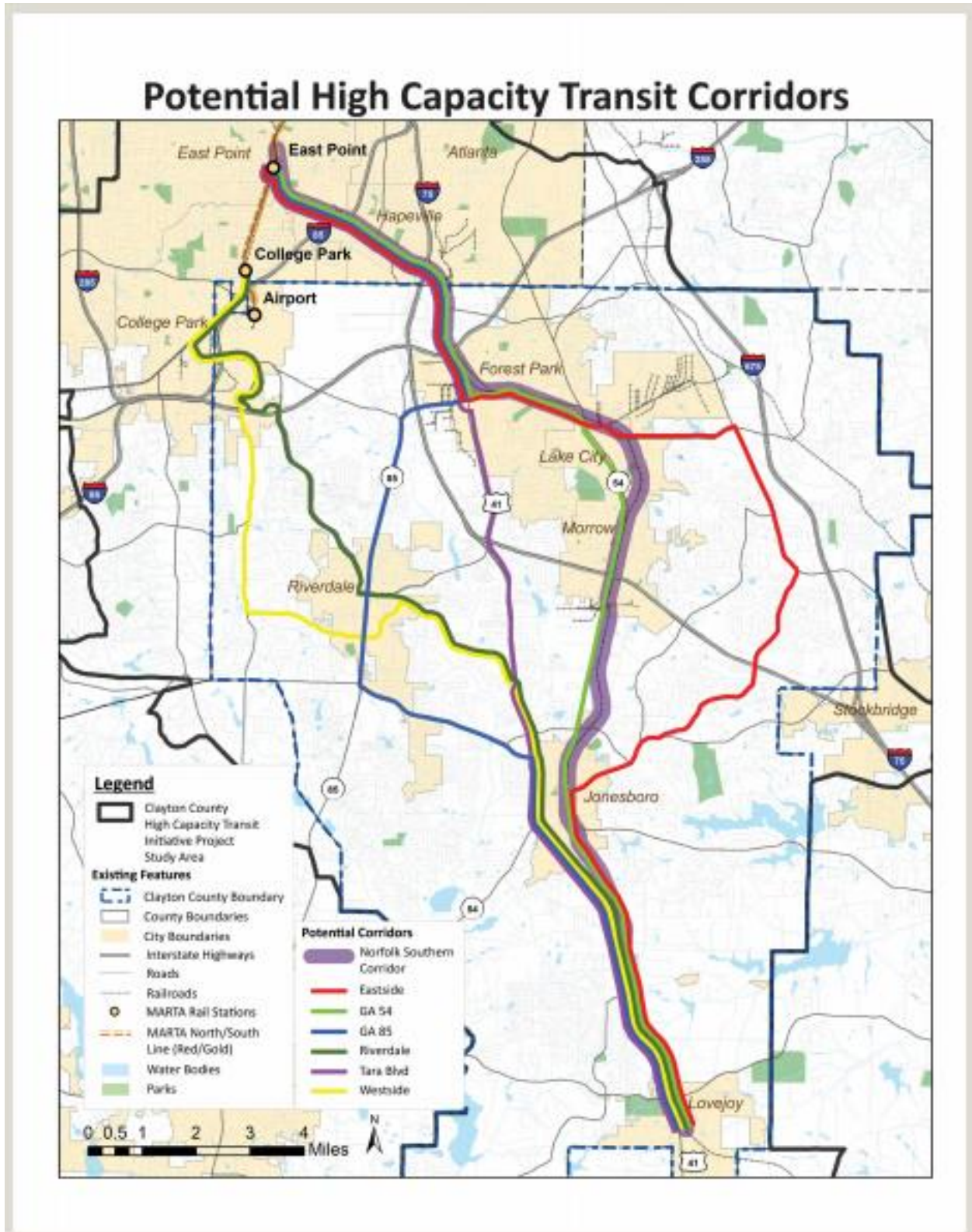
STATE OF THE STUDY

At present, MARTA is studying how Clayton County can maximize the half-cent sales tax dedicated to high-capacity transit from the November 2014 ballot referendum. The overarching goal of this project's public involvement from MARTA's perspective is education and engagement. Because this is a new type of

transit service for the County, MARTA views part of its role as an educator on how this sales tax will be utilized for transit (Roberson). The agency launched the Clayton County Transit Initiative Study in 2016. Since the launch, MARTA has held 2 rounds of public meetings, and also assembled a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC) and Citizen Advisory Group (CAG). To Roberson's knowledge, no individuals involved in 2014's campaign to bring transit to the County serve on either of these bodies.

As of this April writing, the study has completed analyzing the County's baseline conditions, is now determining the purpose and need for high-capacity transit. This current stage considers where transit service is most-needed, and what kind of service matches the travel needs of existing and projected residents. Public meetings in February asked stakeholders and residents to offer feedback on 7

corridors for potential transit service, depicted in the map below:



The mode of service (i.e. type of transit technology, such as light rail or heavy rail) in these corridors will depend on the estimated number and purpose of trips gathered in this current study phase. For example, if the 85 corridor is chosen, travel patterns suggest demand for a commuter service to Atlanta. However, because this corridor would exclude a significant population of commuters in Jonesboro, planners will consider how to connect those residents to existing MARTA heavy rail, or through improved local service to the 85 corridor. Though the primary concern of this study phase is the projected origins and destination of residents, other factors, such as ongoing planning will also influence which corridor is selected. For example, Norfolk Sothern's cooperation will determine its viability as a transit corridor, while concurrent vehicle-focused Georgia Department of Transportation studies on Tara Boulevard make that corridor an unlikely choice for multimodal recommendations of the Clayton County Transit Initiative (Daelhousen).

Regardless of which mode and corridor are ultimately selected, MARTA expects the study to be complete by late 2017, and environmental reviews by 2018. Though the current political jeopardy of FTA's New Starts program makes construction timeline more difficult to predict, the designated sales tax and completed study lay the prerequisite groundwork for near-term implementation of these plans.

Therefore, given the current state of MARTA's study on Clayton County transit, it is valuable at this point in time to assess local and regional actors and the roles they play in planning for equitable transit-oriented development. This section surveys these types of local actors, and the current capacity of these entities in

Atlanta. This analysis will inform my study's ultimate recommendations towards how housing, advocacy, and transportation entities can cooperate to produce a version of equitable development in Clayton County.

REGIONAL ACTORS AND ROLES

MARTA

MARTA's foremost role is as a transit service provider. As a result, the planned service profile must match the commuting needs of Clayton County residents. For example, if the State Highway 54 corridor is chosen, residents in Riverdale, the county's second largest municipality, would still lack high-capacity transit services. In this hypothetical example, MARTA would need to consider how more frequent local feeder service from Riverdale to the agency's existing Gold and Red heavy rail lines or new services on State Highway 54. Alternatively, planning may explore whether simultaneous BRT service through Riverdale and the preferred corridor could be possible with the projected half-cent sales tax revenue.

MARTA also plays an important role in maintaining station access design guidelines to guide development of station areas in such a way that ensures safe and desirable pedestrian access. Though park-and-rides will likely be a component of many new stations, lots should be designed in such a way that does not create unnecessary barriers for people who approach the station by foot or bicycle. These recommendations should strongly consider station access measures, such as pedestrian amenities, that will ensure that MARTA riders have a safe route to a station area, which can in turn support a healthy mix and integration of surrounding retail and housing.

MARTA could also consider a joint development role, which would allow the agency to gain revenue while maintaining a vision for how development can provide housing and services for all residents, including those with low incomes. This version of agency leadership would also allow MARTA to commit to long-term or permanent affordability strategies, such as land-banking or community land trusts, discussed later in this paper.

Clayton County

According to interviews, Clayton County requires a different type of “civic infrastructure” to facilitate the aims of equitable transit-oriented development (Scott). In jurisdictions which have planned for affordable housing or TOD on a regional scale, counties play a key role in passing supportive policies, organizing community engagement processes, restructuring zoning and review processes, and offering incentives, such as density bonuses or reducing parking requirements.

At present, such structures remain a distant reality. County leadership cheerleads the economic growth associated with more MARTA service, but with little contemplation to long-term implications regarding affordability, or whether this growth is inclusive. The county currently lacks a comprehensive plan or housing policy, key tools underscoring progressive initiatives.

The challenge for Clayton County is to construe mixed-income development around transit stations as a component of an incremental economic development strategy. Enthusiasm for multiplier effects of infrastructure investments cannot obscure the current realities of Clayton County’s housing stock, obliterated by the 2008 crisis. Focusing on affordability measures is a more realistic approach to

increasing station area amenities and transit-adjacent housing options, yet still capturing the value of this growth for existing residents. The County is eager to “think big,” yet a premature embrace (i.e. incentivizing a surfeit of market-rate apartments via density bonuses) could detrimentally affect real estate markets and current residents alike (Kimbrough).

Unfortunately, the political dynamics of Clayton County make the development of TOD-supportive policies different. In addition to the immature “civic infrastructure” discussed above, a frequently-occurring 2-2 split during votes on the Board of Commissioners complicates consensus on the County’s Board of Commissioners. Nonetheless, the buy-in for transit is encouraging, and additional education with elected officials from advocacy groups could still work within this fractured system. Encouragingly, Commissioner Turner seeks a comprehensive economic development strategy, focused on housing and jobs, and recently hired a new Economic Development director. Limited planning staff capacity still hinders this vision, but it nonetheless these two factors signify an important turn towards building capacity for progressivism at the County level.

For progressive advocacy to take hold, however, the County must be financially sound and solvent. County government is also responsible for property tax evaluation and assessment. A potential economic development step may consider whether “undertaxation” impacts the County’s existing tax base. Investigating where historic, potentially outdated, tax breaks have reduced the amount owed by County property owners would be a way to regain revenue.

Additionally, the County may need to reassess tax breaks associated with the revaluation of properties following the 2008 housing crisis. In 2009, Clayton County reassessed 87% of its residential parcels to account for a 43% decline in sale prices. In response, the County reduced median taxable values for its properties by 5 percent (Bennet and Perry). Though these reductions were mostly devised for struggling homeowners, other larger parcels, especially those owned by national or regional corporations, likely require reassessment. Such practices would generate additional tax revenue for the County, contributing to overall economic health as well revenue that could be specifically targeted towards inclusive economic development aims.

Local Jurisdictions

As demonstrated in the literature review, planning for affordable housing cannot begin when the project's alignment is settled. Rather, once the corridor is selected, MARTA, local jurisdictions, and the Transformation Alliance should begin surveying land uses and current housing needs around likely station areas. Most immediately, local Clayton County jurisdictions with current Livable Centers Initiative studies (conducted through the Atlanta Regional Commission) should apply to update those studies towards accommodating more transit-supportive land uses. These include:

- Fairburn Historic Downtown LCI Study
- Forest Park Town Center LCI Study
- Mountain View Innovation LCI Study
- Morrow Station Area Activity Center LCI Study
- Northwest Clayton Activity Center LCI Study
- Old National Highway Transit Oriented Development LCI Study
- Riverdale Town Center LCI Study

- Southlake Mall and Mixed Use District LCI Study

Reducing minimum lot sizes, reducing parking requirements, and incentivizing density around planned transit station areas all represent potentially powerful zoning reforms to enable the development of more affordable housing units around MARTA service.

Certain jurisdictions within the county may be more viable than others for affordable housing development. Beyond considerations of land use planning, siting strategies should also consider where political will and leadership are most amenable to developing affordable housing. At present, Riverdale and Forest Park represent the locus of affordability concerns in the County, due to their northern location and proximity to the airport.

If Northern Clayton County represents the forefront of affordable property in the Atlanta region, these are the two areas most likely to be impacted by rising real estate values. As such, Georgia STAND UP, the self-described “Think and Act Tank” which led 2014 “Power of the Penny” campaign, is currently focusing organizing efforts in Riverdale and Forest Park. A mobilized constituency in these cities, paired specifically with stronger city infrastructure (particularly in Riverdale), could amplify community and resident voices in development processes surrounding new MARTA stations (Scott).

Development Authority

Currently, the Clayton County Development Authority’s foremost activities entails the creation of incentive packages for business contemplating relocation to the County. Advertising the County as “the logical choice for logistics,” Clayton County offers the highest valued tax credits in the Atlanta regions, including

industrial revenue bonds, job tax credits for retail and office development, property tax abatement, and a Freeport Exemption for goods manufactured in Georgia.

Potentially the most aggressive stance that the development authority could take would be the creation of a Tax Allocation District (TAD) connecting the airport to potential transit-oriented development sites. Tax Allocation Districts are a tool widely-utilized in community development finance to redistribute gains associated with a particular investment, whether an infrastructure project or shopping mall, towards improvements within designated boundaries surrounding the potential project. Existing TADs surround Mountain View and Clayton County's central commercial corridors (i.e. Tara Blvd and Jonesboro Rd).

However, within Clayton County, a contiguous TAD district could be drawn between Hartsfield Jackson and adjacent municipalities (i.e. Forest Park or Riverdale). In this example, the airport's tax gains could be reallocated towards improving transit station access, transportation-related land acquisition, or affordable housing. According to Aerotropolis Atlanta, the airport has a \$34.8 billion impact to the city (Atlanta Regional Commission). Other cities, like Dallas and Chicago, have employed this model on an even more impactful scale, where TAD districts do not require geographic contiguity. For example, development occurring around a wealthier area of a transit line can finance affordable housing in areas surrounding that same line where current demographics and market demand would not drive the construction of new housing. Bringing such models to Georgia would require state-level legislative reform, yet remain one of the most powerful redistributive financial tools available to counties and municipalities.

Advocacy and Regional Alliances

In Benner and Pastor’s review of regional-level equity planning, the authors discuss the importance of a convening partner to facilitate and unite among private, public, and advocacy actors working toward shared regional goals. Atlanta’s current incarnation of this entity is the TransFormation Alliance, a “collaboration of community advocates, policy experts, transit providers, and government agencies that believes equitable transit-oriented development can promote community building practices to link communities near transit stations with the opportunities they need to thrive” (Transformation Alliance). As a collaborative between 17 public, private and non-profit entities, the Alliance understands its role as a convener, educator, advocate, and technical assistance provider towards the realization of equitable transit-oriented development in the Atlanta region.

Since 2011, the Alliance has worked to galvanize policies and projects that enable the creation and preservation of affordable housing around MARTA. Major work has focused on surveying existing MARTA stations to create typologies for emerging transit-oriented development, advancing mandatory inclusionary zoning, and developing an equity evaluation tool to assess the equity components of a transit-oriented development project alongside physical components. While early efforts were strongly concerned with the confines of the initial 3-year Ford Foundation grant, the second extension, as well as a new national-level multi-funder \$1 million Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC) grant, granted in early 2017, have greatly expanded the potential efficacy and scope of the Alliance’s work.

As Alliance members, Georgia STAND-UP and the Partnership for Southern Equity, will continue to engage Clayton residents and elected leaders as plans for MARTA service

unfold. One key tactic for engagement, spearheaded by the Partnership for Southern Equity (PSE), is the creation of an Equitable Transit Oriented Development academy. In the fall of 2016, PSE led 4 modules to increase community power, policy sophistication and cohesiveness around transit-oriented development advocacy. These modules were not geared towards specific organizing campaign goals (i.e. training x # of advocates to secure x # units of housing in a TOD plan), but instead represent a new organizing strategy for PSE, metropolitan Atlanta, and even the American South (Patterson).

These modules are geared towards long-term, consistent engagement and leadership development in Atlanta, grounded in a more equitable, alternative vision for regional development. Whereas campaign-focused organizing aims to elect progressive leadership, such victories often lack any system to hold leaders accountable. Therefore, these modules focus on issue-based advocacy and ongoing processes, such as development review and long-range planning, as a more fertile realm for achieving equity aims. PSE plans to scale these efforts beyond ETOD, as “levels of gentrification create an unending demand for advocates” (Patterson).

What is the Alliance’s ideal role in Clayton County moving forward? The Transformation Alliance can continue to function as an outside moderator as high-capacity transit plans solidify in the County. Public entities in Clayton County currently lack the capacity or will to advance the Alliance’s agenda, creating a void, especially for its advocacy members like PSE, to demand more from local leadership during important decision-making around MARTA’s expansion. The Alliance can convene the diversity of stakeholders needed to generate interest and action around ETOD, while local organizing can galvanize current residents to participate and shape ongoing planning processes. Once a corridor and

alignment are selected, the Alliance should also replicate its previous work with existing station area typologies to highlight which sites are most viable for equitable transit-oriented development.

An additional partner and anchor institution in the county is Clayton State University. As a key education hub for County residents, Clayton State could play an important role in contributing towards a more sophisticated workforce development strategy. Currently, the university plays a key role in introducing students to the types of opportunities in the region by aligning its job training programs with Governor Nathan Deal's "high-demand career initiatives," including information technology, cyber security, supply chain management, hospitality and film industries (Georgia Department of Economic Development). Continuing to develop the County's human capital will drive additional economic development, incentivizing the creation of jobs as employers become more confident that residents are qualified to fill growing positions. Attracting more jobs to the county, residents will become less dependent on far-flung work opportunities, minimizing the burdensome costs of transportation as a share of household costs. Alignment between Clayton County's Development Authority and Clayton State can further ensure that workforce training meets the needs and desires of residents (Terry).

Additionally, the University's experiential education program, Partnering Academics and Community Engagement (PACE), also represents an opportunity to engage students in the County's development through service learning opportunities. Community-based learning programs can identify initiatives for student involvement with municipal or county-level political processes.

Private Sector and Philanthropy

Philanthropy and the business community both play key roles in the execution of affordable housing development, as civic and financial investors. Because gap financing is critical to making projects these viable, such entities can support development through providing grant and debt capital. “Patient capital” is important when public processes, such as community engagement or gaining necessary zoning exemptions, beleaguer the tight development timelines.

As such, philanthropy and social impact investors can assist in the acquisition and pre-development funding, which often represent the greatest hurdle for ETOD projects (Macleish-White). By incenting a more risk-averse investment, these entities can supply the upfront risk that conventional lenders or equity investors may be unwilling to contribute. Other regions, such as California’s Bay Area and Denver, have created transit-oriented development funds to serve as a vehicle for assembling such capital. These funds will be discussed in greater detail in the Recommendations section of this paper, but philanthropic groups, such as the San Francisco Foundation, Silicon Valley Community Foundation, and the Ford Foundation, were instrumental in seeding these funds.

Banks are also important partners in financing equitable transit-oriented development, often under the guise of meeting Community Reinvestment Act obligations. The 1977 Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) stipulates that depository institutions to meet the credit needs of all communities where they lend, especially minority and low-income communities. Federal-level regulatory entities periodically review the lending activities of banks, which should ultimately denote

activities in low and moderate-income areas. These obligations can compel banks to make larger, strategic investments in high-profile public-private partnerships.

Despite a historic focus nearly exclusively on home loans and affordable housing development, equitable transit-oriented development projects also qualify. As Walters discusses, recent CRA activities in Dallas and Denver have both addressed neighborhood stabilization goals via mixed-income, transit-oriented development. While some banks may exercise caution about whether such lending meets CRA stipulations, Federal Reserve representatives stress that communication with CRA officers and oversight committees can vet the eligibility of such projects (Walters).

Various “creative” loan products also continue to mature as mixed-income development projects become more commonplace. These include bridge loans which take our conventional permanent debt, low-interest loans comprising senior debt, or even blending lower interest rates. Community Development Finance Institutions or banks attempting to fulfill CRA obligations can continue to evolve and standardize these lending practices.

Real Estate Development Groups

Developing affordable housing requires a very specific version of expertise. An experienced local nonprofit or for-profit developer is needed to navigate a complex series public and private financing mechanisms. Finding a developer who possesses this knowledge, as well as local relationships, is a prerequisite to overcoming the complexities of a transit-oriented development project. Community

relationships are as important as technical expertise, and a qualified developer must possess both.

CREATING AND MAINTAINING MOMENTUM

Several factors coalesce to supply momentum for the viability of equitable transit-oriented development projects. As discussed in the literature review, the market demand for housing near transit has never been higher. Meanwhile, awareness of the role of transportation costs in keeping low-income households in poverty continues to grow. These two themes could be viewed as oppositional counterparts: the former drives gentrification, while the latter represents its spatial aftermath.

Still, these are precisely the spaces where equity planners can weave together apparently contradictory threads and intervene on behalf of vulnerable populations. While prospective profit margins from transit-oriented development continue to grow, there are opportunities to cross-subsidize a component of affordable housing. Meanwhile, a growing consensus of advocacy and community voices are demanding more from public and private leadership in how cities approach the provision of affordable housing. For example, AFFH is a formal policy change reflective of demands for an approach to housing which prioritizes access to opportunity. LIHTC applications are now often evaluated for proximity to transit, while FTA rubrics smile upon transit alternatives which service low-income areas. The interdependency between housing and transportation costs has never been clearer, nor more urgent as these costs continue to climb.

My final section considers how planning can harness this momentum, offering short-term, mid-term, and long-term recommendations around the formation of a housing-transportation strategy in Clayton County, which ultimately increases the County's supply of housing near new MARTA services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Most critically for this study, these entities can begin to explore several options for the preservation or creation of affordable housing near planned transit service. Depending on available land or existing affordable housing, there is a variety of strategies to explore in the short-term, medium-term, and long-term, enumerated below.

Short-Term: Immediate

1. *Engage members of the TransFormation Alliance and national-level entities to assess the viability of equitable transit-oriented development in Clayton County.*

Determine which transit corridors under consideration present opportunities for affordable development, based on previous TOD typology work completed by organizations like Reconnecting America. Below is an example of categories that analysis can use to classify areas for development around proposed transit corridors as the current feasibility study advances.

Type A: Low Vulnerability + Emerging/Mature Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In/near major job centers • Affluent population • Strong market, lack of existing affordable housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve job access • Improve connectivity of station areas • Build new affordable stock • Develop affordable at adjacent MARTA stops with good access
Type B: Moderate/High Vulnerability + Emerging/Mature Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater mix of incomes present • Susceptible to displacement from strong market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing preservation • Rent stabilization to help existing residents stay • Introduce new compact housing types • Station infrastructure
Type C: Moderate Vulnerability + Emerging Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Greater mix of incomes present but displacement an issue • Market not as strong but improving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing creation • Affordable preservation • Invest in community assets, attractive to middle class residents
Type D: Moderate/High Vulnerability + Emerging Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Given weak market not likely to see development in short term • Improve access to jobs in other areas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable housing creation • Affordable preservation • Expand jobs and services to increase services to existing households.
Type E: High Vulnerability + Lagging Market	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High percentage of low income households • Due to weak market limited short term housing investment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Station areas need improved access to jobs via transit • Improvements to station areas • Strengthen community assets

Above all, this process would entail understanding land ownership along proposed corridors. Identifying large vacant parcels of land for potential affordable development, as well as surveying existing affordable housing (where private market-rent or publically subsidized), are both important components of understanding where to locate additional housing.

Large, vacant parcels near likely station-areas should immediately be investigated as sites for Community Land Trusts. Existing affordable housing should be identified as threatened, and work with local housing authorities should begin immediately to ensure that any incipient expiring subsidies are underway for renewal. “Naturally-occurring” private affordable housing is another asset, which the Alliance should work towards preserving with national-level entities, such as the Housing Partnership Network’s Housing Partnership Equity Trust (HPET), a real-estate investment trust that purchases affordable housing for permanent preservation.

2. *Scale up local organizing.* The organizing which underscored the victory to bring transit service to Clayton County was historic. These efforts need to extend into shaping the type of transit and types of housing this new MARTA service will bring. The Partnership for Southern Equity should work with local leaders in Clayton County and even host an additional series of ETOD Academy modules locally. Increasing the turnout of community advocates at MARTA's remaining community engagement meetings for the Clayton County Transit Initiative offers an opportunity to influence the public process. If possible, community leaders should have a role on the study's official Community Advisory Group. Meanwhile, ETOD Academy graduates should become stakeholders in the County's process moving forward, meeting regularly with leadership from the County and local jurisdictions, and other private actors identified in this study's section on relevant actors.

Additionally, STAND-UP's current organizing in Riverdale and Forest Park provides a venue for educating leaders on the opportunities associated with the county's forthcoming MARTA expansion. Demanding more from local leadership will be key, given the consensus among interviews that the elected officials lack political will or vision to plan proactively for affordable housing near transit.

3. *Update LCI studies and begin zoning reform conversations.* To build affordable housing at any impactful scale, local zoning will need to accommodate additional density around planned transit. Existing ARC LCI studies serve as important templates for directing transportation funding, which may include

the station area enhancements needed for accessible, affordable development. Revising these plans, and explicitly stating equitable housing aims, will identify needed infrastructure at planned station-areas. These updates are also a vehicle for needed zoning reform regulations in local jurisdictions.

4. *Assemble capital.* The success of any affordable housing is directly tied towards permanent funding sources dedicated towards this explicit purpose. Housing trust funds and Transit-Oriented Development loan funds (such as those in Denver and the Bay Area) are examples of the types of funds Atlanta needs to support equitable transit-oriented development efforts in Clayton County. Fortunately, the capacity of the TransFormation Alliance, as Atlanta's best convening vehicle for assembling such a fund, has never been greater. Energized and validated by the receipt of significant SPARCC funding, the Alliance is in a strategic place for raising, attracting, and assembling the substantial funds needed for a regional-level affordable housing fund. "Patient capital" is critical to underscoring real estate development cycles which will ultimately require additional time and funding.

Mid-Term Recommendations (1-3 years)

5. *Develop incentives.* The County's current range of incentives is impressive, but will require geographic targeting around transit. With focused, bounded incentives in identified TOD areas, captured development interest can cross-subsidize some of the costs of developing affordable housing. Tax Allocation Districts, especially ones which capitalize on existing county revenue sources

(such as Hartsfield Jackson International Airport and Southlake Mall), would be a particularly valuable incentive program to initiative around planned station-area development.

6. *Advocate for a more stringent affordability policy from MARTA.* MARTA's current affordability policies of recommending 20% affordable housing are neither enforceable nor aggressive enough to produce any significant share of affordable units. Community groups should advocate for a more strident policy associated with this expansion, given the relatively low costs of affordable development in Clayton County. Though MARTA will likely not be the owner of land around transit stations in Clayton County, it still has an influential role in shaping development through its policy requirements.
7. *Assemble contiguous parcels and buy land.* Land acquisition is the centerpiece of equitable transit-oriented development viability. Drawing upon resources from a regional-level fund, the Alliance or other non-profit entity (like Denver's Urban Land Conservancy) should purchase land around proposed stations areas, preferably before the completion of the CCTI study invites real estate speculation. Upon purchase of these parcels, policies or development Requests for Proposals should set affordability targets, informed by demographic analysis surrounding the land that indicates appropriate Area Median Income target thresholds.

Long-Term (4-10 years)

8. *Create mixed-income, affordable developments around high-capacity transit service.* Following the assemblage of land, select a qualified developer with

the specific expertise required to develop mixed-income or affordable housing properties. Due to the complexity of these developments, only someone with a verified history of executing these projects successfully should control this process. An acute understanding of local market conditions and ability to navigate complex public-private funding streams are essential prerequisites to developing projects with significant components of affordable housing.

9. *Preserve existing affordable housing.* Continuing to provide affordable housing in Clayton County will depend upon continued subsidies and preservation of existing affordable housing. Ensuring that long-term affordability restrictions are placed on publically-administered properties is one component to this strategy, while another entails acquisition of existing “naturally-occurring” privately-managed affordable properties. Setting affordability thresholds there, once owned by a fund the REITs or TOD funds described above, is a way to ensure that existing low-cost housing remains affordable.
10. *Let the community lead the conversation.* Above all, local community leaders should shape the process of what type of housing is built, where it is located, and who can live there. Sustained organizing and regular meetings between community organizations and local elected officials will ensure that these developments continue to benefit the residents most in-need of affordable housing and transportation choices. Overly top-down efforts will inevitably skew perceptions of these projects, as well as the commitment to real equity

targets. To prevent this prospect, community leadership needs to be at the table throughout the duration of transit planning, site selection, fund development, land acquisition, and developer selection. This involvement will ensure that resulting development reflects community needs and priorities.

CONCLUSION

Planning for continued affordability in Clayton County should above all be a preemptive act, initiated while real estate within transit sheds remain tenable for affordable development. Locating housing near transit is a powerful way to minimize excessive housing and transportation costs alike. Despite the overwhelming scale of our nation's affordability crisis, continued coordination between these two realms offers opportunities for low-income individuals to share in the economic returns of infrastructure investments. This paper has demonstrated the local need for more affordable housing, and demonstrated the feasibility of equitable transit-oriented development as an approach to produce additional affordable units. Demand for housing near transit, the growing success of mixed-income housing typologies, and financial sophistication in peer cities serve as a proof of concept for what is possible in Clayton County, if action is taken now.

As Atlanta's ongoing growth remains largely unconcerned with the needs of its neediest residents inside the perimeter, an equitable model of regional development must begin to look southward. By intentionally, proactively promoting opportunities for affordable development around Clayton County's transit expansion, planning can feasibly

work to reverse of decades of disinvestment across the Atlanta region. However, the ongoing local organizing around such demands, and responsiveness of local leadership, is what will move this discussion from rhetorical inclusivity to brick-and-mortar construction. Only sustained engagement and persistent pressure from advocacy groups will turn these ideas into action, and promote a truly equitable version of economic development in Clayton County.

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