
It is the details that set apart the good from the great. All can be for naught if the intersection does not have a proper crosswalk; if walking next to a building is inordinately windy; and so on.

and study and shop within walking distance of a transit station, transit will not work. The picture must be completed by transit-supportive buildings and a transit-supportive public realm. If driving a car is cheaper and more reliable, convenient, and attractive than using alternative modes of travel, transit will not work.

Common mistakes and risks include the following.

Wanting to maintain (or increase) current-day vehicular traffic capacity – More often than not, decisions will derail towards wanting to ensure that the introduction of transit does not compromise the status quo ability of cars to use the same corridor. Introducing transit is about improving the way people – not just cars – move.

Allocating only the residual space for pedestrians – Negotiating a right-of-way is often a nail-biting exercise where everyone (traffic engineers, utility operators, snowplough operators, emergency services, etc.) list their “absolutely must have” technical requirements, which are then plotted out on a street section, where only the residual space is granted for the less ominous concerns of pedestrians and landscaping. To create a transit-oriented city for people, however, these priorities must often be transposed: prioritizing pedestrians first, then cyclists, transit, HOVs, goods movement, and single-occupancy vehicles.

Value-engineering urban design and landscaping out of the equation – Look at the most successful transit systems in the world – all of them include quality urban environments. These things are connected. You cannot realize the city-building value unless you make the corresponding investment.

Not getting the density right – There is a direct correspondence

between a transit system and the necessary ridership to support it. Building subways in low-density area (existing and projected) does not make sense. It is critical to clearly understand and incentivize a critical mass of users that is scaled to the capacity of the system.

Missing the details – It is the details that set apart the good from the great. All can be for naught if the intersection does not have a proper crosswalk; if walking next to a building is inordinately windy; if sunlight does not reach the park during lunch time; and so on.

Lessons Learned

Experience from dozens of transit-initiated, city-building projects across Canada provides some key learnings, as outlined below.

This is a paradigm shift, where leadership is necessary – Inherently Transit Urbanism is a move away from the status quo, and change can be threatening to some. Champions are necessary. As well, articulating the vision in a way that generates public buy-in and support is essential. Difficult decisions will need to be made, and decision makers need to be well-informed believers in Transit Urbanism.

Unbearable congestion can be a call to action – The more cumbersome and expensive driving becomes, the greater the interest for alternative modes. Congestion can often be a catalyst for action – it is up to decision makers to use it towards a more sustainable end.

Government's looming insolvency can be a call to action – An economic crisis can be seized as an opportunity for re-stabilizing priorities and strategies. The sooner we realize that post-war urban development patterns

are unsustainable, the quicker we can commit to doing things differently.

Transit is inherently a strategic intervention – Focusing resources/interventions strategically around priority areas – those with the greatest potential to support transit and city-building (e.g., nodes and corridors) – will both increase the transformative potential of some neighbourhoods and also reduce the threat of “change” for others.

It is about value, not cost – Inevitably, building less costs less – and this is often where we end up. However, the question should not be “what does it cost?” Better questions are: “What value do I get and what is the long-term value generated?” And, if the intended objectives include attracting *choice* transit users and new real estate development, then we need to invest today accordingly.

Everybody thinks they are different – “in my city, people drive” – Before transit is developed, the status quo will be driving. And, some people will argue that “here” is inherently different from the places where successful transit was developed, because it snows, because it is cold, because people enjoy driving, etc. All of the success stories are a result of the tenacity and fortitude of people who imagined something different for their communities.

You need fewer standards and less infrastructure, more “smallness” and intuitiveness – It is easy to over-design road standards and kill the goose that lays the golden eggs in the process. Inevitably, small, compact, integrated designs are harder to deliver – as they entail hard work and negotiation. Yet, they can be significantly more rewarding.

You cannot design in a vacuum – hosting a conversation is key – The

more complex a project (and complexity is a good sign), the more it will necessitate an extended conversation with stakeholders to build and develop capacity and tailored solutions, geared for implementation.

Effectively Delivering a Transit Strategy

Transit Urbanism is not simply a technical exercise. Rather, at a more fundamental level, it is about understanding the kind of place that each community is striving to become. Designs and policies must not only be broadly agreed upon, but must also be understood. This understanding will shape designs and the interpretation of policy, and will result in public and private initiatives that are a part of a larger whole.

Developing a common understanding and vision – A transformative process must result from ambitious efforts to institute, integrate, and culturally engrain the opportunity of a fully integrated Transit Urbanism – recognizing the importance the public realm plays in supporting transit, generating economic development, and

enhancing the quality of life for all residents.

Fostering a culture of collaboration – Fundamental to successful implementation is a cross-disciplinary integration and meaningful involvement of council, city staff across departments, the local development industry, and community stakeholders. Essential to capacity building and to hosting a successful dialogue is ensuring that all stakeholders have the necessary information to meaningfully participate, presented in a manner that is accessible and engaging. As well, continuity and commitment to the vision throughout implementation is essential for success.

Design excellence and innovation – An underlying characteristic of successful systems is a commitment to design excellence that is interwoven at every point, with a concurrent commitment to economic vitality. Iteration between a highly creative team and an engaged and inspired public leads to support for innovation. It is better to build *less* with higher quality than to build *more* with poorer quality that can never be upgraded.

A sustainable, value-added urban design – Sustainability is about the integration of environmental, social, cultural, and economic objectives, as measured over the long term – for example, if investing in the public realm results in enhanced transit use, there is a sustainable value added. To this effect, particular attention should be paid to the overall vision, modal integration, incorporation of natural systems, and maintenance and operations requirements – with a view to achieving the greatest long-term value for all.

Conclusion

The idea of Transit Urbanism holds the promise of a higher standard of living and of more sustainable, resilient, welcoming, and healthy cities for tomorrow. However, it requires commitment and tenacity *today*. It requires that we come together and invest means and abilities, wholeheartedly. It requires that we think about our future differently, knowing that our actions become our legacy.

Whether we like it or not, this is a paradigm shift, and we can choose to lead or we can choose to be left behind. **MW**

as published in

Municipal World

CANADA'S MUNICIPAL MAGAZINE – SINCE 1891

1-888-368-6125

www.municipalworld.com