



Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Planning Program – Phase II

SEPTEMBER 2023



<https://www.gbnrtc.org/>



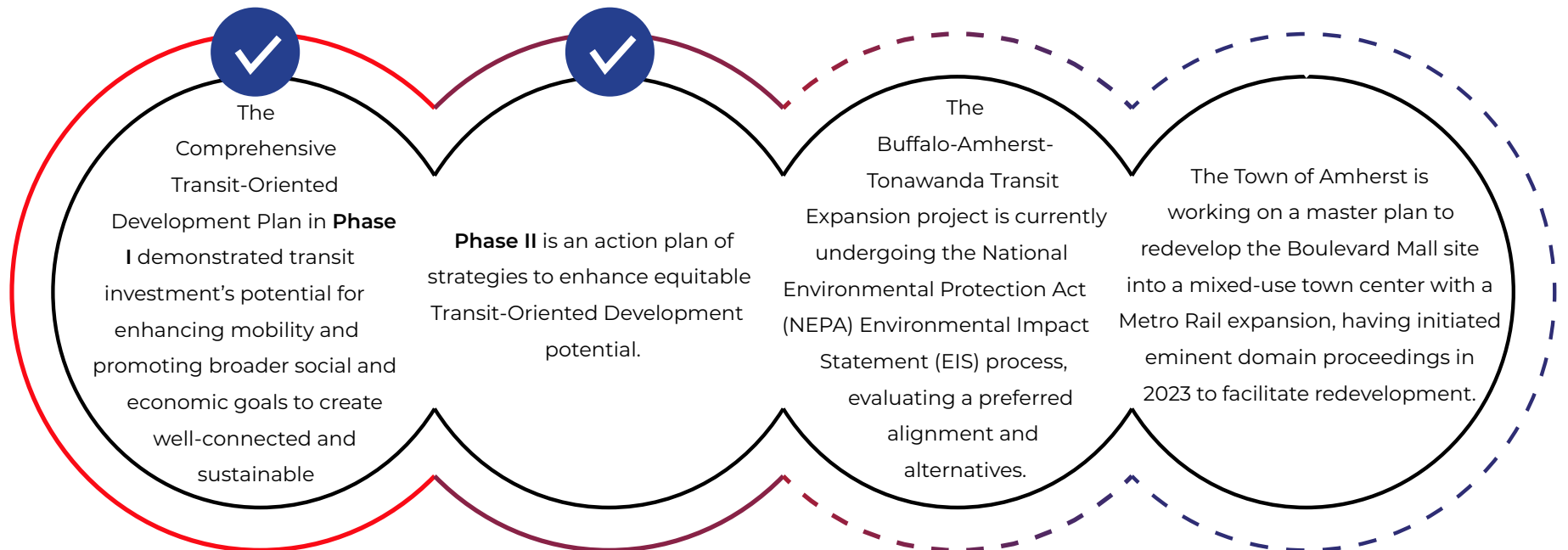
WHAT IS THE COMPREHENSIVE TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Planning Program- Phase II, TOD Strategic Implementation Plan was finalized in September 2023. This Plan is the second phase of the Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Planning effort undertaken through funds provided through the Federal Transit Administration's Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development Planning.

The Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Planning study demonstrates that the proposed investment in Metro Rail expansion will not only have the ability to enhance mobility options for the community but also serve to support broader social and economic goals by promoting Transit-Oriented Development (TOD). The study shows that the Metro Rail expansion not only enhances regional mobility, but is part of a larger regional investment strategy to leverage economic and community development opportunities associated with transit investment.

The TOD Strategic Implementation Plan summarizes the following:

- Establishment of a TOD Coordinating Committee.
- Capacity building within the community to build support and advocacy for transit investment.
- Comprehensive Plan, zoning, and land use policies for enhanced transit-supportiveness.
- eTOD Housing Strategy to support mixed-income housing.
- Preferred station area infrastructure investments.
- Development of performance criteria and evaluation measures.
- Evaluation of existing funding/ financing strategies.



PROJECT PURPOSE



Athenia Cyrus, Developing Our Transit Future Cohort Member

This Strategic Implementation Plan documents the progression of the Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Plan process, following recommendations from their inception in the planning stages to the current implementation phase.

As we transitioned from planning to implementation, the central role of equity in shaping community engagement, station area development, infrastructure priorities, and mobility enhancements became increasingly evident. This report provides a practical, action-oriented strategic implementation plan, outlining immediate steps and establishing a robust foundation for sustained eTOD.

eTOD aligns the region's transit investments with its vision for intelligent, sustainable, and equitable growth and economic development, particularly as identified in One Region Forward. Emphasis areas of TOD in the Buffalo-Niagara Region include:



Equitable, Affordable Living – TOD prioritizes investments that help bridge socio-economic gaps in underinvested communities; promote equitable investment without displacement; create and retain diverse, affordable, and quality housing; and reduce the amount of money households spend on housing and transportation.



Regional Mobility – TOD improves mobility across the region by connecting people with more jobs, education, health care, retail and services, and regional destinations without needing an automobile.



Healthy & Active Lifestyle – TOD encourages a more active and healthier lifestyle, decreasing the number of automobile trips and helping to improve air quality.



Placemaking & Community – TOD promotes walkable, vibrant, and active places that strengthen the connection between people and their neighborhood.



Regional Competitiveness – TOD will enhance the Buffalo-Niagara Region's ability to compete for Federal Transit Administration (FTA) funding as well as compete with other regions for population, employment, and tourism growth.

eTOD OVERVIEW

Equitable Transit- Oriented Development, or eTOD, is a development approach that enables all people regardless of income, race, ethnicity, age, gender, immigration status, or ability to experience the benefits of affordable, mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development near transit. eTOD elevates and prioritizes investments and policies that close the socio-economic gaps between neighborhoods that were traditionally under-invested and are predominately people of color and communities that are majority white and have experienced economic investment.

eTOD projects and processes elevate community voice in decision making processes and in realizing community-focused benefits such as affordable and mixed-income housing, public health, strong local businesses, and environmental sustainability. When centered on racial inclusion and community wealth building, eTOD can be a driver of positive transformation for more vibrant, prosperous, and resilient neighborhoods connected to opportunities throughout the city and region.¹

eTOD Framework

Equity and eTOD are fundamental elements of the Strategic Implementation Plan and are guided by the following equity framework:



Equitable Housing & Reinvestment

Prioritize investments that bridge socio-economic gaps in underinvested communities; promote equitable investment without displacement; and create and retain diverse, affordable, and quality housing.



Regional Mobility

Improve mobility across the region to connect people with jobs, education, health care, and regional destinations.



Healthy & Active Lifestyles

Encourage a more active and healthier lifestyle; decrease the number of automobile trips; and reduce the amount of money households spend on transportation costs.



Placemaking & Community

Strengthen the connection between people and their neighborhood.

¹City of Chicago Equitable Transit-Oriented Development, City of Chicago, [https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/equitable-transit-oriented-development/home.html#:~:text=Equitable%20TOD%20\(eTOD\)%20is%20development,oriented%20development%20near%20transit%20hubs](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/equitable-transit-oriented-development/home.html#:~:text=Equitable%20TOD%20(eTOD)%20is%20development,oriented%20development%20near%20transit%20hubs).

IMPLEMENTATION TO DATE

The TOD Coordinating Committee is a standing committee of regional stakeholders from the public sector that have a common interest in promoting, planning, and implementing TOD across the Metro Rail corridor. Establishing a TOD Coordinating Committee was identified as a need through the Comprehensive TOD Plan that was completed in 2019 and is an element of FTA funding criteria that can improve a region's overall rating.

Goals of the TOD Coordinating Committee:

- Provide focused region-wide advocacy for eTOD.
- Establish and leverage a collaborative process to support meeting the region's vision for smart, sustainable, and equitable growth and economic development.
- Enhance and capture the value of transit investment.
- Leverage successful eTOD implementation policies and transaction structures.
- Enhance and expand regional mobility.
- Collaborate on regional eTOD policy and strategy development and implementation.
- Strengthen the region's ability to attract and retain population, employment, and tourism.
- Strengthen the region's position in applying for Federal transit funding.

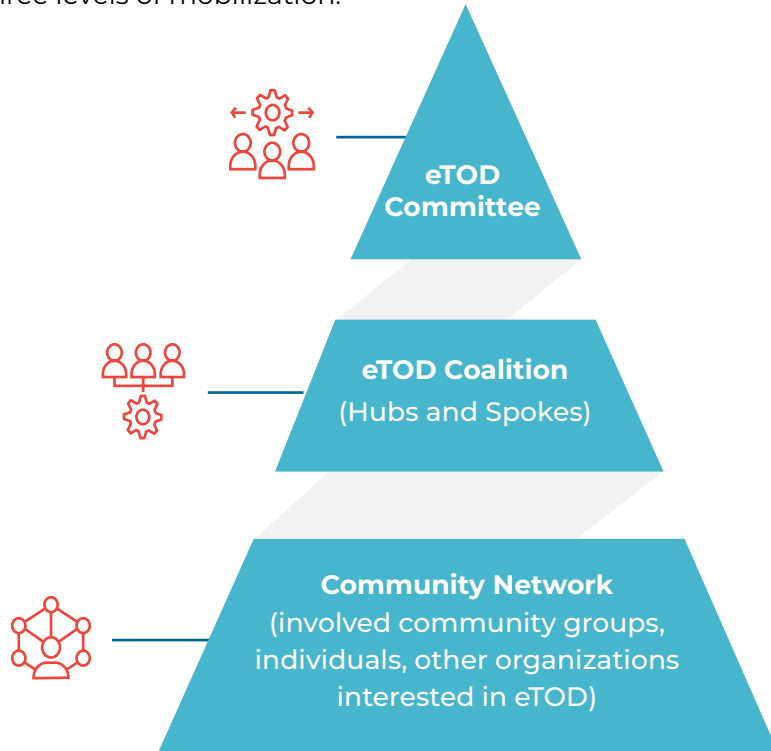
Coordinating Committee Accomplishments

Through September 2023, the TOD Coordinating Committee accomplished the following:

- ✓ Began holding routine meetings as a formal TOD Coordinating Committee.
- ✓ Collaboration on regional planning activities (discussions on advancing eTOD policy and plan recommendations around Boulevard Mall and LaSalle Station).
- ✓ Reviewed and accepted an equitable TOD engagement process that equips community partners (known as Developing Our Transit Future) with the knowledge and information to continue building capacity for eTOD in their communities.
- ✓ Committee members incorporated input from Developing Our Transit Future into the community input process for LaSalle Station.
- ✓ Committee members participated in an event for celebrating the success of the Developing Our Transit Future cohort.
- ✓ Members were provided updates on the eTOD Housing Fund and agreed on Fund goals.
- ✓ Committee members were provided recommendations and strategies to reference in updating their plans and policies to become more TOD supportive. Municipalities are equipped with a checklist to measure their accomplishments.

EQUITABLE COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

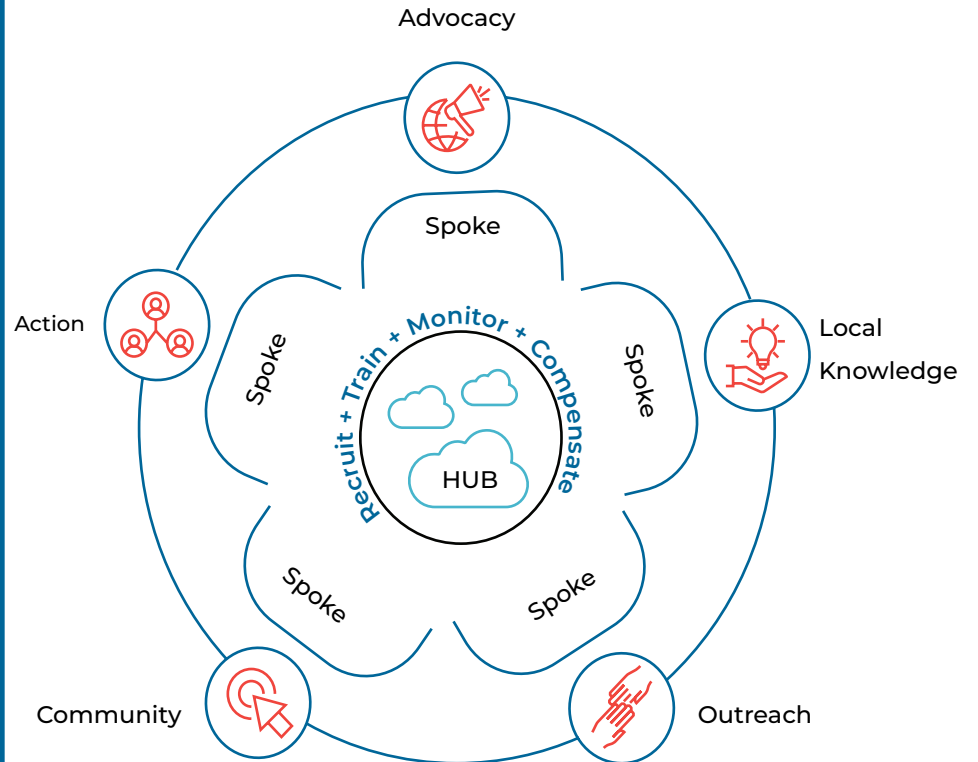
The equitable community and stakeholder engagement approach utilized a Hub and Spoke concept. This concept is a two-way campaign on eTOD for neighborhoods along the Metro Rail corridor and consists of three levels of mobilization:



Engagement Activities

- 2022 summer sessions offering presentations on eTOD topics and discussions
- Panel discussion from stakeholders involved in equitable development, mobility justice, and housing
- Design workshop for LaSalle, Utica & Summer Best Stations
- Developing Our Transit Future celebration event with TOD Coordinating Committee members
- eTOD panel final discussion & dinner by DOTF members

Developing Our Transit Future



GObike and LISC NY partnered, as Hubs, to develop a coalition of committed citizens. This network of active community members is needed to support equitable transit-oriented development efforts throughout the region. This coalition came to be known as Developing Our Transit Future (DOTF). Constant updates on the DOTF sessions and progress were provided online at: [Developing Our Transit Future](#)

STATION AREA VISIONING

Based on the feedback gathered during the Equitable Comprehensive Transit-Oriented Development Planning process, the top priority for enhancing the Metro Rail corridor is to improve the ease of access and overall comfort between transit stations and the neighboring communities. This improvement is crucial to make public transportation a more attractive and practical choice for individuals who either cannot or prefer not to use private cars. Achieving this enhanced accessibility and comfort primarily involves making improvements to public roadways, streetscapes, and intersections, all of which collectively create a more welcoming and accessible environment for those using public transit.



Developing Our Transit Future Cohort participating in Station Area Visioning Workshop

eTOD Values

- Bicyclist and pedestrian safety
- Affordable housing for all household sizes
- Anti-displacement
- Greenspaces and sustainability features
- Cultural and historical preservation; authenticity
- As beneficial to the community as to developers
- Benefits for people who live locally
- Developed with the input of the local community and using a scoring process to ensure equity

Station Area Visions

DL&W: Leveraging transit as a catalyst for Cobblestone District/ Waterfront Revitalization

Summer-Best: Creating a Neighborhood Hub while transitioning from the Buffalo-Niagara Medical Campus

Utica: Enhancing the East-West Core

LaSalle: Building upon the Rail Trail Connection

Boulevard Mall: Re-purposing the Boulevard Mall as a live-work neighborhood

Audubon: Re-imagining an office park as a transit-supportive, mixed-use center

Regulatory and Policy Strategies

- ✓ Comprehensive Plan Updates
- ✓ Zoning Revisions
- ✓ TOD Public Realm Placemaking Guidance
- ✓ Pre-Approved Infill Housing Programs
- ✓ Municipal Action Plan/ Checklist
- ✓ Evaluation of Funding, Laws, and Legislation Related to eTOD



Example of Public Realm Recommendation, Real Time Arrival Board and Map, NYC
www.medium.com/sidewalktalk

The project entailed an extensive review of zoning codes and policies for the City of Buffalo and the Towns of Amherst and Tonawanda, which led to the identification of key gaps and needs related to transit-supportive elements. Furthermore, potential tools and incentives were identified to address these gaps and enhance transit-supportive zoning codes and policies. This comprehensive review served as a foundational framework for drafting zoning amendment language. A range of regulatory and policy recommendations were developed to aid municipal partners in effectively managing the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning updates. To facilitate this, comprehensive checklists were created to outline specific actions required.

Additionally, a consolidated set of slides from various presentations delivered during Phase II was provided to municipalities. These slides offer valuable resources to help convey the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning, and other elements of eTOD to the public, stakeholders, and elected officials, with the flexibility for customization to suit the requirements of different meetings in support of eTOD policies and actions.

Further, planners in the region sought recommendations for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) public realm placemaking guidance, which could be incorporated into design guidelines for the C-M Corridor Zone in the City of Buffalo or the Mixed-Use zoning design guidelines in the Town of Amherst. These guidelines are essential for supporting TOD public realm placemaking around Metro Rail stations and facilitating public infrastructure investments and private development in station-adjacent areas.

eTOD HOUSING ASSESSMENT & ACTION PLAN

The eTOD Housing Assessment outlines a comprehensive approach resulting from extensive research and analysis. It evaluates the potential of establishing a regional TOD Housing Fund as the primary tool for ensuring long-term housing affordability along the Metro Rail corridor. Such funds have been used in various regions across the country to promote equitable TOD by creating short-term loan funds aimed at acquiring property for future use in affordable or mixed-income housing projects. These funds are most common in regions where TOD opportunity sites are limited and affordable housing developers compete with others for the same sites.

The first step in this process was to prepare an affordable housing needs assessment, examining housing market conditions, demographic changes, housing stock characteristics, and the types of potential development opportunity sites along the Metro Rail corridor. This assessment, found that housing markets and demographic conditions along the corridor are already changing. To maintain a long-term mix of housing affordability levels along the corridor will require various actions. These recommendations include creating a Metro Rail TOD Investment Fund. The fund should have clearly expressed goals which form the basis for the fund's activities, as well as its outreach to potential investors. The following three goals have emerged:

- Maintain and expand affordable housing supply along the Metro Rail corridor, anticipating that market-driven demand for housing along the corridor will continue to increase over time.
- Foster a long-term income mix along the entire Metro Rail corridor.
- Augment the many existing affordable housing programs and funds already available in the Buffalo-Niagara Region.



Vision: The Buffalo-Niagara Region leverages its Metro Rail asset and extension process to increase job accessibility for low & moderate-income households.

This Action Plan includes three goals to achieve the eTOD vision. The purpose of these goals is to translate the vision statement into reality by advancing equity, producing affordable housing, and preserving affordability for current neighborhood residents along the Metro Rail corridor. The three goals are as follows:

- 1. Produce 3,274 new units of affordable housing within ½ mile of Metro Rail stations by 2050 (2050 MTP projects 8,184 new households along Metro Rail Corridor; 40% affordable based on City of Buffalo goal)**
- 2. Stabilize current households by preserving affordable units and providing affordable ownership opportunities**
- 3. Use eTOD projects to support minority developers and small locally-owned businesses**

MEASURING SUCCESS

Seven criteria for evaluating the success of eTOD around stations along the NFTA Metro Rail corridor (existing and the proposed expansion) were submitted in NFTA's grant application to the FTA. The following are the criteria submitted in the grant application:

- 1 Private sector investment in TOD corridor.
- 2 Public investment in TOD corridor.
- 3 Affordable and Mixed Income Housing (Number of households).
- 4 Employment opportunities (Number of jobs).
- 5 Percentage of regional residents living in and working in the corridor.
- 6 Capital raised for a regional TOD fund.
- 7 Walkability and pedestrian safety in TOD corridor.

Research related to measuring eTOD was conducted to confirm and amend the criteria submitted in the 2018 FTA Pilot Program for Transit-Oriented Development Planning grant application and identify metrics to measure the criteria. Additionally, the 2023 FTA Capital Investment Grants Policy Guidance was incorporated to qualitatively examine the existing local plans and policies to support economic development related to the project.

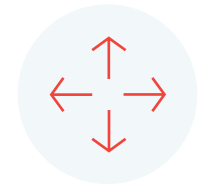
Six additional criteria were added based on the eTOD research, as follows:



Car Usage and Parking



Density (development and employment)



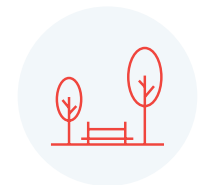
Anti-Displacement TOD



Public Transit Usage



Commute to Work



Public Space

LOOKING FORWARD

Continuing eTOD Planning Activities

To support the TOD Coordinating Committee in its ongoing mission of achieving annual work plan objectives and advancing eTOD implementation, we anticipate the need for staffing resources. These requirements, outlined below, can be fulfilled through the collaborative efforts of government agencies, non-profit organizations, or a combination of both.

The staffing and resource needs to administer daily eTOD planning activities, include:

- ✓ Continuation of the TOD Coordination Committee.
- ✓ Progressing TOD Coordinating Committee work plan items.
- ✓ Coordinate and advance the eTOD Housing Strategy.
- ✓ Routine TOD planning and coordination items.
- ✓ Undertake performance measure evaluation.
- ✓ Prioritize key station area infrastructure improvements in TIP and CIP processes.
- ✓ Support of Developing Our Transit Future (DOTF) activities.



Developing Our Transit Future Cohort on a site visit to the Summer-Best Metro Station

Regional Progress

- Buffalo committed to ensuring that 40% of its housing units are permanently affordable.
- In 2022, Buffalo saw substantial \$300+ million investments, particularly in East and West Buffalo, encouraging collaborations with minority developers.
- The eTOD Housing Strategy, part of the TOD Strategic Implementation Plan, aligns with the New York State Housing Compact policy.
 - The Housing Compact focuses on increasing rental units, promoting home ownership through pattern books, and directing resources to Metro Rail station areas.
 - The housing strategy prioritizes retaining long-time residents, improving quality of life, and public acquisition of affordable housing near the Metro corridor.
 - Strengthen partnerships with local minority developers by implementing explicit procurement policies and providing ongoing support.
 - Support local small business retention and expansion, transforming commercial properties into mixed-use, mixed-income developments.
 - Promote intergovernmental cooperation through the TOD Coordinating Committee.