

Safe, Active, Connected: The Public Health Imperative for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in Washington

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Executive Summary

Washington state policies regulating transit-oriented development (TOD) are housing-focused and lack a broad public health lens. Policies fall short in creating safe, equitable, and healthy communities that have accessible transportation options. Policy alternatives like requiring Complete Streets with TOD, or incentivizing equitable-TOD principles could increase the public health impact. These policies could significantly benefit historically under-resourced roadways like Rainier Avenue South. Through this policy analysis, **we recommend 1) creating a TOD community advisory board to share decision-making power, and 2) advocating to integrate equitable TOD requirements in all TOD corridors.**

Background

Transit-oriented development (TOD) uses compact, mixed-use development to bring together affordable housing, retail, and community spaces near transit centers [1]. TOD's goal is to create vibrant streetscapes and neighborhoods that are accessible to people walking, cycling, rolling, and using public transportation [2]. TOD has the potential to decrease preventable injury, increase access to resources, improve air quality, promote active transportation, and increase housing affordability, if implemented with more intentionality.

Local Context

In Seattle, Rainier Ave South is one of the most dangerous roads [6]. This area also suffers from high PM 2.5 levels, a measure of air quality [7]. There are high rates of car utilization; only 16% of residents use public transit [8]. This area is slated for TOD improvements in the coming years, which could have a significant impact if designed intentionally [9].

Problem Statement: There is a policy and measurement gap in how WA TOD initiatives link to public health and safety.

Current Policies

- House Bill 1491 is the primary state-level TOD Bill. It mandates increased housing density, zoning, and affordability near transit hubs [3].
- TOD adjacent bills:
 - House Bill 1110 increases housing density minimums [4].
 - Complete Streets mandates safe infrastructure for all modes of transit on projects over \$1 million [5].



Rainier Ave South, Seattle, WA (Source: Google Earth)

TOD Could Improve...

Preventable Injury



Traffic fatalities have reached levels not seen since 1990 [10].

Equity



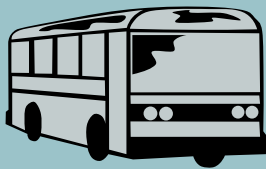
Inadequate transit infrastructure disproportionately impacts people of color [11].

Environmental Health



Traffic creates 90% of PM2.5 in the air in urban areas [12].

Proposed Policy Options



Require Complete Streets in TOD

- Creates streets that safely serve all people, and modes of transit [13];
- Adds safety requirements to the areas that are developed around TOD transit hubs [13];
- Encourages non-car transportation in TOD developments [14].

Incentivize Equitable TOD (ETOD)

- Advocates that anyone can access benefits of mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development near transit hubs [15];
- Improves livability and overall wellbeing of residents by focusing on historically underserved neighborhoods [16].

Policy	Impact	Feasibility	Limitations
Status Quo: House Bill 1491	Increased housing density and affordability around transit [3]	Passed and includes city compliance deadlines [3]	No specific community engagement mandates [3]
Complete Streets + TOD	Builds safer design, active transportation, and social connection around transit [5]	Includes education, community input, and forms strong organizational collaboration [14]	Expensive to implement significant infrastructure changes [17]
Equitable TOD	Support community health, prioritizes equity and anti-displacement [18]	Includes flexibility and significant community partner and coalition input [19]	Moderately expensive and may require longer timelines to ensure equity [18]

Call to Action

Short-term

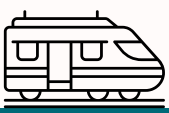
Form a TOD community advisory board to share decision-making power.



Long-term

Advocate for ETOD integration into all planned TOD corridors.





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