

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.

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].

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].



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

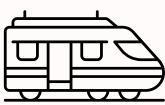
Form a TOD community advisory board to share decision-making power.



Long-term

Advocate for ETOD integration into all planned TOD corridors.





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