

METRO-MOBILITY TALKS

Transit's Role In Sustainability & Livability

CORPUS CHRISTI DOWNTOWN REVITALIZATION PROJECT

The City of Corpus Christi has the opportunity to leverage \$27.5 million in federal funds to create a better community, enhance the city's financial stability, and improve the quality of life in the downtown areas.

That's one of the conclusions in a report prepared for the Corpus Christi Metropolitan Planning Organization (CCMPO) entitled "Transit's Role in Sustainability & Livability." The report, prepared by The Goodman Corporation, a nationally recognized transportation and urban planning consulting firm, describes opportunities and techniques for increasing the livability of Corpus Christi's urban core.

The report encompasses these efforts in what it calls a Corpus Christi Downtown Livability Program. Such a program could use \$5.5 million in local value to attract \$22 million in federal funding to significantly improve existing infrastructure, create a better pedestrian environment, and stimulate mixed-use development and economic value for the community.

The report explains how transit can provide a framework that ties together the community's varying visions for downtown in order to bring more federal dollars. The CCMPO, along with the City of Corpus Christi and the Corpus Christi Regional Transportation Authority, has identified cornerstone projects that, along with transit, can jumpstart the program.

Creating "sustainability" for communities, also known as "Livability," is receiving renewed emphasis since the new administration took over in Washington, D.C. In June 2009, the Obama Administration created the Sustainable Communities Partnership (also known as the Livability Partnership) that brought together the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) to plan for communities that are efficient consumers of housing, transportation, and energy use.

Transit plays a key role in guiding livability initiatives. By linking planned developments to transit, Corpus Christi can access federal funding from Federal Transit Administration (FTA) and other agencies to increase the livability of planned developments. The FTA may fund as much as 80 percent of qualifying costs for transit facilities and streetscape improvements.

Two important tools in this effort are Transit Enhancements (landscaping and street amenities such as benches and transit shelters) and Transit Joint Development that build public spaces based on transit (such as the Corpus Christi Staples Street Station near city hall). Transit Joint Developments increase property values, stimulate additional sales and use tax, generate parking revenues, and increase leasing opportunities. Transit Enhancements improve integration of transit facilities into surrounding development, create a sense of place, improve safety, and enhance access to businesses.

The report recommends that the community take certain steps to develop a successful Corpus Christi Downtown Livability Program. The first is to create a steering committee that includes stakeholders from private, public, and nonprofit organizations committed to downtown revitalization. The next steps are to identify projects that will enhance the program and determine how transit connections will complement them.

Finally, eligible capital projects should be "protected" for federal reimbursement for up to five years through a process known as "Letter of No Prejudice" presented to the FTA. A Letter of No Prejudice allows local governments and transit authorities to advance project activities with local funds, building "local share" credit toward the overall project, and allowing for subsequent federal reimbursement.

The report states that an opportunity presented by the Obama Administration's change in federal policies comes along once in a generation and should be embraced by Corpus Christi leadership.

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