

Unanswered Questions from EPA's Smart Growth Webcast March 31, 2010

Megan Susman, U.S. EPA Smart Growth Program

What is EPA doing to increase public support for smart growth? Are there any resources for non-profits that are working on this? If we want to keep cities informed of resources available to them, where should I go first?

The EPA Smart Growth Program has written or funded many publications designed to show the benefits of smart growth strategies. Although most of our products are aimed at the public, nonprofit, or private sectors, many of them are written to be understandable to the general public. The most accessible publication is probably "This Is Smart Growth," produced through the Smart Growth Network (see <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/tisg.htm>).

Our office sometimes has grants available to nonprofits, but not often. You can check <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/grants/index.htm> for open requests for proposals. This page also links to pages of national and regional/state funding sources, many of which are open to nonprofits. One other page to check is <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth/partnership/tools.html>, which lists some useful tools and funding programs from EPA, HUD, and DOT on a variety of issues. The Smart Growth Network maintains a clearinghouse of resources at www.smartgrowth.org. You can sign up for a weekly email newsletter that will list relevant news articles and new resources, or just periodically check the web site. This site also lists funding opportunities.

Has EPA documented the reduction in VMT that results when you improve walking/biking/transit conditions?

The studies that I mentioned in my presentation (Growing Cooler, Moving Cooler, and Driving and the Built Environment) all take into account VMT reduction from the increased walking, biking, and transit that are made possible by more compact development patterns, as well as the reduced trip length for drivers. Moving Cooler estimates reductions from categories that include "nonmotorized transportation strategies" (adoption of "complete streets" policies, improved bike and pedestrian infrastructure, and traffic calming) and "public transportation improvement strategies" (subsidizing public transit fares, increasing service on existing transit routes, building new transit infrastructure, and expanding inter-city bus and rail). The report is available at www.movingcooler.info. (EPA contributed funding to and helped review Growing Cooler and Moving Cooler, but they are not EPA products.)

Does EPA have any studies showing that ITE trip rates or parking ratios are overstated for dense development?

EPA has sponsored research to develop new methodology for more accurately predicting the traffic impacts of mixed-use development. ITE helped guide this research. Draft results do show that the current ITE Trip Generation Manual overestimates the amount of parking needed. We cannot share the research study right now; however, it will appear in a journal (hopefully in the next few months), and ITE will consider this research when it revises its Trip Generation Manual (we don't know when that revision will take place).

Could you comment on rural areas, not just suburban and urban? Transportation is a huge cost in rural areas because jobs are farther away.

Yes, I should have mentioned a rural example in the presentation. Reliable, affordable transportation is very important in rural places.

Not every rural area will have the population density to support public transit, although a small-scale bus service can often work in small towns. And while it might not be possible for people to walk or bike to

their jobs, compact rural towns can make it possible to walk or bike to school, a place of worship, a corner store, a doctor, or other destinations, which allows residents to drive less overall even if they still need to drive to work. This is not a new idea -- traditional rural towns consisted of main streets, markets, and a variety of shops that were convenient to adjacent neighborhoods. For farmers and others living outside of the town, the mix of uses and compactness solved a number of transportation challenges. Developing compactly also allows communities to preserve the land that is an essential part of the character and economy of rural communities by directing development to the town instead of onto farmland or other open space. EPA worked with ICMA to develop a rural smart growth primer, which will be published by June.

Could you please provide the source for the fact that three-quarters of millennials plan on living in urban areas? (Answered during the webcast; follow-up is below)

The reference is:

The Growing Market for Smart Growth: Consumer Demand and Demographic Drivers

Shyam Kannan, Robert Charles Lesser & Co.

February 2010

http://www.rclco.com/pdf/Market_for_Smart_Growth.pdf

(That specific stat is on slide 8.)

Elaine Clegg, Idaho Smart Growth Program

For the Boise infill implications slide, was the cost savings a result of not having to extend infrastructure estimated?

No. We did do a rough estimate of the transportation costs but the data for that is buried. My memory is that transportation expansion costs for the compact development scenario will run \$700,000 over 20 years and without the development constraints would be more than \$1.5 million, but sorry I can't find the documentation. The jurisdiction of the other infrastructure is much fractured in this region and we didn't try to quantify the costs of the two scenarios for the rest of it.

The new, denser developments in Boise – are they fully occupied?

Of the developments shown, three buildings are fully occupied and three came on the market just as the downturn hit and have had difficulty selling. However, compared to the rest of the market in the region they are begin to see an uptick. (http://www.idahostatesman.com/2010/03/05/1105218/downtown-boise-condo-sales-are.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+IdahostatesmancomNewsUpdates+%28IdahoStatesman.com+News+Updates%29)

For the Banner Bank, 65% less electricity use is compared to what baseline?

The builder had completed another office building in downtown just a few years earlier (I don't know the exact date but within five years), using then best practices on energy use that he knew of at that time. The comparison is to "typical office building of the same size" with the earlier building providing the base for the comparison.

Has displacement been a problem within the communities you've developed, and are you integrating any measures within your planning to ensure the availability of affordable housing?

Most of the areas that are redeveloping were not previously low-income housing but commercial/industrial or median income housing. Gentrification was beginning to emerge as an issue, but the drop in housing values has mitigated that quite a bit. Our biggest displacement issue has been the redevelopment of mobile/manufactured home parks. We commissioned a study by Boise State University to develop an action plan for that issue

(http://www.boisestate.edu/history/cityhistorian/essays_city/essays_pdf/MobileHomes_Boise.pdf) and are

beginning to implement the recommendations from it. Otherwise affordable housing is less of an issue in Boise itself – the city is the only direct recipient of CDBG and HOME funds from HUD in the region, but is more so in the rest of the region. Boise has both the most jobs and the most “affordable housing” (as defined by 50% to 80% of market median income). What Boise is lacking is “workforce housing” (defined as 80% to 140% of market median income) which has moved out to the suburbs. A study that outlines the issues is available at:

<http://www.cdcboise.com/Documents/ReportsAndMarketStudies/CCDC%20Workforce%20Housing%20Task%20Force%20Report%20Final%2012-28-06.pdf>.

With prices having come down the need for workforce housing may have changed – I don’t have a more current analysis, but I believe there will still be an issue when the recovery begins in earnest. The local realtors association is also working on an Employer Assisted Housing plan based on the model in Chicago (<http://www.reachillinois.org/>), that my help home buyers choose a closer in location if they work for an employer who participates. Short answer – in the short term we have many families in need of temporary housing assistance because of the recession, in the long term our issues are related to implementing a plan to mitigate displacement of mobile/manufactured home residents, and locating sufficient workforce housing near the jobs it serves.

Chris Zimmerman, Arlington, VA Smart Growth Program

Was data about Alexandria not included since it's a city, not a county?

Data in the presentation largely refers to Arlington. Alexandria is a separate jurisdiction. The only other jurisdictional reference, in a few cases, was to Fairfax County. I used this as a comparison because, (a) it is a large, fairly typical suburban jurisdiction in its post-WWII, car-oriented development pattern; and (b) at 400 square miles and 1.2 million people, it actually is most of Northern Virginia (with more than 50 % of the region’s population).

If we don't have an existing transit corridor, how can we apply these principles?

You don’t have to have transit to apply many of the principles, and you don’t have to have “mega”-transit to have a transit corridor. Our Columbia Pike and Shirlington areas are both examples of using existing roadway infrastructure and buses as the basis of transit. (In the former case, an old mainstreet-cum-suburban-strip-cum-new-mainstreet; in the latter, an adjacent interstate highway.) The principles are largely independent of scale: They apply whether you are at the center of a major metropolis or in a small village. The key thing is to focus on compactness in the development pattern, emphasizing “walkability” and the quality of the ground plane. Whether you’re planning for skyscrapers or two-story buildings, you need to pay attention to the relationship of the buildings to the street, and the experience of the person walking past them. Details are important in the (roughly) 20-30 feet between the building and cars, and the 20-30 feet from the ground up. If you’re going to be dependent on cars (at least for a while), work on a “park once” strategy, and aim to have all other trips accommodated on foot. Maximal walking distances are within a quarter-mile. You can fit a lot of stuff in a one-quarter mile radius. Make the spaces active, people-generating. Transit ridership will follow.

In regards to the bus use, is this a low level of ridership and is the development expected to increase ridership?

Columbia Pike has a very high level of bus ridership; indeed, it is probably the most well-used bus line in the Commonwealth. We have increased bus ridership in the corridor over the past 6-7 years (30-50 percent) with a series of service improvements. There is still more ridership potential, however, especially with the developments that are emerging along the Pike. Given the constraints on the vehicular capacity of the roadway, it is essential that future growth be accommodated on transit. The Streetcar opens the possibility for significant increase in transit ridership (from ~15,000 daily now, to ~25,000 +).

What is the timeframe for completing the streetcars? How is Arlington funding the streetcars?

We are currently in the preliminary design/environmental assessment phase, which is scheduled to be completed in mid- to late 2011. If we are able to go to bid after that, construction would take something like three years. Part of this process is determining the financing plan. We are anticipating using local funds (a dedicated transportation tax) for about fifty percent; we hope to pursue federal funds (possibly “small starts”) for the balance.