



FULL CASE STUDY: EQUITABLE TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

“We envision a Chicago that no longer concentrates poverty and racially segregated people from socioeconomic opportunity; where racism no longer is manifested in city policies, programs or investments, and where a person’s race or zip code no longer determines their health or their wealth. ETOD is both a process and a development form that can help us realize this vision.”

- ETOD Working Group

TITLE: Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (ETOD)

POLICY AREA: Transportation, Neighborhood Planning & Development, Housing, Environment & Climate, Public Health

TEAM MEMBERS: Elevated Chicago, Mayor’s Office Policy, OERJ, CDPH, ETOD Working Group

Problem Statement

From 2016 to 2019, ninety percent of Transit Oriented Development (TOD) investments occurred downtown or in Chicago’s North/Northwest areas. Communities on the West and South Sides of Chicago, where Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and Asian individuals primarily reside, saw few TOD investments, furthering the City’s decades-long history of disinvestment and the by-products that come along with it.

Reflection Questions

- How can Chicago start to address the scars in the car-centered design and segregated built environment of our City?
- How can ETOD policy advance health and racial equity in Chicago?
- What would it look like to center equity and communities in transit-oriented development?
- How can we promote community-led, people-centered development connected to transit?

REFLECT ON OUR PAST

Chicago has supported Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) since City Council passed a TOD ordinance in 2013. Government officials hoped to encourage walkable communities by allowing larger projects and reducing parking requirements near CTA and Metra rail stations. Amendments in 2015 and 2019 built on this existing zoning code by incentivizing affordable housing and expanding TOD use to bus corridors.

TOD often results in less car-dependent communities, job creation, and affordable housing because it encourages mixed-use development and business types in a compact area. However, in Chicago, the benefits of TOD were not experienced by all communities. An analysis of City data revealed disparities in TOD investments— almost ninety percent of TOD investments occurred in the downtown and North/Northwest sides from 2016-2019. Areas that did not receive TOD investments, but were eligible, had 40% more residents of color, 23% more low-income residents, and 16% more residents with a high school education level or less than areas where TOD projects occurred. In addition, in most areas that received TOD investments, white population grew; Latinx populations saw an increase in some areas and a decrease in others; and Black populations decreased. Without an equity lens, TOD contributed to the displacement and depopulation of our Black and Brown communities.

Like many other racial disparities seen today, the inequitable outcomes of Chicago’s earlier TOD policies are not a natural occurrence. Policy decisions such as redlining, urban renewal, the construction of the federal highway, and many more have led us to today, where environments prioritize cars over people, where there is an 8.8 life expectancy gap between Black and white Chicagoans, and where there are uneven levels of economic activity and investments across communities.

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REFLECT ON OUR PAST

When equity is not centered in TOD, policies and decision-making can reinforce the outcomes of past policies. ETOD seeks to redress past policy decisions by prioritizing investments and policies that: 1) ensure every resident in the City of Chicago lives in a neighborhood that is walkable, safe, affordable, sustainable, and that connects them to what they need (e.g., food, education, jobs, healthcare, etc.); 2) close socioeconomic gaps; 3) elevate community voice in decision-making processes; 4) center racial inclusion and community wealth building.

Reflections from Community Members

“TOD has a negative connotation for a lot of North Siders given all the gentrification happening in Logan Square, particularly along Milwaukee Avenue. There it was very much centered on big towers that are TOD, but they are not equitable. Most of them are market-rate apartments that are very inaccessible to low-income people.” – Lynda Lopez, Active Transportation Alliance.

“I was born and raised here, and I spent a considerable amount of time in a vehicle growing up on the South Side. My mom and grandparents never really used buses and trains much because the access was always limited. There were also concerns about safety or the perception of safety on the South Side...I saw disparities across the City [while on the train]. You start at 95th and ride the train up to Howard and see a completely different space...you can see the change in communities.” - Anonymous Community Member

RECLAIM OUR PRESENT

In 2020, the City of Chicago released the draft [Equitable Transit-Oriented Development \(ETOD\) Policy Plan](#) for public comment, which the Chicago Plan Commission updated and adopted unanimously in June 2021. Within it was a comprehensive set of commitments to center equity, build community wealth, support climate resilience, and promote public health through ETOD. The city collaborated with Elevated Chicago, a community-based coalition at the forefront of this work, to form a cross-sector ETOD Working Group to develop this plan. The ETOD Working Group established new values, priorities, and policy recommendations, which were incorporated into the overall plan. Unlike many other city planning processes, the ETOD Policy Plan aimed to change policies to improve equity across the city and to change the process to get there. It not only centered equity but **boldly asserted and demonstrated that community voice and power in decision-making are necessary to reach intended outcomes.**

To support the implementation of the ETOD Policy Plan, partners from Elevated Chicago, Enterprise Community Partners, and the ETOD Working Group collaborated with the City to develop an ETOD Pilot program. Community partners helped create the pilot program, which gave community organizations the resources needed to develop innovative solutions around equitable development. Selected pilots included: A community-owned grocery store, a food hall, a mix-use development, affordable housing, public art, office space, and more.

In partnership with Elevated Chicago and the Illinois Public Health Institute, the City also engaged members from the ETOD Working Group, pilot sites, youth groups, and the City’s Disability Advisory Council to identify the potential impacts of various zoning reform policies included in the plan. [The Health & Racial Impact Assessment](#) was the first of its kind. With it, the City demonstrated its commitment to ensuring communities across the city experience TOD benefits and to capturing community voice at all stages in the process. The assessment findings showed that the Connected Communities Ordinance and community-centered implementation and investment would likely make progress toward addressing persistent health and racial inequities.

Reflections from Community Members

We aren’t just fixing stations and making things accessible, we are “building communities.”- Anonymous Community Member

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REIMAGINE OUR FUTURE

[City Council passed the Connected Communities Ordinance](#) in July 2022. It was the result of over two years of deep collaboration with city departments, city agencies, and community-based organizations. It promotes development that will help residents live more conveniently, affordably, and sustainably while spurring economic development across the city, making it one of the largest reforms to the Chicago zoning code in decades. Many of the recommendations in the ETOD Policy Plan were included in the ordinance, which had three overarching goals:

1. Create jobs and allow for more homes and businesses near transit by expanding TOD incentives.
2. Improve the safety of our streets and sidewalks near transit, and encourage walking, biking, and rolling.
3. Increase housing opportunity, affordability, and accessibility, especially near transit.

In addition, the City announced a \$10 million ETOD grant program to support eligible projects to implement aspects of the ETOD Policy Plan and the Connected Communities ordinance. This grant program will provide funding of up to \$250,000.00 and technical assistance to support community-led equitable development near transit.

Through ETOD, the City has forged a new path of continued collaboration between community and government, historic new investments in areas that have seen disinvestment, community-led development that creates environments people want to live in, and policies that center equity as both a process and an outcome.

OERJ HEALING INSIGHTS

Center community voice in design, implementation, and evaluation. Community engagement is an ongoing process. Community priorities and voices should be amplified and included through every phase of your plan. They are also your accountability partner; after implementing a plan, you should re-engage communities impacted to assess whether or not the plan is accomplishing the intended outcomes.

Build on community assets. Community members are the best partners to address the problem, especially those most impacted by the problem. They often hold the knowledge, relationships, and networks necessary to create and implement innovative solutions. Our role as government is to build on long-standing community work and existing assets.

Apply a racial equity lens and analysis before policy implementation. Racial equity tools are key to evaluating the potential impacts of a policy plan. It allows you to proactively assess how a plan might benefit or burden a population. It also gives you an opportunity to improve your plan with recommendations that will ultimately mitigate harm to individuals most negatively impacted and maximize benefits.

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<http://chicago.gov/etod>

