Delivering Transit Oriented Development in South East Queensland - The case for comprehensive station area planning

ANDREW BATTS
Associate
Arup Pty Ltd
andrew.batts@arup.com.au

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ABSTRACT
Planning at public transport stations often involves an uneven field of stakeholders with varying degrees of interest in a station and its immediate area. Because a controlling or integrating influence among these stakeholders is often absent, station area planning is usually divided into its component parts and therefore the outcomes are not well integrated. Although this approach is practical and expedient, it often ignores the integrated nature of a station, its surrounding land uses, and the larger transportation network. South East Queensland (SEQ) is rapidly expanding. The Queensland Government has determined its policy to accommodating this growth will in a large part be through the development of transit oriented communities. Ensuring that the policy of transit oriented communities is achieved will require integrated planning and investment. Therefore, a process of comprehensive station area planning is considered essential to create a consensus for future planning and investment decisions by the various “players” including government agencies, the private sector and the community alike. This paper will identify and analyse existing approaches in SEQ and then will investigate how the comprehensive station area planning process can integrate the components of station capacity access and local area development to create a well-balanced investment strategy and bring together the various players in a collaborative approach.

1. Introduction
Transit Oriented Development (TOD) has been part of the Queensland Government’s strategy to manage rapid growth of SEQ since the release of its first statutory regional plan in 2005. In the Queensland context, TOD is a planning and development approach to address expected continuous and high population growth. It advocates and seeks to use both urban land and infrastructure efficiently to maximise community benefit, chiefly by clustering a mixed-use development (including a diverse mix of relatively high-density residential housing, commercial, retail, employment and community activities) around public transport nodes and the corridors between such nodes.

Many different players, with a wide range of concerns are involved in planning and delivery of TOD (Dittmar and Ohland, 2004). Like in all similar urban regions, the successful delivery of TOD in SEQ hinges on collaborations between (and within) the various levels of government, the development industry, the community at large and the many other individuals and groups that comprise our regional community. Such collaborations may (and do) challenge both entrenched institutional cultures as well as established avenues of communication between the various players. Government departments have
an established tradition of specialisation in their particular subject area (eg, public transport infrastructure planning and service coordination) and when having to collaborate to deliver TOD these different agencies are required to synergise their expertise and overcome potentially conflicting agendas. The development industry which aims to optimise its investments around single-use/single-site products (such as a residential apartment complex) finds itself similarly challenged by the demands of TOD which calls for integration and concentration of various land uses in one precinct centred on a public transport node. Also, there is the substantial undertaking of gaining support from the many public transport users, business owners, residents, community-service organisations and many others for TOD to truly reflect the principles of integration on which it is based.

Figure 1 - Roma Street Railway Station and adjacent high density residential development and parklands – an accidental TOD (Photo: Andrew Batts)

Many studies suggest that successful TOD typically involves well-crafted collaborations between the many individuals, organizations, and institutions with different goals, priorities and interests in outcomes (Cervero, Ferrel & Murphy, 2002; Arrington, 2005, Dittmar & Ohland, 2004). The implementation of TOD requires the integration of transport and land use planning and strong collaborations between different public sector and private sector agencies (Renne 2005, Dittmar & Ohland, 2004).

In fact, I along with many others authors before me, would go so far as to say that without close collaboration of the players in using a common script, then many different conversations will be heard by the audience, none in itself reflecting the theme of the show and thus leading to confusion and wasted effort both by those involved and those watching. No single actor can completely set the agenda (Dittmar & Ohland, 2004).
This paper looks at the issues associated with the implementation of TOD in SEQ. It discusses the opportunities for a comprehensive station area planning program to create a consensus between the various “players” for future investment – public and private alike – in the delivery of TOD in SEQ.

2. Background to TOD in SEQ

Whilst TOD cannot be developed everywhere throughout the SEQ urban footprint area, it can be developed in conjunction with the region’s heavy rail and busway transit systems which snake their way through the pattern of development. Opportunities for TOD in SEQ are signposted in the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031 (SEQRP2009).

2.1 Planning Framework

In July 2009, the Queensland Government released the SEQRP2009 and its associated regulatory provisions. This document was the product of a formal review and consultation process undertaken in respect of the South East Queensland Regional Plan 2005 - 2026 and its ability to respond to the issues facing SEQ in respect to its growth and development. Like its predecessor, the SEQRP2009 is a plan to manage growth in the region and reinforces the promotion of a more compact and sustainable lifestyle. Primarily it seeks to establish a framework to achieve the additional 754,000 new dwellings identified as being required to accommodate and cater for the expected population growth in SEQ in the next 20 years to 2031.

The SEQRP2009 intends that this target will be partly achieved through focusing higher density residential development within and around regional activity centres, and public transport nodes and corridors. This concept of TOD forms a key strategy within the SEQRP2009 for achieving sustainable urban development outcomes. The push to locate transit oriented communities around nodes or corridors where transit infrastructure exists or is proposed is heavily tied to the concept of activity centres. Regional activity centres are seen as primary locations for the application of TOD principles.

However, TOD precincts are also envisaged for lower order suburban and neighbourhood locations serviced by “transit corridors” across sub-regions in SEQ. “Transit corridors” are explained in the SEQRP2009 as key public transport routes where mixed use, public transport supportive activities and development are to occur. The “typical” form the TOD should take is determined having regard to the type or level of centre of the surrounding precinct.

The SEQRP2009 identifies baseline density targets for TOD within activity centres of between 40 and 120 dwellings per hectare (net), for suburban and neighbourhood locations of between 30 and 80 dwellings per hectare (net) and for priority transit corridors 40 dwellings per hectare (net). By way of comparison, the SEQRP2009 requires new residential developments in Development Areas to achieve a minimum net dwelling yield of 15 dwellings per hectare.
Like its 2005 predecessor, the current SEQRP2009, in attempting to provide a statutory basis for the region’s urban growth management, it leaves the process of identifying local TOD sites to the control of local councils throughout SEQ. The use of local growth management strategies and structure plans introduced under the 2005 regional plan has been abandoned, in favour of each local government using the TOD principles for appropriate locations set out in Tables 4 and 5 of the SEQRP2009 when preparing local planning strategies, planning schemes and amendments. This practice appears to recognise that there is no single set of precise criteria that can be applied to determine the suitability of a particular site for TOD and that TOD principles should be applied differently in different locations based on the local characteristics of each transit node.

As mentioned above, the 2005 regional plan set out pre-requisites for TOD sites, flagged TOD proposals under consideration and contained strategies on how TOD will be achieved for SEQ. In lieu, the SEQRP2009 makes the TOD table of principles more comprehensive and inserts Table 5, which sets out TOD typologies. The SEQRP2009 does not state any specific projects or proposed locations for TOD development in SEQ although some location guidance for TOD may be gleaned from the sub-regional narratives contained in Part C of the SEQRP2009, which identifies various major infrastructure projects for the region. Consequently, it would appear that the Queensland Government is content for local government to determine the appropriate location for the delivery of TOD - having regard to the specific scale, intensity, transit services and land use mix of any proposed site.
2.2 Players

The key players in the planning and delivery of TOD in SEQ and a brief description of their roles and key positions are as follows:

Department of Local Government and Planning (DLGP)

DLGP is the lead agency for coordinating Queensland’s TOD implementation activities. DLGP’s role includes developing whole-of-government TOD policy, determining TOD priorities, coordinating the state’s interests and involvement in TOD delivery and identifying and determining the planning and delivery mechanisms for, and sequencing of, TOD projects.

Department of Transport and Main Roads (DTMR)

DTMR is the owner of the rail corridor on behalf of the State of Queensland. It is responsible for protecting the long-term integrity of the rail corridor and identifying future rail corridor. DTMR consults with its key stakeholders—QR, as the railway manager, and the TransLink Transit Authority—as required on specialist matters. DTMR is also responsible for facilitating and negotiating private sector purchase and development of corridor land.

Queensland Rail (QR Ltd)

QR Ltd is a government-owned corporation and is the railway manager for most of Queensland’s rail corridor, and is responsible for the safe operation of the railway and for managing the rail infrastructure and passenger operations.

TransLink Transit Authority (TTA)

TTA is the statutory body responsible for purchasing and scheduling government-funded services on the passenger network, administering the funding for Citytrain services, stations, station upgrades and rolling stock, and designing stations and station upgrades. TTA advises DTMR about the impact of development on stations and passenger services and the requirements for access to stations and intermodal facilities. TTA manages the delivery of new and upgraded public transport station facilities within SEQ.

Department of Environment and Resource Management (DERM)

DERM maintains the Queensland Government’s land policies and manages state land disposal processes through the Property Management Committee.

Urban Land Development Authority (ULDA)

The ULDA works with local and state governments, the community, local landholders and the development industry to help deliver commercially viable developments that include diverse, affordable, sustainable housing. The ULDA is responsible for preparing development schemes and assessing development applications in declared Urban Development Areas.

Local Governments

Local governments are responsible for the planning, delivery and maintenance of urban infrastructure, open spaces and some community services and facilities. Local governments plan for land use and control development, including the built form and streetscapes.

Private Sector

The private sector has a key role in developing sites within TOD precincts through investment in buildings, public spaces, facilities and infrastructure. It is also involved in the design and construction of the development and in the marketing and sale of real estate.
SEQ Community

People in the community are the future neighbours, residents, business owners and employees of the TOD precinct. They will use the public spaces and transit, local shops and community services, creating the activity needed to bring vitality and economic success to the precinct.

Having a large number of players creates obvious logistical and performance issues in delivering TOD in SEQ. However, no one player can make TOD work by itself. Rather, by ensuring that goals, policies and resources of each are aligned through an appropriate mechanism, then the task – the planning and delivery of TOD in accordance with the SEQRp2009 – can be achieved.

2.3 Projects

A number of different TOD projects throughout SEQ are at various stages at the present date:

Milton

A project promoted by a major national development company which has had to face significant issues during the planning and approvals phases. There is very little evidence of collaborative planning or support between the various players, including significant opposition from the local community mainly from a NIMBY perspective.

Albion

Similar to its “sister” project at Milton, the same major national development company’s proposed TOD adjacent to the Albion Railway Station has also faced a number of major obstacles during its planning and approvals phases. Although not facing the same level of local community backlash, the level of support from other TOD players (primarily those from the public sector) is generally underwhelming. An obvious exception to this is the recently funded pedestrian/cycle overbridge which QR Ltd is funding to improve access to from the railway station and the emerging TOD.

Bowen Hills

Bowen Hills is the location of one of SEQ’s first TOD planning projects. However, to date little if any progress has been achieved in delivering on the Queensland Government’s vision for the area. It is fair to say, that since a large part of the area has been declared an Urban Development Area with regulation of both planning and development now under the control of the ULDA, more progress has been made in delivering TOD in Bowen Hills that the initial foray by the Queensland Government through its former Office of Urban Management.

Buranda

Like Albion and Milton, the establishment of a TOD on land adjacent to both the railway and busway stations at Buranda is being planned and delivered by the private sector. In this case, a local Brisbane development company is the proponent who is trying to achieve a new urban development based on the principles of TOD enunciated by SEQRp2009.

Woolloongabba Busway Station

The government-owned land adjacent to the Woolloongabba Busway Station is under the planning and development control of the ULDA as it has been declared an Urban Development Area. It is understood from the ULDA that due to the Cross River Rail project being “shelved” by the Queensland Government due to funding issues, the likely timing for delivery of the TOD is now somewhat “long term”.

Figure 3 - Location of some of Brisbane’s key TOD projects (c.2011)

Varsity Station Village

A master plan for Varsity Station Village was released by DTMR in 2008. Construction of the Varsity Station Village was intended to commence in 2010 when the Varsity Lakes Railway Station was opened. It is noted that due to the location of the site “hard up against the Pacific Motorway”, Varsity Station Village will be a “one-sided TOD” limited mainly to the land owned by DTMR.
Yeerongpilly

The Queensland Government through DLGP is currently undertaking a planning process for the creation of a TOD on the former primary industries research station site at Yeerongpilly. Although this planning process is fairly well advanced at the time of writing this paper, the development of a TOD at the Yeerongpilly site in the future faces significant hurdles as the 2011 Brisbane Floods showed that the site is subject to quite considerable inundation from flooding of the nearby Brisbane River.

Coorparoo Junction

The proposed Coorparoo Junction TOD is the latest of the TOD projects announced by the Queensland Government and is currently going subject of a procurement process through which DLGP is seeking private sector assistance with the delivery of the TOD. The scope of the proposed Coorparoo Junction TOD is limited to a relatively small area of government-owned land surrounding the proposed Coorparoo Junction Busway Station. However, the section of the Eastern Busway on which the TOD is to be located currently remains un-funded and it is also limited in scope, even though an existing railway station exists at Coorparoo and there is the opportunity between the railway and busway corridors to create a significant mixed use TOD offering.

As well as the preceding TOD projects, the *South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program 2009-2031* released in July 2009 also identifies that a number of other TOD projects are being pursued in other parts of SEQ including:

- Fitzgibbon;
- Northshore Hamilton;
- Gold Coast University Hospital;
- sites along the proposed Eastern and Northern Busways and the Gold Coast Rapid Transit corridor;
- Coomera, Chermside, Caboolture, Maroochydore and Ipswich regional activity centres; and
- Boggo Road Urban Village.

The level of collaboration between the players involved with these projects varies markedly as does the level of success in terms of the delivery of each TOD.
3. Lack of collaboration a big barrier to the delivery of TOD in SEQ

Many different authors have identified the barriers to the delivery of TOD in SEQ (Hale & Charles, 2007; Khan & Bajracharya; Curtis & James, 2004). Such barriers include infrastructure costs, land amalgamation and availability, obtaining development approvals and conflicting policies. Numerous barriers addressed by others relate to the issues discussed herein; namely, coordinating the many players that are involved in planning and delivery of development and transport within station areas (that is, generally 400 metres walking distance of a public transport station). Issues such as land assembly, use of public land, achieving appropriate planning and implementation of infrastructure required to promote dense, mixed use development requires close collaboration between the transport and land use agencies, public and private landowners, and the public.

While SEQRP2009 continues to be an advocate for TOD, its success in the context of SEQ seems jeopardised by a lack of effective implementation and supportive regulatory or incentive mechanisms. This is surprising given that SEQRP2009 effectively necessitates that TOD principles be applied in order to achieve the infill targets and the more sustainable use of SEQ’s cities. There are barriers, outside SEQRP2009, which have the potential to limit the successful implementation of this concept and such challenges include community perceptions of a TOD lifestyle, market demand, character issues together with institutional/political barriers in terms of transport network planning, land assembly and planning approvals.

As Khan & Bajracharya point out, a less proactive State government has meant that the realisation of TOD projects in SEQ has been left largely to the private sector and this has sometimes resulted in piecemeal approach to TOD implementation. The private sector led TOD projects at Albion, Buranda and Milton generally cover only relatively small areas, with a focus on designing and delivering individual building sites, rather than effecting an integrated land use development for the whole of a larger area around a public transport node as SEQRP2009 intends.

Whilst some progress has been made towards planning for TOD in SEQ since the original SEQRP was released in 2005, there are no real examples of TOD that have been delivered and are “on-the-ground”. As many authors have attested, there are a number of significant challenges which will continue to be an impediment to the widespread delivery of transit oriented development in SEQ. Peter Newman, 2005, notes that “Australian cities are littered with examples of lost TODs”, and cites the lack of proactive State government involvement in implementation as the primary cause. He notes that if left to local government alone the regional perspectives are lost and the political unpalatability of density undermines potential projects.

Further, current infrastructure delivery programs are often not aligned with development efforts, resulting in poor outcomes which compromise the ability to sell the wider benefits of TOD. Key actor agreement on priority TOD locations would allow investment to be coordinated to more quickly and effectively deliver desired outcomes.

As described above, a number of major State agencies have particular interests that relate to TOD. Coordination of these interests is essential throughout the precinct planning, project design and construction phases, if TOD is to be delivered efficiently in reasonable timeframes. As well, the development industry continues to report significant issues regarding delays caused by poor coordination of government interests in TOD projects currently underway.

Given the complex nature of TOD requiring the integration of elements of land use mix, public transport services and infrastructure provision, high quality urban design, etc, the collaboration of the players involved is essential. Resolving the various issues between players can be complex, particularly in regard to service levels, commercial operational issues including access, amenity and safety while achieving successful TOD design in markey terms. Planning for station areas and
assessment of development proposals can involve resource intensive negotiations between agencies in order to gain ‘sign-off’.

SEQ’s TOD players are feeling their way in terms of building a robust process that can be reapplied to different locations. In particular, coordination and trust between developers, local governments and State agencies will take some time to mature to become part of the planning process.

In early 2008, the Queensland Government established a Transit Oriented Development Coordination Unit within the then Department of Infrastructure and Planning (now Department of Local Government and Planning) with the following objectives:

- To oversee development of government policy on TOD;
- To identify priority TOD locations; and
- To coordinate the Queensland Government’s interests in this form of development. It is noted that this Unit was to work closely with the DTMR (and its predecessor Queensland Transport), the other key agency with a major interest in transit oriented development delivery).

It is acknowledged that the Coordination Unit has taken a lead role in the coordination of State input to some key TOD projects by working with State agencies to ensure TOD processes are streamlined. Despite this it is recognized that further work is necessary to ensure coordination across and within State agencies and between the State agencies and the other players to ensure agreement on interests and priorities for the delivery of TOD in SEQ.

However, responding reactively to private sector driven locations by the State and local government players has placed significant pressure on these players to respond on a large number of fronts spreading government effort and resources and undermining an ability to concentrate effort in priority locations. Therefore, agreement and focus by all players – public and private - on delivering TOD in a number of strategically important priority locations would allow energy and investment to be coordinated to more quickly and effectively deliver desired outcomes.
4. Comprehensive station area planning – a possible way to collaborate

Dena Belzer, Gerald Autler, Judith Espinosa, Sharon Feigon and Gloria Ohland in their work entitled “The Transit-Oriented Development Drama and Its Actors” (Dittmar & Ohland, 2004) identify that TOD often suffers from a wide variety of disparate views about what a project should accomplish. Each actor has different goals, priorities and interests and in the absence of an overall vision and streamlined structure for implementation there is no framework for comparing different interests and making choices about how to balance competing goals. Planning is often an exercise in consensus building.

One means for ensuring that all players and the varying goals, priorities and interests of each are considered and balanced both during the planning and delivery of TOD is Comprehensive Station Area Planning. Comprehensive Station Area Planning is essentially a fancy title for the coordination of planning and implementation processes undertaken by all of the relevant players for a station area (or the 400 metres around a public transport station). Similar to the concept of Integrated Local Area Planning, Comprehensive Station Area Planning provides a framework for the players to collaborate (in theatrical terms, a script) through which top-down policy and planning is balanced with bottom-up implementation processes.

The major principles underlying Comprehensive Station Area Planning process which support its use in delivering TOD in SEQ are:

- station areas and the communities within which such station areas are located differ and therefore emphasis should be placed on devising plans responsive to local needs and circumstances;
- a holistic view of station areas (addressing physical, social and economic spheres of equal importance) adds to the delivery of ongoing successful TOD;

![Figure 6 – Involvement of SEQ’s players in the comprehensive station area planning process](image-url)
there is a need for a shared understanding and a shared vision between all players concerned with planning and delivery of development and infrastructure in the station area;

related activities for the different players should be coordinated in order to address key issues and achieve desired futures;

efficient and effective use of available resources is essential and unnecessary gaps or duplications between players should be avoided; and

community involvement throughout the whole planning process will enable the end product to gain widespread support.

Therefore, Comprehensive Station Area Planning would provide a streamlined process to coordinate and integrate the planning, design and delivery of the precinct within a 400 metre radius of a public transport station. This approach should essentially ‘frontload’ the State and local government interests, resolve the issues of other players and challenges in the local context and support streamlined development approvals. The Comprehensive Station Area Planning process would include preparation of integrated infrastructure plans for the area which would encourage innovative approaches (such as sharing and unbundling between infrastructure providers) across a station area.

5. Conclusion

Delivering TOD in SEQ is more critical than ever as the region faces new and emerging challenges such as higher than anticipated growth, climate change, increasing congestion, decreasing housing affordability and declining health due to lower levels of physical activity. International research shows that if successfully implemented at the regional level, TOD can successfully respond to each of these issues - critical to the economic prosperity, liveability and sustainability of SEQ.

The SEQRP2009 continues to focus strongly on accommodating the future population of SEQ in existing urban areas close to activity centres and public transport nodes and corridors. Encouragement for TOD remains, although more is required to deliver the concept of TOD into the mainstream. Having regard to the barriers holding back acceptance of TOD, it may be concluded that appropriate support in station area plans and for combined governance for TOD will be required to see more TODs emerge and eventually prosper as a form of urban development embraced by the SEQ community.

Therefore, the challenge exists to translate the principles of TOD into reality in SEQ. It is clearly evident that the complexity of the task will require effective collaboration of all the players and harnessing all the necessary resources (such as funding and regulation) to achieve this reality.

In this regard, I think that the following quote from Dena Belzer, Gerald Autler, Judith Espinosa, Sharon Feigon and Gloria Ohland in their work entitled “The Transit-Oriented Development Drama and Its Actors” (Dittmar & Ohland, 2004) best sums up the benefits of collaboration for the delivery of TOD:

> Good TOD is not magic. Rather, it is like theater: it requires a good script, strong vision and leadership, and actors who are committed to working together. When these elements are in place, the result is greater than the mere sum of the parts. TOD works best when it is an ensemble piece.

I suggest that Comprehensive Station Area Planning, involving the collaboration of all the players to develop the vision/plan for the station area and then to implement works and development in accordance with the common vision and agreed schedule is such an “ensemble piece” and a program of Comprehensive Station Area Planning would assist in the successful delivery of TOD in SEQ.
6. References


