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## SEQ Regional Plan 2009-2031

~~Where else~~ How else but  
TODs? The Pursuit of Transit  
Oriented Development in the  
*South East Queensland  
Regional Plan 2009-2031*

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## Where else How else but TODs? The Pursuit of Transit Oriented Development in the *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009-2031*

### Introduction

On 28 July 2009, the Queensland Government released the *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009 - 2031* and associated regulatory provisions. This document is 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 now facing South East Queensland. Like its predecessor, the 2009 Regional Plan 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 South East Queensland in the next 20 years.

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 Transit Oriented Development (TOD) forms a key strategy within the 2009 Regional Plan 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.<sup>1</sup> 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 South East Queensland. “Transit corridors” are explained in the 2009 Regional Plan 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 2009 Regional Plan 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 2009 Regional Plan requires new residential developments in Development Areas to achieve a minimum net dwelling yield of 15 dwellings per hectare.

### What is TOD?

TOD is a planning approach which aims to create communities around transport hubs. It is a concept using 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. TOD theory advocates that strong connections between each of these components are created by improving access to them and using integrated planning to create a “complete community”.

Both the 2005 and 2009 Regional Plans acknowledged that TOD principles ought to be applied to precincts within a comfortable 10 minute walk of a transit node. The notion of a complete or complementary community is said to be facilitated by local government planning schemes allowing for a mix of land use (tertiary education, office, local retail, entertainment, high density residential and professional services) that generate high demand for public transport within 400m to 800m of stops or stations in transit corridors.

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<sup>1</sup> The author notes that James Ireland’s paper deals more particularly with the application of activity centre principles

The TOD concept of promoting the relationship between land use and transport appears to have three main elements:

- They are, or will be serviced by quality and high frequency public transport.
- They have the capacity to provide dense, mixed use development at public transport stops.
- They can provide well-designed urban environments, including a pedestrian-friendly, walkable catchment, centred around a public transport node or corridor.

TOD literature offers the view that numerous opportunities can be derived from TOD at both a local and regional scale, including the containment of urban sprawl, reduced congestion pressures through increased public transport usage, vibrant urban centres and more healthy lifestyles. With this in mind, this paper will attempt to explore whether the TOD benefits of an increased sense of community or idea of “why go anywhere” is actually going anywhere in the 2009 Regional Plan.

## How is TOD being promoted in the 2009 Regional Plan?

First it is helpful to look briefly at how TODs were promoted in the 2005 Regional Plan. As a whole, the 2005 Regional Plan laid some belated planning foundations for ongoing growth in the South East Queensland region. Through its deficiency in containing or effecting any meaningful changes to the public transport landscape, it seems reasonable to remark that it effectively laid down a future of continued car dependence.

Chapter 8 of the 2005 Regional Plan concerned “urban development” and stated measures to maintain the region’s lifestyle under an overarching Desired Regional Outcome for “*a compact and sustainable urban pattern of well-planned communities, supported by a network of accessible and convenient centres close to residential areas, employment locations and transport.*”

Under the heading “Integrated land use and transport planning”, chapter 8.7 of the 2005 Regional Plan set out a range of policy measures and strategies relating to TOD. Supporting notes to this section elaborated further on the nature of TOD and specifically cited TOD proposals under consideration at the time. Relevantly, these were the redevelopment focused around Milton, Bowen Hills, Cleveland, Albion Park and Buranda railway stations, Woolloongabba busway station and Southbank busway and railway stations. Some of the strategies for achieving TOD were also stated, such as:

- ensuring appropriate built form and densities proximate to ferry stops
- concentrating higher density in Greenfield areas designed around existing or future public transport nodes
- preparing master plans for activity centres and transit oriented communities
- establishing a Transit Oriented Development Taskforce or alternative special purpose governance arrangements to assist in delivering of TOD outcomes

The identification of other specific sites where TOD principles should be applied was left to the local government as part of preparation of its local growth management strategy, guided by the advice contained in information papers and draft criteria prepared by the TOD Taskforce. Upon a cursory examination of the role and work of the Taskforce and the later established TOD Coordination Unit, it seems fair comment that these bodies focus more on operational rather than technical matters and indeed lack any force in the shape of planning or decision making powers to effectively assist in the delivery of TOD outcomes.

Turning now to how the 2009 Regional Plan further advances the interests of TOD, the emphasis in chapter 8 which was previously on “urban development” has been rebranded to “compact settlement”<sup>2</sup> and Desired Regional Outcome 8 has been reformulated to endorse “*a compact urban structure of well-planned communities, supported by a network of*

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<sup>2</sup> As an aside, it is interesting to note that the heading for chapter 8 in the Draft 2009 Regional Plan released for public consultation in December 2008 was “smart growth”

*accessible and convenient centres and transit corridors linking residential areas to employment locations establishes the context for achieving a consolidated urban settlement pattern."*

Again, adopting the sub-heading of "Integrated land use and transport planning", the statement of principle is to "ensure new development utilises existing infrastructure or can be provided with timely transport infrastructure, community services and employment." This formulation represents a move from "integrating development" in the 2005 Regional Plan to "ensuring utilisation". Seven policy measures then follow. Although the 2009 Regional Plan contains one less policy in this area than its predecessor, this version of the plan introduces two "programs" through which the stated policies may be achieved, namely:

- 8.9.8 Prioritise amendments to planning schemes to support delivery of TOD outcomes in activity centres and identified nodes on priority transit corridors; and
- 8.9.9 Identify areas in consultation with local government that are suitable for the application of TOD principles.

These programs would appear to replace the TOD strategies previously contained in the notes to chapter 8.7 of the 2005 Regional Plan.

Like the 2005 Regional Plan, the 2009 Regional Plan, in attempting providing a statutory basis for the region's urban growth management, leaves the process of identifying local TOD sites to the control of local councils. The use of local growth management strategies and structure plans specifically is abandoned, in favour of local government using the TOD principles for appropriate locations set out in Tables 4 and 5 of the 2009 Regional Plan when preparing local planning strategies, planning schemes and amendments. This practice would appear 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. It is interesting to note that the policy references to the preparation of detailed master plans to promote and guide this integrated land use which were contained in the 2005 Regional Plan and Draft 2009 Regional Plan have been removed.

As already mentioned, 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 South East Queensland. In lieu, the 2009 Regional Plan makes the TOD table of principles more comprehensive and inserts Table 5, which sets out TOD precinct typology. The 2009 Regional Plan does not state any specific projects or proposed locations for TOD development in South East Queensland, although some location guidance for TOD may be gleaned from the sub-regional narratives contained in Part C of the 2009 Regional Plan, which identifies various major infrastructure projects for the region. While these mostly include transport investment with a focus on motorway systems and road upgrades, some of the public transport projects identified are:

- The Northern, Boggo Road and Eastern Busways.
- Mitchelton-Ferny Grove rail line duplication.
- A heavy rail connection between the Gold Coast and the Gold Coast airport.
- A rapid transit system running along the high-density coastal spine.
- Upgrading rail access to Springfield.
- Improving public transport connections between Beerwah and coastal centres from Caloundra South to Maroochydore.

It is interesting to note that during the consultative period for the Draft 2009 Regional Plan, submissions were received and considered by the State Government which specifically requested the identification of specific TOD precincts in the final Regional Plan, in order to provide some certainty for the market by limiting economic risks in pursuing non-priority locations and to reduce the number of potential development fronts. In response to this, the notes contained in the *South East Queensland Regional Plan 2009- 2031* consultation report, published July 2009, indicate that specific site identification was complex and a potentially sensitive course of action that needed to be undertaken in the broader

context of local government planning processes. Consequently, it would appear that the State 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.

Chapter 12 of the 2009 Regional Plan, entitled "Integrated Transport", also contains principles, policies and programs for the integration of transport and land use planning. It acknowledges that the ability to achieve the compact urban settlement pattern advocated in Desired Regional Outcome 8 is subject to a significant shift and ultimate emphasis on improving the public transport system. Transport investment by the Queensland Government, particularly in public transport, is necessary to support transit oriented communities, yet it would appear that much funding is going to new roads, road networks and improvements to existing roads.

The 2009 Regional Plan refers to public transport being of "high quality" and "frequent" as pre-requisites of TOD precincts. Public transport systems must link the places that people are coming from to places and people they wish to visit. Currently the South East Queensland regional public transport system fails to achieve this notion of connectivity. It is clear from chapter 12 of the 2009 Regional Plan that there is an apparent system centre in Brisbane, but it does not connect well to desired destinations on the Gold and Sunshine Coasts. Further, the 2009 Regional Plan specifically and repeatedly references "timely" transport infrastructure provision, thereby appreciating that there needs to be the concurrent building of infrastructure alongside new urban development in order to avoid establishing a culture of car use and dependency. The challenge for South East Queensland appears to be timing, and it is acknowledged in the process timeframes contained in Table 4 of the 2009 Regional Plan that TOD outcomes take time to deliver and that such precincts mature over time.

Helping the Regional Plan to achieve its stated intention to manage growth is the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program. This document acts as the implementation and project-oriented counterpart to the Regional Plan and outlines pre-committed infrastructure projects according to estimated costs and timing. The Plan was first released in 2005 and is annually reviewed to reflect Government's latest planning and budget commitments. Currently, the Plan outlines various transport infrastructure priorities, timeframes and budgets for South East Queensland to 2026. Relevantly, it focuses on the delivery of TOD outcomes in three priority areas:

- major transport nodes and state landholdings within a 10km radius of the Brisbane CBD;
- key regional activity centres identified in the Regional Plan; and
- major new state public transport infrastructure.

An update on the progress of TOD in South East Queensland over the period 2008 to 2009 is provided in the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program released in July 2009. It notes the following:

- The Queensland Government is working with developers, local government and the Urban Land Development Authority to pave the way for transit oriented communities in a range of locations including Albion, Bowen Hills, Buranda, Fitzgibbon, Southbank, Milton, Hamilton Northshore, Woolloongabba, Gold Coast University Hospital and sites along the proposed Eastern and Northern Busways and Gold Coast Rapid Transit corridor.
- The Queensland Government is working in cooperation with local government to plan for regional activity centres based on TOD principles at a range of locations throughout South East Queensland including Coomera, Chermside, Caboolture, Maroochydore and Ipswich.
- Funds have been allocated to build a pedestrian bridge to Albion rail station as part of that precinct's redevelopment.
- A master plan for Varsity Station Village was released in 2008. Construction of the Varsity Station Village will start in 2010 when the Varsity Lakes train station is to be opened.
- Construction is underway on the Boggo Road Urban Village, which is a transit oriented community. In February 2009 the government released an Expression of Interest for developers to take up further opportunities in the Boggo Road Urban Village.

When read in conjunction with the 2009 Regional Plan, there is an obvious emphasis on the heightened role for TOD.

In addition to the policies and programs set out in the 2009 Regional Plan and specific projects identified in the Infrastructure Plan and Program, further details on implementing the Government's vision of integrated transport planning are left to the Department of Transport and Main Roads finalising and releasing a document entitled "*Connecting SEQ 2031: An Integrated Regional Transport Plan for South East Queensland*." This document is said to underpin the transport and transit components of the 2009 Regional Plan and is intended to become the primary transport plan for the region. It is understood that the draft plan will be released later this year and will contain the detailed implementation for those strategic infrastructure projects which are prioritised for delivery in the Infrastructure Plan and Program.

TODs are primarily provided for in chapters 8 and 12 of the 2009 Regional Plan. However, it is important to recognise that it is a concept which is also aligned with the sustainability principles and policies in chapter 1 and the Desired Regional Outcome of "strong communities" in chapter 6. The management of urban sprawl and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions through strategic planning are directly consonant with TOD principles. The 2009 Regional Plan champions TOD for reasons that its compact urban form and dependency on public transport offers one potential solution to redress the imbalance that has occurred with urban sprawl and resultant car dependency. Despite consistent and repeated themes in the 2009 Regional Plan for regional accessibility, addressing climate change and consolidating urban growth, there appears to be tension in the 2009 Regional Plan and the Infrastructure Plan and Program in terms of the stated regional goals of sustainability, as the package of infrastructure measures seems heavily in favour of road network expansion.

The 2009 Regional Plan strongly supports public and active transport. The premise of the Regional Plan, particularly in the context of achieving Brisbane infill targets of 156,000 dwellings by 2031, is clearly based on successfully supporting TOD and activity centre policies. In summary, a comparison with the 2005 Regional Plan reveals that in relation to the achievement of TOD:

- there is no specific identification or mapping of TOD sites;
- densities around TODs have not increased;
- the roles and responsibility for TOD implementation remains unclear; and
- there is an increased focus on efficient use of active transport routes and linking planned development with timely planned infrastructure provision, but little, if any, details on how this will be achieved.

While the 2009 Regional Plan stresses the importance of infill development, it lacks measures to effectively facilitate TOD, such as through the use of regulatory provisions.

## Challenges to the provision of the TOD concept

While the 2009 Regional Plan continues to be an advocate of TOD, its success in the context of South East Queensland seems jeopardised by a lack of effective implementation and supportive regulatory or incentive mechanisms. This is surprising given that the 2009 Regional Plan effectively necessitates that TOD principles be applied in order to achieve the infill targets and the more sustainable use of South East Queensland cities. Some hesitance for a greater level of detail in the 2009 Regional Plan to reinforce TOD for the region may in part be understood when one considers that as a planning concept, TOD is not without its limitations and criticisms. There are barriers, outside the Regional Plan, 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.

## Land assembly

Assembling large parcels of land around existing public transport nodes can be a significant barrier to achieving successful TOD outcomes. Consequently, there may be a trend towards Greenfield sites where large parcels of land are available under one ownership. Although Greenfield sites offer a clear opportunity to plan a TOD, the adoption of TODs in South East Queensland, as envisaged by the 2009 Regional Plan, intends that they not be in the exclusive domain of Greenfield sites. The goals of the Regional Plan and, most likely the demand of the buying public, would seem to dictate that inner city infill sites must not be precluded from consideration as future TOD sites owing to any inability to assemble sufficiently large parcels of land. It is noted that proposed TOD projects at Milton and Albion only cover small areas and focus largely on individual building sites rather than effecting an overall integrated land use development for a larger area around the train stations. To overcome the hurdle of fragmentation, TOD needs to be supported by special provisions, including potentially legislative and processing changes, to enable land parcels of an appropriate scale for TOD development to be amassed and held under one common ownership. The Urban Land Development Authority, who are tasked with acquiring and consolidating land suitable for new housing and bringing the land quickly to the market, have effected TOD projects at two inner city sites - Bowen Hills and Woolloongabba. It is specifically acknowledged in the Infrastructure Plan and Program that the Urban Land Development Authority is a key vehicle to deliver TOD throughout the state. However, is the assistance derived from the Urban Land Development Authority enough? Should the role of the Urban Land Development Authority be expanded to specifically include delivery of TOD? It would seem that there is a need to examine the powers of the 2009 Regional Plan including the associated regulatory provisions, together with those of the State Government and relevant agencies involved in promoting TOD, to effect effective land consolidation around potential TOD sites.

## Character

Many of the inner city sites identified in the 2005 Regional Plan for potential TODs (such as Milton, Woolloongabba and Albion) contain a substantial number of "Queenslander" style architecture and character houses. Most local government planning schemes protect such architecture from unsympathetic redevelopment and, having regard to the nature of development associated with TOD precincts, there is the potential for TOD to conflict with, or potentially result in the loss of, character housing. Unlike its predecessor, the 2009 Regional Plan recognises this challenge in policy 8.9.5 in providing for TOD principles and practices to be applied having regard for "local circumstances and character". Character issues are therefore an important consideration which makes it difficult for redevelopment to occur, particularly at the densities proposed for TOD projects.

## Community perception

TOD will only be successful if there is market interest in this form of development. Are the notions of sustainability and the other associated "transit town" idealisms of TOD enough to generate a demand for this type of lifestyle? People's preferences for cars, the great Australian dream of owning a house on a quarter acre block and the prevailing economic climate may pose significant challenges to the implementation of the TOD concept in South East Queensland. Green policies promoting less travel, while admirable, may fall away when the reality of living in higher priced, although more accessible, inner city suburbs is weighed against the cheaper low-residential density housing offered in the outer suburbs. Any relative additional travel costs may, at least in the short term, not calculate to the savings to be achieved in housing costs, nor translate to savings in terms of the perceived density fears and amenity sacrifices associated with the "boutique planning" of TOD. Further, as already mentioned, TOD may also be hampered in becoming a mainstream product as a consequence of the continued emphasis by the Queensland Government on transportation investments that focus on a car based system. Changes such as policy and other strategies directed at overcoming any existing inherent perceptions about TOD may be required to achieve palatability for TOD outcomes before South East Queensland residents can fully appreciate and embrace this form of mixed use development as a legitimate housing choice. The involvement of the Urban Land Development Authority to ensure that a diverse and affordable range of housing options can be delivered is one positive measure, although this in turn raises issues about the need to provide incentives to developers to embrace this type of development.

## Investment by developers

The realisation of TOD projects requires clear incentives for developers. While the 2009 Regional Plan advocates the TOD package for the community, for example through vital and active streets, social equity, travel choice and walkable catchments, there needs to be an incentive package focused on developers. Having regard to the limitations for TOD already canvassed, and discussed below, this may include support with respect to land assembly, clearer commitments to infrastructure provision and benefits of a simplified and integrated development approval system.

## Planning approvals

The introduction of TOD in South East Queensland is dependent upon there being a local planning scheme which is supportive of the TOD concept. Current approval frameworks and levels of assessment may hinder the development of a site otherwise suited to a TOD. The 2009 Regional Plan relies on prioritising amendments to planning schemes to support the delivery of TOD outcomes, yet fails to define an implementation or approval process for TODs. Instead a heavy burden is placed on local governments to ensure its planning scheme reflects the core objectives of TOD, to identify locations for TOD, decide upon the appropriate form of TOD for each location and then to accommodate the required additional housing needed to reach infill targets. Amendments to planning schemes require community consultation and having regard to the density and intensification associated with TOD, it may be difficult to convince interested groups to accept TOD as a legitimate and necessary form of development. Appreciating that TOD is part of a state-wide network, there may be good cause to consider TOD governance and whether these local issues faced by Council, which have the potential to undermine the provision of TOD, can be addressed by an increased role of the State facilitating the provision of this development from a regional perspective, particularly in the realms of further technical and financial support.

In terms of technical support, the intentions of the 2009 Regional Plan to facilitate TOD need to be translated across into the planning schemes, preferably in the form of clear land designations or zonings. A specific TOD zoning captive of the specific benefits and requirements necessitated by this form of development would greatly assist the provision of the mixed uses associated with these dense centres. Without this, the delivery of TOD may be considerably and inappropriately hindered. As already mentioned, the 2009 Regional Plan fails to use regulatory provisions to assist local government achieve its outcomes in this area. One obvious example is where local government planning scheme documents have fallen behind the stated principle and policy outcomes of the Regional Plan, such as where new transit projects are underway which require almost immediate precinct design and project development activities, but the local planning scheme does not reflect its provision. The 2009 Regional Plan does not deal with streamlining current processes for preparing planning schemes and planning scheme amendments so that Council can deliver on TOD outcomes required by the regional plan. Accordingly, there is a need for any mismatch between local and regional planning arrangements to be resolved so that decision making is not constrained and there is no additional complexity added to obtaining planning approvals.

In terms of an increased role for the State in TOD governance with respect to financial support, a factor limiting the emergence of TOD may be the understandable reluctance of the development industry to embark on such projects without clear commitments by the State Government in relation to the provision of public transport infrastructure. While this is mostly relevant for Greenfield sites, it is also relevant for large infill sites in terms of being able to service any large planned development. As briefly mentioned, the Infrastructure Plan and Program identifies a number of new public transport corridors in the region and provides funding for these over the period 2009-2026. However, genuine consideration of TOD by not only developers, but also the buying market, may be hampered by a lack of a clearer commitment from Government that it can and will provide an adequate public transport system for the region.

## Conclusion

The 2009 Regional Plan continues to focus strongly on accommodating the future population of South East Queensland 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 such sites, it may be concluded that appropriate support in planning schemes and for combined local and state governance for TOD will be required to see more TODs emerge and eventually prosper as a form of urban development embraced by South East Queensland.

As the pre-eminent document for planning in South East Queensland, the 2009 Regional Plan must provide a clear direction and program for action. At present, the regulatory provisions do not recognise or assist in facilitating the integrated nature of land use planning associated with TOD, nor does the Plan, as a whole, include incentives for residents and developers to embrace TOD as a legitimate housing choice and make greater use of public transport. The vision of promoting TOD in South East Queensland and the goals contained in the Regional Plan can only be achieved with the support of local government, the development industry and the community procured through appropriate incentive mechanisms.

Given the need to move towards a more sustainable future, TOD has enormous potential to move the State strongly and clearly along this path. Unfortunately the 2009 Regional Plan does little more to build on the foundation for "smart growth" outlined in the 2005 Regional Plan by failing to include comprehensive measures to see the creation of more TOD projects and facilitate the requisite level of effective integration between urban planning and transit infrastructure. This paper has identified some of the missing links in the TOD project delivery equation. Without transferring the principles and policy statements of support for TOD contained in the 2009 Regional Plan into project delivery, large scale TOD projects that take into account the management of the expanding South East Queensland population and the issues of housing affordability, congestion and climate change will be unlikely to be realised. The way that TOD is engaged and implemented in the region, at least in the immediate future, will continue to be through smaller test cases. This reduces the momentum towards planning for a better future for all Queenslanders that the 2009 Regional Plan seeks to generate.

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