

Daly City: the Next Bay Area TOD?

In the year 2000, Daly City boasted nearly 50,000 residents; yet, despite having a BART station in the city, not even 8% of the residents used the subway. Furthermore, although almost 18% of the residents used public transit, less than 1.5% biked or walked to work.¹ As has become the norm, the most common mode of commuting was the single-occupancy vehicle: 57% of Daly Citizens drove alone to work, and only 28% had a commute time of less than 20 minutes.² For a city so close in proximity to San Francisco and Berkeley – both cities known for their walkability and bicycle-friendliness – this is deplorable...but also an opportunity for dramatic change. That change could come on the heels of a new TOD at the Daly City BART station.

The principles of TOD – jobs/housing balance, health, mobility, accessibility, and environment – could easily be within the reach of Daly Citizens with some creative redesign. What happened in Daly City is the story repeated in nearly every city that developed in tandem with the car: auto-oriented development. But it need not be that way, and the current success stories in the Bay Area, as well as in places like Portland, Oregon, show a different path – leading to a different future.

Jobs/Housing Balance

One of the most dramatic areas in need of change for the Bay Area is that of housing. The shortage of affordable housing afflicts all but those in the upper income brackets, and promises to become even more threatening as California continues to grow in population. However, the Bay Area has many underdeveloped land parcels that could potentially turn into excellent TOD sites. One site in particular, the Daly City BART station, is ripe for change. The station currently has four parking lots, each a large expanse of concrete. Because it is utilized only during the day for working hours, this valuable real estate is virtually wasted for nearly two-thirds of each day. Building housing along with mixed-use development could quickly change that, remaking Daly City into a denser, more livable community just by proximity to high-quality transit alone. As well, within one-half mile radius of the station, there is potential for future redevelopment on other parcels, such as around the Westlake Shopping Center.

A key to the success of the new housing, however, is mixed uses, including a grocery store and other commercial and office space; ideally these would enable the residents to take care of errands within feet of their housing. Important to note, those new uses will provide jobs, and those jobs could serve not only Daly City residents, but also residents from surrounding communities in Colma, San Francisco, and beyond – in a manner that would also encourage commuting by BART. The future businesses could further entice BART usage by implementing parking/cash-out programs, or by refusing to pay for parking at the station, instead providing bicycle storage and transit passes.

Mobility and Accessibility

Two buzzwords in today's transportation planning world are mobility and accessibility, for they determine how well the needs of residents can be met. With a little creativity, the Daly City TOD could more than meet both transportation needs of all residents, beyond just having the BART station a few steps away.

If the City chose to redevelop the area, one strategic move would be to renovate the section of John Daly Boulevard just south of the station. By adding more landscaping, generous sidewalks, and bicycle lanes, the City would signify to its residents that this area is changing for the better, in keeping with the Bay Area proclaimed vision of sustainability. Urban design, as a rule, includes varying façades to keep people interested as they move along at a slower pace than in the car. A huge benefit of the new mixed-use/housing development, then, would be the landscaping and storefronts that would populate the area, keeping the eyes moving to new designs as the pedestrians and bicyclists make their way along. If the city chose to redevelop that section of the road concurrent with the new housing and mixed-uses, all citizens could take advantage of it, and quite possibly more people would walk or ride bicycles to BART instead of driving along the current multiple lanes of paving that now make up the Boulevard.

The City could also reexamine its current transit connections to the BART station, thus ensuring that those who live and/or work at the new development also have access to other parts of the city other than by car. Combining BART service with new bus rapid transit, for example, could entirely revamp the Daly City transportation system, bringing mobility and accessibility to many who might have had limited choices beforehand. As well, reconsidering pedestrian and bicycle access could help ensure that the lowest income-levels, as well as those who aim to live healthy lifestyles by commuting via their feet, have options for transit.

In addition to John Daly, Highway 1 runs just to the west of the station parking lots, and Highway 280 splits the lots. The highways thus provide another form of access for those who would live there, in the event that they need to drive a car.

Environment

If housing were built on the existing Daly City parking lot, not only would public transportation to nearly all parts of the Bay Area be literally steps away from one's front door, but Thornton Beach State Park (along the Pacific Ocean) would be located just over one mile away, as would Lake Merced and San Bruno Mountain State Park. Ample opportunities to be immersed in the natural beauty of the area thus abound, and are within easy reach from the proposed TOD site of the Daly City BART station. All three amenities can be reached via boulevards, as well.

Health

Public health is directly connected to the built environment, as multiple studies now show.³ Simply by encouraging people to take public transit instead of driving, design encourages more walking, as does building housing with mixed uses. Even if the amount of walking seems minor, those few steps walked every day accumulate, and the air

emissions saved by not driving do, as well. Furthermore, locating housing near such incredible amenities as two state parks and a lake – uses that, by their very nature encourage some physical activity, the City would almost be guaranteeing a healthier lifestyle for the new residents. If the City then revamped the neighboring boulevards and streets to make them more pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly, the entire community would benefit from a reduction in traffic and a greater aesthetic experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Daly City seems to be an area with incredible potential to be the Bay Area's next TOD project. Given the natural amenities, as well as the man-made blunders that could be transformed into affordable housing and jobs for current residents, it seems foolish *not* to begin working with Daly City to create a more livable community via the principles of Transit-Oriented Development.

¹ U.S. Census Bureau; 2000 Census of Population and Housing, SF 3, Table P30

² U.S. Census Bureau; 2000 Census of Population and Housing, SF 3, Table P31

³ Urban Sprawl and Public Health, Frumkin, H., Frank, L., Jackson, R., 2004