
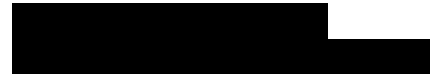


# **A Smart Growth Vision for Downtown Fremont: Enhancing Mobility One Step at a Time**

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## **Introduction: The Time is Ripe for Transit-Oriented Development**

In the Bay Area, transit-oriented development (TOD) has become synonymous with the concepts of *New Urbanism*, livable cities, environmental sustainability, and healthy communities. The goal for TOD is to reduce sprawl through compact, mixed-use development, without creating “dysfunctional densities” too low to fill trains and buses but high enough to create congestion (Cervero 2003). The literature cites many advantages for cities to implement TOD, including transit ridership increases, and significant land value premiums. California’s Transit Village Development Planning Act (CSS 1996) allows for density bonuses and transit villages, and grants are available to leverage TOD such as MTC’s Transportation for Livable Communities and Housing Incentive programs. To quote John van Gieson, Bay Area cities should embrace the fact that “Now is the time for TODs” (Gieson 2006).

## **Downtown Fremont and Opportunities for Smart Growth**

Some cities in the Bay Area are more suited for transit villages; cities such as Berkeley and Oakland were designed as streetcar suburbs when walking was a main form of transportation. However, many cities in the Bay Area arrived at their high growth phases during the ascent of automobility and massive government outlays in highway building. Fremont is a paradigmatic example of this. Although the Fremont area was first settled with the establishment of Mission San Jose by the Spanish, the City was formed in 1956 with several communities combining together in a sprawling structure of land once apricot orchards and fields. Nowadays, as a commuter suburb situated at the end of an extensive BART line, and positioned at the confluence of I-880

and I-680, the City of Fremont has a myriad of challenges to align with smart growth principles.

On the one hand, Downtown Fremont exemplifies one of the biggest barriers to transit-oriented development: residents that are satisfied with their neighborhoods strongly resist change, and will often fight adamantly to prevent increasing density. The population of Fremont, comprised of a high percentage of wealthy suburban commuters, fear policies associated with TOD. On the other hand, external pressures for moving toward smart growth have begun to infiltrate the Fremont dialogue. For instance, the BART station just north of Fremont station, Union City, has already committed to becoming a TOD that is “Coming Soon” (MTC 2006). Bay Area VTA’s “smarter suburbs” concept has had some influential success stories including TODs around Alma Place in Palo Alto, Mountain View Caltrain Station, and the Ohlone-Chynoweth Mixed-Use Project (SCVTA 2005). In these model developments, VTA has capitalized on young professionals commuting into Silicon Valley who may have an alternative definition of the American Dream – one different from the lifestyle focused on traditional single family home and large lot size. A smart growth vision for Downtown Fremont would require increasing density around the BART station and creating a TOD, but this paper will provide recommendations which fit the suburban model of townhouse living and mixed use community uses around transit stations, a form of TOD more similar to VTA’s “smarter suburbs.”

The city of Fremont can achieve smart growth in a way that fits comfortably with its residential profile. Within the one-mile potential TOD-shed, the mean household income is \$92,092 and the median age is 34 (Appendix A). To support nodal growth around the Fremont BART station – a critical aspect of TOD and smart growth – the city

has already published a short working brochure which stresses transportation and land use linkage in better pedestrian spaces, place-making, and access-by-proximity rather than mobility. This short document espouses all the right land use buzzwords including the hopes of being a “premier pedestrian-scale, mixed-use, lifestyle center” (City of Fremont 2002). The current development focus is on “retail for an exceptional customer base” (City of Fremont 2002). However, in order to make for an investment that will be sustainable and truly vibrant, the city of Fremont should examine the following three issues: parking lot conversion and pricing, residential housing packaged with retail, and providing neighborhood linkages with pedestrian and biking pathways. The new Downtown Fremont TOD would have to be coordinated at a regional level to marry transportation and land use agencies that have jurisdiction over this region. By following these three recommendations, Fremont can capture the value of being a transit village, rather than maintaining an auto-centric suburban retail like so many of its neighbors.

### **Recommendation One: Convert Sprawling Parking Lots into Vibrant New Development**

The linchpin is that Fremont is still a city which serves an automobile-centric ridership profile; most BART riders drive to the expansive and free parking lot (Appendix B). To accelerate smart growth, a new outlook for the parking lot must be considered. If trips to the parking lot are mainly shorter distances that require a cold start, pollution benefits are limited, and in terms of greater land use impact, it appears that improving the BART station to serve park-and-ride commuters will continue to encourage far-flung growth in the name of urban sprawl.

Downtown Fremont has opportunities for more sophisticated transport and land use coordination by land banking its parking lots and converting them for future mixed-used through Joint Development Partnerships (JDPs), a still nascent but promising concept. JDPs can integrate land use and transportation, capitalizing on the concepts of public-private partnerships and value capture (TCRP 2002). By aligning the goals of BART, the City of Fremont, and interested developers, multiple parties can invest and benefit from such an arrangement. A local example of how innovative financing has been shown to be successful includes the adaptive reuse of former park-and-ride lots at Ohlone-Chynoweth station in San Jose (TCRP 2002). The City of Fremont, along with BART, should consider the development of the current parking lots immediately next to the station. For those outerlying lots surrounding the station, an appropriate price on parking should be implemented to discourage the use of driving to BART. On the supply side, a series of shuttle buses should circulate through major residential corridors so that commuters can take a shuttle bus to BART.

### **Recommendation Two: Ramp up Residential**

One main rule of thumb for successful TOD is to build ridership by providing housing for varied income levels (affordable and high-end) where retail and businesses are also planned. Mixed use TOD with office, retail and residential connects origins with destinations in a walkable distance and with a captive audience (Arrington 1998) that encourages trips that involve non-motorized or transit modes. Building residential around transit will increase the number of riders; according to a Caltrans study, people who live within a half-mile of transit stations are five times more likely to ride than others living further away (Lund et al 2004).

Currently, the City of Fremont has a vision for Downtown Fremont's Capitol Avenue which includes high-end retail and a new retail concept, but does not include plans for housing (City of Fremont 2002). This could be a missed opportunity to create a vibrant transit village similar to Fruitvale or Pleasant Hill BART stations, both of which have integrated mixed uses as a key component of development. A Downtown Fremont TOD could create a unique space which highlights community, in the way that Fruitvale has celebrated Latino roots by creating a station image which parallels its demographic constituency. With 37 percent Asian population according to the Bay Area census (2000), a TOD with an Asian flair could attract Asian immigrants who move to the Bay Area. New immigrants may find denser residential living near retail amenities around a transit station to be a major benefit to living in Downtown.

### **Recommendation Three: Building Pathways for the Audience You Want to Attract**

Developers often follow gut instinct when they say "if you build it, they will come." Although transportation planners and engineers know that a substantial amount of demand forecasts and OD surveys should be done before building any new building or transportation infrastructure, there is a sense of "induced demand." A TOD in which pedestrian spaces are venerated more than the private vehicles means building better walkways; development should strive for safe sidewalks and crossings supported by interesting views and pedestrian-scaled lighting. Building a pedestrian area does not only mean creating infrastructure in the TOD, but also with a concept in harmony with the neighborhood at-large. Downtown Fremont is blessed with a Central Park very near to the center city. By creating footpaths that link the TOD with the Central Park, the zone of livability can be extended (Appendix C). People who are

walking or biking for recreation or commuting can benefit from well-designed pathways leading to the transit village. Those people living in Downtown Fremont can easily access a natural environment without driving there. Designing a smart growth strategy includes a plan that extends beyond the immediate quarter-mile radius around the transit station. It must include a visit which involves the greater Fremont community in which residents can be proud to visit and linger on a sunny summer weekend, bike along the lake for their morning commute, or eat a sandwich during a weekday lunch break.

## **Conclusion**

By applying a few transportation and land use strategies for smart growth, Downtown Fremont can improve the area near its BART station by investing in a transit village that encourages mixed-use, pedestrian-scale principles, creating a neighborhood that follows the pattern of other suburban TODs around the Bay Area. With a young demographic base that values community without sacrificing mobility, following a smart growth agenda can be both a viable investment strategy and an exemplary vision for a livable community for the fourth largest city in the Bay Area.

## Appendix A: Demographic Profile of Residents in Downtown Fremont

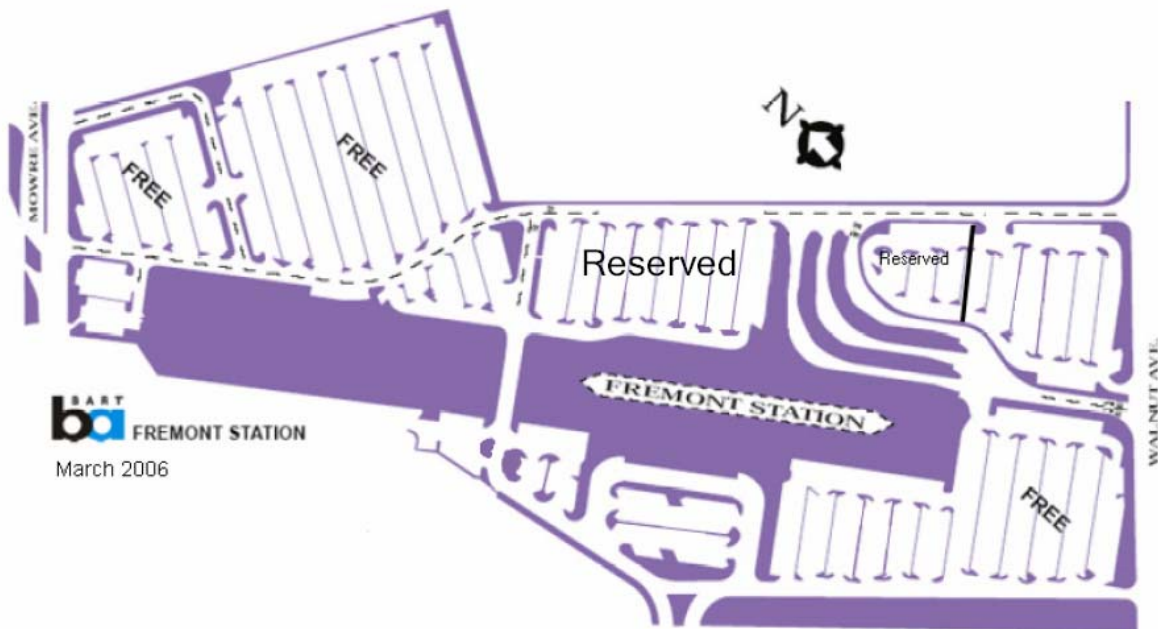
The following demographic information is based on a one, three, and five-mile radius around the intersection of Fremont Boulevard and Mowry Avenue.

Fremont Blvd. & Mowry Ave.	1 Mile	3 Mile	5 Mile
2006 Population	34,485	166,570	272,985
2006 Households	11,501	55,366	86,794
Average Household Income	\$92,092	\$98,948	\$104,192
Households with Incomes > \$50,000	8,244	41,981	66,760
Households with Incomes > \$100,000	3,880	21,324	35,861
Median Age	34	36	36
College Graduates	48.7%	44.7%	45.7%
Median Home Value	\$627,861	\$633,162	\$639,621
Source: Claritas 2006 Estimates			

Source:

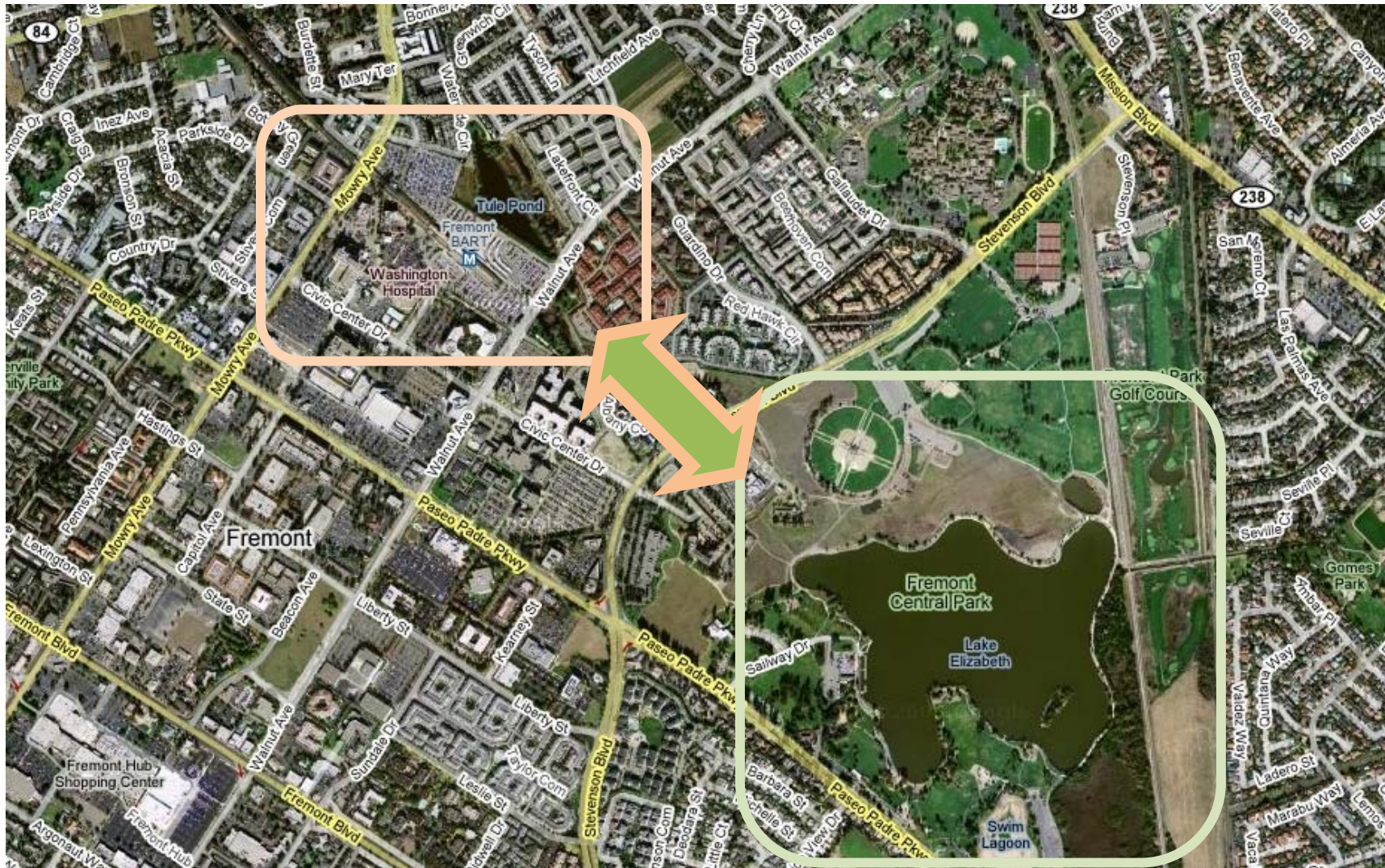
<http://www.ci.fremont.ca.us/Business/BusinessDistricts/DowntownBusinessDistrict.htm>

## Appendix B: Layout of the Fremont BART Station, March 2006



Source: [www.bart.gov](http://www.bart.gov)

Appendix C: Potential Linkage from Fremont BART to Fremont Central Park



Source: Google Maps (maps.google.com)

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