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Planning for Complementarity: An Examination of the Role and Opportunities of First-Tier and Second-Tier Cities Along the HSR Network in California

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MTI Project 1030
March 2012

Several preconditions are necessary for successful development around HSR stations.

California's High Speed Rail (HSR) offers opportunities for positive urban transformation in station cities, but the economic, urban design, real estate, and municipal behavior variables that may influence such change are understudied. This research identifies these variables and explores possible complementary roles among first- and second-tier cities along California's HSR network. It addresses three questions:

1. What are important preconditions for positive station area development; how are they different for first- and second-tier cities?
2. In what ways are municipalities preparing for HSR?
3. What recommendations should be in place to foster positive development in California's station cities?

Study Methods

The study includes: 1) a literature review on the impact of HSR systems on development; 2) a Delphi survey of HSR experts from different countries; 3) a series of case studies of land use and urban design policy in two first-tier (San Jose and Los Angeles) and four second-tier cities (Gilroy, Fresno, Norwalk and Anaheim); and 4) interviews with knowledgeable stakeholders in these cities.

Findings

- The experience of other HSR systems indicates that a "build-it-and-they-will-come" approach is insufficient.
- Positive economic and urban development impacts from HSR will happen only if certain preconditions exist.
- Factors such as proactive public sector involvement, the station's central-city location, multimodal connectivity, political vision, and high quality station design and area development make a difference.
- The preconditions for successful development around stations are different for first- and second-tier cities.
- European and Asian experiences with HSR demonstrate the advantages that accrue to first-tier station cities with diverse, globally-connected, knowledge-based economies.
- The experiences of second-tier cities are more varied. While the potential exists for HSR to contribute to their growth, to do so ways must be found to leverage increased accessibility to sectors in which these cities already have comparative advantages.

- Even though complementarity between city pairs along the California HR network is possible, there is little systematic regional thinking about the potential for complementary roles among neighboring station cities.
- Uncertainty about the state agency plans for station locations, local fiscal exigencies, and the long-tradition of local land use planning have so far inhibited regional planning and visioning.

Policy Recommendations

1. Local contexts and particularities should be carefully considered in planning for the HSR.
2. Each city must consider its context and create a development scenario that engages public and private sector participation.
3. Cities should consider the interface of four spatial zones: the station, the station-adjacent district, the municipality at large, and the larger region which includes adjacent station cities.
4. Pre-planning for the HSR should include centrally locating stations, enhancing multimodal connectivity, encouraging greater station-area density, mitigating the barrier effect of parking, and creating an urban design vision for the station area that builds on existing local assets.
5. Planning for development around HSR stations must be undertaken as a set of phased goals. If second-tier cities wish to become urban, mixed-use destinations, they should create interim plans that recognize their current lower density and real estate values.
6. Second-tier dormitory cities have the potential to create affordable, workforce housing as well as low cost warehouse facilities for their first-tier neighbors.
7. Second-tier cities could benefit from planning models other than the normative transit oriented development. They should consider catalytic projects, complementary planning with first-tier neighboring cities, and branding strategies that emphasize their unique offerings.
8. Planning for HSR in low-density second-tier cities should consider the destinations within that wider region for jobs, services, and commercial activity.
9. Station design should take into account value capture in the surrounding area as a means for the public sector to generate desired development effects.
10. Stations should be designed as externally oriented hubs, well connected to the adjacent area and rest of the city through a robust transportation network.

About the Authors

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To Learn More

For more details about the study, download the full report at transweb.sjsu.edu/project/1030.html

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