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**Case Study Brief:
SMART GROWTH: REFRAMING THE ISSUE**

Why this case is important to land use and transportation

The concepts and theories pushing Smart Growth and the reduction of automobile dependency are becoming increasingly prevalent in urban landscapes around the country. Theories attempting to employ alternative planning models intend to reduce traffic and offer a choice in transportation. Current empirical data diminishes the value of these theories and suggests that smart growth provides little, if any, traffic reduction; however, skepticism remains that the unit measure of traffic in empirical data inaccurately reports the projected effects of smart growth. While the contemporary alternative planning movement currently lacks sufficient empirical support, the emerging benefits, costs and true effects of smart growth transcend traditional measures of urban development success.

The strong relationship between land use and transportation is central to the implementation of smart growth techniques. Physical characteristics of Smart Growth designs include highly flexible grid-shaped road patterns, compact high density mixed-use developments, and pedestrian/ bike-oriented corridors. These elements are subsequently matched with policies that incentivize the rehabilitation of existing infrastructure to preserve green space in urban centers, invite a robust mixture of commercial and entertainment space, reduce requirements for surface parking, and require an influx of public transit systems to meet the needs of proximate socio-economic groups.

This alternative to traditional auto-oriented suburban expansion, which has been the driving force of past urban growth, faces a daunting challenge to extend into public, political and economic favor (Lockwood). Questions regarding the perceived economic gain (in the form of increased land value), and traffic reduction (in terms of vehicle-miles traveled) remain unanswered, yet a surplus of support exists within intangible and theoretical benefits of smart growth (Johnston, Stone). The question remains whether enough support exists to sway popular opinion toward policies favoring such growth.

Policy/research implications of this case

As in all transitional phases of urban development, opinions regarding the feasibility, relevance and effectiveness of this new return to traditional urban form are both speculative and contentious. This ambiguity is the result of a simple lack of sufficient data on the relative successes of Smart Growth. This lack of data further hampers the progress of integrating Smart Growth techniques into real-world transportation and land use projects. However, some innovative research reveals significant patterns that may lead to support within academia and growing political and economic influence that could increase Smart Growth development.

One study indicates that the demand for smart growth communities exceeds supply. This economic imbalance reveals an opportunity for higher land values in areas deemed originally as undesirable through inherent auto-friendly development policy; claims to such economic opportunity are backed by empirical evidence. In a survey of US land developers, almost half of respondents who have had experience in proposing alternative development projects have experienced some amount of rejection from local governments, and over 12 percent of firms surveyed nationally have been rejected over 1/4 of the time when attempting to introduce alternative growth. These expensive lessons of lost time and effort have effectively scared developers away from many Smart Growth projects, even when over 2/3 of developers within the study believe there are not enough such developments to meet demand (Levine).

The primary factor that establishes such restrictive transportation policy and development funding opportunities are traditional traffic models that analyze regional effects of transportation; studies show that these models are outdated and lack the small-scale resolution to detect future reductions in auto traffic within a given community. Two alternatives for traffic modeling have been applied in real-world examples in Charlotte, NC and San Francisco to more accurately describe potential light rail, bus routes and other transit-oriented ridership numbers (Cervero).

In addition, research is revealing an alignment of community members' priorities for ideal neighborhood qualities and the perceived attributes of Smart Growth; this evidence of changing public preference may facilitate more rapid acceptance of Smart Growth designs by local governments (Brown, Handy). Further research in residential selection may turn land use and transportation policies towards serving the perceived demand for more Smart Growth communities. The increased investment in Smart Growth-oriented communities act as a working educational and promotional tool to gain further public support, and begin to reverse the cycle of inadequate research and policy hesitancy.

Smart growth policy serving its intended purpose

Although more data should be obtained regarding improvement in the design of smart growth policy, there is already evidence for the increased value of Smart Growth in the US. As more examples of successful Smart Growth appear in urban communities, increasing numbers of individuals warm to the idea of incorporating these designs, and demand will be met with supply. In addition, the conclusion of the Levine report states that the allowance of choice in where one lives may have as much an effect on transportation and land use values as do regional VMT figures.

Perhaps the most essential part of the evolution towards a more transit-oriented, pedestrian-friendly neighborhood begins with improved stakeholder relationships (Schoenbauer). Attempting to identify common interests of traffic engineers, city planners, developers, business owners and community citizens is key to this evolution. As a conflict of interest appears to exist between Local Governments and developers, a consensual approach to alternative developments can strengthen collective progress towards project success. Including local community leaders assures that those most affected by a changing neighborhood – the inhabitants themselves – are considered, and that safety, accessibility, mobility and quality of life are not compromised in the process.

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