California Promoting Sustainability

California is a leader in promoting infill development, sustainable land use and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reduction through its Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008 and the California Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program (AHSC). The AHSC is funded by the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, which is supported by the state’s Cap-and-Trade program.

Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008

This state law calls on each of the 18 Metropolitan Planning Organizations in California to prepare a “sustainable communities strategy” to show how they plan to meet previously established GHG reduction targets through integrated land use, housing and transportation planning.

AHSC Program

This program uses revenue from California’s Cap-and-Trade auction to support affordable housing projects and related transportation infrastructure that reduce GHG emissions by supporting more compact, infill development patterns, encouraging active transportation and transit usage and protecting agricultural land from sprawl development. AHSC also supports “coordinated infrastructure investments” in affordable housing and transportation infrastructure.

Environmental Benefits of Brownfields Redevelopment

- Cleans contaminated properties
- Promotes public transportation
- Reduces vehicle miles traveled
- Reduces GHG emissions
- Reduces stormwater runoff

Air and Water Quality Impacts of Brownfields Redevelopment: A Study of Five Communities

For more information, see EPA’s study on analytical approaches to quantifying the environmental impacts of multiple redevelopment projects in a given municipal area.

What Is a Brownfield?

Brownfields are properties that are not in use or have not been redeveloped due to concerns about possible contamination from former uses—including industrial activities, gas stations, dry cleaning facilities, asbestos, lead-based paint, and fuel storage tanks. EPA’s Brownfields Program is a voluntary, non-enforcement program that provides key support for the reuse of these sites. Through technical assistance and “seed” grant funding, EPA helps communities assess, clean up and reuse contaminated properties for purposes such as affordable housing, commercial buildings, transit-oriented development and open space. Through the beneficial reuse of brownfields, EPA’s Brownfields Program works to make a visible difference in communities, especially those that are underserved, overburdened, and economically distressed.

Why Are Brownfields Assets in Transit-Oriented Development?

Brownfields redevelopment can be complicated, but as these case studies show, the payoff is worth it. Many cities have overlooked and underutilized brownfields within the urban core that are ideal for transit-oriented development (TOD). TOD is higher-density commercial and residential development near transit nodes, which have numerous community and environmental benefits. Specifically, infill TOD projects provide additional housing with easy access to jobs and services. These projects can also increase property values, inspire further revitalization and stabilize communities by attracting new resources and a greater diversity of income levels. From an environmental perspective, redevelopment of infill brownfield sites not only cleans contaminated land, but also reduces greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by reducing car trips, and reduces stormwater runoff by managing rainfall on-site. TOD infill projects support neighborhoods that improve quality of life and are better for the environment.
California Projects that Are Leveraging Local, State, Federal Resources

The infrastructure required for Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) projects can be costly, often requiring updated street networks, sidewalks, parking options, and stormwater management. However, dozens of funding mechanisms and financing tools have emerged in recent years that can be used for TOD projects¹, some specifically tailored to catalyze them. The projects summarized below, all of which are located in environmental justice communities and include affordable housing components, offer examples of successful TOD-related projects in California that have leveraged funding from multiple sources.

**Fresno – City-wide TOD Planning, Including High Speed Rail**

In the words of Fresno’s Planning Director, “Fresno is growing up.” The city—the fifth largest in California—is investing heavily in TOD and smart growth planning, including Bus Rapid Transit, a comprehensive network of biking routes, and a California High Speed Rail station. An example of Fresno’s TOD focus is the South Stadium redevelopment area: highly accessible to existing and planned public transit opportunities, the area will include a mixed-use, multi-story development featuring housing units, retail/commercial space, and podium parking. Associated improvements include reconstructing main thoroughfares to and from the area with wider sidewalks and Class 2 bike lanes, and repaving selected streets with permeable paving to manage stormwater. Leveraged funding includes: a $400,000 EPA Brownfields Assessment grant, which focused on assessing brownfield sites downtown as well as in West Fresno; $711,000 in TOD funds from the city; and AHSC Program funding.

**San Diego – TOD Along the City’s Trolley Line and Beyond**

The Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation is a social enterprise nonprofit driving sustainable development in San Diego’s underserved Diamond/Encanto neighborhoods. Improvements to the city’s trolley line are a priority within the city’s TOD-oriented redevelopment plan. A new residential complex along the trolley line used a number of “green” features in its design, including photovoltaic solar panels and a LEED Gold certification. EPA Brownfields grants helped to remove thousands of tons of pesticide-contaminated soil from the site, allowing the project to proceed. Residents will enjoy a multi-use urban trail planned as part of the adjacent Chollas Creek restoration project, and new bike paths funded through an Active Transportation Program grant. In addition, the city’s “Euclid + Market Complete Streets” project will bring streetscape and pedestrian enhancements to the area. Leveraged funding includes: $3.12 million from the San Diego Housing Commission, $7.64 million from equity in Federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits, and $4 million in federal TOD grants; as well as the following grants from EPA: $50,000 to identify sustainable cleanup options; $600,000 for cleanup; a $400,000 California DTSC Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) sub-grant; $200,000 for brownfields planning; and $25,000 in TOD-related technical support.

**Richmond – TOD Integrated with Senior Affordable Housing**

With the legacy of a long industrial past, the City of Richmond is primed for urban infill development. The city is proactively working to improve quality of life for residents and reduce its carbon footprint through projects like Mira Flores, a former nursery site contaminated with pesticides. The site will be developed into 80 service-enhanced homes affordable to the lowest income seniors. The project is located near bus lines that run to the Del Norte Shopping center (which includes grocery stores, pharmacies, restaurants, and banks) as well as the Del Norte Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) Station. Local non-profits were early partners that helped to identify the property’s availability for purchase and worked with the community to determine its most beneficial reuse. Leveraged funding includes: a $600,000 EPA cleanup grant and a $600,000 EPA low-interest cleanup loan; $2.6 million in cleanup funds from the state’s Pollution Control Finance Agency; and $1.66 million for urban greening from the Strategic Growth Council (SGC).

The community is part of the LEED-Neighborhood Development Sustainable Certification Program, recognizing the value of healthy and walkable communities. The project has come to be seen as a transformative cornerstone in the revitalization of Old Town/Westside National City; it received a Silver Catalyst Award as part of California’s Sustainable Strategies Pilot Program and was selected as one of five federal Sustainable Communities Partnership Pilots in the country by EPA in partnership with HUD and DOT. Leveraged funding includes: $50,000 in EPA technical assistance, $200,000 from EPA for Area-Wide Planning, and $400,000 in sub-grants through San Diego’s EPA Brownfields RLF; as well as $21 million from National City, $9.2 million from the AHSC Program, and $4 million from the state’s Infill Infrastructure Grant Program.

Los Angeles – Serving the Community Through TOD

Named in honor of a Filipino-American labor organizer, the Larry Itliong Village property was an oil well field that operated between 1930 and 1992. In 2013, the property underwent a $1.5 million remediation, with help from an EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant and EPA Brownfields Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) provided by CA Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) to remove hydrocarbon-contaminated soil. Little Tokyo Service Center CDC, which has been a leading community organization in preserving neighborhoods, found more than a dozen additional funding sources to make this project happen. The result is a 3,000-square-foot community center serving the city’s Filipino population, as well as a new residential complex with 45 units of affordable housing near public transportation, including nine units set aside for transition-age youth and 22 units for homeless individuals. Leveraged funding includes a $200,000 EPA Brownfields Cleanup Grant, $88,000 from the EPA Brownfields RLF, and $1.7 million from Los Angeles County’s Community Development Commission. Bank of America provided a $9 million construction loan, a separate $2.25 million loan, and $9 million in tax credit equity.

Emeryville – TOD with a Traffic-Calming Component

Once a major intrastate route between Emeryville and Oakland, the San Pablo Corridor now serves as a main thoroughfare in Emeryville and has been integrated into the city’s TOD goals. The conversion required traffic “calming” measures such as speed bumps and median improvements to mesh with adjacent development and enhance safety for residents. In December 2010, using Low- and Moderate-Income Housing funds, Emeryville’s Redevelopment Agency acquired three parcels at 3706 San Pablo Avenue and two others the following year. The buildings were empty, covered in graffiti, and a general blight to the community. Using a mix of federal and state funding -- including EPA Brownfields grants for preliminary site assessments—the dormant, dilapidated structures were demolished and the site was cleaned in preparation for infill development. Soon, the site will be a mixed-use development with commercial space and 86 low-income apartments featuring LEED Silver Certification and solar panels; increased sidewalk capacity to enhance walkability; and safe play locations and child care options within “stroller radius” of the residential units. Leveraged funding includes $400,000 in EPA Assessment and $200,000 in EPA Cleanup grants.
Maryland Parkway in Las Vegas, Nevada is a priority transportation corridor under consideration for a proposed light rail/bus rapid transit route to connect high-activity centers such as McCarran International Airport, the UNLV campus, commercial and medical complexes, and downtown Las Vegas. It is a project built from the Southern Nevada Strong Regional Planning effort, which focuses on ways to better connect transportation and land use planning. Plans include the new, modern transit system as well as enhanced bike and pedestrian facilities and a safe and efficient road network. As part of the project, Clark County is assessing brownfields along an approximately six-mile stretch of the Maryland Parkway Corridor using an EPA Brownfields Grant awarded in 2015. The assessments focus on sites near six nodes identified as potential future transit stations. Grant-funded activities include community engagement, and cleanup and reuse planning for corridor sites that align with regional priorities, including affordable housing, healthcare access, neighborhood safety, GHG emission reductions, and reducing freeway congestion. Leveraged funding includes a $3.5 million HUD grant to assist with planning, a $500,000 EPA Assessment grant and EPA technical assistance to the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada focused entirely on TOD.

The Honolulu Authority for Rapid Transportation (HART rail transit system is the newest phase of the ongoing evolution of an island-wide multimodal transportation system—a major investment in infrastructure that will eventually transform how people, live, work, play and move around on Oahu. In 2012, the City of Honolulu and the Federal Transit Administration (FTA) signed an historic agreement that secured $1.55 billion in federal funding for Honolulu’s Rail Transit Project, a 20-mile, 21-station light rail metro system. The agreement falls under the National Public Transportation/Transit-Oriented Development Technical Assistance Ladders of Opportunity Initiative—a collaboration between FTA and Smart Growth America to improve access to public transportation, build new economic opportunities and pathways to employment, and support TOD. The HART rail system project will create a compact, mixed-use development within easy walking distance of each transit station. Channeling development pressure to these rail station areas, most of which are already located within urbanized communities, will curb urban sprawl and take advantage of existing infrastructure.Each station area will celebrate historic and cultural assets, connect homes with major employment and education centers, and provide convenient access to goods, services, and recreation. The full line is expected to be operational by 2019. Leveraged funding includes $800,000 in EPA Brownfields Assessment funding and $100,000 in EPA technical assistance.

The City of Tucson’s Downtown Redevelopment plan is revitalizing an historic and underutilized portion of downtown Tucson. A major component is the city’s Sun Link Modern Streetcar line—an all-electric, local transit amenity that connects downtown to the University of Arizona campus as well as the city’s business district. The streetcar has breathed new life into Tucson’s downtown (as well as substantially reducing GHG emissions) by not only encouraging people to ride to their destinations rather than drive, but by helping to trigger more than $800 million in public and private investment. Assessments of brownfields along the streetcar line, many of which were funded by EPA Brownfields grants, have contributed significantly. A prime example is the site of a former Greyhound Bus Station where assessments confirmed the absence of petroleum-based fuels, oils or other contaminants of concern. The property has since been privately redeveloped and is now a thriving, multi-use student apartment complex, “Cadence,” with 15,000 square feet of amenities, loft-style apartments, an indoor and outdoor fitness area, and a rooftop lounge. Leveraged funding includes $800,000 in EPA Brownfields Assessment grants.

For more information, visit the EPA Brownfields website

www.epa.gov/brownfields
r9.info@epa.gov

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