



U.S. Department of Transportation
Federal Transit Administration

Guidelines for Economic Development Effects for New Starts and Small Starts Projects



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1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The U.S. Federal Transit Administration (FTA) is required by Federal law to evaluate and rate all projects seeking Capital Investment Grants (CIG) program funding. This includes New Starts, Small Starts, and Core Capacity projects. The rating is based on two categories of criteria outlined in law: project justification and local financial commitment criteria. The criteria are detailed in the [CIG Policy Guidance](#).

Project sponsors seeking a project evaluation and rating are required to submit materials to FTA on each criterion as described in FTA's [Reporting Instructions](#). This document supplements the Reporting Instructions for New Starts and Small Starts by providing additional information for project sponsors on how to document economic development effects for their project. This document is also intended to assist project sponsors in understanding how FTA evaluates these criteria and to understand what constitutes a strong submission.

For Core Capacity projects, FTA uses a “warrants” approach that automatically assigns a Medium rating for the Economic Development criterion. At the Core Capacity project sponsor's option, information may be submitted to FTA for evaluation and rating in accordance with the requirements under the New Starts Economic Development criterion. Please see the New Starts chapter of the CIG Policy Guidance and this document for more details.

This document has been updated to align with the current CIG Policy Guidance that FTA released on December 17, 2024 and took effect on January 16, 2025. This document takes effect immediately and supersedes the *Guidelines for Land Use and Economic Development Criteria* released in August 2013.

2. THE REPORTING PROCESS

Project sponsors are required to submit to FTA documentation pertaining to economic development effects for the evaluation and rating of the project. Elements of the submission include:

- Supplemental Economic Development Information and Supporting Documentation Template; and
- Supporting documentation to substantiate statements made in the Supplemental Economic Development Information and Supporting Documentation Template.

The template and documentation are submitted in electronic format. It is acceptable to provide web links instead of electronic copies of supporting documentation such as transit-supportive plans and policies. However, project sponsors should be sure that links to critical information do not expire.

3. THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT EFFECTS CRITERION

The rating for the economic development effects criterion is based on ratings for supportive zoning in station areas, performance and impacts of transit-supportive plans and policies, and tools to maintain or increase the share of affordable housing in station areas. Several subfactors are considered:

- Supportive Zoning in Station Areas:
 - Supportive Zoning in Station Areas (including zoning for universal design).
- Performance and Impacts of Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies:
 - Growth Management (for New Starts projects);
 - Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies (including policies that support universal design);
 - Tools to Implement Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies;
 - Performance of Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies; and
 - Potential Impact of Transit Project on Station Area Development.
- Tools to Maintain or Increase the Share of Affordable Housing in Station Areas:
 - Evaluation of Affordable Housing Needs and Supply Specific to Station Areas;
 - Plans and Policies to Preserve and Increase Affordable Housing;
 - Adopted Financing Tools and Strategies to Preserve and Increase Affordable Housing; and
 - Developer Activity to Preserve and Increase Affordable Housing.

These are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Economic Development Effects Criterion Subfactors

Subfactors	Items Considered
I. SUPPORTIVE ZONING IN STATION AREAS	
a. Supportive Zoning in Station Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning ordinances that support increased development density in transit station areas. • Zoning ordinances that enhance transit-oriented character of station area development and pedestrian access, including requirements for universal design. • Zoning allowances for reduced parking and traffic mitigation.
II. PERFORMANCE AND IMPACTS OF TRANSIT-SUPPORTIVE PLANS AND POLICIES	
a. Growth Management (New Starts)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration of development around established activity centers and regional transit. • Land conservation and management.
b. Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans and policies to increase station area development. • Plans and policies to enhance transit-friendly character of station area development, including policies promoting or requiring universal design. • Plans to improve pedestrian facilities, including facilities for persons with disabilities. • Parking policies.
c. Tools to Implement Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach to government agencies and the community in support of land use planning. • Regulatory and financial incentives to promote transit-supportive development. • Efforts to engage the development community in station area planning and transit-supportive development.
d. Performance of Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated cases of development affected by transit-oriented policies. • Station area development proposals and status.
e. Potential Impact of Transit Project on Station Area Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptability of station area land for development. • Regional and station area economic environment.
III. TOOLS TO MAINTAIN OR INCREASE SHARE OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN STATION AREAS	
f. Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing in Station Areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of affordable housing needs and supply specific to station areas. • Plans and policies to preserve and increase affordable housing in region and/or station areas. • Adopted local and/or state financing tools and strategies targeted to preserving and increasing affordable housing in the region and/or station areas. • Evidence of developer activity to preserve and increase affordable housing in station areas. • Extent to which the plans and policies account for long-term affordability and the needs of very and extremely low-income households in the station areas.

A rating for each subfactor is assigned based on the items considered. The subfactor ratings are then combined to generate an overall rating for economic development effects. Ratings are assigned on a 5-point scale:

- 5 = High;
- 4 = Medium-high;
- 3 = Medium;
- 2 = Medium-low; and
- 1 = Low.

3.1 Supportive Zoning in Station Areas

Zoning regulations establish the framework for station area development. Both existing and proposed zoning ordinances are reviewed to assess allowable densities and types of uses, incentives to increase development in station areas, provisions to enhance transit-oriented character and pedestrian access, provisions to require universal design, and provisions for reduced parking and traffic mitigation. In evaluating this item, the greatest emphasis is placed on residential and commercial densities allowed under current as well as proposed zoning regulations. Other elements of zoning (addressing transit-supportive character of development, universal design, and parking provisions) are not by themselves sufficient to achieve a “medium-high” or “high” rating, but are needed to support such a rating if zoned densities also support it.

Strong existing zoning regulations in most or all station areas merit a “medium-high” or “high” rating. Sponsors of projects may also obtain a “medium” or even “medium-high” rating if aggressive efforts are being made to revise existing zoning to increase its transit-supportiveness. Specifically, conceptual plans and local plan revisions should be developed to provide the framework for future zoning changes. It is understood that in some cases, zoning revisions may be contingent on executing an FFGA/SSGA. For example, local agencies may develop station area specific plans and overlay zones with the intention of applying these to specific station areas once an FFGA/SSGA has been obtained.

FTA considers whether local zoning ordinances encourage universal design. Universal design is a strategy for making products, environments, operational systems, and services welcoming and usable to the most diverse range of people possible. Its key principles are simplicity, flexibility, and efficiency. It increases ease of access to products, places, and services for multiple, diverse populations.

The following issues are considered in evaluating supportive zoning:

- Zoning ordinances that support increased development density in transit station areas;
- Zoning ordinances that enhance transit-oriented character of station area development and pedestrian access and include requirements for universal design; and
- Zoning allowances for reduced parking and traffic mitigation.

Table 2. Ratings of Supportive Zoning Near Transit Stations

Supportive Zoning in Station Areas	
HIGH	Local jurisdictions have adopted zoning that strongly supports a major transit investment in all transit station areas.
MEDIUM	Local jurisdictions have adopted zoning that moderately or strongly supports a major transit investment in most or all transit station areas. Alternatively, strongly transit-supportive zoning has been adopted in some station areas but not in others.
LOW	No more than initial efforts have begun to prepare transit-supportive station area zoning. Existing station area zoning is not transit supportive.
Ratings based on assessment of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zoning ordinances that support increased development density in transit station areas; • Zoning ordinances that enhance transit-oriented character of station area development and pedestrian access, including requirements for universal design; and • Zoning allowances for reduced parking and traffic mitigation. 	

3.1.1 Zoning Ordinances that Support Increased Development Density in Transit Station Areas

Zoning ordinances and maps are the best source of information on existing zoning regulations. Draft ordinance revisions may describe planned changes that allow or encourage development at transit-supportive densities. The extent to which existing or planned zoning allows transit-supportive densities is evaluated based on quantitative benchmarks. Benchmarks for commercial FARs and residential dwelling units per acre are shown in Table 9. As elsewhere in the evaluation process, zoning is evaluated for the half-mile area surrounding the proposed transit stations. Information should be provided on all current and proposed zoning conditions in all station areas, not just those elements of zoning considered transit-supportive. This information should be provided for each station area (or group of adjacent station areas where similar provisions apply) in the form of maps, excerpts of zoning ordinances, and any applicable supporting documentation, as described in the Reporting Instructions.

Proposed station areas often encompass a wide variety of zoning categories. The greatest consideration is given to the zoning districts that: a) are in closest proximity to the station location, especially those within one-quarter mile; and b) cover the greatest amount of the station area. FTA applies judgment in considering the mix of zoning categories across the station areas when developing a rating.

Transit-supportive overlay districts are tools for increasing densities, restricting uses that are not transit-supportive, and improving design features in station areas. The greatest weight is given to districts that have been adopted into ordinance and applied to station areas. Consideration is also given to districts that have been adopted but not applied, or to districts that are proposed for adoption.

Zoning incentives for increased development in station areas are also considered. Such incentives may include density bonuses, housing fund subsidies, relaxation of regulations, expedited zoning reviews, or other measures. Efforts to rezone office, commercial, or light industrial zones or incentivize the adaptive reuse of vacant or underutilized properties to allow multifamily or mixed-use development are also considered.

In some cases, a city may not have zoning regulations. In such cases, a “medium” rating is typically applied because the regulatory environment is essentially “neutral” with respect to transit-supportive development. Emphasis is placed on other policies that guide development (e.g., covenants, design review procedures) and on the character of development observed in practice to determine whether the absence of zoning controls appears to be supportive or not supportive of transit-oriented development.

3.1.2 Zoning Ordinances that Enhance Transit-Oriented Character of Station Area Development and Pedestrian Access and Include Requirements for Universal Design

Zoning that encourages transit-supportive design may include zoning for mixed-use buildings and sites; low minimum and/or maximum building setback requirements; design requirements to create human-scale, active façades; requirements for entrances oriented towards streets, sidewalks, and other public areas; and site design requirements related to parking placement.

Zoning may designate a broader area as a “compact” or “traditional” neighborhood or transit overlay zone with appropriate design regulations. These measures and others should be reflected in small area plans or architectural guidelines for the area. Documentation should identify any pedestrian access and pedestrian-friendly design guidelines, and the mechanisms for the implementation and enforcement of these guidelines.

Zoning may also incentivize universal design. Examples of the principles of universal design in zoning ordinances include requiring at least one zero-step entrance from an accessible path at the side, front and/or rear of each building; requiring a percentage of all units to have one zero-step entrance; requiring seating areas at intervals along a circulation path that do not obstruct the path; and requiring covered main entries for weather protection.

To achieve a “medium-high” or “high” rating, zoning should specify pedestrian-friendly design treatments and encourage mixed uses in most station areas. Maximum front setbacks are commonly in the range of up to 10 feet in commercial and mixed-use districts, or up to 20 feet in residential districts. Zoning should prohibit or discourage the placement of parking in front of buildings and may establish minimum requirements for building frontage and façade treatments. Zoning that requires or incentivizes universal design principles would support a higher rating. Proposals to reduce or eliminate requirements related to building height, lot coverage, minimum unit or lot size, floor area ratio, and other common land use controls are also considered. Existing zoning that predominantly requires “suburban” design features, such as large building setbacks and segregation of uses, should result in only a “low” or “medium-low” rating.

3.1.3 Zoning Allowances for Reduced Parking and Traffic Mitigation

Ordinances typically specify minimum and/or maximum parking requirements for residential and commercial areas near stations. Elimination or reduction of minimum parking requirements, as well as establishment or reduction of maximum requirements, are strategies that are considered transit-supportive and may support a higher rating. In addition, reductions in parking requirements for developments near transit stations may serve as an incentive to increase development near stations. Table 9 shows some ranges of parking requirements for commercial and residential development that roughly correspond to different rating levels.

3.2 Performance and Impacts of Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies

Plans and policies shape growth and development in station areas. This rating seeks to measure the impacts and effectiveness of transit-supportive plans and policies by evaluating development patterns outlined in comprehensive plans and/or small area plans, coordinated efforts to plan and develop station areas, proposed and completed development, and the likelihood of future transit-supportive development. New Starts projects are also rated based on enforceable growth management and land conservation policies. The emphasis is on examples of implementation and the potential impacts of transit-supportive plans and policies, in conjunction with the transit investment, on both existing and future regional development patterns.

FTA evaluates five items related to local plans and policies that encourage transit-supportive development:

- Growth Management (for New Starts projects);
- Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies (including policies that support universal design);
- Tools to Implement Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies;
- Performance of Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies; and
- Potential Impact of Transit Project on Station Area Development.

3.2.1 Growth Management

This item does not apply to Small Starts. The evaluation of this item for New Starts is based on:

- Concentration of development around established activity centers and regional transit; and
- Land conservation and management.

Table 3. Ratings of Growth Management

Growth Management	
HIGH	Adopted and enforceable growth management and land conservation policies are in place throughout the region. Existing and planned densities and market trends in the region and station areas are strongly compatible with transit.
MEDIUM	Significant progress has been made toward implementing growth management and land conservation policies. Strong policies may be adopted in some jurisdictions but not others, or only moderately enforceable policies (e.g., incentive-based) may be adopted region-wide. Existing and/or planned densities and market trends are moderately compatible with transit.
LOW	Limited consideration has been given to implementing growth management and land conservation policies; adopted policies may be weak and apply to only a limited area. Existing and/or planned densities and market trends are minimally or not supportive of transit.
Ratings based on assessment of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concentration of development around established activity centers and regional transit; and • Land conservation and management. 	

3.2.1.1 Concentration of Development around Established Activity Centers and Regional Transit

Consideration is given to the extent to which: 1) state or regional policies and agreements have been developed to concentrate development at transit-supportive densities within established activity centers and around regional transit; and 2) local comprehensive plans, zoning, and capital improvement programs throughout the region have been revised to support this objective. “Regional” policies are typically adopted by the regional planning agency and/or metropolitan planning organization (MPO), or occasionally established by state requirements. The extent of local jurisdictional acceptance of regional policies is a strong indicator of the potential success of such policies.

Regions that have not undertaken any regional growth management activities, or are just in the fledgling stages of discussion, may receive a “low” rating for this factor. A “medium-low” rating is appropriate for areas that have undertaken more extensive growth management discussions and/or adopted regional agreements that are not enforceable through regulatory or fiscal mechanisms. A “medium” rating acknowledges the presence of weak to moderate regulatory or fiscal incentives covering the entire region as well as the presence in some (but not the majority of) local jurisdictions of local policies, comprehensive plans, and zoning to concentrate development in transit station areas and/or service areas. A “medium-high” or “high” rating is appropriate for areas with stronger incentives for compliance with regional growth management objectives as well as broader adoption of local plans consistent with these objectives. Examples of policies that may warrant a “medium-high” or “high” rating include:

- Policies implemented by state and/or regional agencies that restrict the provision of infrastructure (transportation, utility, or otherwise) outside of designated growth areas.

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- Comprehensive plans adopted in most major jurisdictions in the region to concentrate higher densities of development in existing or proposed transit station areas. Widespread adoption of “smart growth”-type zoning codes that specify pedestrian-friendly design in new developments.
 - Evidence of the successful implementation of such policies.

3.2.1.2 *Land Conservation and Management*

The key elements of this item are similar to those above: 1) adoption of state or regional policies and agreements; and 2) revision of local comprehensive plans, zoning, and capital improvement programs consistent with these agreements. Relevant policies focus on identification of areas in which development should be limited and the adoption of implementation strategies. Reasons for limiting development in certain areas of the region may include preservation of open space, sensitive habitat, farmland, or areas of rural character; and as a complement to policies that work to concentrate development in areas served by transit.

Actions that reflect an area’s goals to manage growth may include: specific growth management policies, delineated growth management boundaries, incentives or mandates for land conservation and management, actual land conservation purchases or designations, transfer of development rights programs, actual transfers of development easements, and multijurisdictional coordination of policies.

3.2.2 *Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies*

The transit corridor planning process should include an assessment of existing conditions and opportunities, identification of needed revisions to local comprehensive plans and capital improvement programs, and development of other tools to enhance the transit-supportive nature of the corridor and station areas. The process may involve three distinct steps:

- **Conceptual Plans** – Conceptual plans are based on an assessment of station area existing conditions and opportunities. They consider the potential placement and type of development; pedestrian facilities and linkages; and design concepts/guidelines for buildings and public spaces. These plans should include policy recommendations and implementation steps. The conceptual planning process should include a broad range of stakeholders, including local government, the general public, and developers, to ensure the greatest chances of implementation.
- **Local Plans** – Local plans provide a local policy framework for development. Local plans may include local comprehensive plans, small area plans, and redevelopment plans; institutional master plans; and design guidelines. If local plans are not already transit-supportive, actions should be taken to revise them, ideally based on the outcome of the conceptual planning process.
- **Capital Improvement Programs** – These are multiyear lists of specific capital improvement projects to be undertaken by public agencies and are prioritized based on available resources and the community’s desire for specific improvements. Transit-supportive capital improvements may include features such as pedestrian linkages, accessibility improvements,

or streetscape enhancements. If capital improvement programs are not already transit-supportive, actions should be taken to revise them.

The evaluation of this item is based on:

- Plans and policies to increase station area development;
- Plans and policies to enhance transit-friendly character of station area development, including policies promoting or requiring universal design;
- Plans to improve pedestrian facilities, including facilities for persons with disabilities; and
- Parking policies.

Table 4. Ratings of Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies

Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies	
HIGH	Conceptual plans for the station areas have been developed. Local jurisdictions have adopted or drafted transit-supportive revisions to comprehensive and/or small area plans in most or all station areas. Development patterns proposed in conceptual plans and local and institutional plan revisions are strongly supportive of a major transit investment.
MEDIUM	Conceptual plans for the station areas have been developed. Local jurisdictions have initiated the process of revising comprehensive and/or small area plans. Development patterns proposed in conceptual plans and local and institutional plan revisions are at least moderately supportive of a major transit investment.
LOW	Limited progress, to date, has been made toward developing station area conceptual plans or revising local comprehensive or small area plans. Station area uses identified in local comprehensive plans are marginally or not transit-supportive.
Ratings based on assessment of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans and policies to increase station area development; • Plans and policies to enhance transit-friendly character of station area development, including policies promoting or requiring universal design; • Plans to improve pedestrian facilities, including facilities for persons with disabilities; and • Parking policies. 	

3.2.2.1 Plans and Policies to Increase Station Area Development

Conceptual plans and local plans should encourage development at transit-supportive densities in station areas. To assist in evaluating this, FTA uses benchmarks for commercial floor area ratios (FAR) and residential dwelling units per acre, as shown in Table 9. These quantitative benchmarks are given a significant amount of weight in rating the Transit-Supportive Corridor Policies subfactor. Other factors such as planned high trip generators are also considered.

3.2.2.2 *Plans and Policies to Enhance Transit-Friendly Character of Station Area Development, including Policies Promoting or Requiring Universal Design*

FTA considers the nature of planned development surrounding stations and the quality of the pedestrian environment, as described in conceptual plans, local plans, and design guidelines for both streets and site development. Transit-supportive plans and guidelines should encourage features that not only facilitate but encourage transit use through site and urban design characteristics and a fine-grained mix of uses.

FTA also considers plans and policies that encourage universal design. Examples of the principles of universal design in local plans and policies include promoting continuous paths of travel with no obstacles for all users from site access points to all site destinations; promoting the use of wayfinding markers, signs, and other information devices; reducing pedestrian crossing distances by providing bulb-outs, medians, and/or safety islands; avoiding slippery or hazardous surfaces; and making parking manageable and safe for all users, including pedestrians.

To support a “medium-high” or “high” rating, plans and design guidelines should call for features such as short building setbacks; human-scale, active façades; entrances oriented towards streets, sidewalks, and other public areas; street furniture, trees, crosswalks, and other pedestrian amenities; and parking primarily placed behind buildings or in structures. Plans should also encourage vertical and/or horizontal mixing of building uses, land use mix, retail and housing availability. Master plans that include new roads should keep road widths to a minimum and incorporate traffic-calming features. The existence of procedures to enforce plans and guidelines (such as a design review process) is also considered; the best guidelines are worth little if they are not implemented.

3.2.2.3 *Plans to Improve Pedestrian Facilities, including Facilities for Persons with Disabilities*

FTA considers conceptual plans, local plans, and capital improvement programs that include provisions for sidewalks or wider sidewalks as needed, street spacing at regular intervals, connected pedestrian paths, street crossings, lighting, and facilities for disabled travelers sufficient to ensure safe and direct pedestrian mobility and access throughout the station area at all hours of the day. Adopted or proposed design guidelines are also considered for how they address pedestrian network connectivity, facility design, and safety and security and for how they encourage universal design. These plans may need to address access across private property in cases where public rights-of-way are not adequate to provide access. Adopted or proposed plans and guidelines promoting or requiring universal design principles are also considered. Project sponsors should document progress at achieving curb ramp transition plans and milestones required under CFR 35.150(d)(2).

3.2.2.4 *Parking Policies*

Here, FTA focuses on transit-supportive policies and plans related to parking, which may include: local requirements for developers, parking limits and ratios, parking cash-out programs, provisions for shared parking, and parking fees. FTA also considers proposals to reduce or eliminate land use requirements related to parking, particularly in transit station areas. Table 9 includes benchmarks for planned parking ratios.

3.2.3 Tools to Implement Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies

This item is intended to assess the availability and effectiveness of tools for transit agencies and local jurisdictions to implement transit-supportive development. Issues considered include:

- Outreach to government agencies and the community in support of land use planning;
- Regulatory and financial incentives to promote transit-supportive development; and
- Efforts to engage the development community in station area planning and transit-supportive development.

Table 5. Ratings of Tools to Implement Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies

Tools to Implement Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies	
HIGH	Transit agencies and/or regional agencies are working proactively with local jurisdictions, developers, and the public to promote transit-supportive planning and station area development. The transit agency has established a joint development program and identified development opportunities. Agencies have adopted effective regulatory and financial incentives to promote transit-oriented development. Public and private capital improvements are being programmed in the station areas which implement the local policies, and which leverage the Federal investment in the proposed major transit investment corridor.
MEDIUM	Transit agencies and/or regional agencies have conducted some outreach to promote transit-supportive planning and station area development. Regulatory and financial incentives to promote transit-oriented development are being developed, or have been adopted but are only moderately effective. Capital improvements are being identified that support station area plans and leverage the Federal investment in the proposed major transit corridor.
LOW	Limited effort has been made to reach out to jurisdictions, developers, or the public to promote transit-supportive planning; to identify regulatory and financial incentives to promote development; or to identify capital improvements.
Ratings based on assessment of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outreach to government agencies and the community in support of land use planning; • Regulatory and financial incentives to promote transit-supportive development; and • Efforts to engage the development community in station area planning and transit-supportive development. 	

3.2.3.1 *Outreach to Government Agencies and the Community in Support of Land Use Planning*

Outreach to stakeholders is a common part of comprehensive planning, zoning, and other public sector policies that set the framework for development. An effective outreach program is critical not only to educate people about transit-supportive characteristics, but to increase the chance of adoption and implementation of supportive comprehensive plans and zoning regulations. Project sponsors should provide evidence of promotion and outreach activities by the transit agency, local governments, and regional agencies in support of station area planning and development. They should also demonstrate the extent of public involvement in station area planning activities. Projects receiving a “medium-high” or “high” rating demonstrate a strong outreach and public involvement program that focuses on involving local stakeholders in planning not only for the transit system but for surrounding uses as well.

Support for coordinating planning with transit investments from the public sector may be present in local government agreements, resolutions, or letters of support from government agencies. Additionally, private sector participants such as local action groups, professional development groups, citizen coalitions, local Chambers of Commerce, and others may undertake public outreach activities in support of transit-oriented development practices.

3.2.3.2 *Regulatory and Financial Incentives to Promote Transit-Supportive Development*

Incentives for transit-supportive development near stations or in corridors may come in many forms, including:

- Density bonuses;
- Streamlined and modernized processing of development applications, such as enabling one-stop or parallel process permitting;
- Eliminated requirements that unduly delay the permitting process or establish unreasonable thresholds for approvals, such as duplicative and burdensome hearings and documentation;
- Reduced or waived zoning requirements for traffic mitigation fees and in-kind contributions;
- Land assembly programs;
- Financial programs such as tax increment financing zones, tax abatement, or transit-oriented loan support; and
- Other economic development and revitalization strategies.

Not every incentive is relevant or appropriate to every project context. Project sponsors receiving a “medium-high” or “high” rating typically demonstrate an array of incentives appropriate to local market conditions and development needs, and explain the importance of and need for these incentives. Furthermore, to the extent that such incentives have been previously available in station areas or elsewhere in the region, project sponsors should provide evidence of actual use and effectiveness of the incentives.

3.2.3.3 *Efforts to Engage the Development Community in Station Area Planning and Transit-Supportive Development*

Public sector actions can set the framework for station area development but cannot, except for occasional public projects, directly create development. Outreach to developers, property owners, and financial institutions regarding characteristics of and opportunities for transit-supportive development is key. Outreach may take forms such as invitations to participate in public planning processes, one-on-one meetings, or other educational activities. Local agencies may also conduct transit-oriented market studies to assess the potential for and barriers to increased station area development.

Joint development is an especially important strategy for promoting station area development. Some transit agencies, particularly those owning significant amounts of station area property, have been able to achieve a “medium-high” or “high” rating on tools to implement transit-supportive policies based in part on the strength of their joint development program. Project sponsors should provide evidence that the transit agency has established or is planning to establish such a program, and that, if established, it has resulted in specific development proposals and projects in station areas.

3.2.4 *Performance of Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies*

FTA evaluates the demonstrated success in achieving transit-supportive development patterns, through examples of actual and proposed development projects. If a proposed New Starts or Small Starts project is the first recent fixed-guideway or corridor-based bus rapid transit (BRT) project in the region and the project is early in the process, transit-supportive policies specific to the proposed corridor may not have been developed, or limited evidence may be available to judge the effects of such policies. Nevertheless, a “low” or “medium-low” rating is normally assigned regardless of the stage of transit project or system development if specific transit-supportive policies have not been implemented and results have not been demonstrated. A “medium” or higher rating is assigned only if transit-supportive policies have been adopted in the region and their effects are already being demonstrated through the presence of transit-supportive development patterns.

The purpose of this approach is not to penalize projects in regions with no recent history of fixed-guideway or corridor-based BRT transit investment, but rather to provide a consistent and uniform measurement scale by which to benchmark progress across projects. Furthermore, there are many examples of planning activities throughout the country that generally support transit by achieving “smart growth” outcomes and improved livability, and there are many “no-regrets” strategies that can yield benefits even if the transit project is not ultimately completed. The fact that a fixed-guideway or corridor-based BRT corridor has not yet been funded in a city or region should not stand in the way of laying the groundwork for future transit corridors.

The evaluation of performance of transit-supportive plans and policies need not be limited to the specific transit corridor being evaluated. Project sponsors may provide evidence of successful developments and policies elsewhere in the municipality or region. The greatest weight will be given to examples within the same municipality, since this demonstrates favorable local market conditions as well as a willingness to implement adopted policies.

The performance of plans and policies is evaluated based on the following two items:

- Demonstrated cases of development affected by transit-oriented policies; and
- Station area development proposals and status.

Table 6. Ratings of Performance of Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies

Performance of Transit-Supportive Plans and Policies	
HIGH	A significant number of development proposals are being received for transit-supportive housing and employment in station areas. Significant amounts of transit-supportive development have occurred in other, existing transit corridors and station areas in the region.
MEDIUM	Some development proposals are being received for moderately transit-supportive housing and employment in station areas. Moderate amounts of transit-supportive development have occurred in other, existing transit corridors and station areas in the region.
LOW	A limited number of proposals for transit-supportive housing and employment development in the corridor are being received. Other, existing transit corridors and station areas in the region lack significant examples of transit-supportive housing and employment development.
Ratings based on assessment of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrated cases of development affected by transit-oriented policies; and • Station area development proposals and status. 	

3.2.4.1 *Demonstrated Cases of Development Affected by Transit-Oriented Policies*

Project sponsors should provide documentation of other recent projects that have been successfully developed consistent with transit-oriented design principles such as higher densities and pedestrian-friendly design characteristics. Documentation should include photographs, renderings, and/or site plans that clearly illustrate the transit-oriented character of the development. The descriptions should at a minimum include the size, type(s) of use, amount of parking, and when the project was completed. Examples may include projects that have taken place in proposed station areas or along other, existing transit routes; urban redevelopment or infill projects; and new developments designed around transit-supportive principles. The location of each project should be clearly indicated in the map, description, or both.

If transit-supportive policies exist but little or no evidence is available that they have had any impact, a “low” or “medium-low” would be supported. Evidence demonstrating that transit-supportive development is present in station areas and a result of plans and policies would support a more favorable rating. FTA does not solely consider the number of examples of transit-supportive projects; rather, FTA evaluates examples based upon the number of stations, the extent to which existing land uses in station areas are already transit-supportive, and the scale of transit-supportive development compared to nearby land uses.

3.2.4.2 *Station Area Development Proposals and Status*

Project sponsors should describe development proposals and plans and provide renderings and/or site plans to better illustrate the character of the development. The descriptions should at a minimum include the size, type(s) of use, amount of parking, whether the development has been permitted, and the expected dates of construction start and completion. Throughout the stages of the process, the presence of development proposals inconsistent with transit-supportive design principles should lead to a “low” or “medium-low” rating. Even a small number of transit-supportive proposals, however, may justify a “medium” or “medium-high” rating, as long as they are present in station areas. Evidence that developers are interested in transit-supportive concepts, but waiting for greater certainty about the project before developing more specific project proposals, may also support a “medium” rating. If local market conditions are supportive, transit-supportive projects may move forward even when the status of the transit project itself is uncertain, since they may be viable even in the absence of a transit investment.

3.2.5 *Potential Impact of Transit Project on Station Area Development*

This measure addresses the potential impact of the proposed project on regional growth and development patterns. The intent is to assess the perceived likelihood of significant transit-supportive development changes occurring, considering existing conditions, existing or proposed plans and policies, examples of the performance of policies, market conditions, and other factors that may influence development. The development potential in station areas is assessed together with demonstrated development conditions and trends in the larger transportation corridor and region. The items considered are:

- Adaptability of station area land for development; and
- Regional and station area economic conditions.

Obtaining a “medium-high” or “high” rating is contingent upon: 1) significant land being available for new development or redevelopment at transit-supportive densities; 2) a favorable economic environment in station areas; and 3) transit-supportive plans and policies in place or proposed that are expected to facilitate significant changes.

Table 7. Ratings of Potential Impact of Transit Project on Station Area Development

Potential Impact of Transit Project on Station Area Development	
HIGH	A significant amount of land in station areas is available for new development or redevelopment at transit-supportive densities. Local plans, policies, and development programs, as well as real estate market conditions, strongly support such development.
MEDIUM	A moderate amount of land in station areas is available for new development or redevelopment at transit-supportive densities. Local plans, policies, and development programs, as well as real estate market conditions, moderately support such development.
LOW	Only a modest amount of land in station areas is available for new development or redevelopment at transit-supportive densities. Local plans, policies, and development programs, as well as real estate market conditions, provide marginal support for new development in station areas.
Ratings based on assessment of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptability of station area land for development; and • Regional and station area economic environment. 	

3.2.5.1 Adaptability of Station Area Land for Development

The primary considerations for this issue are the amount of land near transit stations that is vacant or available for redevelopment, and the amount of development anticipated or permitted for these parcels (as measured in FAR or dwelling units per acre), based on existing zoning or actual proposals. A project serving a completely built-up, but low-density, area with little or no redevelopment potential would receive a “low” or “medium-low” rating. (A “medium-low” rating may be assigned if a project may help stabilize properties and fill vacancies, even if major projects are not anticipated.) A project serving significant amounts of vacant land would receive a “high” or “medium-high” rating, but only if the land is covered by zoning that allows transit-supportive densities. If existing or planned zoning is not transit-supportive, the rating will typically be no higher than a “medium-low” even if considerable vacant land is available. Built-up areas with already high density that allow for continued high density and the conversion of development sites to higher densities may receive “high” or “medium-high” ratings.

Another way to consider this issue is in terms of potential station area population, employment, and densities at build-out: What is the total capacity for additional population and employment under current station area plans? To achieve significant changes in development patterns from a regional perspective, projected station area growth will need to be in the thousands of residents or jobs for a single station (rather than hundreds), or in the tens of thousands for an entire project.

3.2.5.2 *Regional and Station Area Economic Environment*

The extent to which the real estate market is likely to support transit-oriented development in the region and station areas is considered, assuming that appropriate policies and zoning are in place and land is available for development.

Project sponsors are encouraged to submit population and employment projections for the region and station areas. This data can be used to analyze the economic environments of the region and station areas. Additionally, project sponsors may provide information on other major employment and activity centers in station areas and their expected growth. Other data that project sponsors may choose to provide include commercial and residential vacancy rates, lease rates, housing prices, and absorption (square footage of new development). These indicators will change as economic cycles change and may not be readily available in every area, so FTA has not established quantitative benchmarks. However, comparisons can be made between station areas and other parts of the region, with other peer regions, and with past trends to help gauge the strength of the local market.

While it is not required, the project sponsor may choose to conduct a market study that examines short- and long-term prospects for different types of development in station areas. A market study can be a powerful tool for supporting planning activities and informing the development of appropriate zoning regulations as well as fiscal and regulatory incentives that may be needed to support growth. Development of a market study can therefore help support the ratings for multiple factors related to the economic development effects criterion. Evidence may also be provided on market trends in existing transit station areas and the extent to which the regional market supports higher-density, pedestrian-friendly, and transit-oriented developments.

3.3 Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing in Station Areas

Local plans, policies, and incentives should be in place to help ensure that affordable housing in station areas is maintained or increased. Increasing land values around transit projects can sometimes result in a loss of affordable housing in proximity to the project, thereby reducing the accessibility of the people most in need of service. FTA believes that maintaining affordable housing near transit creates more inclusive communities and helps to ensure lower-income families have ready access to transit. FTA encourages transit agencies to coordinate and form partnerships with localities to guide transit-supportive development and affordable housing.

The term “affordable housing” as used by FTA in this context means housing affordable over the long-term to renters with incomes at or below 60 percent of the area median income and/or owners with household incomes at or below AMI. To be considered “affordable housing,” the housing units must include a legally binding affordability restriction (LBAR) such as a lien, deed of trust or other legal instrument attached to a property and/or housing structure that restricts the cost of housing units to be affordable to households at specified income levels for a defined period of time and requires that households at these income levels occupy these units. This definition includes but is not limited to, state or federally supported public housing and housing owned by organizations dedicated to providing affordable housing.

Projects score higher if the sponsor can demonstrate long-term restrictions or programs favoring very and extremely low-income households (earning at or below 50 percent and 30 percent of AMI, respectively). Consistent with the White House [Housing Supply Action Plan](#) (2022), projects score higher if the documentation demonstrates adopted zoning and land use reforms that reduce the regulatory barriers for affordable housing production and supply, financial tools that can be leveraged to finance construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing, and increased residential density for low- and medium-income renters and homebuyers. FTA emphasizes LBAR housing over “naturally occurring” or “market rate” affordable housing to preserve long-term affordability. FTA favors unique local and/or state affordable housing programs and incentives over typical federal programs and incentives such as U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 8 Housing.

Items considered when evaluating this include:

- Evaluation of affordable housing needs and supply specific to station areas;
- Plans and policies to preserve and increase affordable housing including anti-displacement policies in region and/or station areas;
- Adopted local and/or state financing tools and strategies targeted to preserving and increasing affordable housing in the region and/or station areas;
- Evidence of developer activity to preserve and increase affordable housing in station areas; and
- The extent to which the plans and policies account for long-term affordability and the needs of very and extremely low-income households in the station areas.

Table 8. Ratings of Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing

Tools to Maintain or Increase the Share of Affordable Housing in Station Areas	
HIGH	<p>Comprehensive affordable housing plans have been developed and are being implemented that identify and address the current and prospective housing affordability needs in station areas. The plans include efforts to preserve existing LBAR housing. The plans also explicitly address the housing affordability and quality needs of very and extremely low-income households (earning at or below 50 percent and 30 percent of AMI, respectively).</p> <p>Financing commitments and/or sources of funding and robust financial incentives are secured and available at the local and/or regional level and in station areas to support affordable housing acquisition (including acquisition of land and/or properties intended to be converted to affordable housing), development and/or preservation consistent with adopted plans and policies. These commitments may include early phase or acquisition financing as well as permanent financing.</p> <p>Local and/or state policies and zoning codes support and encourage significant LBAR housing development and/or preservation in station areas.</p> <p>Developers are actively working in station areas to secure priority development sites and/or maintain affordability levels in existing housing units.</p>
MEDIUM	<p>Affordable housing plans have been developed and are being implemented that identify and address the current and prospective housing affordability needs in station areas. The plans include efforts to preserve existing LBAR housing. The plans also explicitly address the needs of very and extremely low-income households (earning at or below 50 percent and 30 percent of AMI, respectively).</p> <p>Some financial incentives are available in station areas to support affordable housing acquisition (including acquisition of land and/or properties intended to be converted to affordable housing), development and/or preservation consistent with adopted plans and policies. These commitments may include early phase or acquisition financing as well as permanent financing.</p> <p>Local policies and zoning codes support affordable housing development and/or preservation in station areas to a moderate extent.</p> <p>Developers are starting to work in the corridor to secure development sites and/or maintain affordability levels in existing housing units.</p>

Table 8. Ratings of Tools to Maintain or Increase Share of Affordable Housing (continued)

<p>LOW</p>	<p>Affordable housing plans and policies are in development or non-existent, or fail to address key elements such as length of affordability, preservation of existing affordable housing, and the needs of very and extremely low-income households (earning at or below 50 percent and 30 percent of AMI, respectively).</p> <p>Few or no local or state financial incentives are available to support affordable housing development and preservation in station areas.</p> <p>Local and/or state policies and zoning codes support only limited affordable housing development in station areas.</p> <p>There is little or no affordable housing development/preservation activity in the station areas.</p>
<p>Ratings based on assessment of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation of affordable housing needs and supply specific to station areas; • Plans and policies to preserve and increase affordable housing including anti-displacement policies in region and/or station areas; • Adopted local and/or state financing tools and strategies targeted to preserving and increasing affordable housing in the region and/or station areas; • Evidence of developer activity to preserve and increase affordable housing in station areas; and • The extent to which the plans and polices account for long-term affordability and the needs of very and extremely low-income households in the station areas. 	

3.3.1 Evaluation of Affordable Housing Needs and Supply Specific to Station Areas

A first step in planning for affordable housing is to document affordable housing supply and needs. A needs assessment evaluates the demand for affordable housing and compares it to the supply of housing. For example, a needs assessment can examine metrics such as the ratio of median monthly housing costs to median income (for both renters and owners), and the fraction of households paying more than a given percent of their income for housing. A needs assessment can also use qualitative methods to evaluate the extent to which people who want to live in the area can afford to do so. A needs assessment should consider regional as well as station-specific conditions. Affordability goals or targets may be set for the study area and/or specific subareas.

Affordable housing policies should be crafted in a manner that is specific to the needs of station areas. The most appropriate tools to preserve and expand affordable housing may vary from region to region and even within a region. Land values and rents – and therefore affordability – vary substantially across metropolitan areas and municipalities. Areas where land values are high may have a greater need for such policies and may also have different tools at their disposal. Even areas with relatively low land values can benefit from policies that protect low-income residents from rising costs and decreasing affordability in transit station areas.

3.3.2 Plans and Policies to Preserve and Increase Affordable Housing Including Anti-Displacement Policies in Region and/or Station Areas

The station area planning process that is often conducted in advance of a transit project is an ideal time to consider affordable housing policies. Localities should take advantage of the opportunity to plan for affordable housing preservation *before* the transit project is built, when it may be possible to acquire property or apply protections at a lower cost.

Examples of plans and policies to preserve and increase affordable housing include:

- Inclusionary zoning or housing programs, which require or provide incentives for developers to set aside a certain percentage of units (typically 10 to 25 percent) for income-qualified buyers or renters;
- State-level laws requiring transit-supportive zoning, such as density minimums or minimal (if any) parking requirements, near transit stations;
- Density bonuses or reduction of parking requirements for the provision of units made available for income-qualified buyers or renters;
- Employer-assisted housing policies, using tax credits, partnerships, matching funds, and/or other mechanisms to encourage employers to help employees to buy or rent homes close to work or transit;
- Rent controls or condominium conversion controls on existing units to maintain affordability for renters;
- Minimized regulatory processes for affordable housing development or preservation projects, such as streamlined permitting and environmental review, reduced parking requirements, or waived development fees;
- Zoning to promote housing diversity, such as zoning that eliminates single-family-only zoning, permits accessory or “in-law” units, and residential zoning based on floor area ratio rather than dwelling units to reduce the disincentive to build smaller units;
- Tenant “right of first refusal” laws, which require that an owner provide the tenants with an opportunity to purchase the property at the same price as a third-party buyer; and
- Affordability covenants, which limit appreciation of rents and/or sales values for units rented or sold to income-qualified tenants for a given length of time.

Affordable housing plans and policies should promote rather than discourage private investment in housing. Such policies must be carefully crafted to ensure that they do not discourage the production of new housing, which serves to increase the overall supply of housing in the area and therefore lower housing costs. For example, rent or cost controls applied to new units brought on the market can discourage production of housing because developers may not be able to make adequate profit to justify their investment. Similarly, inclusionary zoning requirements must recognize the reduced profit for the developer and should not be set at a level so high as to discourage developers from entering the market.

Project sponsors should work with local planning agencies and housing and community development authorities to document the most significant needs and most appropriate policies that can be applied locally to preserve and expand the stock of affordable housing. In their submissions to FTA, project sponsors should document affordable housing plans and policies specifically targeted to station areas, as well as broader plans and policies for the affected communities as a whole.

3.3.3 Adopted Local and/or State Financing Tools and Strategies Targeted to Preserving and Increasing Affordable Housing in the Region and/or Station Areas

Planning for affordable housing should also consider appropriate financial mechanisms that could be applied. Affordable housing can be supported through financial mechanisms such as:

- Funding for targeted property acquisition, rehabilitation, and development of low-income housing, including direct funding for public and nonprofit development authorities, Low-Income Housing Tax Credits (including criteria that favor application of credits in transit station areas), and local tax abatements for low-income or senior housing;
- Land banking programs to support the assembly of land for new affordable housing development by public, private, or nonprofit developers;
- Financial assistance to housing owners and/or tenants through mechanisms, including affordable housing operating subsidies, weatherization and utilities support programs, tax abatements or mortgage or other home ownership assistance for lower-income and senior households;
- Local or regional affordable housing trust funds to provide a source of low-interest loans for affordable housing developers; and
- Targeted tax increment financing, other value-capture strategies, or transfer tax programs to generate revenue that can be directed towards low-income housing programs.

Project sponsors should document any available financial mechanisms, as well as provide evidence of their use in the region, station areas, or both.

3.3.4 Evidence of Developer Activity to Preserve and Increase Affordable Housing in Station Areas

This issue considers the performance of affordable housing policies as demonstrated through actual provision of housing by private and public developers. Affordable housing can be created or maintained through incentives and/or requirements for private sector developers, direct engagement of public or nonprofit agencies in housing provision, and/or direct subsidies to low-income renters or buyers, or to landlords. In many cases, it will not be feasible or desirable to meet the demand for affordable housing simply through subsidies or public agency actions alone. The private sector plays an important role in creating and maintaining affordable housing.

Transit project sponsors should work with local housing authorities and planning staff to identify examples of the provision of affordable housing in new or existing developments and should

provide information such as the number of units, specific affordability restrictions, length of time the restrictions apply, etc.

3.3.5 Extent to Which Plans and Policies Account for Long-Term Affordability and Needs of Very and Extremely Low-Income Households in the Station Areas

Preservation is crucial to ensuring that housing in proposed station areas will remain affordable. Property value appreciation in an affected area can occur over a number of years, yet in many cases, affordability restrictions have time limits. These properties will be at risk of conversion to market-rate housing, contributing to the displacement of low- and moderate-income families.

A housing unit that is affordable at the time of FTA's evaluation and review of the project could have its affordability restrictions expire either during the planning and construction phase or shortly after the transit project is open for service, thus negating the benefits of the transit investment for low- and moderate-income households. Therefore, there should be evidence of continuance of a legally binding affordability restriction in station areas over the long-term following the project's opening. There are a number of different ways that long-term affordability can be assured, including commitments tied to the receipt of Low-Income Housing Tax Credits, HOME or other HUD funds, payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT) agreements, and other legal instruments tied to the receipt of Federal, state, local, and/or private funds/financing.

Table 9. Quantitative Element Rating Guide

Rating	Residential Dwelling Units per acre (maximum)	Central Business District (CBD) Floor Area Ratio (maximum)	Other Floor Area Ratio (maximum)¹	CBD spaces per 1,000 square feet (minimum)	Other spaces per 1,000 square feet (minimum)
High	≥ 25.0	≥ 10.0	≥ 2.50	≤ 1.00	≤ 1.50
Medium-High	15.0 – 24.9	8.0 – 9.9	1.75 – 2.49	1.01 – 1.75	1.51 – 2.25
Medium	10.0 – 14.9	6.0 – 7.9	1.00 – 1.74	1.76 – 2.50	2.26 – 3.00
Medium-Low	5.0 – 9.9	4.0 – 5.9	0.50 – 0.99	2.51 – 3.25	3.01 – 3.75
Low	≤ 4.9	≤ 3.9	≤ 0.49	≥ 3.26	≥ 3.76

Note: This table is intended as a rough guide for assigning ratings for items in which quantitative data are given primary consideration.

¹ Elsewhere in station areas (typical for commercial districts).