



SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2011, the Bronx Office of the Department of City Planning (DCP) initiated the Sustainable Communities Metro-North Corridor Transit-Oriented Development Study. The Bronx is currently growing at a rate unseen since the 1940s and is projected to grow by 14% by 2040, the fastest of any borough. This study makes recommendations that will foster sustainable growth in the borough by expanding transit-oriented development opportunities to create housing affordable at a range of incomes, improve job access for residents, and grow the overall economy of the Bronx, strengthening its position within the city and region. Eight study areas surrounding existing and planned Metro-North rail stations were selected for evaluation to determine strategic land use, transportation, and pedestrian realm actions to accomplish these objectives.

To achieve its goals, DCP undertook an extensive community outreach process focused on education, visioning, and implementation. Because the project study area was geographically dispersed over a large portion of the Bronx, DCP developed an array of educational tools such as graphics depicting the elements of successful neighborhood streets and the potential relationships between land use and TOD. These general tools as well as more targeted site-specific information were used to engage stakeholders within communities for each of the station study areas. They provided a common language to help facilitate discussion of objectives and development of strategies. As part of this process, DCP held

more than 40 community/stakeholder meetings in a variety of formats. DCP's extensive site-specific analyses combined with input gathered through partners and general outreach provided the groundwork for recommendations around each station area.

This study identifies transit-oriented development (TOD) strategies and recommendations that will:

- Capitalize on Bronx Metro-North stations by integrating them into Bronx neighborhoods, creating safer streets and expanding access to housing, transportation, and jobs
- Spur investment in lively, sustainable, mixed-use neighborhoods by permitting additional density and land uses with a focus on new mixed-income housing opportunities and a broad range of retail and neighborhood services
- Connect both Bronx residents to local and regional job centers, and regional workforce to Bronx job centers
- Improve station visibility, pedestrian access, and intermodal connections around selected Bronx Metro-North Stations to support access and ridership



FIGURE 1 | Successful TOD communities in New York City ensure that areas with good transit access can accommodate future growth. This type of development is created by allocating the highest and best land uses within close proximity to the station, creating a safe pedestrian environment, and providing a highly integrated multi-modal transit system.

- ① High density mixed-use development with both employment and affordable living opportunities
- ② Seamless transition between different modes of transit
- ③ Successful pedestrian streets

STUDY APPROACH & FINDINGS

The six existing and two proposed Bronx Metro-North station areas include:

- Melrose
- University Heights
- Morris Heights
- Tremont
- Williams Bridge
- Fordham
- Morris Park (*proposed*)
- Parkchester (*proposed*)

These station areas were selected based on an evaluation of **four key factors**: (1) potential to accommodate future growth, (2) lack of station visibility, (3) overall accessibility, and (4) opportunity to improve connections between modes of transit.

The Melrose and University Heights Stations were chosen for more detailed study because their surrounding areas have the most potential to accommodate future growth. The planning process for these stations included a comprehensive land use study and a more intensive public outreach process.

The report is divided in **two sections**: (1) Strategies for TOD around commuter rail in the Bronx, and (2) Station Area Studies. The findings are summarized in the following section.

SECTION 1 | STRATEGIES

DCP identified a number of common challenges to successfully integrate Metro-North stations into the complex and distinct fabric of Bronx neighborhoods. In order to address these challenges, DCP developed a set of general strategies applicable to all study areas within the Bronx Metro-North corridor. These strategies, while developed through studying the eight Metro-North station areas, have potential applicability to commuter rail stations locally, regionally, and beyond. The strategies are described in four categories as indicated below:

(1) LAND USE AND ZONING

A framework for addressing outdated zoning, fostering appropriate mixes and densities of uses, and bolstering regional centers that will allow Bronx neighborhoods to better capitalize on transit assets.

(2) WALKABILITY

Best practices to improve safety, street life, and walkability of neighborhood streets that connect Bronx residents with jobs, retail and services, and mass-transit options.

(3) INTERMODAL CONNECTIVITY & COMMUTER RAIL STATIONS

Improvements to create seamless connections between Metro-North and other modes of transit will provide greater accessibility for Bronx residents and local and regional workers, and improve overall ridership.

(4) RAIL-ADJACENT LOTS

Improvements to create seamless connections between Metro-North and other modes of transit will provide greater accessibility for Bronx residents and local and regional workers, and improve overall ridership.

SECTION 2 | STATION AREAS

The study includes individual area studies for each station. It focuses on challenges and opportunities to strengthen these areas through targeted regulatory changes and physical improvements, and it offers for each area a set of recommendations developed in concert with stakeholders.

EXISTING STATIONS

University Heights: “Balancing Access Needs and Development Potential”

The University Heights station sits on the Fordham Road Corridor between an undeveloped portion of the Harlem River Waterfront and the Major Deegan Expressway. The area has the potential for significant housing and retail growth that would open up the waterfront to the community; however, its potential is significantly limited by barriers to access.

Recommendations

- Implement phased access, safety, and pedestrian improvements to the intersection of Fordham Road and the Major Deegan Expressway and surrounding sites
- Develop a comprehensive approach to redevelopment of the waterfront area with zoning that permits a balance of land uses tied to infrastructure improvements
- Strengthen pedestrian amenities along the Fordham Road corridor

Melrose: “Tying it all together”

The Melrose station area played a key role in the storied history of the South Bronx and has been the target of significant and successful public investment. Despite the area’s assets and recent revitalization, the area lacks cohesive urban fabric.

The Melrose station area played a key role in the dynamic history of the South Bronx and has been the focus of significant and successful public investment where more than 3,500 new units of affordable housing have been created in the last fifteen years with significant additional units planned. Despite the area’s assets and recent revitalization, the community lacks a cohesive urban fabric.

Recommendations

- Create a consistent pedestrian environment along the 161st Street corridor
- Create a gateway to the Metro-North station area on 161st Street through phased capital improvements to existing neighborhood amenities
- Adopt a long-term land use strategy that knits together recent investments by providing additional retail opportunity, encouraging additional housing options in special mixed use districts

Morris Heights: “Connecting the Island”

The Morris Heights Metro-North Station and its surrounding features, which include Roberto Clemente



FIGURE 2 | Streetscape exercise at a Melrose community workshop. Community participation was a central part of the planning process for this study, with over forty community meetings held in various formats. The NYC Department of City Planning also lead neighborhood tours to both engage and educate the public on issues of walkability, intermodal connection, land-use, and TOD principles in the Bronx.

State Park, are isolated from the community largely by topographical changes and a major highway. There is an opportunity to increase usage of the park and station, as well as increase access to the Harlem River Waterfront and River Park Towers housing development.

Recommendations

- Enhancements to pedestrian pathways to reconnect amenities to the surrounding community, increase safety, and promote usage of the park and station
- Promote Cedar Avenue as a mixed-used commercial corridor through land use actions
- Create a safe and attractive gateway to the station, park, and waterfront along West Tremont Avenue through coordinated design of pedestrian crossings and pathways, step-street improvements, signage, and lighting

Tremont: “Emerging Commercial Corridor”

The Tremont Metro-North Station is located along the re-emerging East Tremont Avenue commercial corridor. The area was recently rezoned to promote

housing and retail growth; however, gaps in street trees, lighting, and inconsistent pedestrian paths result in a disjointed corridor.

Recommendations

- Implement comprehensive streetscape improvements to East Tremont Avenue in coordination with emergent Business Improvement District to capitalize on the recent 3rd Avenue/ East Tremont Rezoning and support additional mixed-income housing along the corridor
- Streamline connections to mass transit and strengthen access to local employment centers and community and retail amenities

Williams Bridge: “Completing Connections”

The Williams Bridge Metro-North station sits along a busy corridor, has convenient intermodal connections, and is near a major medical facility that is one of the Bronx’s largest employers. A recent rezoning provides opportunity for additional growth and ridership. However, poor visibility and connectivity present challenges to achieving a strong mixed-use retail corridor.



Recommendations

- Complete pedestrian connections from station area to Gun Hill Road and Webster Avenue retail corridors, area employers, and recreational amenities
- Support the goals of the recent rezoning for Webster Avenue as a neighborhood main street

Fordham: “Taking the Next Steps”

The Fordham Station area is home to a number of regional attractions and institutions including Fordham University, the Bronx Zoo, New York Botanical Garden, Little Italy, and one of the busiest retail corridors in the city, Fordham Road. With high ridership today, it has potential to become a stronger regional hub of activity.

Recommendations

- Strengthen pedestrian connections between area attractions, surrounding neighborhoods, and transit assets
- Improve coordination between area attractions, institutions, and retail corridors
- Adopt land use policy that supports additional growth around transit and retail corridors and facilitates uses such as office, regional retail, and hotels, typical of commercial business districts

PROPOSED STATIONS

MTA Metro-North Railroad has developed an overall concept to provide additional regional rail service by linking its east-of-Hudson service directly to Penn Station. It includes two proposed stations on the West Side of Manhattan, and four new stations in the East Bronx. This study examines two of the proposed Bronx station areas with the greatest potential for long-term transit-oriented growth.

Parkchester/Van Nest: “Overcoming Dividers”

The proposed Parkchester/Van Nest station is located along East Tremont Avenue between the Parkchester planned community and Van Nest neighborhood. The proposed station will help establish a new center for these neighborhoods, but currently it is characterized by inactive uses, difficult crossings, and general lack of pedestrian amenities.

Recommendations

- Re-examine zoning along both sides of East Tremont Avenue to encourage the development of a mixed-use retail corridor and pedestrian activity, and to re-orient the community towards the corridor and proposed station area

- Implement comprehensive streetscape improvements to both sides of East Tremont Avenue which include activating rail adjacent lots and revisiting the street alignment to allow for wider sidewalks and pedestrian safety

Morris Park: “Regional Professional Employment Center”

As the home to a number of large professional institutions and planned development, Morris Park is a regional center for employment and education. The proposed station currently lacks pedestrian infrastructure and commercial uses to support the institutions’ needs. The new station would help bolster the area’s status as a regional employment center and be an asset to the community.

Recommendations

- Re-examine zoning to permit retail and a range of housing options on both sides of the rail line
- Identify long-term improvements to pedestrian and vehicular access to improve circulation
- Explore opportunities to brand the area through increased partnerships between institutions

IMPLEMENTATION

Throughout this study DCP built strong partnerships with stakeholders who are rooted in these communities. These partnerships have expanded opportunities for implementation of recommendations identified in this report, and in some cases, existing efforts have already jump-started action. To realize the full potential of recommended improvements, implementation will require:

- Land use actions and zoning changes with a focus on an appropriate mix of uses and a wide range of affordable housing options
- Prioritization of capital projects to promote safer, more walkable streets and smooth transfer between various modes of transportation
- Continued coordination with city agencies and community stakeholders

Together the application of these strategies will create a more livable Bronx by increasing access to jobs and neighborhood amenities, providing mixed-income housing options for residents, and creating more sustainable communities surrounding Bronx Metro-North stations.