

# Capitol Region Council of Governments

## Building Corridors of Opportunity: Best Practices for Engaging Anchor Institutions and Neighborhoods

### *Executive Summary*

## Acknowledgements

---

***Building Corridors of Opportunity: Best Practices for Engaging Anchor Institutions and Neighborhoods, Final Report*** was prepared with financial support from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. The report was prepared for the Capitol Region Council of Governments by the consulting firm of HR&A Advisors, Inc.

**CTfastrak** is a bus rapid transit (BRT) service that began operation in 2015, running from downtown Hartford to downtown New Britain, Connecticut.

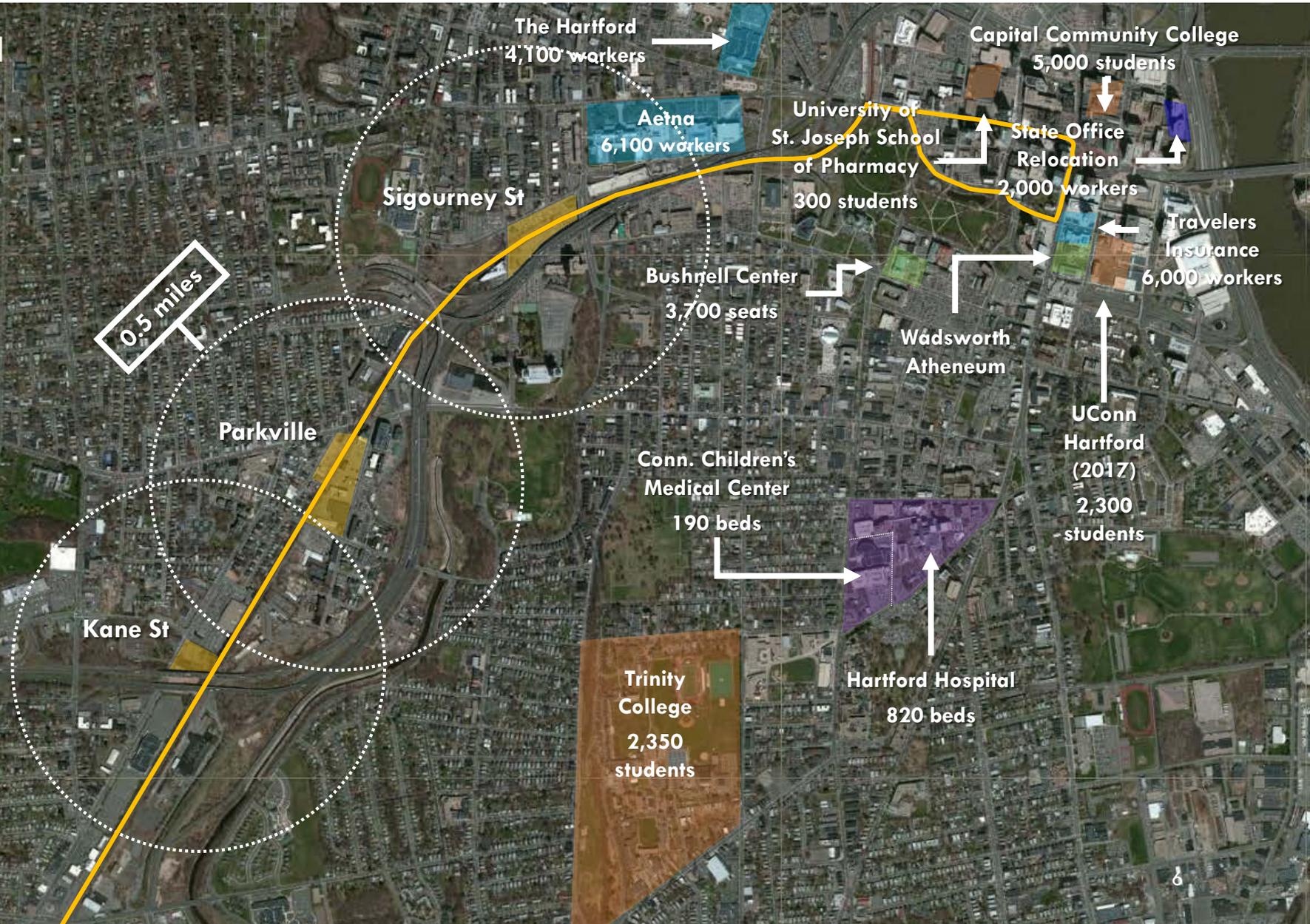


- With a dedicated right-of-way, frequent service, pre-boarding payment system, and specially designed buses, it is one of the highest-rated systems in North America.
- **CTfastrak** has carried over four million riders since its launch on March 28, 2015.
- The system runs along a former rail line through a variety of neighborhoods: from downtown urban settings to districts with an industrial heritage to single-family home suburbs.
- Through a number of initiatives, the State of Connecticut and local municipalities are exploring ways that this transit system can begin to catalyze transit-oriented development (TOD).

Anchor institutions can be first-movers of development along the CTfastrak corridor, even though most are close to, but not within, the station areas.

Anchor Institutions-Map 1, Hartford

- CTfastrak Stations
- Private
- Higher Education
- Medical
- Cultural
- Government



# ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS-MAP 2, GREATER HARTFORD

- CTfastrak Stations
- Private
- Higher Education
- Medical
- Cultural

University of Hartford  
7,000 students

University of Saint Joseph  
2,600 students

St. Francis Hospital  
620 beds

uConn School of Law  
621 students

0.5 miles

Sigourney St



# ANCHOR INSTITUTIONS-MAP 3, NEW BRITAIN

- CTfastrak Stations
- Private
- Higher Education
- Medical
- Cultural

Central Conn. State University  
12,000 students

Cedar St  
★

Retail  
116,000 SF

★ CCSU East Campus  
150 acres

East St

0.5 miles

Berkowitz Building  
Mixed-use  
24,500 SF  
24 units

Stanley Black & Decker

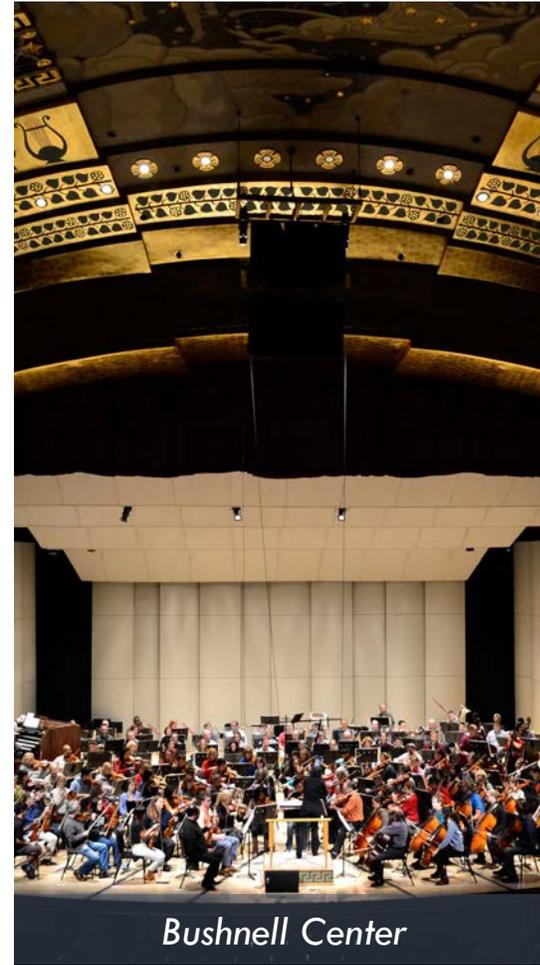
★  
Downtown New Britain

East Main St

Museum of American Art  
97,000 visitors

Hospital of Central Conn.  
410 beds

Anchor institutions are a region's schools, hospitals, large employers, cultural facilities, and government offices. Anchors are deeply embedded in a region and unlikely to move.

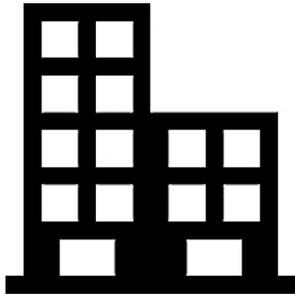


As documented in a major academic study\*, anchors can contribute to economic growth and development, no matter the size of a community or the vitality of its economy.

---



**Anchor institutions often drive the knowledge-based economy, producing goods and services directly tied to innovation and workforce development.**



**In order to carry out their institutional mission, many anchors face a constant need to modernize and expand, making them key real estate developers.**

\* National Resource Network, NYU Wagner, Urban Institute, *Striking a (Local) Grand Bargain: How cities and anchor institutions can work together to drive growth and prosperity*, (September 2015).

Anchors and local governments can help each other, but certain barriers can prevent them from formalizing their relationship.

---

### **Divergent Missions**

Anchor institutions typically focus their mission on their constituents and clients, which does not always align with community goals for economic growth or development in the surrounding area.

### **Siloed Plans**

Anchor institutions and government tend to develop master and strategic plans in siloes. Leaving stakeholders out of the process can weaken the anchor-government-community relationship and undermine planning efforts.

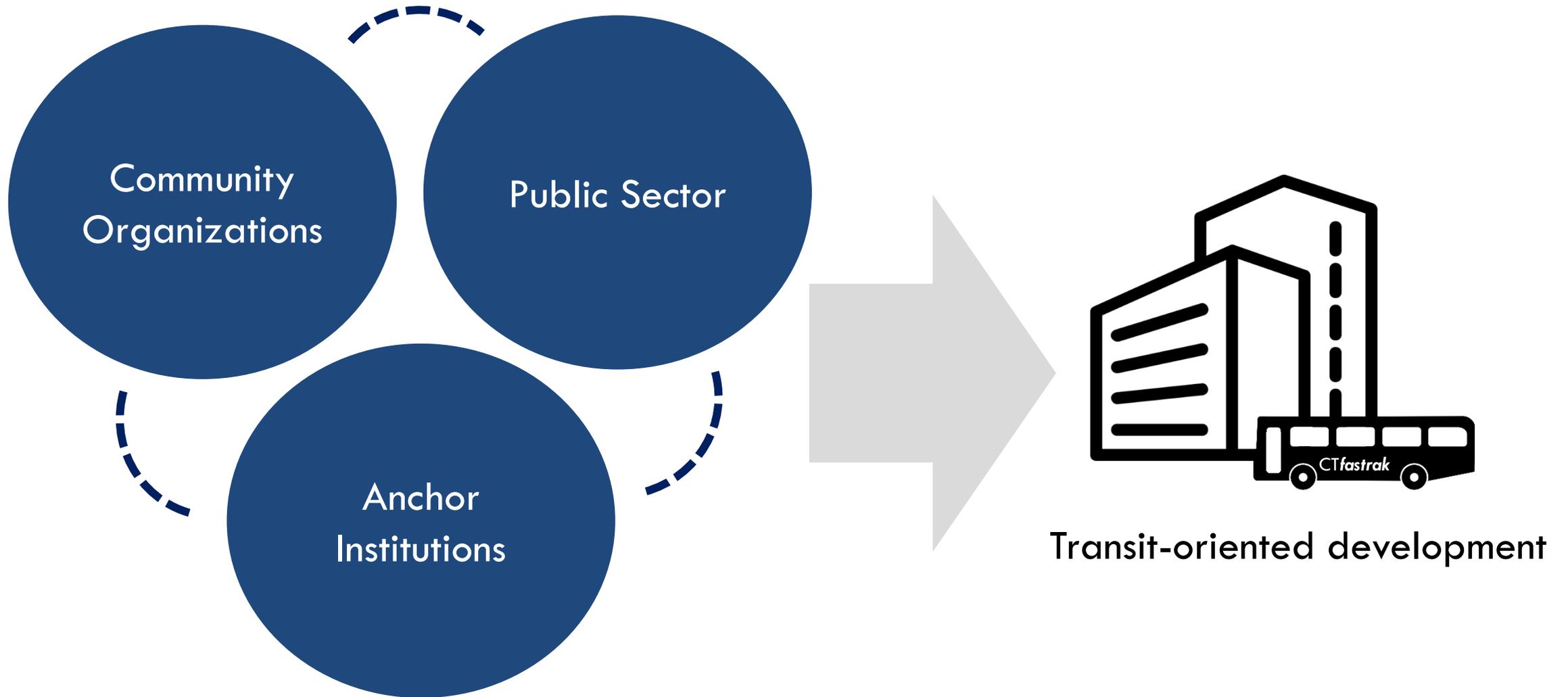
### **History of Disengagement**

Anchors can be disengaged from their surrounding communities. The mismatch between an anchor's mission and community goals, in combination with property tax exemptions for most anchor institutions, can often lead to political tension regarding the long-term vision for an area.

### **Lack of Shared Vision**

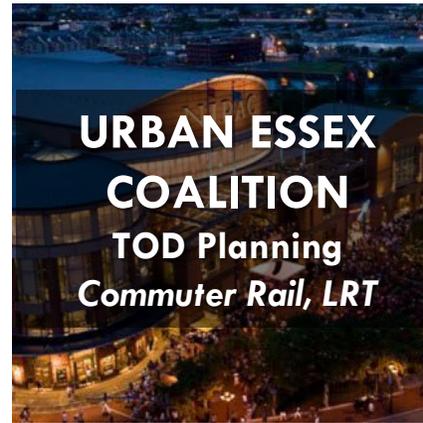
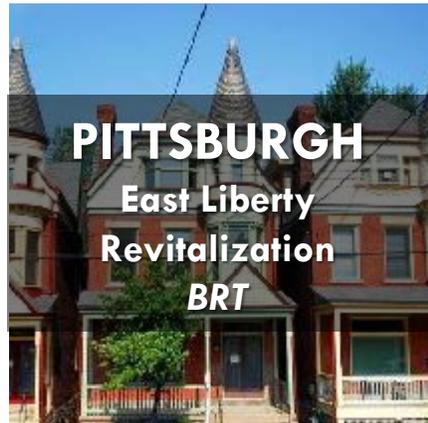
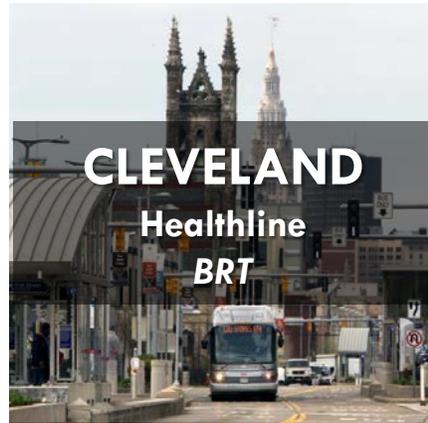
As large institutions, anchors are guided by a specific mission and constituency they serve, which may not align with the public policy objectives of local government, representative of a much broader and more inclusive constituency.

By establishing common goals and clear roles, previously disjointed and one-off relationships can become a sustained, mutually beneficial partnership.



HR&A researched anchor institution engagement in six peer regions, selected from a long list of 24 comparable corridors. Based on these case studies and existing research, HR&A identified best practices that can help advance TOD along the *CTfastrak* corridor.

---



**Best Practices:** Five key characteristics define best practices for engaging anchors, government, and community organizations in a mutually beneficial relationship that can spur TOD and economic growth in the region.

---

**Vision**

*Common goals and a shared long-term plan for development.*

**Partnerships**

*Formalized partnerships centered around a mutually beneficial vision.*

**Development  
Entity**

*A public, private or nonprofit entity with the ability to guide development and channel multiple funding streams.*

**Community  
Involvement**

*A sustained commitment to include the community's perspective in the visioning, partnership, and implementation phases.*

**Public  
Investment**

*Government investment, including up-front financial commitments, incentives, and the physical relocation of government offices.*

## Best Practices – Vision: Anchors, community organizations, and local government convene to establish common goals and a shared long-term plan for development.

### Vision

### Partnerships

### Development Entity

### Community Involvement

### Public Investment



In St. Louis, education and health anchors, as well as civic organizations created a vision for a biotech and innovation district in midtown, called the **Cortex**.

Phased development and district partnerships have aligned with the Cortex vision since its inception in 2002. Today, over 150 organizations reside within the Cortex district, including five incubator spaces.



Pittsburgh's **East Liberty Revitalization** was driven, over the course of decades, by a firmly established vision shared by major stakeholders. This allowed for a plan to emerge to incrementally reposition the area for redevelopment, leading to the "overnight success" that rapidly emerged once these elements began to take shape and a critical mass was reached.

## Best Practices – Partnerships: Effective partnership structures are formally or loosely organized to advance the development vision and create accountability.

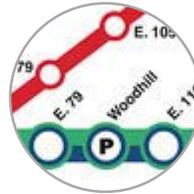
Vision

Partnerships

Development  
Entity

Community  
Involvement

Public  
Investment



In Cleveland, The Cleveland Foundation served as a neutral convener for a formalized group of education, health and arts & cultural anchors, called the **Greater University Circle Initiative (GUCI)**.

The GUCI coalition established an opt-in model for project collaboration in which anchors could participate in development aligned with their institutions' mission and vision for growth. This flexible, structured approach to forming partnerships created accountability without the pressure to participate.



Northern New Jersey's **Urban Essex Coalition for Smart Growth** was an effort that assembled a broad array of civic, non-profit, and private interests including real estate developer RPM and Rutgers University as a part of the development of a regional plan by Together New Jersey.

By working with the most invested partners in a transit corridor, plans for a number of station areas were able to efficiently coalesce, providing a roadmap to implementing TOD in each area.

**Best Practices – Development Entity:** The partners engage, or sometimes create, a public, private, or nonprofit entity to lead the development process and channel multiple funding streams.

Vision

Partnerships

**Development Entity**

Community Involvement

Public Investment



In Pittsburgh’s **East Liberty neighborhood**, the City of Pittsburgh’s economic development agency, the Urban Redevelopment Authority, and nonprofit East Liberty Development Inc., a community development corporation, led revitalization efforts.

Both organizations played strong roles as funders of infrastructure development and leaders of public-private developments that brought jobs and affordable housing to the East Liberty neighborhood.



As the Master Developer for the district, **Cortex** in St. Louis has broad power and control to negotiate and fund development opportunities with private and public investors, guided by Cortex’s Master Plan. In this capacity, the organization buys land, plans development, and forms public-private partnerships.

**Best Practices – Community Involvement:** The partners actively engage local stakeholders to participate in a formal process to contribute meaningful feedback in development planning and implementation.

Vision

Partnerships

Development Entity

**Community Involvement**

Public Investment



The **Urban Essex Coalition for Smart Growth** led community outreach in three municipalities—Orange, East Orange, and Newark, New Jersey—and five station areas to streamline planning along a commuter rail corridor.

The Coalition included nonprofit organizations with strong ties to local communities and a history of working on neighborhood revitalization efforts.



The **Emerald Express** in Eugene was founded on the basis of very strong community involvement, with early planning led by a Citizens Advisory Committee representing civic and business leaders that provided recommendations to the Metropolitan Planning Organization on transit policies and station-specific plans, leading to a very successful transit line and TOD.

The extension of the line has been met with difficulties from local interests as officials did not employ these methods in later phases.

**Best Practices – Public Investment:** Government often plays a major up-front role in development by providing financial commitments, subsidies and incentives, or even committing to relocate agency offices.

Vision

Partnerships

Development Entity

Community Involvement

Public Investment



In **New Carrollton**, Maryland, development in the area near a new transit station was encouraged by government funding and County TOD planning initiatives.

The County’s strategic relocation of a rent-paying, government agency near a transit hub demonstrated to developers the marketability of the New Carrollton area.

Incentive funds were also important in anchoring the area by relocating businesses and subsidizing private development via municipal loans, tax breaks and site preparation.



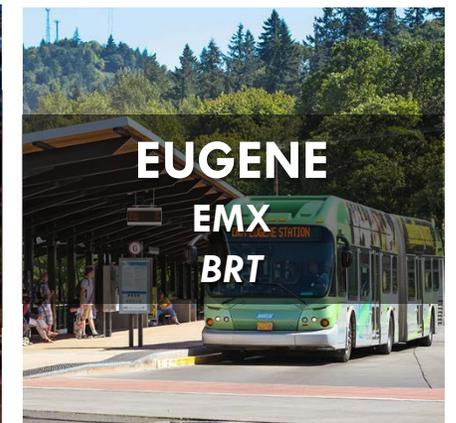
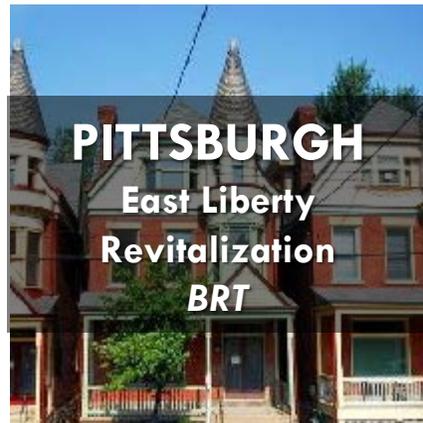
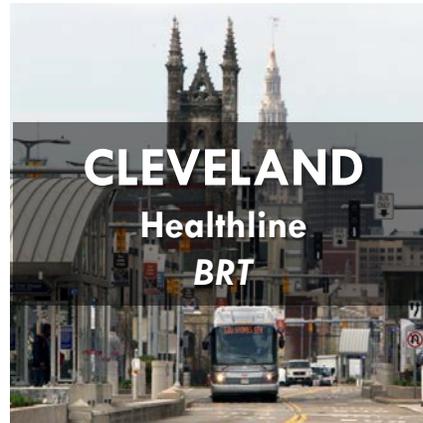
**Cortex** in St. Louis utilizes a range of public investments to make improvements to the district in order to further enable success. This includes a USDOT TIGER grant to fund construction of a new MetroLink station as well as the establishment of a TIF district, which has provided \$168M in order to subsidize new commercial development.

# Case Studies

HR&A selected 6 peer regions from a long list of 24 comparable transit corridors that exemplified Capitol Region Council of Governments' goals to spur TOD through anchor institution and community partnerships.

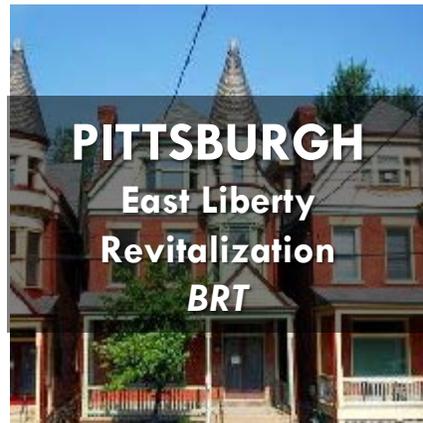
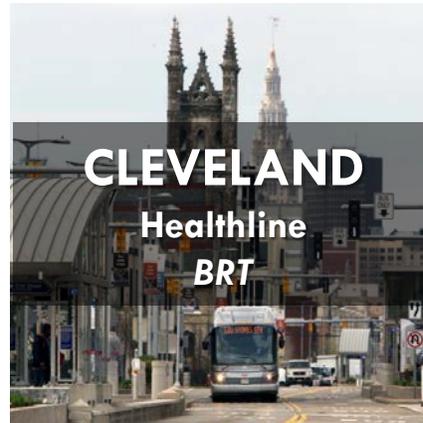
**Criteria for selection included:**

- Small to mid-size cities, preferably those with an industrial legacy
- Mix of small urban and suburban neighborhoods
- A mix of BRT and other Fixed Guideway transit corridors
- Anchor institutions actively involved in catalyzing TOD, either as singular entities or in formalized coalitions in collaboration with the public sector



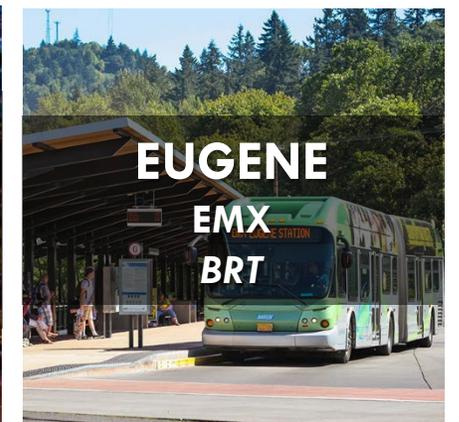
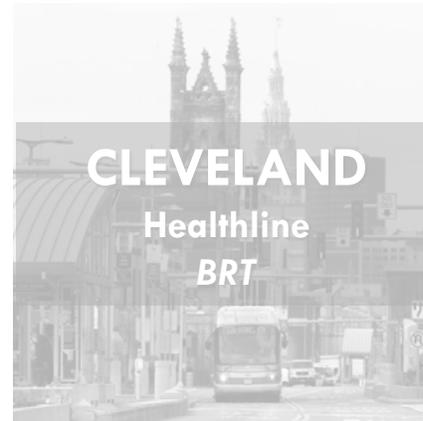
Cases in established cities have very strong anchor institutions that serve as a catalyst for development activities.

In these cases, the anchor institutions are major drivers of development locally, either as a part of a coalition facilitating and directing development at station areas or as a part of an innovation ecosystem that attracts growing businesses.



More suburban cases are instructive in illustrating how governments collaborate across jurisdictional boundaries and facilitate major developments to spur economic activity.

In these cases, the anchor institutions are important regional assets, but may play a less defined role in catalyzing development. Government plays a larger role in planning and incentivizing development.



## Key Takeaways from the Cleveland Healthline

✓ <b>Vision</b>	<p>Anchor development plans can leverage community institutions and development corporations to advance anchor initiatives, reinforce messaging, and build off of existing development initiatives.</p> <p>Trust, collaboration, and buy-in can be fostered by allowing anchors to invest in projects that are mutually beneficial on a volunteer basis, without formal MOUs or agreements.</p> <p>A neutral convener (in this case, the Cleveland Foundation) is beneficial to lead multi-anchor redevelopment strategies to create a forum for in-depth collaboration among diverse partners.</p>
✓ <b>Partnerships</b>	
✓ <b>Development Entity</b>	
✓ <b>Community Involvement</b>	
✓ <b>Public Investment</b>	

## Key Takeaways from the East Liberty Revitalization

- ✓ **Vision**
- ✓ **Partnerships**
- ✓ **Development Entity**
- ✓ **Community Involvement**
- ✓ **Public Investment**

East Liberty Development Inc. (ELDI) and the City’s Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) together were a strong presence that could draw big-name retail that helped draw new residents.

ELDI retained authority over and focus by creating secondary coalitions like the Community Council to target and specialize in community engagement tasks; this allowed ELDI to prioritize strategic planning and development execution.

Risk was shared through public subsidies to make development feasible and through accessing multiple funding sources.

# Key Takeaways from the St. Louis Cortex Innovation District

- ✓ **Vision**
- ✓ **Partnerships**
- ✓ **Development Entity**
- Community Involvement**
- ✓ **Public Investment**

Multiple anchors within and surrounding the district created a non-profit entity to guide the master planning process and engage with public and private partners.

Founding partners provided upfront funding to develop space along the transit corridor. Cortex leveraged tax increment financing to incentivize private development.

Cortex created a districtwide identity around existing agri-tech and bioscience sectors in the local economy. Lab and office space support a growing biotech and innovation ecosystem.

## Key Takeaways from New Carrollton

**✓ Vision**

**✓ Partnerships**

**✓ Development Entity**

**Community Involvement**

**✓ Public Investment**

Relocating government offices with hundreds of employees can create critical mass and generate demand for retail spending as a component of a larger plan.

The commitment of the Economic Development Initiative Funds and continued approval of redevelopment projects helped sustain the forward momentum of revitalization.

## Key Takeaways from Urban Essex Coalition for Smart Growth

✓ <b>Vision</b>	<p>The Coalition's plans highlighted existing infrastructure and landmarks within blocks of each station that could serve as focal points for transit access and mixed-use development.</p> <p>The Coalition gained momentum following the release of the corridor-wide plan in 2014. Today, Together North Jersey, the organization that spearheaded the Coalition, is more active and serves to advance these ideas.</p> <p>Community outreach identified common challenges across the transit corridor, but stations maintained unique economic development plans.</p>
✓ <b>Partnerships</b>	
<b>Development Entity</b>	
✓ <b>Community Involvement</b>	
<b>Public Investment</b>	

## Key Takeaways from Emerald Express BRT

<b>Vision</b>	<p>The Citizen’s Advisory Committee was active during the first two expansions of the Emerald Express (EmX). Today, the Lane Transit District receives public feedback through annual surveys and public meetings.</p> <p>While the BRT lines track closely with the geographic location of large employers, anchor institutions were not involved in making strategic land use and planning decisions that would benefit the larger community.</p> <p>Without sustained citizen involvement, streamlined TOD plans, or anchor engagement, EmX officials missed an opportunity to advance a publicly-supported development effort.</p>
<b>Partnerships</b>	
<b>Development Entity</b>	
<b>Community Involvement</b>	
<b>Public Investment</b>	