GREEN TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS
to Support Transit Oriented Development
at Very Low Income Urban Properties

Best Practices Report

Green Transportation Systems, or GTS, is the blueprint for providing transportation options at EAH Housing developments that can substantially reduce the environmental impact of residents’ personal transportation while saving them money and improving quality of life. EAH has a long-standing commitment to providing affordable transit-oriented development. This year alone we have six new developments entering construction that are clustered around places of work, shopping, community services and are within a quarter mile of transit options. GTS is an effort to leverage those locational advantages with active transportation management services in order to boost access to and utilization of alternative transportation options for residents.

This report describes a pilot GTS program at one property, Buchanan Park Apartments in San Francisco. The pilot has had some success at forging broader community partnerships and increasing access to transportation options at the affordable housing property, but has been challenged in attempts to significantly increase utilization. A key lesson learned is that resident engagement should begin even before project implementation is rolled out, to help shape the program offerings and better align program goals and residents’ perceived needs, and to increase commitment to the program among site staff.

This report is designed to help community leaders, community development corporations and nonprofit affordable housing developers engage in strategies and develop tools to preserve affordable housing near transit. EAH Housing, meanwhile, is continuing to develop and learn from the Buchanan Park GTS program,

TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT

Transit Oriented Development (TOD) is compact, mixed-use development near transit facilities that promotes sustainable communities by providing people of all ages and incomes with improved access to transportation and housing choices, as well as decreased transportation costs, which reduces the negative impacts of automobile travel on the environment and the economy.

Ownership of a car, often considered to be a requirement for leading a normal life, is the second largest expense for most households and getting more expensive. Transportation eats up a disproportionate amount of low-income people’s household income – 24% for people earning between $5000 and $30,000 per year. Low-income people tend to face longer commute times than wealthier residents. Additionally, owning a car has been shown to lead to overuse for many types of trips that might be made as conveniently with other modes that have a lower impact.

While affordable housing projects can help households control their housing costs, comprehensive efforts to help these households understand and control their transportation expenses are rare.
On a larger scale, our society is now reaching the limits of what our auto-dependent society can cope with and we are looking for new solutions that will balance our expectations for personal mobility with environmental responsibility to reduce consumption of resources that result in both local air pollution and climate change.

**GTS PILOT PROGRAM STRUCTURE AND GOALS**

As an organization, EAH Housing has long been engaged with transit-oriented development, with developments from the high-rise Kukui Towers in downtown Honolulu to Camellia Place at the Dublin BART station. The goal of GTS is to provide transportation options intended to improve residents’ mobility, promote healthier choices, save them money and overcome a history of limited access to economic opportunity. GTS aims to leverage major public transportation projects and bicycling resources in the vicinity, to substantially reduce the environmental impact of residents’ personal transportation. With these goals in mind, EAH examined our existing portfolio to determine which properties located within a quarter mile of transit opportunities could make use of the infrastructure that supports mobility and independence from the car.

A pilot project was launched at Buchanan Park Apartments, a HUD-funded rehabilitation project serving very low-income families in San Francisco’s Western Addition, within walking distance of two major bus rapid transit projects that are among the city’s highest transportation priorities. The property is also close to a number of other transit lines and bicycle routes, and the immediate topography is relatively flat and walkable for hilly San Francisco.

Major program elements include:

- On-site bike share
- Transit System Monthly Pass
- Carpool matching
- Transit information kiosk

The project was implemented in conjunction with the major rehabilitation and re-syndication of the property. The 68-unit family apartment complex, located between Eddy and Turk Streets on Webster and managed by EAH Housing since 1996, Buchanan Park contains four residential buildings and one community building. The population consists of low and very-low income families with a total of 63 children ages 4-15 years old and 20 young adults ages 16-25. The project was funded through a $25,000 grant from Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.

Buchanan Park already includes many transit-oriented resources: the property contains only 48 total parking spaces in two open lots. The property is serviced by bus lines 5, 22, 31 and 38 and MUNI lines M and J within one-quarter mile. On Geary Boulevard, where the 38 line already provides frequent service 24 hours a day close to the Buchanan Park, a bus rapid transit project is proceeding. The property is within one-half mile of at least 13 more lines, including the Van Ness corridor where the City’s other bus rapid transit project is commencing. The property is located on Webster Street, providing direct connection to a dedicated bike lane and bicycle routes surrounding the area that connect to San Francisco’s extensive bike networks.

Our innovative approach is to integrate bike sharing, transit passes, carpool matching and an on-site transit information kiosk into a transportation package and actively market it to our residents. The bike sharing program, working to bridge the gulf between San Francisco’s vibrant biking culture and the paucity of cycling experience among very low-income, mostly minority residents, is a signature element of the pilot program.
BICYCLES. EAH Housing initially proposed to partner with the San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) to provide a bike-sharing kiosk on the property, as part of the Bay Area BikeShare program managed by Alta Bicycle Share (renamed Motivate this year). When SFMTA/Alta ultimately declined to participate, EAH created our own program in partnership with Missing Link Bicycle Cooperative and input from the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition. SFMTA conducted a citywide bicycle sharing suitability analysis on regional transit nodes. Some of the factors considered when determining ideal locations for stations within the service area were topography, transit connections and proximity to the bikeway network. Buchanan Park Apartments immediately jumped out as conducive to bike sharing based on its high concentration of regional transit. Bike sharing is less expensive than operating and owning a motor vehicle, reduces traffic congestion and improves public health. Research shows that while bicycle use is expanding dramatically in recent years and people of color are a fast-growing segment of bicycle riders, access to a bicycle and participation rates remain more limited for lower-income people. The kiosk on-site and promotion of cycling is intended to help residents participate in San Francisco’s positive bicycling trends and jumpstart the large number of younger Buchanan Park residents into a lifelong cycling habit.

TRANSIT PASSES. The concept was to provide our residents with shared community transit passes that can be checked out with the resource coordinator on the property. The property would purchase approximately 20 low-income “Lifeline Fast Passes” and provide them free to any resident who prequalifies by meeting with the resource coordinator for a 45-minute green education training, which will include carpool matching for the resident. The concept, to be negotiated with SF Muni, is to use them like a library card or a car share program, to be checked out from the resource coordinator for limited periods of time when the resident anticipates the need. If an accord with SF Muni cannot be reached, the back-up plan was to seek funding to reduce the out-of-pocket cost of a transit pass to residents for an initial one year period, after which either new funding would be found or the resource coordinator would simply continue to promote the reduced-price Lifeline passes for which most residents qualify.

RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT. The key to the success of GTS is onsite staff to actively market the various transportation alternatives, provide trip planning and organize carpools. At move-in, households are offered a free review of their transportation costs and shown how they could save money on certain trips using GTS. As an incentive, some of the GTS benefits are conditioned on a household member having participated in a GTS orientation meeting with the resource coordinator. The resource coordinator maintains relationships with local transportation agencies and programs such as SF Muni, as well as our partners including M the SF Bicycle Coalition; this active role of staff will secure an increase in adoption rates over time. In addition to his or her work coordinating with partner agencies and meeting with residents, an important part of the resource coordinator’s marketing and promotion role will be to maintain a transit information center (TIC). The GTS TIC currently consists of transit pamphlets and resources, prominently located in the computer learning center. The resource coordinator regularly posts information on GTS program features, transportation options, events and promotions, and other information

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS. Community connections are central to this project, on multiple levels. Physically, Buchanan Park sits near the crossroads of two of San Francisco’s highest transportation priorities, the bus rapid transit projects being developed for Van Ness Avenue and the Geary Corridor. Yet, despite its proximity to these two great cross-city routes and a wealth of other transportation resources, Buchanan Park sits aside, in the center of the historically impoverished, high-crime Western Addition neighborhood. The pilot is an ongoing effort to turn proximity into access.

EAH Housing’s first efforts at Buchanan Park, when our affiliate took over this run-down expiring-use property in the mid-1990s, focused narrowly on the property itself. The approach was based on community organizing. Leading a broad coalition of residents, community groups and city officials, and making smart investments in
property upgrades and resident services, EAH succeeded in turning Buchanan into a secure oasis of safe, dignified housing. Yet these results, though welcome, were inward-looking.

Today the challenge is to open doors, to better connect this community to the broader transportation improvements and thriving economy of the city as a whole. This challenge is a driving force behind the resident-oriented GTS program.

**PROJECT ORGANIZATION.** The GTS project team is jointly led by the project manager for Buchanan Park Apartments’ rehabilitation and the sustainability program manager, who will set out to implement our goals and communicate with stakeholders. Primary responsibility for many ongoing GTS operational duties will be carried out by the on-site resource coordinator. The team draws upon full access to EAH resources, from marketing assistance by the communications department to IT work on embedding and updating the TOD checklist within the company’s dynamic database. Problem-solving support will be available from the high-level, cross-departmental asset management team and resident relocation meeting group, with limited consultant contracting to ensure completion of selective elements, such as synchronizing the TOD checklist with the new construction and acquisition-rehab checklists and other such standard operating procedures within the XRM database.

The work, as ever, will be challenging. Resident engagement will be the key. Though the physical distances to the transit corridors are small, the perceived distance to these access points may be dauntingly large in the mental maps of residents. These challenges are why the GTS concept is centered on the residents, their needs, and enhancing access to their transportation choices.

**GTS PILOT OUTCOMES**

During the period of performance, September 2013-December 2014, this project has served as a “TOD laboratory” in which the funded TOD activities benefit Buchanan residents and also serves to capture, evaluate and systematically apply to future activities. The overall intended purpose is to bring together EAH’s long history of making transit-housing connections, our various innovations and successful ideas into a well-defined and documented business model we can readily replicate, continuously improve and scale up as opportunities arise.

**Bicycle Share Program.** The intended outcome to establish on-site, an official bike-sharing kiosk was achieved. Upon the grant award, the sustainability program manager negotiated the details of creating a kiosk at Buchanan Park. The bike-sharing kicked off in conjunction with the general GTS program grand opening on August 16, 2014.

While the bike share program director at the SFMTA agreed that EAH’s location is suitable to the Alta-managed Bay Area BikeShare program, SFMTA decided that in this first phase of their roll out they are focusing the pilot in the financial and retail neighborhoods of San Francisco with plans to expand based on the success of the pilot. Ironically, SFMTA’s decision serves to underscore the socioeconomic divide in the growing bike share movement and further justify EAH’s efforts to create a workable bicycle component within our GTS model.

We addressed this challenge by creating our own program. Buchanan Park provides bicycles for our residents in a safe, secure, highly visible location. The program also strives to provide greater levels of education and assistance than the City run bike share program. EAH engaged eLock Technologies, the designer of BikeLink System and related bike sharing and parking solutions, to build a secure bicycle locker that contains four individual pods to house four bicycles that were purchased using grant funds (see attached photos). Missing Link Bicycle Cooperative supplied the 4 bikes. Each bike is outfitted with safety reflectors, baskets and locks. EAH provides helmets in assorted sizes for resident use. Additionally, the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (SFBC) provided bike safety training on multiple week nights, which is a requirement for residents before they are able to check out the bikes. These trainings were not well attended but the resource coordinator is committed to the continual promotion of this new program and host events including coordinating with SFBC to provide more ongoing training for our
residents. As we move forward with implementing more bike share programs in our new and existing properties, EAH will draw on these established relationships with community-oriented suppliers of bike locker storage, bicycles and training and support services.

The bicycle launch party brought out approximately 10% of the property population and represented a diverse multi-generational group. While there were more spectators than participants, the Saturday bike riding event highlighted the ease of bike check out, (just swipe a card and go) and brought the community together to demonstrate the fun and convenience of riding a bike. Two of Buchanan Park’s seniors rode the bikes around the property, one parent followed suit and a young adult was encouraged to ride while three of his peers watched. All participants had fun and expressed how easy it was to check out the bikes. The Buchanan Park residents were receptive to the bike safety agreement and understood the importance of bike safety. The residents actively participated in the “ABC check list” (check air, brakes and chain), seat adjustment and properly secured their helmets before getting on the bikes. The residents had fun, and even those who were apprehensive about the program expressed more comfort and enjoyment with having bicycles as one of the property benefits. The Buchanan Park children were instrumental in encouraging their parents and caregivers to come out of their apartments and be a part of the music, food, fun and excitement of the Hot August Ride. Overall it was a community building event which is a valuable promotional model moving forward.

Transit Pass-Sharing. We did not achieve the goal of creating a transit-pass-sharing program among the 68 households. The concept was proposed to SFMTA, which runs the SF Muni public transit program, specifically to purchase approximately 20 low income discounted “Lifeline Fast Passes” monthly, and use them like a library book to be checked out from the resource coordinator for limited periods of time when the resident anticipates the need to make trips around the city. During the initial negotiations, SFMTA indicated that no bulk purchases are available for low income Lifeline Fast Pass. The barrier turned out to be SFMTA’s procedures. Unfortunately, each low income individual must first make an appointment with the city Department of Social Services to request an I.D. card that proves their income eligibility for the Lifeline Fast Pass, and then go to the distributor of the Lifeline Fast Passes and purchase the transit pass on a monthly basis at designated retailers. This process takes hours out of a low income resident’s day; hours which are often spent working to support a household. Given this barrier to entry, EAH’s resource coordinator at Buchanan Park will communicate how residents can obtain the Lifeline Fast Pass and help residents obtain their discounted transit passes.

Resident Engagement. Significant resident engagement efforts began at the begin of the performance period in September 2013, this is including the “grand opening” for the GTS program activities and features. We fell short of the goal for the resource coordinator to meet with a member of 75% of the Buchanan Park households within the first year the program is actively promoted.

Initial activities at the property included co-hosting two urban bicycle training workshops with the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition (SFBC) during the grant period. The trainings took place on July 10, 2014 with 4 attendees and July 22, 2014 with 11 attendees. The Buchanan Park resource coordinator posted event flyers on every building within the complex. The workshops were also open to the public and posted on the SF Bicycle Coalition website.

The program launch occurred on Saturday, August 16, 2014 and was aptly named “Hot August Ride.” The on-site resource coordinator planned and implemented the event, with support from the sustainability manager and the EAH Communications Department. Utilizing a small internal budget, refreshments were provided and small prizes were donated by our bicycle provider, Missing Link Bicycle Cooperative. Gift cards were awarded to any resident that rode the bike around the block and/or neighborhood. Approximately 20 Buchanan Park residents attended the event (represents 10% of the total population, far short of our 75% enrollment goal).
The carpool matching and transportation kiosk, also planned features in the GTS model, have not yet been implemented at Buchanan Park. The resource coordinator has been tasked with assisting residents with relocation during the property rehabilitation, which task has used much of the time available for this part-time position during the initial GTS program year.

LESSONS LEARNED.

The GTS program as implemented at Buchanan Park Apartment taught us the necessity of staff engagement and resident participation. Resident engagement was targeted early, given the ultimate objective empowering residents to expand their range of transportation options and become better connected, in healthier ways, to the larger community around them.

The resource coordinator at the property was intended to be the lead figure in engaging residents and promoting the program. However, it turned out that this part-time position was also tapped to assist residents with temporarily relocating their homes during extensive construction to rehabilitate the property – a significant disruption to the life of the community that was deemed to be a higher priority of this limited staff resource.

Our biggest hurdle is bike share usage at Buchanan Park. Since installing the bike locker and making bikes available for residents to share we have not had one resident check out a bike to borrow. The launch party, the two bicycle training events, promotional bike share posters, including advertising free bikes to ride on the property’s Facebook page and communications with residents have served to make residents aware that bikes are available for their use. The resource coordinator has had individual conversation with residents about why they are not checking out the bikes. The top three responses are:

1. I’m too old.
2. I don’t want to be responsible (This comment pertains to the Bike Share Rental Agreement attached).
3. I don’t need to.

We can’t change the mind sets of our residents but we plan to address these challenges by continuing with our promotional efforts. In the spring of 2015 we plan to have the San Francisco Bicycle Coalition help organize a group ride and we will have another summer event similar to the Hot August Ride. EAH believes that is only takes one resident to drive the program’s success. We will continue with our efforts to address the barriers to adopting bikes as a viable transportation alternative on this property and continue to promote bike sharing at Buchanan Park.

Another key lesson was to start engagement earlier, during the program planning stage, not just with the resident who is the user of the transportation but also with the staff who will carry the program out. We assumed that this urban family property would be an ideal model for the bike share program but didn’t ask the residents what their transportation preferences were before installing bikes as an option. Staff capacity and buy-in is as critical as user population. The staff at Buchanan Park promoted the program through flyers and conversations but indicated their apprehension from the initial project planning stage. When working with property staff to implement the GTS program there wasn’t enthusiasm for the bikes and when it became clear that discounted shared transit passes were not an option, the staff had little motivation to promote other aspects of the program such as carpool matching and a designated transit information center.

Moving forward, a transportation survey will be conducted at the proposed property before GTS program development to assess capacity and motivation of staff and resident interest.

EAH’s challenge is to open the door to connect the Buchanan Park community to the broader transportation improvements and their transportation options. This pilot has served as a lab for future TOD programs and supports the long term organizational strategy to continue to provide transit friendly affordable housing.
Attachments.

1. Bike and locker photos
2. Bike Safety Checklist
3. Buchanan Park Bicycle Program Procedures
4. EAH Housing Bike Share Rental Agreement