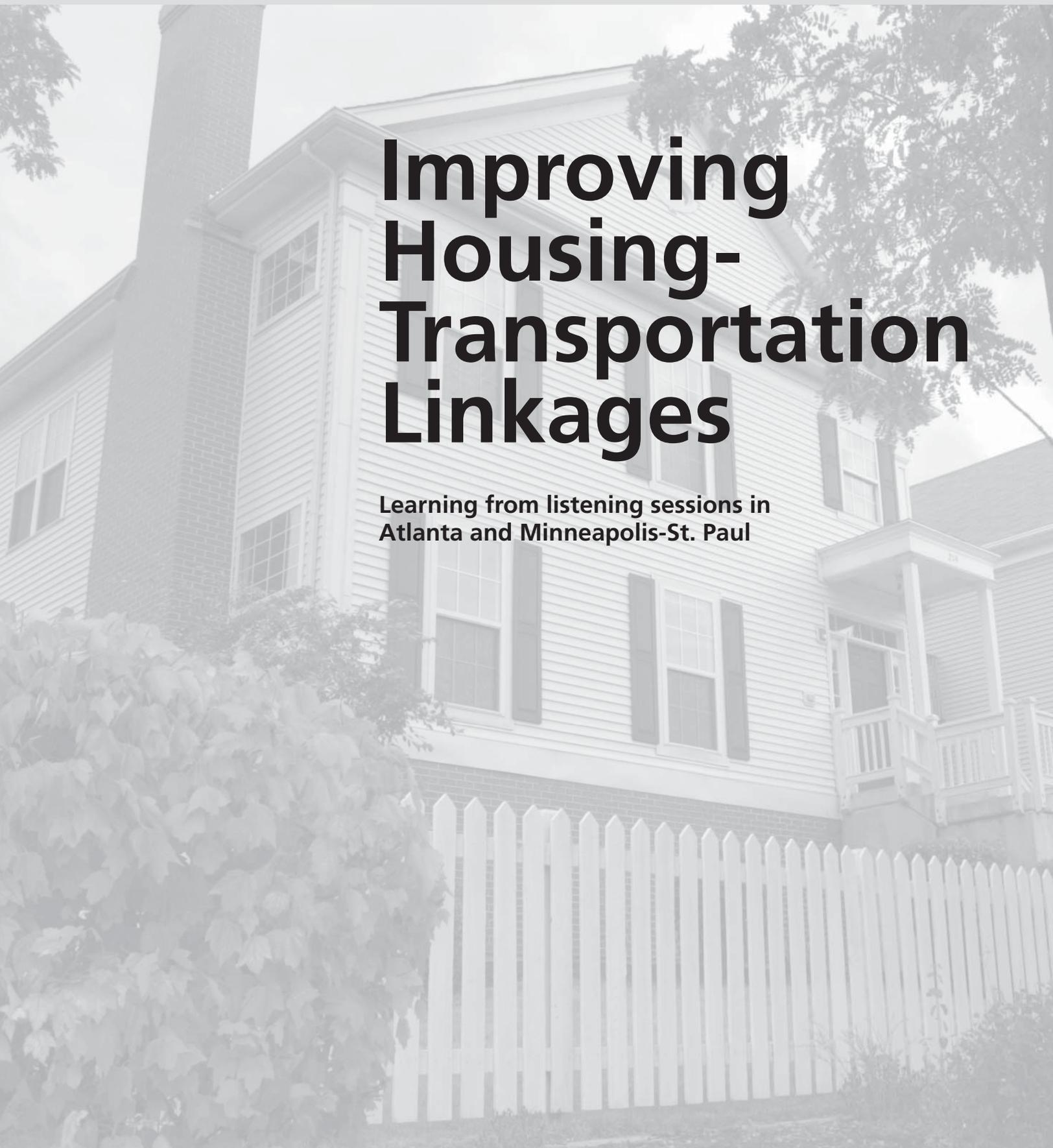


Improving Housing- Transportation Linkages

Learning from listening sessions in
Atlanta and Minneapolis-St. Paul



Metropolitan Planning Council

Since 1934, the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) has been dedicated to shaping a more sustainable and prosperous greater Chicago region. As an independent, nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, MPC serves communities and residents by developing, promoting and implementing solutions for sound regional growth.

National Housing Conference and Center for Housing Policy

The National Housing Conference (NHC) is a nonpartisan advocacy organization that promotes national policies and legislation for suitable housing in a safe, decent environment. The Center for Housing Policy, NHC's research affiliate, specializes in developing solutions through research. In partnership with NHC and its members, the Center works to broaden understanding of the nation's housing challenges and to examine the impact of policies and programs developed to address these needs.

Project Background

In recent years, the Metropolitan Planning Council (MPC) and National Housing Conference have worked together to advance employer-assisted housing as a strategy for leveraging private sector leadership and investment in support of workforce housing and "live near work/transit" options.

Employer-assisted housing (EAH) is beneficial in its own right. It also has become clear that housing solutions can be even more effective if implemented in a manner that advances communities' broader transportation and land-use goals, as part of a comprehensive approach to sustainable development. By engaging private-sector actors and assistance, EAH strategies can serve as a catalyst for more effective coordination of the many agencies required to pursue a sustainable development strategy.

While the exact nature of sustainable development efforts can vary from community to community, in general, they seek to:

- Promote compact and transit-oriented development,
- Increase the supply of affordable homes for renters and owners close to transit and jobs,
- Coordinate transportation, land use, and workforce planning,
- Ensure transportation investments adequately maintain existing infrastructure, and
- Set goals for household affordability that incorporate both housing and transportation expenses.

Listening Sessions

To learn more about how private-sector participation in EAH can be leveraged to advance the goals of sustainable communities, MPC and the National Housing Conference's research affiliate, the Center for Housing Policy, facilitated listening sessions in the spring of 2009, in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minn., and Atlanta, Ga.

The goals of these sessions were to surface best practices, lessons learned, and key barriers, as well as identify how employer assistance and federal leadership can address barriers to interagency coordination and bring best practices to scale. The two cities were selected based on their interest in better coordinating housing, transportation, and workforce policy, and for their prior efforts to advance employer-assisted housing strategies. The Surdna Foundation generously supported the sessions.

Key Take-Aways

The stakeholders participating in the listening sessions had expertise in housing, transportation, or both. They highlighted local successes and challenges, citing several models.

- In Atlanta, the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) and Atlanta Development Authority encourage affordable housing development near transit stations by rezoning adjacent properties to support mixed-use.
- Minnesota Housing, the state housing finance agency, and the Metropolitan Council (the MPO representing the Twin Cities) administer a fund that makes loans to local governments and nonprofit developers that prioritize green, affordable housing development near employment centers, transit, and other amenities to minimize vehicle miles traveled.
- Both the Atlanta and Twin Cities MPOs offer grants to help communities plan and implement strategies that link transportation improvements, affordable housing, and land use.

Even in areas committed to coordinated regional decision-making, implementation can be difficult. Participants identified several challenges, including the following:

- 1. A lack of technical expertise at the local level can impede successful planning.**
- 2. Competing requirements and misaligned goals of different federal funding sources can prevent agencies from working together.**
- 3. The private sector is not sufficiently engaged in policy discussions around land use.**

Listening session participants observed, while there have been successes, more interagency coordination is needed at the local, regional and federal levels. Participants also noted public-private partnerships can prove very successful; however, more incentives are needed to engage the private sector. Participants suggested public investments made in accordance with targeted plans yield more positive outcomes, and recommended strengthening the relationship between plans and investments.

Recent Progress

While the National Housing Conference and MPC continue to work with regional partners, both organizations also have the privilege of working with the current Administration, which has committed to these goals via the Sustainable Communities Partnership. Announced by the U.S. Dept. of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and U.S. Dept. of Transportation (DOT) in March 2009, and expanded to include the Environmental Protection Agency in June 2009, the Partnership's goal is to "help improve access to affordable housing, more transportation options, and lower transportation costs while protecting the environment in communities nationwide." The Partnership also has identified a slate of Livability Principles to guide coordinated efforts

across agencies to achieve these goals.

Since the initial launch of the Livability Principles, these goals have been applied both to funding and policy reforms.

- HUD's FY 2010 budget includes funding for initiatives that foster sustainable communities.
- The Surface Transportation Policy and Planning Act proposes national policy that improves safety, reduces congestion, creates jobs, and protects the environment.
- The proposed Surface Transportation Authorization, which will identify billions of dollars for funding surface transportation projects nationwide, includes greater emphasis on goal-driven investments, competitive grants, and fix-it-first.
- The Livable Communities Act was introduced, proposing increased funds and technical assistance to implement the Sustainable Communities Initiative.
- DOT announced funding available for transit projects that support the Livability Principles.

Opportunities

Federal policymakers are committed to promoting livable communities, encouraging interagency and interjurisdictional coordination, and fostering more public-private partnerships. Localities from coast to coast are demonstrating the ongoing need for: flexibility in federal funding streams to encourage and facilitate interagency partnerships; increased resources to support technical assistance that will build capacity for local communities to plan and then implement investments based on those plans; and **incentives** that will bring the private sector to the table.

Challenge grants or "reverse RFPs" can set the stage for communities to develop comprehensive plans that propose how their activities can meet federal priorities. Funding the Livable Communities Act will help increase local capacity and spur smart investments based on plans, as well as foster communication of local best practices. Additional incentives are needed to engage private sector leadership. In particular, incorporating EAH incentives within the Livable Communities Act can lead to more public-private partnerships. The upcoming federal transportation authorization provides another opportunity for objectives-based decision-making. With the groundwork laid and priorities identified through the Sustainable Communities Partnership, the time is right to invest in model projects and truly systematize interagency and cross-jurisdictional coordination.

New Federal Policy Addressing Key Challenges

Challenges identified by stakeholders

1. A lack of technical expertise at the local level can impede successful planning.

Examples of Recent Progress

Sustainable Communities Initiative, funded in FY2010 HUD Budget, includes technical assistance to local and regional entities.

Opportunities

Proposed Livable Communities Act provides additional planning assistance and resources.

2. Competing requirements and misaligned goals of different federal funding sources can prevent agencies from working together.

Sustainable Communities Partnership already aligning goals and incentives of HUD, DOT, EPA, and other agencies.

Surface transportation authorization can include policy objectives that link housing, transportation, environmental sustainability, and other goals.

IDOT announced Federal Transit Agency funding will prioritize projects that promote livability.

U.S. Dept. of Energy announced Energy Efficiency and Community Block Grant funding that encourages innovation linking housing, transportation, and land use.

3. The private sector is not sufficiently engaged in policy discussions around land use.

Nationwide, more than a dozen states have local employer-assisted housing programs with private-sector partners engaged in addressing workforce housing challenges.

Incorporating EAH incentives into the Livable Communities Act can provide impetus to engage local business leaders in policy discussions.

For more information:



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