

SUSTAINABLE URBAN REGENERATION AND THE TOD DEVELOPMENT MODEL: LESSONS FROM ALBION MILL IN BRISBANE

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ABSTRACT

Many cities are dispersed, disconnected and vulnerable to oil price rises. In contemporary urban policy, Transport Orientated Development (TOD) is a popular solution but remains theoretically conflicted and practically expensive. TODs are walkable precincts, centred on train or other public transit systems with dual logistical and place-enhancement functions. The tension of unresolved function is particularly pernicious for marginal TODs. Mindful of the TOD paradox and project pitfalls, we investigate a regeneration project in Brisbane and evaluate the challenges for this site to achieve sustainable urban regeneration. Generalising beyond the Queensland context, we outline possible strategies to overcome challenges to sustainable TOD development. The results suggest that TOD commercial and collective success turns on five key drivers: partnership engagement (informally or in a joint venture), site simplicity, place distinctiveness or sufficient enhancement funding, transport integration, speculative constraints and, finally, authentic local community discourse.

Keywords: Transport Orientated Development, sustainable urban regeneration

INTRODUCTION

Transport Orientated Development ('TOD') is gaining in popularity as an urban fix but is theoretically conflicted and often expensive to successfully implement. We first review the general TOD literature and then investigate a specific case study, looking for key issues preventing its successful implementation in practice. The Albion Mill in Brisbane, Australia is the TOD investigated. While the site is located close to the CBD, it is complex and the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) exposed the locations commercial limitations. In effect, Albion Mill is a faded neighbourhood without compelling differentiation when compared to, for example, Bowen Hills or Kelvin Grove. Although site engineering, rail upgrades or neighbourhood enhancement, could mitigate its relative competitive disadvantages, such place enhancement is expensive. The case study illustrates how TOD success is conditioned by various local externalities, including land use patterns, logistics, public realm aesthetics and the intensity of cultural activities. The Albion TOD investigation involved a site visit, audit and the interrogation of several key stakeholders as well as a broader consideration of its financial, urban design, and institutional constraints.

The TOD Model

The term TOD was coined by Peter Calthorpe in his book *The Next American Metropolis; Ecology, Community, and the American Dream* (1993). According to Curtis et al (2009), the book was inspired by land use and transportation concepts of Howard's Garden City in the late 19th century. As Dittmar and Ohland (2004) point out, the typical definition of TOD is descriptive and includes the different components: a mix of uses, at various densities, within a half-mile radius around each transit stop. However, TOD cannot be defined by physical form alone. TODs is both a *node* and a *place*. Wherever implemented, TOD requires a degree of government involvement but its intensity and delivery mechanisms vary. Typically, in Australia, government involvement is limited to land-use re-zoning (Renne 2008).

The Queensland Government (2010) view TOD as a planning approach that promotes the creation of a network of well-designed communities focused around transit stations. Areas developed using this approach are called TOD precincts, and generally comprise a mixed-use community within a

comfortable 10-minute walk of the transit station. Conventionally, TOD definitions tend to focus on built form (Belzer and Aulter 2002). Here, we can refer to the three 'Ds' of Bernick and Cervero (1996): density, diversity and design; considered pivotal for TODs built form (Belzer and Aulter 2002). However, an alternative approach is to focus TOD regeneration on desired outcomes in the broader sense.

Belzer and Aulter (2002) identified six performance criteria to assess project function and outcomes: location efficiency, value recapture, liveability, financial return, choice, efficient regional land-use patterns. According to the Urban Land Institute, TODs should also create transit-centred community, therefore attention to scale and design appears as being an essential component of successful TODs.

Hale and Charles (2006) emphasise that TOD success is linked to supportive actions by various stakeholders. For instance the State government is responsible for urban planning policy; transit agencies for the transport strategy and infrastructure funding; local government for zoning; developers are in charge of the construction of dwellings and consultants for the project delivery (Hale and Charles 2006).

From the literature, some key TOD challenges include:

- providing a supportive institutional framework for TOD development;
- defining acceptable TOD performance measures;
- involving the community in identity creation and place making; and
- distributing the transit and place benefits of TOD to low income households.

The first key challenge is to properly structure the institution framework to enable dialogue and development coordination between various TOD stakeholders (Hess and Lombardi 2004).

TOD Australian Backdrop

Since the war, Australian cities have struggled to sustainably manage growth. Many opportunities were missed. For example, in 1944 Brisbane passed-up a 'green belt' and satellite towns plan and in 1969 it closed its tramlines. Despite government rhetoric, fossil fuel dependence and congestion will continue to plague the Australian transport system (Dodson and Sipe 2007). However, various iconic developments portend a more thoughtful approach to development:

- Melbourne Docklands;
- Bondi Junction, Pyrmont and St Leonards in Sydney;
- East Perth; and
- Southbank, Brisbane.

Khan and Bajracharya (2007) found Perth's approach to transit oriented developments more progressive compared to South East Queensland and metropolitan. Both jurisdictions have urban management strategies to promote TOD, but Western Australia is more proactively implementing TOD. In Western Australia, LandCorp facilitates land assembly and public-private partnerships for redevelopment. In Queensland the focus is more on policy frameworks such as Regional Plans and local growth management strategies, with a greater reliance on market forces for the realisation of TOD projects. In the Queensland context, the TOD model is a primary land-use strategy (included in the *South-East Queensland Regional Plan*). TODs are seen to contribute to better use of cities' investments in public transport by promoting mixed-uses and higher-density (Queensland Government 2010a).

According to Newman (2007), TODs in Australia require four strategic planning approaches: strategic policy for centres, strategic policy for rail transit, statutory process to implement TOD, public-private funding mechanism. Table 1 presents how these strategies are implemented in the five main Australian cities. We then discuss in more detail the case of Brisbane.

LOCATION	STRATEGIC POLICY FOR CENTRES	STRATEGIC POLICY FOR RAIL TRANSIT	STATUTORY PROCESS TO IMPLEMENT TOD	PUBLIC-PRIVATE FUNDING MECHANISM
SYDNEY	CITIES OF CITIES: METROPOLITAN STRATEGIES IN 2005	IN PAST DECADE - WEAK. NEW RAIL PROJECT HAS HUGE POTENTIAL	YES IN NEW AREAS	POTENTIALLY, BUT NONE AS YET
MELBOURNE	MELBOURNE 2030 IN 2001 BUT STRUGGLING	WEAK. AT PRESENT MOSTLY RAIL	YES BUT NOT STRONG IN IMPLEMENTATION	NO
BRISBANE	SEQ 2030 IN 2006 BUT NO CLEAR GOALS FOR EACH CENTRE	RAIL MAINLY BUT NEW RAIL LINES AND BUSWAYS ARE BEING BUILT	SOME THROUGH CONCESSIONS ON DENSITY AROUND STATIONS	NO
PERTH	NETWORK CITY IN 2004 BUT NOT WELL DEFINED	YES	NO	NO
ADELAIDE	METROPOLITAN ADELAIDE PLAN, 2006	WEAK ON RAIL	NO	NO

Application of Four TOD Strategies in Main Australian Cities

Source: Newman (2007)

Table 1

According to Newman (2007), the Queensland SEQ Regional Plan includes a strategic policy for centres as 80% of SEQ is a no go zone for development to contain urban sprawl. The aim is to concentrate development in a series of centres; it is therefore a development orientation supportive to TODs. However, there is no statutory planning mechanism for TOD in Brisbane as mentioned. The successful redevelopment project in Fortitude Valley, an outstanding Australian example which was organised through a State-local partnership, was the result of a strong institutional framework through the 1980s Federal Better Cities programme (Newman 2007).

TOD SUSTAINABILITY

Roberts (2000) defines urban regeneration as a “comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change.” Urban regeneration goes a step further than urban renewal which – according to Couch (2010) – is essentially a process of physical change. Hemphill et al (2004) define sustainable urban regeneration (SUR) as an “holistic process of regenerating an area having regard to the economic, environmental and social aspects of the process as well as wider quality-of-life issues.” The selection of criteria depends on the project to be studied although Hemphill et al (2004) identify five sustainable urban regeneration indicators: economic and work; resource use; buildings and land use; transport and mobility; and community benefits. TOD selection criteria though must be adapted to the specifics of the site but the Queensland Government (2010b) stress community diversity.

Case Study Method

Our methodology adapts that of Boarnet and Compin (1999) who generalised from a representative case study of a well-regarded San Diego TOD. Here, to investigate the Albion Mill, we use a mixed method, collecting secondary data, observing conditions on site and interrogating various stakeholders. First, an analytical review of the project in its locational context was conducted. Then, in August 2011, the site was visited, audited and photographed. Over subsequent months, key project stakeholders were consulted. In practice, dialogue was limited to industry experts contributing to an undergraduate university development course. Recording and written notes were made for relevant lectures. The site audit and expert views were then analysed to identify the project's major challenges. The Mill's sustainability performance across urban form and land-use, housing diversity and local economic development was evaluated, based on Queensland Government 'community diversity within TODs' framework' (see Table 2). Finally, we made five generalisations which, we argue, have sustainable TOD ramifications well beyond Brisbane and Queensland.

Albion Mill Project

FKP's is a property developer, engaged in construction, investment and management. Its main income sources are the retirement and residential divisions. 'The Mill', a 1.3 ha site, is located immediately adjacent to the Albion railway station, 4.8 km north of Brisbane's CBD (Figure 1).



Location of Albion Mill
Source: Google Map, accessed 17 May 2012
Figure 1

As originally conceived, The Mill exposed FKP to significant project and marketing risk. In 2008 an application for a mixed use development, based on Transit Oriented Development principles, was lodged with Brisbane City Council. The proposal incorporates original and heritage listed buildings within the site, providing contextual links to the site's history as a flour mill, and its position of prominence as a landmark site on an elevated central site at Albion. There is immediate access to public transport, with options of rail or a short (800m) walk west to the planned Northern Busway project, which will follow Lutwyche Road. The project is mixed use (Figure 2) including residential apartments, commercial and office and retail building incorporating a full line supermarket, specialty foods, and leisure activities - cafés, restaurants (FKP 2011).

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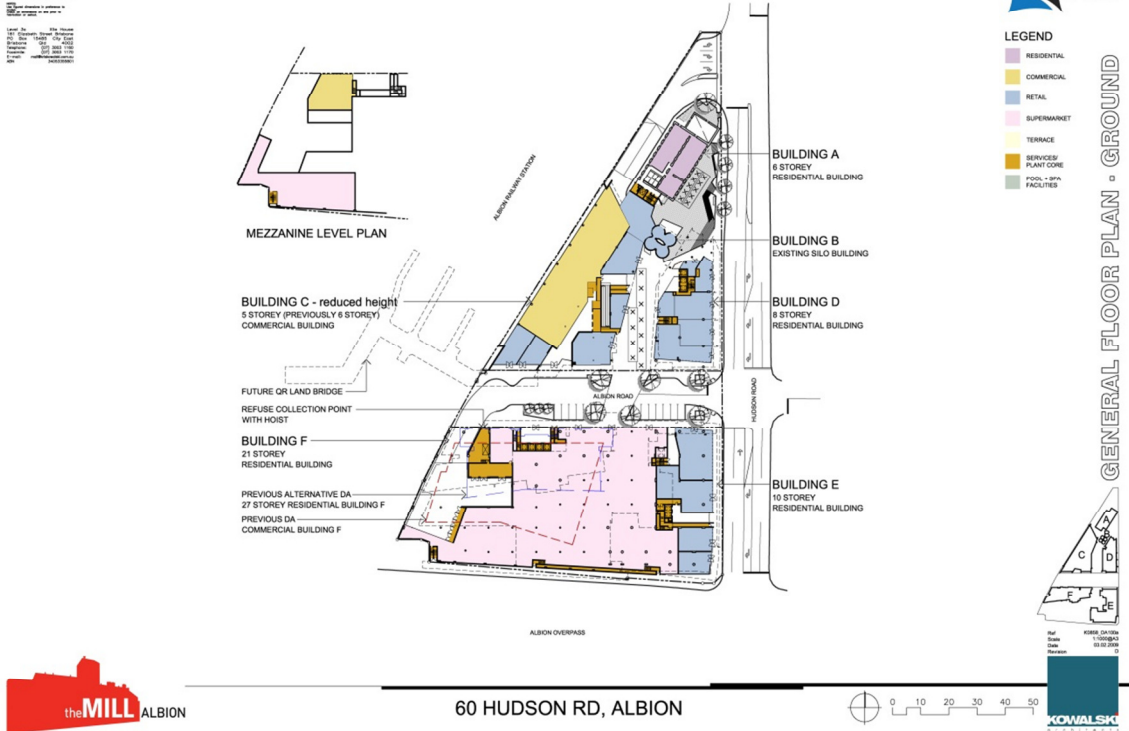
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**Initial Design Concept Lodged and Approved by Brisbane City Council
Source: FKP (2011)**

Figure 2

While the proposal was generally well received and would improve Albion station's 'desolate feel'; the public had reservations. Barry (2008) recorded a range of negative views including:

- disappointment that the residential component was aimed at the luxury market; and
- perceived trading difficulties for the small shops to compete with the planned supermarket.

FKPs original proposal was conceived in a buoyant market with optimistic expectations. Hence, the proposal was ambitious, featuring major increases to both building height and density (120 dwellings per hectare) in comparison to the existing mid-rise building packages currently within Albion Village precinct. The proposal featured residential units within the historic building, commercial office units in proposed neighbouring buildings, anchored with ground floor retail including a large scale grocery store. This design provided public space in between the buildings, and could be seen from an urban design perspective to have aimed for a new town centre contained within the mill site, as opposed to integrating within the existing Albion village precinct as well (Keen 2011). Within five months, \$90 million of presales were registered (Miller 2011). However, the site and surrounding context had limitations which hindered the realisation of its integrated redesign aspirations.

In fact, the site called for a revamped local plan (Miller 2011). As well as inherent neighbourhood limitations, parking provision requirements, particularly for the grocery store, were financially onerous. The collapse of global financial markets highlighted The Mill's financial infeasibility.

Leasing and sales dried up (Miller 2011) and the project was put on hold. Far from a catalyst for Albion regeneration, the site signalled the neighbourhood relative limitations (Miller 2011).

THE SITE

Albion village itself is a mixed use neighbourhood, with an industrial history and a unique village character. Albion has been identified in the Brisbane City Council Master Plan and South East Queensland Regional Plan as a priority neighbourhood with the intention to intensify the area as a TOD project. There are several precincts identified in the local plan within Albion, including the Albion Village precinct, the North, Commercial, Industrial, Hunt Street and Crosby Park precinct (Brisbane City Council 2000). Albion village, at the centre of the suburb, has a cluster of amenities and some, albeit rather dilapidated, character buildings. While the village is close to the railway station, access is impeded by major road corridors. Overall, the location is disposed to renewal and the Albion historic mill could act as a catalyst site in any regeneration process.

A viable Albion TOD must extend to the regeneration of the Albion village precinct to enable consolidation of the major infill development opportunities and connect the rail transit line with the parallel arterial roadway (BCC 2000). To date, Urban Renewal has focused its regeneration effort almost entirely on underutilised land abutting the Brisbane River which is no longer politically acceptable (Malberry and Lawson 2011). Searching for more peripheral intensification opportunities, the abandoned Albion Mill lot with its historic buildings has become the focus of infill. The Albion village and mill sites both have access to a major Queensland Rail transit line, regular bus services, and two major arterials, Sandgate and Albion road. A rejuvenated Mill could catalyse general renewal within the Albion suburb (Malberry and Lawson 2011).

While Albion has been targeted for redevelopment as a TOD, substantive regeneration will be required to realise this aspiration. Albion's close proximity to the city meets the 'Location' TOD principal quite easily (Queensland Government 2010a). In addition, train and bus transport offers a solid basis to partially fulfil the 'Transport' TOD principal (Queensland Government 2010), but much more needs to be done to facilitate the use of intermodal transport share and efficient intermodal connections within the neighbourhood. Every major rail line runs through Albion with on-peak trains running every four minutes and off-peak every nine minutes which is a huge opportunity (Miller 2011). Nevertheless, this paper takes the position that the Albion neighbourhood does not yet fulfil the 'Transport' principal due to a lack of provision for intermodal share and connection due to the hostile pedestrian and cycling infrastructure and the lack of connectivity within existing and limited public space. The 'Land-use', 'Design' and 'Social' TOD principal targets have not yet been demonstrated within the area (Queensland Government 2010a). Meeting these currently unfulfilled principals is no doubt something that can only be addressed through the renewal and intensification process of Albion neighbourhood.

At the regional level, the SEQ Regional Plan explicitly recognised Albion's potential for intensification. The Queensland Government (2009) South East Queensland regional plan is a key document that addresses scales beyond local areas with a wider vision, which sets out to direct 'smart growth' toward the compact development of brownfield urban sites. In the plan, Albion is identified as an area for residential, employment and high-end industrial growth in areas such as health, education and technology. Albion is considered a 'growth corridor', addressing its accessibility potential, to support residential, commercial, retail activities while also providing high-quality access to major transit routes (Queensland Government 2009).

At the urban scale and local suburb, Brisbane City Council's Urban Renewal team, has contributed to central regeneration in Brisbane since the early 90's (Malberry and Lawson 2011). Originally, Urban Renewal concentrated on industrial and derelict sites but today it has evolved with a focus on

public river access, residential housing and social planning, heavily informed through community consultations and local stakeholder engagement (Malberry and Lawson 2011). Catalyst Urban Renewal projects improve the public urban realm, such as through lighting and street scaping (Malberry and Lawson 2011).

Brisbane City Master Plan also identifies Albion as a key local area for redevelopment. The location is dotted with underdeveloped and derelict lots and the historical mill site, the quarry, the raceway facilities and the Queensland cricket facilities all present intensification potential (Malberry and Lawson 2011). The local plan for Albion aims to improve bus routes, pedestrian and cycling links along Sandgate Road, as well as to improve streetscapes and pedestrian connections through Albion Village precinct (Brisbane City Council 2000). There is no doubt when visiting the area that traffic volume and speed is intense and hostile towards pedestrians and cyclists, compounded with the fact that public space is minimal and pedestrian sidewalks are impassably narrow.

Albion lies close to the city along a major rail line and was, in former years, a major inner city industrial area. Although there are some abandoned industrial sites, the existing local plan envisages retaining Albion's existing industry which contributes to the local economy (Malberry and Lawson 2011). In addition to manufacturing, Albion has a mix of residential housing and commercial infrastructure (Malberry and Lawson 2011). Regrettably, decline in Albion is manifest in vacant lots and underused commercial space which diminishes its village character. This is an area that needs some action at the regional, state and local governance level to initiate its renewal and help to maximize its potential. There is agreement across all levels of government that the location is ripe for renewal. Recently, to attract investment, government capped infrastructure costs (Miller 2011).

Albion's main strength is its 5km proximity to the city centre of Brisbane. It straddles the main northern rail track and also bisects Sandgate Road. Proximity and infrastructure connect Albion to Fortitude Valley and Bowen Hills (Keen 2011). Unfortunately, one price paid for transport connections is consistently heavy traffic volumes. The train station is particularly busy at peak hours and these passengers generate high levels of east and west pedestrian foot traffic (Keen 2011). Crosby Park lies within the neighbourhood precinct and within short walking distance of both Brisbane River and Breakfast Creek. Empty lots in the neighbourhood suggest it has intensification development potential (Malberry and Lawson 2011). Among the vacant sites, The Mill presents particularly imposing views towards the Brisbane River, the city and Mt. Coonah (Malberry and Lawson 2011).

While some character buildings along Sandgate road have aesthetic character appeal, a lack of suitable off-road parking constrains its commercial advantages. Few commuters stop to make impulse or more routine purchases (Miller 2011). High traffic volume and industrial buildings diminish the recreation appeal of major arterial intersections (Keen 2011). Traffic creates an 'island effect', isolating the Albion Mill site from its hinterland. Currently, the hostile public realm and lack of pedestrian connectivity between the site and its surrounding urban fabric is a key challenge for the Mill (Keen 2011). It requires major enhancement to encourage street life.

In addition to poor connectivity, Albion lacks a distinctive place identity, compared to, for example, Kelvin Grove or Newstead. To attract shoppers, businesses and residents, Albion must reinvent itself (Miller 2011). Unlike knowledge precincts, traditional manufacturing activity generates unglamorous trade-related traffic. The Albion Queensland Rail (QR) station also detracts rather than enhances the site. The station is undercapitalised. It presents a utilitarian if not bleak prison-like façade with grill fencing and menacing spikes undermining any pedestrian inclination to dwell (Featherstone 1998). A successful TOD will require station beautification. Elegant and inspiring station design is essential to move from TOD rhetoric to authentic implementation (Keen 2011).

QR will need to reposition its culture from one where logistics dominates to a more balanced one with some consideration of its urban aesthetic and creative role. One step Council could take to signal to developers that it was serious about its commitment to progressive TOD planning would be to re-visit currently onerous car parking requirements (Miller 2011).

KEY CHALLENGES FOR URBAN SUSTAINABILITY

As the project has not been implemented yet, we can only evaluate the achievement of this TOD redevelopment based on the proposal and on the information of the process provided by the different stakeholders considered. We are using the criteria to evaluate community diversity in TOD precincts which appear as an adequate proxy to evaluate how the proposal is integrating sustainable regeneration principles.

Indicator	Criteria	Key challenges
Urban form and land use	Integration between new and existing communities	Connect the site back to the Albion Village but Sandgate Road is a major physical frontier
	Community safety	Reinforce ownership of street Redesign of public space around the Albion station
Housing diversity	Dwelling mix	Need to target buyers for this area
	Affordable housing	Residential component was aimed at luxury market No mechanisms for affordable housing provision within TODs in Qld. Need to define what is affordable housing for the site
Local economic development	Economic development strategy	Moving away from reliance on commercial use, towards higher order knowledge based uses.
	Retention of existing business	Retain Albion's Village commercial activities (restaurants) Retail and heritage a key focal point
Access and Movement	Transit modal change	Slow down and calm traffic (curb building outs) Increase pedestrian crossings Design incentives for a more comfortable pedestrian environment.

	Connectivity of network to local destination	Albion is considered as being well connected to PT network. Get a good bus network into the Station for people who are beyond walking distances
Public domain	Provision of recreational and leisure spaces and facilities	Reconfiguring Albion RD with a new plaza
	Provision for children, teenagers, elderly and other groups	Refer to challenge on defining buyers group for the area
Cultural development	Community and cultural development strategy	Risk of a top-down approach to redevelopment
	Community pride and association with space	Lack of identity of the current area
Other factors	Resident diversity	Likely to target higher-end market due to strategic localisation of site
	Accessibility for people with disabilities	Cultural shift needed in terms of station design quality to improve pedestrian access.

Challenges to Achieve Urban Sustainability for Albion Mill

Source: Authors

Table 2

In regard to urban form and land use, challenges for sustainable urban regeneration are mainly due to the nature of the site as an “isolated island” with major high level roadways within the neighbourhood (Miller 2011). Challenges are important for this component to achieve sustainable urban regeneration of the site. Possible injection of \$20 million by the State Government into the project with the revitalisation of the train station might solve some of the safety problems around the station (Miller 2011).

For the housing diversity component, there is a clear need to identify target buyers for the area before developing strategies to increase social diversity (Miller 2011). The initial focus of FKP’s proposal on the luxury end of the market clearly brings up the risk of gentrification associated with TOD redevelopment of strategic areas like Albion in Brisbane. Collaboration of an institution like the Brisbane Housing Company on TOD redevelopment proposals might be a way forward to address this component in the context of Queensland.

In regard to local economic development, the preservation of existing identity of the site linked to heritage building and the necessary attraction of new economic activities (not necessarily retail activities) is a challenge (see Table 2). In regard to access and movement, the main challenge locally is pedestrian environmental betterment within the precinct. Outside it, only the provision of adequate bus networks for households that are not within station walking catchment will reduce excessive reliance on motor vehicles for access.

CONCLUSION

Our reflexive analysis of the Albion TOD redevelopment project has implications beyond the State. It detects broad concerns around sustainable TOD design and execution for planners, developers and investors.

Based on our case study, key strategies to enhance sustainability of TOD redevelopment include:

- increase collaboration and financial support of Queensland Rail to redesign stations (enhanced quality of public space and pedestrian access);
- link TOD redevelopment strategy to better public transport network (e.g. bus network connecting with the station);
- propose mechanisms of affordable housing provision within TOD precincts (e.g. collaboration of Brisbane Housing Company Ltd) to alleviate risks of gentrification; and
- promote bottom-up redevelopment processes that are based on strong community engagement to enhance cultural development and community pride within TOD precincts.

While each TOD project and site will have its own specific challenges, the following questions are relevant for all property professionals considering TOD:

- are the TOD stakeholders strongly committed to the project, suggested by informal collaborative networks or formally written in the terms of a TOD joint venture agreement?;
- is the site level and without complications?;
- is the TOD location distinctive or, if not, then will sufficient funding be available to transform its aesthetic and pedestrian image?;
- will upgrades to train, bus and cycle connections logistically integrate the site into its region?;
- is there a mechanism to attenuate excessive speculation via taxation or mandated affordable housing quotas?; and
- is there a genuine dialogue with the local community?

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