



Sugarloaf CID Transit Enhancements | Gwinnett County, Georgia



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Regional Mobility Hubs: Multimodal Transit Connectivity Beyond Downtown

Population growth and demographic shifts to residential areas on the outskirts of a city or town across the U.S. over the past several decades have increased, but transportation access and options connecting residents to opportunity may be lagging. As regional areas and metropolitan communities continue to grow in population, diversify, and develop, local governments and transportation agencies are faced with a need to provide more options and better access to jobs, education, and healthcare.

Many residential communities adjacent to city centers, like the suburbs, lack convenient, safe, and modern transit infrastructure, amenities, and multimodal connectivity to serve transit riders both today and in the future as they begin, make and connect, or complete their trips. **Can regional and suburban public transit catch up with development patterns experienced during the last few decades?**

Public transportation providers, local governments, public, and private organizations all have an opportunity to rethink how transit can connect to residential areas beyond the city center. Flexible, integrated transportation solutions like regional mobility hubs, scaled to suburban needs, are part of the solution.

Mobility Hubs are More than Just Suburban Transfer Centers

Regional mobility hubs put people and their experiences first and elevate transit's profile in historically auto-oriented areas. Mobility hubs are sites of connectivity with a mix of local and regional multimodal transportation services, and increasingly offer technology-enabled amenities.

What do mobility hubs look like? They meet basic needs before going big: a place to sit and not get wet when it rains; a kiosk with clear, real-time information about bus routes and transit; accessible sidewalks and connectivity to nearby development; multi-use trail connections; and a safe place to cross the street when disembarking.

A successful example of this is in Atlanta, Georgia, where the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA), is developing three mobility hubs in suburban communities South DeKalb, Stonecrest Mall, and the Clayton County Justice Center. These mobility hubs are centralized places outside of MARTA's heavy rail stations where different travel options - walking, biking, bus, paratransit, and ridesharing - come together to make getting around easier, safer, and more efficient in metro Atlanta's suburban communities.



VHB worked with MARTA to evaluate and develop three mobility hubs in suburban communities: South DeKalb (left), Stonecrest Mall (right), and the Clayton County Justice Center.

Successful hubs consider the people and redevelopment potential of the community, bring together various modes of travel, and focus on improving safe connectivity. All have unique transit, land use, and economic development considerations. The hubs may host local and commuter bus service transfers and micromobility rentals now but should be flexible to expand with the needs of the community, such as [higher capacity passenger rail and bus rapid transit \(BRT\)](#) when needed.

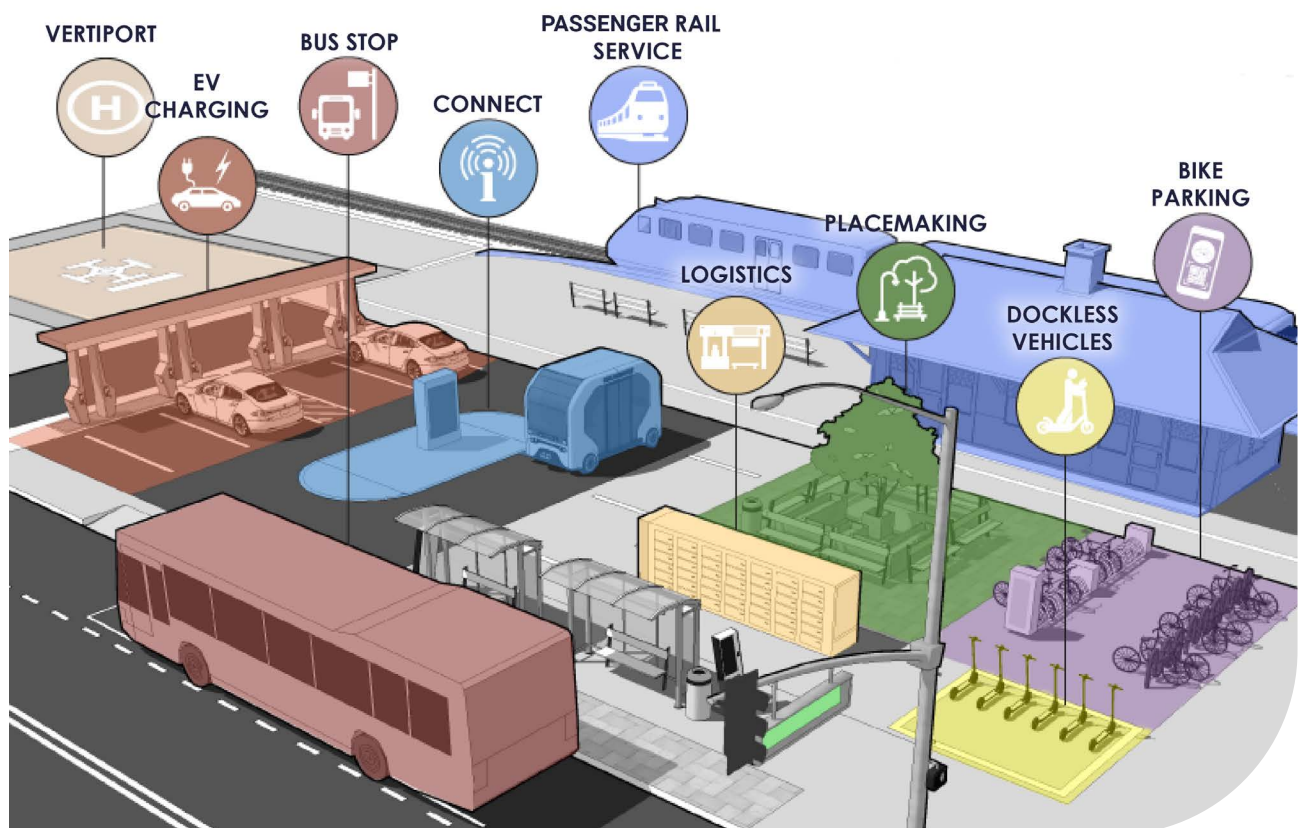
Through proactive planning, asset repositioning, and an equity focus, suburban communities can develop regional mobility hubs and transit enhancements that support community and regional connectivity to opportunity and create a more resilient transportation system that is better prepared for the future.

Proactive Planning & Funding Strategies

The impetus for transit service, mobility hubs and facilities, and supportive development improvements often begins with local and regional planning efforts that feed into and drive larger metropolitan and state transportation initiatives. In North Carolina, a future-focused and comprehensive transit investment initiative began when numerous communities along the future **S-Line Passenger Rail Corridor** submitted and won a U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) grant to study transit-oriented development (TOD). This study helped the communities along the corridor consider how they could create places and spaces to bring people, activities, and buildings together to elevate transit use. The communities understood the potential for future passenger rail service and chose to proactively plan and prepare their communities for this service.

Substantial growth in the Triangle region of North Carolina, which includes the capital city of Raleigh, has emphasized the need for mobility hubs to connect individuals from one town to another for access to employment opportunities, as seen in the Research Triangle Park's \$25M Mobility Hub Funding Award.

Planners can help agencies develop federal discretionary **grant strategies** and be prepared with a well-defined project scope to position projects for federal or state transportation funding that can maximize local investments. In projects like the North Carolina S-Line program, discretionary grant funding has been key to moving the program forward for the smaller communities.



The seeds for suburban mobility hubs are often planted when communities make future-focused investments like the S-Line Passenger Rail Corridor in North Carolina.

Especially for smaller communities, funding is a critical need. An influx of federal monies from the Infrastructure Investments & Jobs Act (IIJA) directed toward transportation in communities large and small across the U.S. has helped to bridge the gap between aging and outdated infrastructure and opportunity.

In one of Georgia's most diverse and growing areas, Gwinnett County advanced recommendations included in its long-range Transit Development Plan to transform, modernize, and future-proof the outdated Gwinnett Place Transit Center to integrate with transit-oriented redevelopment. They successfully secured a \$20 million Rebuilding American Infrastructure with Sustainability and Equity (RAISE) grant, with support from VHB, who also developed the concept for the center.

A data-informed approach to planning regional mobility hubs can position suburbs to move quickly when funding opportunities arise. Transit-oriented mobility hubs are often more successful when they stem from regional and local transit plans that are co-created with the community. An inclusive and meaningful stakeholder engagement process encourages buy-in and develops champions for moving them forward. Building partnerships between federal, state, and local agencies and organizations from planning through implementation will be key to achieving equitable mobility solutions, and finding the right balance of local, state, and federal funding. For suburban communities, the time to act—and dream big—is now.



In Norwalk, Connecticut, VHB helped community leaders receive [a 2024 RAISE grant](#) to fund complete streets improvement surrounding the South Norwalk Train Station. The MLK Corridor Equitable Mobility Enhancement Project is a multi-block area around the station phased for infrastructure improvements including a road diet and separate bike lanes to encourage multimodal transportation.

Asset Repositioning Makes Room to Rethink

Transit and multimodal solutions look different in the suburbs than they do in the denser, more developed urban cores of metropolitan areas. Residential communities on the outskirts of a city or town can solve some of their most pressing mobility challenges by bringing new life to aging assets alongside scaled multimodal improvements.

One idea for consideration is to examine aging, **empty shopping mall sites** as opportunities to better serve the current and future needs of the community as connection points to opportunity. Often, these mall sites were the impetus for surrounding development and are located in prime areas for additional growth and development.

Community input, market feasibility, and consideration of equitable transit options can guide a team approach to revitalization efforts. Market-driven and people-focused visions attract private investors that can coordinate with public investment. The idea of a mixed-use community centered around transit, or TOD, and mobility hubs can complement existing and future transit services and multimodal connectivity needs.



At the former Gwinnett Place Mall site, a reimagined mobility hub concept and strategy bring new life to an old shopping mall site through enhanced and appropriately scaled TOD.



In Georgia, as part of MARTA's Clayton County High-Capacity Transit Initiative, VHB is leading an effort to assist 10 suburban jurisdictions in moving toward transit-friendly land uses and development around future stations on two planned BRT corridors. The study includes a quantitative analysis of more than 5,000 parcels, looking at proximity to transit, land use, walkability and infrastructure, development/redevelopment potential, and previous plans.

Transportation Equity Helps Break Down Barriers

Successful transit is built on the Big 5 of transit supportiveness: density, mixed-use, walkability, people-friendly places, and managed parking. It is an approach focused on people, not cars. Planning for and redeveloping assets as regional mobility hubs is important, but not in lieu of a community's most urgent transit and mobility needs.

Lack of investment in transit upgrades at elemental levels is where inequity is most pronounced. Addressing this issue is the start to **revitalization** in areas that are beginning to see or have seen economic decline. Today's suburban and residential communities traditionally require a vehicle to access economic opportunity like jobs, education, and healthcare. This auto-oriented infrastructure creates a barrier to those who do not own a vehicle or cannot drive. In addition, people are becoming priced out of neighborhoods in urban cores where jobs and healthcare centers, sidewalks and bike lanes, frequent and convenient transit services, and more micro-mobility choices are offered. **It is imperative that communities rethink infrastructure to expand options and support mobility for all so that their most vulnerable and disadvantaged citizens can thrive.**

In vehicle dependent areas such as the suburbs, if bus stops do exist, there is frequently no seating or shelter from the weather, broken sidewalks that inexplicably end or are not connected, and limited nearby places to safely cross the street. These transit stops neither respect the riders using them nor encourage new ridership. At one of many bus stops within the Sugarloaf activity center in Georgia, VHB helped the Sugarloaf Community Improvement District (CID) and Gwinnett County integrate placemaking elements like art and design at bus shelters and crosswalks to elevate the aesthetics of transit and serve as a visual cue that this is a place for transit service and the people who use it.

Some suburban communities lack transit access entirely, therefore creating car-dependent communities with limited options. Mobility hubs are one solution that can be located and appropriately scaled at the nexus of existing and planned transit routes, incorporate multimodal infrastructure, and integrate with development to equitably enhance the rider experience, attract new riders, and serve bus drivers, as well, who need places of respite for layovers along routes.

HOW VHB CAN HELP

A regional transportation and development model calls for a more nuanced, flexible, and community-focused approach to generating multimodal mobility solutions that support thriving, resilient communities and equitable access to opportunity. VHB planners and designers brainstorm, analyze, plan, engage, revise, recommend, and prioritize future-focused solutions that unite communities around a common vision.

Connect with **Regan** today to begin planning for a more connected tomorrow.