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Changing Locations

How transit-rich destinations create more choice, freedom, and convenience in the post-pandemic city.

ABOUT A YEAR into the pandemic, I found myself often announcing during my virtual meetings that I was “changing locations.” I meant I was about to move from my home to the office or some other location to continue the business of the day. What made this statement significant is that it reflected the newfound ability to move freely and conveniently between locations as the tempo and pulse of my day unfolded. What made this possible was the benefit of living in Manhattan coupled with amazing digital technology.

Together these factors provided the choice and freedom to walk, bike, or take a one-seat transit ride between my home and office and not miss a beat. No longer was I either in the office or working from home. I was able to be anywhere and do anything at any time because I could change locations conveniently.



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People want choices. The last few years have shown we want greater control of space and time. We desire vibrant, one-of-a-kind places and experiences to choreograph our day.

The pandemic taught us that we can be *anywhere* as well as the importance of being *somewhere* with high-quality places to teach, collaborate, relax, and be inspired. Easy and convenient access to transit makes these places more desirable.

A recent *Wall Street Journal* poll shows that overwhelmingly the biggest reason people are reluctant to return to work is because of their “dreaded” commute. This dreaded journey almost always refers to getting to work by car, but it can also mean arduous, convoluted transit rides that require changes between modes.

Choice and convenience are the most precious commodities in mobility. They are also the most powerful drivers of development in cities. The “one-seat ride,” the compact and walkable “15-minute city,” and the expansion of bike services and various forms of micro-transit all make changing locations simpler and more convenient than a dreaded journey.

Vertically Integrated Mixed-Use Transit Design

The way to design for choice and convenience in cities is to increase the development in and around new or existing transit destinations. Vertically integrated, mixed-use transit design—or “VI”—is not only a spatial design idea, but also a way to creatively mix uses and programs so they are in proximity and complement one another.

Perhaps the greatest example of VI is Grand Central Terminal in New York City. Because of its rich transit program, people living in the city and the suburbs can easily reach Grand Central with its adjacent office, residential, hotel, and retail space with a single train or subway ride. Everything is designed to work together to create an iconic place.

Vertical integration is the most effective way to capitalize on investments in transportation infrastructure. Design excellence in urban architecture is achieved when the focus is on reimagining transportation infrastructure so that it becomes a part of the address and fabric of the city.

In the case of Grand Central Terminal, the Grand Hall, the passages, and Park Avenue transcend their infrastructural purpose to become a valuable address and a grand living room for the city. As cities continue to grow and evolve, an even greater opportunity arises for vertically integrated mixed-use transit design as the key to unlock real estate value and promote convenience and choice.

New VI projects, such as the Raleigh Union Station Bus development (RUS Bus), Charlotte Central on the site of the Charlotte Transportation Center (CTC) across from the Spectrum Center, and Civic Center Station in Denver (shown on the cover), emphasize convenience and choice with a rich mix of uses and high-quality public spaces that make them destinations in their own right.

These new city-making designs in North Carolina maximize the value of their transit assets so these cities will remain vital and attractive to the marketplace by providing safe, convenient access to the heart of the city. Just like Grand Central Terminal, these new developments will ensure that cities remain the preferred location because they provide the freedom, flexibility, and convenience to change locations.

When we are able to easily move about and access a variety of high-quality, purposefully designed spaces and experiences that suit our activities and emotions, we have the truest freedom, control, and quality of life. That’s why transit-rich destinations are key to the future design of the modern city. **UL**

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