

STAKEHOLDER PERSPECTIVES OF THE SOCIAL  
AND ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS AND  
TRANSIT-ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT. A CASE STUDY:  
TACOMA, WA

by

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## ABSTRACT

I explored the social and economic implications of the proposed Tacoma Link extension, which will be expanded to the Hilltop District, in Tacoma, Washington. Using semi-structured open-ended interviews with resident and community stakeholders, I found that the stakeholders' perceived benefits of the project include increased mobility in the district and connectivity to larger transportation systems in the Greater Puget Sound region. The stakeholders' perceived drawbacks of the project include the negative implications of increased property values, displacement of low-income residents, and gentrification. I then determined the mobility ideologies that the stakeholders publicly hold using a mobility ideology framework. Understanding the stakeholders' mobility ideology may provide insight to future transit-oriented development projects in the district and related decision-making. In conclusion, this research sheds light on stakeholder perception of transportation infrastructure in a historically diverse and low-income neighborhood and how mobility ideologies can be valuable indicators of stakeholder decision-making.

Keywords: Transit-oriented development, mobility ideology framework, transportation systems, gentrification, transportation studies

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## **Preface**

I chose to focus my Master of Environmental Studies thesis on the Hilltop district in Tacoma, Washington after interning at a transportation management association (TMA) in downtown Tacoma during the summer of 2015. During my internship, I learned about the local attitude toward transportation, mobility and of the upcoming development in the Hilltop district. This thesis draws on my experience working for a TMA and connections with various stakeholders throughout the city of Tacoma.

This thesis explores the social and economic implications of the Tacoma Link extension into the Hilltop district, along with identifying stakeholder mobility ideologies. Chapter 1 introduces the growth of transportation systems in North America, the need for diverse transportation in the Puget Sound region, and a brief introduction to the Hilltop district. Chapter 2 covers literature on light rail transportation, the social and environmental benefits of transportation systems similar to light rail, transit-oriented development and the implications of transit-oriented development. This chapter also highlights gaps in the literature for studies using a mobility ideology framework for transportation systems. Chapter 3 provides details on the methods used for conducting this research and includes sample interview questions that were asked to stakeholders. Chapter 4 provides an introduction to the case study, with information on the Tacoma Link expansion and demographic information on the Hilltop district. Chapter 5 shares the results and analysis of my research. This chapter shares excerpts of the interviews conducted and an analysis backed-up by relevant literature. This chapter also shares limitations to the research. Chapter 6 provides further research and policy recommendations to be explored and concludes the research findings.



## Chapter 1- Introduction

How we choose to commute to work, run errands, and engage with our community can be determined by the transportation infrastructure that exist in our communities. Whether we choose to walk, bike, take transit, or drive a vehicle may be influenced by personal choice or by the existing infrastructure itself. With the emergence of urban sprawl, families migrated from the city to the suburbs in the 1950s (Bernick 1997), single occupancy vehicles (SOVs) have become the dominant mode of transportation in the USA. One study conducted by the American Association of State Highways and Transportation Officials, over 120 million Americans rely on a private vehicle to commute to work (AASHTO 2010). This number does not include the number of Americans that use their car for errands or regional travel.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), they recommend that we must reduce our dependency on fossil fuels. Many argue we must reduce our dependency on CO<sub>2</sub> emitting vehicles and rely on other modes of transportation, such as public transportation, bicycling, and walking. Transportation accounts for 29% of the greenhouse gas (GHG) in the United States, with CO<sub>2</sub> accounting for 95% of the GHG emissions (FTA 2010). Transportation has become the fastest-growing source of GHG emissions, following electricity generation (GHGRP 2012).

Many transportation advocates claim that light rail transportation (LRT) can be the most efficient and optimal form of public transportation. LRT systems produce 60% less pounds CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger mile than SOV and 28% less than bus transit (FTA 2010). Newman (2013) claims that additional advantages to LRT include lower per-capita traffic

congestion costs, lower per-capita private passenger transportation energy use, and lower per capita emissions from the transportation sectors. Many cities in North America have installed LRT or are planning install a rail line in the near future (Newman 2013).

In the Pacific Northwest, several planned LRT installations are in development, along with several existing LRT lines. LRT could be a method to reduce regional air pollution caused by SOVs in the Puget Sound region of Washington State. According to the Department of Ecology, the population of the Puget Sound region has more than doubled since 1960, with over 4.4 million people calling this region home (Dept of Ecology 2016). The projections of growth in the Puget Sound region are significant. According to Washington's Office of Financial Management, they estimate that by 2020, 5.1 million people will live and work in the Puget Sound region. To continue to strive for a sustainable Puget Sound, there will be a need to have sustainable mobility options available for people living in the Puget Sound region. Overcoming dependence on SOV (Banister 2008) and having additional transportation options can assist with goal. Therefore, I chose to focus my research on a regional LRT installation in the city of Tacoma. Tacoma, a port city south of Seattle, Washington, plans to expand their current light rail/street car hybrid system, the Tacoma Link, within the next two years, ending the line in the Hilltop District (see Appendix 1.1). Sound Transit's goal for the Tacoma Link is to increase mobility and access for Tacoma residents, employees and visitors throughout the city's major activity center and destinations within the city. Transit-oriented development (TOD), compact mixed-use development that follows transportation development, has a similar goal. TOD strives to improve mobility and accessibility for residents living in its development (Dittmar 2004).

Mobility and accessibility have been significant discussions for the Hilltop district. Geographically, the Hilltop District is separated from the downtown core by a steep-grade hill. This hill has decreased the walking mobility between downtown and the Hilltop district. According to the City of Tacoma and Pierce Transit, there are several bus services that connect the Hilltop District and downtown. With the upcoming Tacoma Link expansion, the City of Tacoma's Subarea Plan for the Hilltop district, and a push for more housing and business development to fill many vacant properties, the Hilltop district could become an attractive place to reside, with a higher residential and employment density. LRT often motivates TOD implementation near a station or popular stops. TOD has the ability to alter a community's physical and social dynamics. With discussion of TOD following the LRT expansion, it is a critical time to identify how different parties are visualizing potential development opportunities.

This thesis asks, "*How do diverse stakeholders implicated in Tacoma's light rail expansion project weigh the relative benefits and drawbacks of the proposed project, in terms of affordability, community changes and mobility, and in terms of mobility ideologies?*" More specifically, who benefits from the increased mobility, and who does not? This thesis will also explore how progressive, neoliberal, and conservative mobility ideologies come into play throughout the discussions and debates involving TOD infrastructure. My research question addresses how stakeholders perceive TOD outcomes in the Hilltop District by examining information released by Sound Transit, the media, developers, and interviewing community members. It is critical to interview stakeholders before a LRT expansion for multiple reasons. For one, it is a way to identify how different parties are visualizing potential development opportunities following the light

rail installation. It is also a way to understand how the stakeholders value accessibility, multimodal transportation options, and equitable development. Interviewing stakeholders will also provide historical data on the project that could be used in a future study researching stakeholder perception. Much of the literature that focuses on the social implications of transportation systems does not research stakeholder perceptions before the infrastructure is installed.

In order to understand the various perspectives and attached mobility ideologies, I conducted open-ended interviews with diverse stakeholders in the Hilltop District. My research suggests common trends among stakeholder perceptions of the Tacoma Link extension in the Hilltop District. Overall, despite differences in age, education level, and residency in the Hilltop, stakeholders held similar perceptions of how the Tacoma Link extension will increase resident mobility throughout the Hilltop district. However, the stakeholders held varying perspectives on gentrification and economic development that are associated with the Link installation. There were also different perspectives on disconnect between the city of Tacoma and Sound Transit and resident needs. This research demonstrates the perceived social and economic implications of public transportation infrastructure which exist, despite the small sample size of stakeholders interviewed.

## Chapter 2 – Literature Review

### **Literature Synopsis**

Throughout this literature review, I discuss the theoretical framework of the literature relevant to my research question. I focus on mobility and accessibility throughout the literature review because of their relevance to TOD and urban planning literature, but also because they can provide additional understanding to topics that stakeholders brought up throughout the interview process. I then describe the political mobility ideologies attached to the term mobility and its influence over the implementation of TOD infrastructure. I also discuss how these mobility ideologies are intertwined in gentrification and displacement discourse, as I situate my analysis in the context of mobility ideologies defined by Henderson (2013). Next, I address the environmental and social benefits and constraints of LRT that are developed by supporters and the opposition. I then briefly discuss TOD, the policies and implementation of TOD, and the associated positive and negative implications that TOD can have on a community, such as increased market value of residential and commercial spaces, displacement of low-income residents, and gentrification. I discuss the limitations of current literature throughout this section.

### **Defining Accessibility and Mobility**

To understand the complexity of LRT and TOD, particularly with my case study in the Hilltop district, it is necessary to understand commonly used terms in urban planning and TOD. By defining these terms, their attached perspectives and ideologies become clear.

For this research, I cite Litman's (2003) definition of **accessibility** as the ability to reach desired goods, services, activities and destinations that are collectively called opportunities. Under this definition, accessibility is the ultimate goal of most modes of transportation. From the user's perspective, transportation users consist of people and businesses that want to reach a particular good, service, activity, or destination (Litman 2003). An underlying assumption of accessibility may be that not all people can be classified as a motorist, meaning there are different yet equal modes of transportation such as walking, cycling, or taking public transportation. This perspective also incorporates how land is currently used as an attempt to make connections among modes of transport with current land use conditions (Litman 2003), by using the current infrastructure that is already in place. For example, using the rail tracks of an existing commuter rail. Simply, accessibility is about the ability to reach a destination.

Litman (2003) defines **mobility** as the movement of people or goods. Mobility differs from accessibility in that it assumes transport users are mainly motorists, but recognizes that people rely on other modes of transport like cycling, rideshares, and transit (Litman 2011). Bluntly, mobility pertains to the movement of people. The term mobility is ingrained with meaning and power. Transportation studies have traditionally attempted to remove mobility from ideology, however, mobility has become politicized (Simpson 2009, Henderson 2013), because mobility is often based on morals and ideologies (Cresswell 2006). Mobility can also be an issue for local political struggles, as it can draw on the interests of diverse individual identities, such as gender, income, and neighborhood residence (Law 1999). Henderson (2013) argues that "how we get around" is an expression of underlying ideological tones, discussed in the "new mobilities"

paradigm (Harvey 2008). The “new mobilities” paradigm compels one to understand the wider ideological assumptions about mobility to determine why decisions involving mobility are made (Harvey 2008, Henderson 2013). The politics of mobility demonstrates why space is configured and organized to encourage movement, ultimately determined by political power (Henderson 2009). Henderson has identified three ideologies of mobility - progressive, neoliberal, and conservative (Henderson 2013).

These ideologies are reflected in sustainable transportation during the planning, design, and execution process. For example, the progressive mobility ideology believes that urban planning should create social equity (Henderson 2013). Progressives are concerned about improving mobility for the working and minority class, to alleviate poverty and end racial injustice (Henderson 2013). However, progressives believe that improving mobility does not always mean *increasing* mobility, but to increase opportunities (such as employment and affordable housing) closer to the populations that are in need of them (Henderson 2013).

An example of this would be to develop affordable housing closer to popular transit lines or near a widely connected light rail station and safe bicycle infrastructure along with providing new employment opportunities to the residents living in that particular neighborhood. This should not be confused with a community development mobility strategy, which attempts to help city residents commute to jobs outside the city, instead of bringing jobs closer to the city (Hughes 1991). The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy’s TOD Standard certification procedures takes the progressive mobility into consideration, requiring that lower income groups have shorter commutes to

transportation in TOD mixed use development. This could mean incorporating affordable housing intermingled with other types of housing and commercial establishments.

In contrast, the neoliberal ideology is the commodification of mobility (Henderson 2013). Neoliberals shape new mobility investments as investments throughout cities, the underlying logic of smart growth (Henderson 2013 & Ewing et. al 2008). Smart growth is an urban planning and transportation concept that concentrates compact walkable urban centers to avoid suburban sprawl (Boeing et. al 2014), however there is scrutiny that smart growth favors for-profit real estate and the use of market-based pricing of roads and parking (Henderson 2013). Progressives also criticize the neoliberal perspective as it separates transportation infrastructure as “premium” and “basic”, where the wealthy can purchase more efficient mobility (i.e. toll highways, private buses, commuter rails), whereas others may not be able to afford such types of access (Henderson 2013). For example, the Tacoma Link extension serves to increase mobility to connect different people to areas with high opportunity, like the downtown core of the city. Depending on the price to ride the Link after the extension, it may be too costly to the people who may benefit from the opportunities in the downtown core.

Lastly, the conservative mobility ideology emphasizes personal responsibility over social responsibility, with the individual being responsible for their own actions (Henderson 2013). Conservatives believe that the government should accommodate motor vehicles, and keep fuel prices low to preserve the freedom associated with owning and driving a car (Henderson 2013). Car ownership is considered a way of life for many, resulting in a robust car culture in the United States (Urry 2008). An example of conservative mobility infrastructure would be a built environment for cars and an



increase in free parking options, like multiple story parking garages (Henderson 2013).

Conservatives may also lobby for streetside parking to remain intact, specifically if a large transportation system, like a light rail, will take away that parking option.

Conservatives favor the promises of automobility. Hagman (2006) writes the promises of automobility as the belief that cars provide instant gratification through speed and the freedom to go wherever and whenever one wants in their own personal vehicle.

Conservatives are likely to favor this idea of the convenience that a SOV can offer.

Mobility ideologies are important to understand when discussing transportation infrastructure plans and policy, as they have the ability to shape the type of transportation infrastructure and TOD implemented. While different environments promote different forms of mobility, the type of mobility is likely to be determined by decision-makers willpower (Henderson 2009). A decision-maker may be accepting of a type of infrastructure due to their ideology, but other existing variables such as cultural, social, and political practices and institutions in place may sway their verdict (Henderson 2013). Public transportation systems and TOD success may depend on the ideological perspectives of the decision-makers and the public's support of the proposed development.

It could be argued that North America has begun to shift from a conservative mobility ideology to a neo-liberalist, and even a progressive mobility ideology in some cities due to a shift in accessibility planning (Cervero 1996). Accessibility planning focuses on people and places, and relies on land use change and pedestrian-oriented designs (Cervero 1996). While much of the United States is still heavily car-dependent (Newman 2013), many cities are implementing enticing transportation infrastructure

draws from the core values of accessibility planning. For example, Portland, Oregon has exemplified how powerful attractive public transportation can be, evolving a former car dependent city that is now accessible through light rail, streetcar, and bus systems, along with TOD that boosts bicycle friendly and walkable streets (Newman 2013). However, it is critical to examine how transportation infrastructure and TOD are transforming a neighborhood's cultural identity and how that will impact long-term residents.

As of the publication of this thesis, there are minimal studies that apply political mobility ideologies to a case study. Henderson (2009) applies it to a parking debate in San Francisco, identifying the progressive, neoliberal and conservative players in the debate. In his research, Henderson (2009) explores the relationship between ideology and parking. Henderson (2013) clearly defines progressive, neo-liberal, and conservative ideologies, establishing an informal framework. My research provides an opportunity to apply Henderson's mobility ideology framework on a new case study.

### **LRT: The Social and Environmental Benefits and Constraints**

Transportation activists tout the social and environmental benefits that transportation systems can provide to an urban environment. Despite the benefits that exist, such as healthier citizens and reduced air pollution, these benefits can create social and economic implications for residents who have traditionally lived in cities. The three mobility ideologies are held by stakeholders engulfed throughout this discussion and debate. Henderson (2009) argues that the politics of mobility is part of systemic global struggle over a more socially just and ecologically sustainable urban future. Throughout

this section, I will discuss the social and environmental benefits of LRT, along with the constraints that are often debated in mobility and transportation studies literature.

In the context of social benefits, studies show that public transportation systems, including light rail, lead to an increase in walking and cycling, and decrease commute-related stress (Edwards 2008 & Legrain 2015). By utilizing modes of alternative transportation such as walking, biking, or taking transit, stress associated with SOV commutes can be decreased significantly, as driving was found to be the most stressful forms of commuting (Legrain 2015). However, if transit is to be less stressful, there must be adequate frequency, reliability and access for public transportation users (Legrain 2015).

Public transportation can also assist with the maintenance of a healthy lifestyle. MacDonald (2010) found that the use of LRT to commute to work was associated with a reduction of body mass index (BMI) and reduced the odds of becoming obese by 81%. Edwards (2008) found that taking public transit will increase a person's time walking an additional average 8.3 minutes a day, encouraging a more active lifestyle. This study also found that if bicycle access leads to public transportation (i.e. bicycle lanes or paths), people may be more willing to ride three to five miles to take transit (Edwards 2008). However, another study found that people will use light rail if the surrounding community is walkable (Werner 2009). For a community to reap the health benefits associated with taking LRT, it needs to be accessible by foot and bike. This can be an incentive for urban planners to design LRT systems that are accessible through multimodal transportation and built near existing infrastructure and housing. Even more

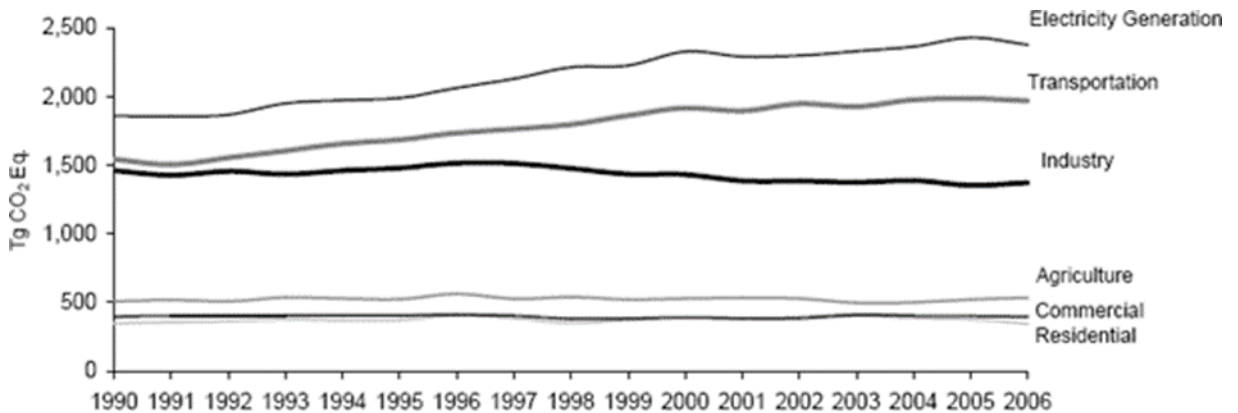
so, it is valuable to have transportation systems that are easily connected to larger transportation infrastructure, such as a commuter rail or a bus station.

LTR has a greater appeal to the public than other public transportation systems in place, like bus systems. Scherer (2012) found that surveyed public in Germany preferred to take light rail over using local bus systems, in a belief that light rail is a more efficient and timely transportation option than riding the bus. In fact, in a study conducted by Carr (2008) in Columbus, Ohio, more than 38 percent of the participants said they were “much more likely” to switch to riding public transportation if there were to be an implementation of LRT in their city. The perceived benefits of light rail and its public popularity may encourage policy-makers and developers to implement light rail over increasing the number of bus lines.

In context of environmental benefits, transportation accounts for 29% of the greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, with CO<sub>2</sub> accounting for 95% of the greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions (FTA 2010). Transportation has become the fastest-growing source of GHG emissions, following electricity generation, which is demonstrated in figure 1 (GHGRP 2012). Chapman (2007) argues that sustainable land use planning, such as planning for transportation systems and adapting cities to become more accessible by foot and bike can reduce carbon emissions related to transportation. However, Hensher (2008) agrees that public transportation can reduce carbon emissions, but his research shows that it will only reduce emissions by 5%.

LRT systems produce 60% less pounds CO<sub>2</sub> per passenger mile than SOV and 28% less than bus transit (FTA 2010). Newman (2013) claims that additional advantages

to rail systems include lower per-capita traffic congestion costs, lower per-capita private passenger transportation energy use, and lower per capita emissions from the transportation sector. However, critical factors to public transportation’s emission saving goals are the number of riders per vehicle. For example, the more passengers that are riding LRT at a time, the lower the emissions will be per passenger mile (FTA 2010). Regardless of the type of public transportation system implemented, campaigns to increase ridership may be necessary for the infrastructure to be worth the implementation. “Ride the Bus” and “Bike to Work” campaigns are often utilized to encourage a change in commuting habits. There are several other types of social marketing campaigns implemented world-wide to encourage commuter behavior change, typically boasting incentives like discounted fares for first time riders.



Following electricity generation, transportation has been the fastest growing source of CO2 emissions in the United States (1990-2006). Source: Greenhouse gas reporting program 2012 (<http://www.epa.gov/ghgreporting>)

However, there is little throughout the literature on how LRT can regionally reduce air pollution produced by SOVs. Therefore, while it is important to point out the environmental benefits that LRT and other sustainable transportation systems proclaim to have comparatively to SOVs, such as the decrease in overall fossil fuel use and decrease

in land use, there still needs to be additional research with how LRT systems can impact regional air quality.

The FTA and some urban planners have found that public transportation can encourage TOD. By encouraging in-fill (the rededication of land) in urban areas, TOD can reduce pressures to convert environmentally sensitive areas (like wetlands) into residential and commercial development and reduce urban sprawl (FTA 2010).

### **What is Transit-Oriented Development?**

The FTA defines transit-oriented development (TOD) as compact, mixed use development near transit stations (FTA 2010). The Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) defines TOD as compact, higher density, mixed-use, walkable development that is centered within a half mile of a transit station. ITDP includes residential, commercial, retail and recreational space into their definition as development. The ITDP have developed a list of principles for urban development and transportation. The principles are:

1. Develop neighborhoods that promote walking.
2. Prioritize non-motorized transport networks.
3. Create dense networks of street and paths.
4. Locate development near high-quality transport.
5. Plan for mixed use.
6. Optimize for density and transit capacity.
7. Create regions with short commutes.
8. Increase mobility by regulating parking and road use.

Rail systems, like LRT, can increase the value of nearby land (Dittmar 2004). Transit agencies and the federal government see large-scale real estate development on property owned by transit agencies as a way to capture some of the value (Dittmar 2004). Dittmar (2004) found that there are several benefits to TOD, such as transit ridership growth, increased investment in transit, smart growth movements, and the public's ability to recognize the advantages to linking development and transit (Dittmar 2004). Scholars credit Portland, OR, San Diego, CA, and Washington D.C. to be successful TOD case studies (Dittmar 2004 and Newman 2013).

It could be argued that stakeholders with a progressive or neoliberal mobility ideology would be partial to ITDP's TOD principles. However, there is criticism that TOD may not be adequately addressing social equity. Several studies indicate that housing proximity to LRT systems lead to a higher market value, ranging from 6 to 45% (Cervero and Duncan, Zuk 2015). This has led gentrification scholars to question if the benefits of TOD are worth the potential displacement and a transitioning neighborhood identity. This criticism is a central principle in the progressive mobility ideology. Progressives believe that transportation systems shouldn't increase poverty, but rather relieve difficulties associated with poverty and generate opportunity for all residents. On the contrary, neoliberals believe TOD can be an opportunity to increase the market value of housing and parking.

### **Costs of TOD**

I have defined costs as negative impacts. Despite the FTA's New Starts Program, a federal program that rewards TOD projects that are close to existing and future affordable housing, Zuk (2015) found that affordable TODs are experiencing more rapid

gentrification than other neighborhoods. Zuk (2015) ultimately found that transit-rich neighborhoods are more likely to experience demographic shifts signaling gentrification pressures. Additional scholarship supports this claim. Moore (2015) found that a large-scale TOD condominium illustrated how mass transit can change the social dynamics within a neighborhood, often creating fragmented communities. Many of Moore's interview subjects felt disconnected with their neighborhood after the condominiums had been built (Moore 2015). Rayle (2015) supports this response, and has found that other forms of displacement exist other than physical, such as social and psychological, and can have similarly severe implications as physical displacement. For example, social and psychological displacement could manifest by witnessing a change in the neighborhood dynamics, like a shift in the neighborhood's identity or culture. Social and psychological displacement could occur by being unfamiliar or unwelcome by new neighbors moving into the neighborhood.

However, at the time of this publication, I could not find literature that interviewed stakeholders regarding their perspectives on the benefit of light rail and their perspective of TOD before a major transportation system was built. This is a significant gap in the literature, as capturing the stakeholder perspectives pre-installation of a LRT system can be useful measurement of the degree of change in perspective that occurred after the Link is installed.

### **Impacts of Gentrification**

Gentrification is a significant cost of TOD. As Howard (2002) defines the term, "gentrification is the process by which high income households displace low income



residents from a neighborhood, changing the essential character and flavor of that neighborhood.” Simply, gentrification has the capacity to shift a neighborhood’s demographic due to various social changes, including LRT development (Howard 2002). Gentrification scholars should not ignore mobility as a potential factor in gentrification, as “mobility is a potent issue for local political struggles, drawing on the interest of individuals and variously identified by class, gender, disability, age and neighborhood residence” (Law, p. 574-575 1999).

Some gentrification supporters argue that gentrification can increase vitality in a neighborhood, providing more economic opportunity than what had previously existed (Howard 2002). Many supporters also argue that crime rates lower in conjunction with gentrification, creating a safer community (Smith and Williams 1986, Moore 2015). While some benefit from the repercussions, if affordable housing is not increased in a changing neighborhood, many low-income residents may be faced with increased rent or a reduction in affordable neighborhood amenities, such as affordable parking, shopping, or transportation (Howard 2002).

Kennedy and Leonard (2001) have a list of gentrification indicators: higher rental rates, uncomplicated transportation centers (highways, light rail, etc.), metropolitan areas constrained by growth, increasing levels of congestion, neighborhoods that have high level or architectural value with comparably low house values. Every community is unique, so gentrification indicators may be different. If a community fears they may be subjected to gentrification, the best time to begin addressing displacement is at the beginning of revitalization attempts (Rose 2002). During the prevention stage, community stakeholders should assemble a housing affordability plan, set aside funds for

emergency rent relief, and remove discriminatory barriers from renters (Rose 2002). However, a neighborhood needs to have actively engaged residents and politically involved stakeholders that support their interests to make that possible.

Another method of reducing the effects of gentrification is following a community benefits agreement model. A community benefits agreement (CBA) is a contract for community groups and developers as a way to provide specific amenities or mitigations to a local neighborhood or community. It is a private agreement between a community coalition and developer(s). It differs from other agreements as it is between a developer and multiple community groups with plural interests (Baxamusa 2008). Gross (2007) argues that a CBA must be inclusive and accountable for the integrity of a CBA to be meaningful and have impact. There are several key elements to a CBA that make it a unique agreement. The CBA must focus on a single development project, be legally enforceable, address a range of community interests, and is the product of community involvement (Gross 2007). The community benefits movement first began in Los Angeles, after a successful application of mixed-use development in the late 1990s. Since then, CBAs have been implemented throughout the country for sensitive projects and developments that could lead to gentrification and displacement of residents and small businesses.

However, for a CBA to work, it must be taken seriously by all players. Gross (2007) found that project proponents, like developers, may use a CBA as a way to fill a political space in a community-driven CBA, as a way to ease the project approval and marginalize the opposition. Community groups need leadership development and training throughout CBA, along with advisors to assist with the creation of a contract. There also

is significant work slated after a CBA is complete, like monitoring the project as it is being developed Gross (2007).

## Chapter 3 – Methods

I used oral qualitative methods and public observation to answer my research question. Oral methods are a way for subjects to speak in their own voice and a way for a researcher to understand individual meanings and experiences to answer a research question about societal structures (Hay 2010). I asked open-ended interview questions supplemented by literature produced by Sound Transit, the city of Tacoma, and peer-reviewed literature to identify stakeholder perspectives on mobility and TOD, in the context of the upcoming Tacoma Link expansion. Using qualitative methods through interviewing stakeholders before a large-scale transportation system expansion is a critical time to identify how different parties are visualizing potential development opportunities associated with the light rail installation, but also as a mechanism to understand how stakeholders' at large place values on accessibility, multimodal transportation options, and equitable development.

This study has several research objectives. First, I needed to identify what Hilltop district stakeholders know about the Link expansion. Second, to understand if certain stakeholders have differing values and ideological perspectives placed on mobility. Referring to chapter 2, Henderson (2013) proposed three proposed mobility ideological perspectives that a person, agency, or organization could hold: progressive, neo-liberal, or conservative. One of the questions I address in the research is how do different stakeholders differ in mobility ideology to another? Third, to determine a connection between certain stakeholders and perceived outcome of the Hilltop District after the expansion.

I used interviews and participant observation at a public meeting to collect my

qualitative data. I conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions and observed one public meeting on a building proposal of a new apartment complex. This apartment complex, considered a TOD project by developers, is slated to be built parallel to the Link extension in the Hilltop district. I initially chose my interview subjects by reaching out to professional colleagues located in downtown and the Hilltop district of Tacoma, Washington that are either involved in the Tacoma Link planning process or have an interest in the expansion. These colleagues include residents of the district and working professionals. From those initial contacts, I used the snowball sampling technique to find additional interview subjects. Snowball sampling is a qualitative methods technique where an interview subject will recommend another interview subject that may have relevant information to share in an interview. From the list of recommendations I received, I reached out to as many contacts I could. Contacts that responded to my request and wanted to be interviewed were then interviewed, unless there was a scheduling or logistic barrier. I also received several interview subjects from my e-mail being passed around throughout the community. Some of my interview subjects reached out to me to be interviewed; however I did not interview all of those who reached out to me due to time and miscommunication (unresponsive e-mails and/or phone calls). I responded to the stakeholders who contacted me first. For this research, I define a stakeholder as someone that has an interest in the Tacoma Link expansion to the Hilltop district. Stakeholders include Hilltop district residents (renters and homeowners), business owners, Sound Transit representatives, and representatives of Downtown On the Go, City of Tacoma's Healthy Homes, Healthy Neighborhoods initiative, Tacoma Housing Authority, Hilltop Business Association and Hilltop Action Coalition.

The interviews were about thirty minutes to an hour in length. Most of the interviews were conducted in the Hilltop or Downtown district of Tacoma, WA. The exact interview location was usually left to the interview subject. Interview locations ranged from office buildings, coffee shops, and private residences. One interview was held over the phone due to scheduling constraints for meeting in-person. All of the interviews were recorded, with the permission of the interview subject.

Every interview subject signed an informed consent form, which is required by The Evergreen State College for research concerning human behavior and opinion. The Institutional Review Board approved my human subjects research application on January 13, 2016. Each interview subject was informed of my intent of the research and the promised confidentiality. I also offered each interview subject to receive a list of questions in advanced before agreeing to participate. Interview subjects were also informed through the Human Subject Review's informed consent form that they could choose to skip any question without penalty.

My original data consists of interviews with **ten** stakeholders. I held semi-structured interviews. My questions were:

1. Please discuss your involvement or role in the Hilltop District.
2. What is your current knowledge of the Sound Transit Tacoma Link expansion to the Hilltop District?
3. How have you been involved in the Sound Transit Tacoma Link expansion planning process? If yes, how have you been involved?
4. What benefits do you perceive of the Link expanding to the Hilltop District for residents that live in this neighborhood?
5. What drawbacks do you perceive of the Link expanding to the Hilltop District for residents?
6. Do you believe that the Link expansion and transit-oriented development will attract new residents to the Hilltop District?
7. Do you believe property values may impacted in the Hilltop District after the Link expansion?

8. Do you believe that there is a concern that residents may become displaced due to transit-oriented development, such as new housing and commercial development located near the expanded Link?

9. What is your opinion of possible gentrification occurring in the Hilltop District?

At the end of the interview, I asked for the stakeholder's concluding thoughts, concerns, or questions about the extension to the Hilltop. I also loosely collected demographic data from my stakeholders. The demographic questions included:

1. Are you a resident of the Hilltop District?

- a. Yes
- b. No

2. How long have you lived in the Hilltop District?

- a. Less than 1 year
- b. 1 -5 years
- c. 6 – 10 years
- d. 10 – 20 years
- e. 20 + years

3. What is your age?

- a. 18 – 24
- b. 25 – 36
- c. 37 – 50
- d. 50 – 70
- e. 70<

4. What is your highest level of education completed?

- a. Some high school
- b. High school degree
- c. Associate's degree
- d. Bachelor's degree
- e. Graduate or professional degree
- f.. Doctorate degree

After transcribing my interviews into written data, I coded my data for recurring themes and topics. For the transcription process, I used the software, transcribe.me. I used

Microsoft Office, specifically Microsoft Word and Microsoft Excel to assist with the coding process. The themes and keywords I coded for were revitalization (or associated terms), gentrification (or associated terms), mobility ideologies (conservative, neo-liberal, and progressive), increase access or mobility, benefits of increased property values to homeowners, loss of community, Tacoma's need for economic development, race and class divide, Hilltop's historic past and disconnect between residents and city officials. I came up with the initial codes from the literature review, specifically the mobility ideologies, and inductively from my collected interview data.



## Chapter 4 – Introduction to Case Study

The city of Tacoma, a port city south of Seattle, Washington, plans to expand their current light rail/streetcar hybrid system, the Sound Transit Tacoma Link by 2022, ending the line in the Hilltop District (see Appendix 1.1). Sound Transit plans to extend the Tacoma Link rail line 2.4 miles through downtown Tacoma. The expansion would begin in the Theater district, and then extend to the Stadium district and Hilltop District. Sound Transit's (2015) goal for this project is to improve mobility and access for Tacoma residents, employees and visitors throughout the city's major activity center and destinations within the city. After receiving the necessary funding, the expansion will begin construction late 2017 or early 2018 (Sound Transit 2015). As of publication, Sound Transit has published an environmental evaluation report, has conducted door-to-door outreach and focus groups, and is receiving feedback on platform designs.

According to the City of Tacoma (2014), the Hilltop District is a historically diverse neighborhood. The district has a population of 12,002. 41% of the residents are White, 30% are Black or African-American, 12% Asian, Hispanic or Latino 7%, 3% Native American, and 1% Pacific Islander. 32% of the population is below the poverty line (Census Data 2010-2014). With the rise of the automobile in the late fifties and early sixties, suburbs began to emerge outside the city limit and Hilltop businesses began to decline. Lack of investment in the district led to deteriorating properties and increasing crime in the 1980's. Currently, the City of Tacoma (2014) states that several organizations work in the Hilltop district to provide services for families in need and work on community improvement projects. For example, the Healthy Homes, Healthy

Neighborhoods initiative connects Hilltop residents to local resources that can help them make their homes and community healthier and sustainable, reducing everyday household costs (City of Tacoma 2015).

Mobility and access have become important discussions for the Hilltop district. Geographically, the Hilltop District is separated from the downtown core by a steep-grade hill. This hill has decreased the walking and biking mobility between downtown and the Hilltop district. According to the City of Tacoma and Pierce Transit, there are several bus services that connect the Hilltop district and downtown. With the upcoming Tacoma Link expansion, the City of Tacoma's new Subarea Plan, and a push for more housing and business development to fill many vacant properties throughout the district, the Hilltop district could become an attractive place to reside, with a higher residential and employment density.

I interviewed ten stakeholders. Four were residents of the Hilltop and six were involved in the Hilltop district. Of the residents, all had lived in the Hilltop district under ten years. The other six stakeholders either work in the Hilltop district, have work that brings them to the Hilltop, or are involved in advocacy or volunteer work in the district. In terms of age, the majority of the stakeholders fit in the 25 -36 age range (n=4), while the second highest age category was 50 – 70 age range (n=3). All the stakeholders had completed higher education degrees, from an associates to a graduate level coursework. Half of the interviewed stakeholders hold a bachelor's degree (n=5).

The following section is organized along four main thematic categories: Increased mobility, changes in the community, gentrification, and policy and politics. Within each

category, I highlight key themes that emerged from the interviews. TOD was a popular talking point amongst the stakeholders, resulting in conversations about property value increasing in the district, displacement of low-income residents, and gentrification.

First, I asked what type of involvement or interest each stakeholder has in the Hilltop district. Almost every stakeholder said they are involved in the Hilltop district or have an interest in the Hilltop district, in the respect that they live there, have friends that live in the district, work in the district, or their work takes them to the district occasionally or often. Only one person claimed to have no involvement in the Hilltop district, other than their involvement with the Tacoma Link expansion to the Hilltop district.

Next, I asked stakeholders to describe their current knowledge of the Link expansion. Not all stakeholders were asked this question because some of the stakeholders had a clear connection to the project (e.g. they are working directly with Sound Transit on the project). However, interview subjects who were asked about their involvement seemed highly aware of the Link expansion to the Hilltop. There is some discrepancy on the timeline of the rail's completion (some said 2018, 2020, and one stakeholder doubting the rail's completion). Most of the individuals interviewed appeared to be generally aware of the project occurring in the district. All of the stakeholders have heard about the expansion.

I wanted to identify if and how the stakeholders were involved in the planning process. Most of the interview subjects have had some participation in the planning process (n=8). Some were directly involved in the planning and decision-making process,

holding positions on advisory boards or committee membership. Others had filled out online surveys, talked with a canvasser or participated in neighborhood or city council meetings where community feedback was solicited.

## Chapter 5 – Results and Discussion

In this chapter, I discuss common trends observed in stakeholder perceptions of the Tacoma Link extension in the Hilltop District. Overall, despite differences in age, education level, and residency in the Hilltop, stakeholders had similar perceptions as to how the Link will increase mobility throughout the Hilltop district. However, the stakeholders held varying perspectives on gentrification, economic development spurred by the Link installation, and disconnect between the city of Tacoma, Sound Transit, and residents. This research demonstrates the perceived social and economic implications of public transportation infrastructure exist among stakeholders. I discuss themes and patterns that emerged from the open-ended interviews, which I situate the discussion within the mobility ideologies framework offered by Henderson (2013). Lastly, I share the limitations of this research.

### **Perceived Benefits of Link Expansion**

I asked stakeholders to share their perceived benefits of the Tacoma Link expansion. Six out of ten people mentioned how it will change mobility patterns for Hilltop residents, specifically commutes to downtown and the greater Puget Sound region. Many stakeholders brought up the geographical barrier that makes it difficult for some to access the Hilltop district by foot or bike from the downtown core. The barrier is a steep grade that goes for several blocks, a difficult walk or bike commute from downtown to the Hilltop district. Several stakeholders mentioned that the Tacoma Link will be an alternative way to access the Hilltop.

*“Well, it would be a nice way to get up the hill! You know, [coming] from downtown, it is always a kind of a hassle. It is kind of a barrier to people going downtown.”*

*-Non-resident, Age 50 - 70*

*“I’ve talked to a lot of commuters who say that they would love to walk or bike to work, but they don’t want to do the hill. So we feel like the Link takes the hill out of the equation. So if you live on the Hilltop and you can just walk six or eight blocks home, it changes your commute entirely.”*

*-Non-resident, Age 26 - 35*

Others mentioned it will provide connectivity to the larger Puget Sound transportation system. Many believed the Tacoma Link would provide an additional connection for residents seeking to travel elsewhere, such as to SeaTac International Airport or to greater Seattle by bus or the Sounder (a commuter train). For non-residents, they did not mention if residents or non-residents would utilize the larger system.

*“Those on the Hilltop will be able to connect to the Tacoma Dome Station, and from there you can take the Sounder, you know, to Seattle....So, that will allow people to take the mid-day train up to Seattle and not have to worry about traffic. Parking downtown [Seattle] is about \$20 bucks a day. You know, what is it gonna be in a few years? So really, if you look at how we are connecting the Hilltop community with other transit to me, to me that is the benefit.”*

*-Non-resident, Age 36 - 50*

For residents, many expressed that they would take advantage of the larger system once they had access to it by the Link.

*“The thing I’m most excited about is when it is connected to the bigger system. And I can walk out my door and go to the airport or go to Seattle.”*

*-Resident, Age 25 - 36*

Increased mobility was the strongest theme present in response to this question. By providing new mobility choices (such as new and/or additional transportation options) can encourage new behaviors and entice new riders. While it is may be premature to tell, the Tacoma Link may encourage multi-modal transportation connections to the greater Seattle area, based off other transportation integration studies (Sharaby and Shiftan 2012). Other themes did arise in reply to this question, like changes in the community. Other perceived benefits listed were an increase of economic development in the business district, an increase in property values, and a revitalized neighborhood. These themes come up frequently throughout the rest of the interviews and are discussed in greater detail throughout this section. Unearthing the stakeholders' perceived benefits provides insight as to what the stakeholders believe they will gain from the Tacoma Link expansion. It provides some understanding as to what the stakeholders' value and one method of determining their potential mobility ideology.

### **Perceived Drawbacks of the Tacoma Link Expansion**

Changes in community and gentrification were prominent categories that stakeholders elaborated on when they were asked about the perceived drawbacks of the Tacoma Link expansion. Eight of the ten stakeholders were able to list perceived drawbacks. One stakeholder did not list any drawbacks, and one stakeholder was concerned that Sound Transit's outreach was not far-reaching. The stakeholders that did express perceived drawbacks mentioned increased property values (specifically impacting low-income residents and small business owners), reduced parking in the Hilltop district, construction from the Link expansion, and gentrification as drawbacks to the Link expansion.

*“I’m not a long time resident of Hilltop yet, but I think a drawback [is] that [there will be a] direct increase in property value or speculative increase in property value”*

*-Resident, age 25 - 36*

One stakeholder made the connection that if property values go up, there could be displacement of low-income residents in the neighborhood as well. This is an indicator of gentrification occurring in a community (Kennedy and Leonard 2001) if this occurs.

*“...And I also see that as property values go up, so will rent. And as rents go up, that’s going to push out um a number of, a lot, of the low-income families that we have in the neighborhood, unless we somehow figure out a way to do rent control or something similar because we’re surrounded here by low income rentals.”*

*-Resident, age 50 - 70*

The perceived drawbacks highlight heavily on how property value increase may lead to displacement and gentrification in the Hilltop district. This provides greater understanding to stakeholder concerns with the Tacoma Link expansion. As there were other drawbacks, such as parking and construction noises, these are arguably short-term issues. Displacement and gentrification can have lasting effects on an inflicted community (Kennedy and Leonard 2001). Identifying perceived drawbacks, just like identifying perceived benefits, gives an understanding as to how the community perceives losses prompted from the Tacoma Link expansion (such as loss of community through gentrification or loss of the Hilltop district identity and culture), as well as what the stakeholders’ value in a community. The stakeholders’ perspectives on gentrification catalyzed by the Link expansion and TOD are discussed throughout this analysis, but it was apparent initially that displacement and gentrification weigh heavily as a drawback.



## **Tacoma Link Expansion and TOD Attracting New Residents**

Every stakeholder acknowledged that the Hilltop district is changing, or is ripe for change. While some stakeholders debated whether the Tacoma Link expansion is the catalyst for change in the district, there is a wide discussion as to how the Hilltop district will transform over the next five to ten years and how the new development will impact the community. Changes in the community perceived by the stakeholders were more than physical development; they perceive cultural changes, displacement, and property values increasing for residents and business owners.

I asked the stakeholders if they believe that the Tacoma Link expansion to the Hilltop district will attract new residents to the neighborhood. Several felt that the Link may be a contributing factor attracting new residents, along with the TOD that will follow. However, others felt that current amenities or developing properties would attract new residents. Some mentioned the Medical Mile, in reference to hospitals located in the Hilltop district that may already be attracting new residents to the Hilltop district. Others mentioned Seattleites moving to the Hilltop to escape the increasing costs associated with living in Seattle, Washington. One stakeholder mentioned this demographic shift occurring in the Hilltop District:

*“...Because rent is more affordable, and there are a lot of vacant homes that are just looking to be occupied and fixed up, and a lot of well to do folks just want to come in and fix up a house and live in a nice area are coming to the Hilltop. And those people generally don’t come from low-income backgrounds, they are usually coming from middle class backgrounds, umm, from the North End, for example, from Seattle, from*

*downtown, those areas.”*

*-Non-resident, 18 - 24*

One stakeholder was hesitant that the Tacoma Link and the following TOD will immediately attract residents to the Hilltop. After witnessing recent development occur in the city, like several condos and lofts constructed overlooking the Thea Foss Waterway, this stakeholder questioned how rapidly Hilltop’s population will increase due to TOD.

*“I think it will attract new residents. But, Tacoma’s been using the whole ‘build it and they will come’ model for a long time, [and] they are just now seeing higher occupancy down at the condos down at the waterfront, you know?”*

*-Resident, 25 - 36*

Overall, the stakeholders believe that there will be physical changes. Changes stakeholders listed were the Tacoma Link extension, TOD, and new economic development opportunities. Many stakeholders believe that these changes occurring in the Hilltop district are likely to attract more residents, potentially middle and upper-middle class buyers. Kennedy and Leonard (2001) list this as a secondary indicator for gentrification, when income levels rise among new residents. Throughout the local media, there are several stories of Seattlelites choosing to move to Tacoma, as there are more opportunities to purchase affordable and larger properties (KIRO 7 2015) and improve the local economy (Driscoll 2015). Driscoll (2015), wrote an opinion piece in the Tacoma News Tribune discussing the trade-offs of new residents moving to Tacoma,

including some lower-income residents being “pushed to the margins,” as affordable housing options disappear.

Interestingly, one study found that a third of residents moved to TODs for a wide range of motivations, with a third only moving to TODs because of their proximity to transit (Lund 2007). However, it is uncertain how rapidly new residents will move to the Hilltop district and how that will impact property values in the Hilltop. However, it is worth addressing the speculation brought upon by the press as to why some people are choosing to move to Tacoma and how that will impact the Hilltop district’s property values and real estate market.

### **Property Values Impacted in the Hilltop District after the Link Expansion**

There is a general consensus that property values will go up after the Tacoma Link expansion. However, there are other driving forces in the market. Some stakeholders believe that property values are currently rising and that this is a common trend in the Puget Sound region; property values are going up everywhere, not just in the Hilltop district. Some stakeholders believe that there is a correlation between an increase in property values and the potential displacement of low-income residents. Change in the community was a strong talking point among stakeholders, specifically how economic development will shift the neighborhood’s demographic makeup.

*“Well, for people like myself, as homeowners, our property values are most likely to go up. The downside of that, as our property values go up, so will our taxes. That is not a problem, you know. I don’t care about that. You have to pay taxes.”*

*-Resident, Age 50 - 70*

This particular stakeholder expressed that their taxes will increase. This stakeholder speculated that the Tacoma Link may impact them financially. In the literature, Kennedy and Leonard (2001) found fear of property values increasing due to higher taxes becoming a common concern among long-term residents, but also “...welcoming a price appreciation due to the increase in financial equity it may bring,” (Kennedy and Leonard p. 14 2001). Another stakeholder surmised if demand will increase for housing in the Hilltop district, potentially impacting the cost of their rent over the long-term.

*“I do wonder if it is part of this bigger wave, you know. I rent, I wonder if it will increase my rent, um if things will be in more demand that way.”*

*-Resident, Age 25 - 36*

Financial and economic changes were significant themes brought up in response to this question. It is a valid discussion to address how property values will fluctuate over the next five to ten years, and also how the property values will impact the cultural changes and transform the Hilltop’s identity. Referencing the literature, there have been numerous studies on the proximity to a LRT system and property values, with values ranging from 6 to 45% (Al-Mosaind 1993, Armstrong 1994, Cervero and Duncan 2006, Zuk 2015). Because the values range significantly, it is difficult to estimate how the Tacoma Link extension will increase property values in the Hilltop district. However, there is speculation by stakeholders that property values will increase enough to have a noticeable impact on residents and small business owners in the Hilltop district. Understanding how stakeholders perceived how property values will be impacted by upcoming development projects provides insight to stakeholder perceptions on economic implications associated with the Tacoma Link expansion and TOD.

## **Displacement in the Hilltop District**

Displacement of low-income and long-term residents is a serious concern for the stakeholders. Six of the ten stakeholders expressed concern about displacement happening throughout the Hilltop district. Some of these stakeholders claimed that displacement would impact the economic and cultural diversity of the neighborhood. One stakeholder mentioned that they are currently witnessing displacement, with an example provided about an elderly neighbor unable to afford living in the Hilltop district any longer. The stakeholders who seemed concerned about displacement expressed that displacement may impact low-income residents, residents of color, and the elderly. Low-income residents becoming displaced is a defining part of gentrification. Kennedy and Leonard (2001) found that residents who are the most vulnerable to displacement are renters who do not speak English or lack legal immigration status. Their research also noted that the elderly are vulnerable to displacement, as 30 percent of low-income homeowners are elderly.

One stakeholder expressed their fear of living in a neighborhood lacking diversity.

*“...I have no interest in living in the neighborhood that is monocultural. It’s one of the reasons I like living in the Hilltop, that there are young people and old people, and rich people and not so rich people, you know....I really would draw away from a community that was monocultural. So, and I, you know, that would be a danger for us, I think.”*  
*-Resident, age 50 - 70*

Two stakeholders said displacement is a concern but that it does not have to be dramatic. Of the two, one stakeholder expressed frustration over the perceived lack of government outreach to low-income elderly homeowners who qualify for property tax

exemptions<sup>1</sup>, which the stakeholder claimed many qualified individuals do not know that this is an option to reduce their tax payments. The same stakeholder also expressed that mitigation from the City of Tacoma and Tacoma Housing Authority (THA) may be necessary, but was uncertain if mitigation will be essential (Non-resident, 50 - 70). The other stakeholder said, “There’s room for improvement without displacement,” (Non-resident, 25-36), hinting that the Hilltop district can withstand new development and an increase in population density without changing the city’s cultural composition.

Several mentioned the THA having a role in mitigating the displacement in the Hilltop. Two stakeholders mentioned THA as a solution to displacement, and one stakeholder mentioned THA’s plans for an affordable housing development with apartments and live-work spaces at the corner of Martin Luther King Junior Way and Earnest S. Brazill Street.

*“People will be displaced. I wish it wasn’t true. And I think there are people thinking about this right now. I think that THA is looking into that, and they are putting together a project in that area, that are mixed income housing. Which I think will make all the difference.”*

*-Non-resident, age 25-36*

Overall, most stakeholders are concerned of displacement following the Link and TOD, but some do not believe it will be a serious concern for the community. Some believe that the city or the THA will assist in alleviating displacement. However, one

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<sup>1</sup> According to Washington State’s Department of Revenue, the property tax exemption program for senior citizens and disabled persons are available to taxpayers at 61 years of age or older, retired from employment due to disability, or veterans of the armed forces of the United States and are currently receiving compensation for a service-connected disability. Applicants who qualify receive reduction in the amount of property taxes due and the reduction is based on the applicant’s income, value of residence, and local levy rates. (WA Department of Revenue 2016)

study found that city planners may need to shift their focus to bicycle and pedestrian accessibility as a way to mitigate displacement and improve the quality of life for low-income households, as transportation costs are a considerably larger portion of household budgets among families living in transitioning neighborhoods (Tighe 2016).

### **Gentrification and the Hilltop District**

To begin, the word gentrification has several connotations. Some stakeholders' body language changed when using the term, appearing to be uncomfortable. One stakeholder became defensive about the term before we officially began our interview because of criticism they had received from the community on a development project they worked on. One stakeholder felt the term was no longer applicable to describe the Link expansion in the Hilltop district, despite expressing a strong progressive mobility ideology, as a progressive mobility ideology has a strong characteristic to promote social equity. There is also considerable confusion among the terms revitalization, beautification, and gentrification, as they were used interchangeably by many of the stakeholders. One stakeholder also asked me to provide my definition of gentrification as a point of clarification.

First, I noticed internal conflict among the stakeholders as to how they perceive the Hilltop district in the distant future. It was apparent that most (if not all) of the stakeholders would like to see the Hilltop district be a safe, economically stable, affordable, and vibrant community. However, many expressed that there is a need to conserve its cultural and historical identity despite the perceived physical and

demographic change that is occurring in the Hilltop. Many stakeholders asked how this could be a reality.

*“...How do we have affordable housing? How do we keep our cultural relevancy? And how do we keep our neighborhood’s authenticity? And how do we not turn it into another cookie-cutter, gross condo, and Starbucks bullshit?”*

*-Resident Age 25 - 36*

One stakeholder felt that it is not fair for homeowners to live in a neighborhood "that looks like Beirut," (Non-resident, age 50 - 70), referring to multiple vacant lots and blighted buildings in the Hilltop district. The same stakeholder believed that gentrification challenges are blamed on the developers, when gentrification goes back to systemic inequities rooted in the community, such as poverty and crime. Another expressed that while gentrification is not good, a changing neighborhood is. Many stakeholders grappled with the side-effects of gentrification, such as a loss of community culture, Hilltop identity, and displacement.

Some expressed apathy; they felt that this is out of their reach or control and that gentrification is a common trend in communities similar to the Hilltop district. The stakeholders who conveyed apathy were unsure what they could do as a stakeholder to alleviate gentrification or who to communicate their concerns with. Gentrification appeared to be an issue larger than one person could solve. Among the literature, apathy is a common feeling expressed by those confronting gentrification (Lee 2014 & Nyborg 2008). For example, Lee 2014 found that tenants felt apathetic toward anti-gentrification movements because of their perceived lack of power.



*“I think rates are going to go up, and people are going to be pushed out for sure. I’m not happy about that, but it is just the way it is.”*

*-Resident, Age 25-36*

*“...it’s really hard to know as an individual to approach that, if someone is motivated to speak to their city council or representatives about it, it’s not clear what they need to ask for to change that picture. I think that it’s not ideal and puzzling for people who see it but don’t really know what to do.”*

*-Resident, Age 25 - 36*

One stakeholder expressed positivity toward the Tacoma Link expansion in the Hilltop, but drew on how it could be considered a tool that encourages gentrification, impacting vulnerable residents the most.

*“I wouldn’t think light rail is a cause of gentrification per se, but certainly part of the process. There’s where I stand on this. I think that this is a total improvement and I think it’s hopefully positive overall and [a] symbol for positive things and the direction we need to move with mass transit. But that’s not to say that there aren’t problems for individuals.”*

*-Resident, Age 25 - 36*

This leads to the question, how do we provide quality mass transportation that will not harm vulnerable populations? How can stakeholders empower each other to communicate their concerns to agencies that have power and privilege to create social equity and sustainability? In conclusion, the stakeholders acknowledge gentrification in the Hilltop district as a concern, but it evoked feelings of apathy and confusion. Stakeholders did not provide any plausible methods to reduce or mitigate gentrification in

the Hilltop district. There are several case studies citing methods to reduce the effects of gentrification (Levy et al. 2007). Levy found that the best mitigation strategy for reducing displacement in a neighborhood is to strengthen the local real estate market by providing more affordable housing options. For this to be an effective strategy, there must be available land-use, city government involvement and continual support to local businesses. However, it would be interesting to follow-up with the stakeholders to see what kind of solutions they have to curb gentrification's impact throughout the Hilltop.

### **Policy and Politics - Disconnect between Agency and Residents**

A small number of stakeholders interviewed believed there to be a perceived disconnect from residents living in the Hilltop district and city officials and Sound Transit officials. This was not directed as an open-ended question, but a common theme that accumulated over the course of interviews. Some stakeholders conveyed apprehension toward the interest and motives of the formal agencies in power. Two stakeholders discussed the intention of agency and their long-term commitment to the Hilltop district. One stakeholder said:

*“And I mean, it’s a huge investment. There is a lot of money being put in there, and part of the concern that I hear from the community is that they’ll just put their money and just walk away and not connect it to the community.” -Non-resident, Age 25 - 36*

This fear of disconnect relates to the fear of the loss of Hilltop's identity changing due to the type of development invested in the Hilltop district. This stakeholder perceives that residents are worried that their interests won't be met, despite agency effort to provide assistance to the Hilltop district. Another stakeholder acknowledged disconnect

between agency and resident interests in the Hilltop district, specifically with the type of programming applied in the community.

*“But just gauging the response, like planning a bike to a business event or like a Hilltop walk, or like any event in Hilltop where people in positions of power or relative privilege particularly from the city government, or well-to-do non-profits or businesses, come in and try to put on this event...it feels very loud, louder than the residents themselves. So it’s like, you can come enjoy the event or you cannot come, but either way your need won’t be met or your concerns aren’t going to be met. So there is a real disconnect between resident concern and desire, and what’s actually being implemented...I think about some of the programming that we do in the Hilltop, some of the attempts in that area. And I don’t think any of them have any classist or racist undertone, or like any malicious intent. But the problem is that the intent rarely lines up with the impact.”*

*-Non-resident, Age 18 - 24*

This stakeholder acknowledged that despite good intentions from agencies, there is an apparent disconnect between the needs of residents in the Hilltop and agency objectives. While the specific programming events are not directly related to the Tacoma Link expansion, they serve as valid examples of ST and the city of Tacoma not meeting the perceived needs of Hilltop district residents. This could be explored further by assessing the outreach efforts of the City of Tacoma and Sound Transit by interviewing a larger sample of Hilltop residents.

### **Mobility Ideology Trends Among Stakeholders**

Mobility ideologies are important to understand, as they have the ability to shape

the type of transportation infrastructure and TOD (Henderson 2013). Their success may depend on the ideological perspectives of the decision-makers and the public's support of the proposed development. After interviewing stakeholders, I wanted to identify their alignment with mobility ideologies. I also wanted to determine if the stakeholders shared a common ideological perspective.

After initially coding the stakeholder interviews, I found none publicly embraced a conservative mobility ideology. None expressed any aversion toward public transportation systems. However, interviewees may have not felt comfortable sharing personal opinions on car ownership and parking, especially as public representatives of an agency or organization that supports public transportation.

I found stakeholders leaned towards a progressive mobility ideology, with some neoliberal mobility ideology tendencies. Again, a progressive mobility ideology asserts that urban planning should create social equity (Henderson 2013). Progressives are concerned about improving mobility for the working and minority class, alleviating poverty and ending racial injustices. Neoliberal mobility ideology believes mobility is a commodity. Neoliberals focus on how new mobility investments can foster further investments throughout the city (Henderson 2013 & Ewing et. al 2008). Many stakeholders indicated that they support affordable housing, particularly the THA's mixed-use TOD that will be along the Tacoma Link extension's route. Stakeholders also addressed concern over gentrification in the neighborhood and disconnect between residents and formal agencies, which could be interpreted as a concern for improving the livelihood of working class and minority residents living in the Hilltop and the need to have tools in place to reduce the impact of gentrification and displacement. This captures

the progressive mobility ideology based on the discussions of gentrification and displacement. However, follow-up with the stakeholders would provide further insight towards their concern for this population of residents in the Hilltop district.

The neoliberal tendencies are prevalent when some stakeholders communicated their excitement for the additional investment to follow in the Hilltop district after the Tacoma Link expansion. For example, one stakeholder conveyed excitement about the prospect of a large coffee retailer in the Hilltop district:

*“And wouldn’t it be great if there is a Starbucks on Hilltop? Right? It’s like, you can hate Starbucks, and I don’t like to go there, but it is an indicator that business is booming.” -Non-resident, 25 - 36*

But, not all stakeholders indicated their excitement for this type of business in the Hilltop district. Many stakeholders indicated they would like a denser, walkable Hilltop district. This idea voices the smart growth movement and the favorability of new real estate (potentially for-profit real estate) to create this type of Hilltop (Henderson 2013 & Ewing et. al 2008). Again, there would need to be a follow-up interview with the stakeholders to determine if they favored the smart growth movement and to ask specifically what type of development they would like to see in the Hilltop district.

### **Limitations to Research**

To keep this project feasible, my sample size of stakeholders was reasonably small (n=10). A more robust sample size may provide more certainty with patterns among stakeholders. A robust sample size could have also provided significantly different results as to what I had found in my research. Future research could include a

larger sample size and a more diverse group of stakeholders (in age, education level, etc.). However, human geographer Iain Hay believes that “there is far more to case studies than the number of units studied,” (Hay p 85, 2005), arguing that a small sample size can still provide significant insight to a particular research question.

This analysis may also be limited geographically. It may be important to ask how the findings from this research relates to other districts in Tacoma, particularly the Stadium district, as that district will be part of the Tacoma Link expansion; as well as beyond Tacoma or Washington state. How does this research relate to other transportation system installation or extension projects in the US? This research could be expanded to include multiple case study sites to see if there are similarities in perceived benefits and drawbacks of LRT projects among stakeholders.

## Chapter 6 – Recommendations for Future Research and Conclusion

My research identified how key stakeholders in the Hilltop district of Tacoma, Washington perceive the Tacoma Link extension impacting their neighborhood. It identified how stakeholders perceived mobility, the benefits and downfalls of transit-oriented development, and hypothesized how the demographic of the Hilltop district may change in the upcoming years after the completion of the Hilltop district. Ultimately, my research demonstrated that there are several perceived social and economic implications of public transportation infrastructure. It also demonstrated that there is much more to LRT development than mobility and accessibility, as there are several social and economic issues connected to the expansion. My research question asked, “*How do diverse stakeholders implicated in Tacoma’s light rail expansion project weigh the relative benefits and drawbacks of the proposed project, in terms of affordability, community changes and mobility, and in terms of mobility ideologies?*” To answer, my thesis research found that while the Tacoma Link will encourage and increase regional mobility for the Hilltop district, the stakeholders perceive several changes to occur throughout the community, such as property value increase and displacement of vulnerable residents, resulting in the loss of community culture and identity.

Using the Tacoma Link extension as a case study, I used mobility ideologies as a framework to understand the direction of development in the Hilltop district. I found that an overwhelming majority of stakeholders hold a blend of progressive and neo-liberal mobility ideologies. To move toward a sustainable transportation system, there is a need to look past the technical and technological aspects of the system, and to identify how it will be environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable. The environmental

benefits of LRT have been mostly conceptualized within a neoliberal paradigm, but there are stakeholders that push for greater social and economic equity, ultimately indicating the existence of a progressive mobility ideology. To be a truly sustainable system, stakeholders must continue to shift away from a neo-liberal mobility ideology and understand the social and economic implications that exist among mobility, which include the increase of property values, displacement, and gentrification of a community. Stakeholders, particularly stakeholders with significant power, should recognize the potential impacts that the Tacoma Link expansion may have on the Hilltop district, and plan to mitigate for gentrification or increase affordable housing options in the Hilltop district.

To conclude this thesis, I share recommendations for future research in mobility ideologies, gentrification and urban development, along with a policy recommendation for Hilltop residents and stakeholders to adopt to encourage inclusive community involvement and sustainable economic development.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

There are several directions where this research could be advanced. First, I recommend follow-up interviews with the original stakeholders to identify how their perspectives have changed on mobility, gentrification and economic development in the Hilltop after the Link has been extended. This would determine if their perspectives were swayed by the development's impact. Another recommendation for further research would be to interview stakeholders who live and work in the Stadium district, the other district impacted by the extension. This would be a compelling way to see how the two



districts compare in mobility ideologies, perspectives on gentrification, and economic development. A final recommendation would be to conduct a GIS analysis after the Tacoma Link extension in the Hilltop to identify how land-use has shifted to new uses and how land-use has correlates with demographic information of residents. This could show how new resident needs are influenced by development in the Hilltop district.

### **Policy Recommendations – Community Benefits Agreement Model**

A formal CBA may benefit the Hilltop district in several ways. One, it could allow multiple community groups to come together and identify how a project like the Link extension could impact their neighborhood (positive and negatively). It would be impertinent to create a CBA with local developers planning to build mixed-use TOD along the route as well. By forming coalitions and creating contracts, the CBA can be tailored for the community to identify what benefits they would like out this project. Examples of benefits include job training programs, living wages, green building requirements, local hiring goals, and minority business contracting goals.

In conclusion, the Hilltop district may benefit from a CBA as their neighborhood quickly develops. There are several aspects to development that the stakeholders I interviewed have control over (like increase property values), but there are existing frameworks like the CBA model that can potentially mitigate side-effects, such as displacement and gentrification.

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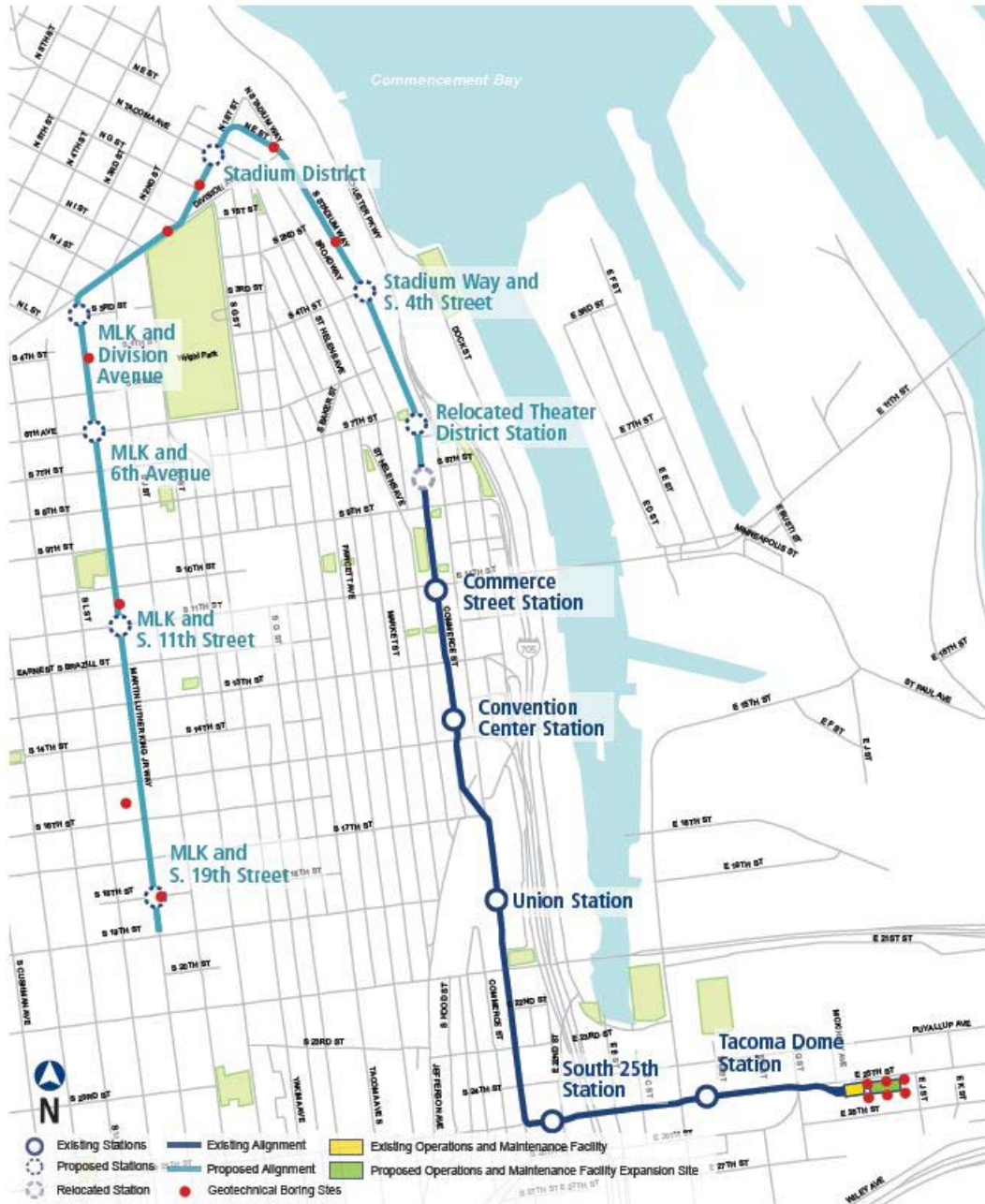
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## Appendix



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Appendix (1.1) This map displays the Tacoma Link rail line. The black line represents the current route. The blue line represents the proposed expansion line.

