



Caltrans Division of Research,  
Innovation and System Information

# Research



Planning, Policy,  
and Programming

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**Project Title:**

The Economic Benefits of Placemaking:  
Transportation Implications

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## The Economic Benefits of Placemaking: Transportation

Understand and evaluate how transportation influences local (even neighborhood) economies, and in the future as new research becomes possible

### WHAT IS THE NEED?

This white paper

1. Summarized the available literature on whether and how transportation is related to local economic development,
2. Discussed theoretical and data challenges on this topic in a way that will contribute to a research agenda, and
3. Suggested best practices for incorporating the evidence on transportation and local economic impacts into transportation decision-making.

### WHAT WAS OUR GOAL?

To deliver a product that can guide Caltrans both in the present, as the agency works to understand and evaluate how transportation influences local (even neighborhood) economies, and in the future as new research becomes possible.

### WHAT DID WE DO?

The white paper summarizes available literature and, more importantly, lays the groundwork for future policy activity and research in this area by focusing on three characteristics that are essential in understanding how transportation is linked to local economic development and the economic benefits of placemaking.

1. The review of the available literature will be carefully tied to existing theory and evidence.
2. The lack of sufficiently fine-grained data means that the white paper cannot simply summarize evidence. The white paper is more theoretical than most white papers. This is partly to frame ideas that might inform policy, even in the absence of



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a full set of evidence, and partly to give policy makers the nuance that is necessary in this area.

3. The white paper illuminates new research directions in addition to summarizing research. Emerging data resources, including innovations in social media or big data, create the possibility that in the future new data might address the economic benefits of transportation-oriented placemaking in ways that are not currently possible.

## WHAT WAS THE OUTCOME?

The evidence suggests that placemaking initiatives, pursued in ways that reduce neighborhood VMT, bring benefits that are valued by residents and firms. Placemaking will require a more multi-modal transportation planning, focusing on neighborhood context and engaging and empowering communities while building system backbones that increase access throughout the metropolitan area. This synthesis is appropriate and necessary for an era in which the automobile, while still important, cannot meet all our accessibility needs. There is a need for more research that further explores the impacts of small scaled placemaking and its effects on local economies and redefining accessibility.

## WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

The white paper both summarizes evidence, and provides an overview of theoretical perspectives that can be used to guide the evaluation of new evidence and policy approaches.

## LEARN MORE

<https://ncst.ucdavis.edu/white-paper/the-economic-benefits-of-vmt-reducing-placemaking/>