

# North America Study Tour

21 November 2009 – 7 December 2009

## Key Findings Report and Lessons Learn't



June 2010

## **Contents**

- 1.0 Introduction
- 2.0 Purpose of Programme
- 3.0 Executive Summary – Key Findings
- 4.0 Detailed Findings
  - 4.1 Approaches to Inner City Revitalisation and Regeneration
  - 4.2 Movement and Accessibility
  - 4.3 Rail links to Urban Regeneration
  - 4.4 Urban Form and Quality
  - 4.5 Affordable Housing and of Role in Regeneration
  - 4.6 Granville Island Trust - Vancouver
- 5.0 Summary

## **Appendices**

- 1.0 List of People Interviewed
- 2.0 Introductory Statement
- 3.0 Photographic Record
  - Schedule A
  - Schedule B
  - Schedule C
  - Schedule D
- 4.0 Portland Development Corporation (PDC) Tax Increment Financing model (TIF)

## **1.0 Introduction**

This paper reports on the North America Study tour undertaken by His Worship the Mayor Bob Parker, Chief Executive, Tony Marryatt and General Manager, Strategy and Planning Group, Mike Theelen.

The tour was conducted from 21 November 2009 to 7 December 2009 inclusive. The tour consisted of visits to four key North America Cities (San Francisco, Vancouver (Canada), Seattle and Portland). The study tour consisted of a series of arranged meetings in each centre with a variety of relevant organisations, coupled with hands on examination and visits to examples of places of interest. (A full list of the people interviewed is attached (See Appendix 1.0).

## **2.0 Purpose of Programme**

The purpose of the study tour was to examine in detail and achieve first hand experience from a series of North American Cities involved in urban regeneration and inner city redevelopment. A key component in selecting the cities was those who had been involved in regeneration and revitalisation projects over a number of decades, and who had used or integrated transit systems [predominantly rail (light rail)] into their regeneration programmes.

In selecting both cities and interviewees the Council was guided by the desire to address five key areas: urban regeneration, use of public transit systems to support urban regeneration, the development/redevelopment of inner city residential areas, the role of affordable or assisted housing in supporting regeneration, and the use of a variety of governance and financial mechanisms to achieve such outcomes. A copy of the introductory statement provided to the different interviewees, and a copy of the tour timetable is attached as Appendix 2.0.

The four cities selected, are all very different, though all were located on the Pacific North West Coast. While in population each was larger than Christchurch all were involved in consciously seeking to regenerate and repopulate their inner city areas, all were involved in some utilizing both transit systems, and affordable housing to assist and facilitate their regeneration objective. Each authority had been involved in regeneration over an extended period of time and were able to demonstrate models of leadership and intervention that had both been successful, and alternately had failed to be effective.

While the scale and size of these agencies is a factor in some aspects (notably the infrastructure) scale plays a very minor role in the conceptual aspect, that is the issue around community objectives, the desire to see central cities as healthy complete urban spaces, the role of different modes to complement growth and regeneration, and even the fiscal, governance and management systems put in place to ensure an enduring success. These latter elements were the principal reasons for going, so experiencing communities that had examined these, and

implemented them, over a period of many decades, made these cities appropriate choices for the trip undertaken.

### **3.0 Executive Summary – Key Findings**

Five key themes consistently emerged in each of the cities visited. These can be summarized as follows.

- Urban Regeneration is a significant challenge that requires a long term commitment, investment, and a collaborative approach to achieving success.
- Urban Regeneration requires strong local government leadership and the use of a variety of tools, including civic leadership, regulation, financial investment, and partnerships with other agencies and the private sector to achieve change.
- Transit systems are key players in both regeneration, intensification and modern suburban “centres based” development. Rail in particular is considered to be a key tool in shifting community acceptance towards use of public transport.
- Timing, critical mass, and scale are important elements in shifting community understanding and involvement and maintaining community support for regeneration and intensification initiatives.
- Commitment to design, quality and a complete lifestyle package was required to encourage people back into the central city.

Affordable Housing was a key part of each of the regeneration programmes visited. However its significance in this context was largely related to the financial capacity it brought to such programmes, along with the populations supported, rather than because of any specific social or economic outcomes it achieved.

### **4.0 Detailed Findings**

This section of the report could be reported in a number of ways. Firstly it would be simple to report by City and by interview as that was how the trip was experienced. However the practical value of the study was to consider the principal themes, and to report within each of these around the salient points made by each interviewee. However even this approach has its limitations, as the interconnections between themes is very strong, and arguably it is within the cross over between initiatives and authorities that the most significant opportunities and learning lies.

In considering this section reference should also be made to Appendix 3.0 which photographically records many of the features and elements discussed.

#### **4.1 Approaches to Inner City Revitalisation and Regeneration**

The key standing for each of the cities visited was a desire, and deliberate intention to reinvigorate or redevelop their central city areas.

North Americans are no different to New Zealanders or Australians in their innate preference for land and open space. Indeed historically one of the major drivers for flight from the urban centres was a desire to escape the worst aspects of inner city living, notably its overcrowding, hard harsh environment, concentration of people in monolithic tenements and tower blocks. Rail and then cars gave communities unparalleled opportunity to flee these “vices”.

However all of the cities visited had deliberately addressed a desire to revitalise the inner cities, in response to changing demographics, a renewed interest in urban living, a desire by people to cut down on transport time, transport cost, and transport miles.

Each of them to varying degrees had also experienced some decline in the future of the Central Cities, both as retail centres, but also as key areas of human interaction and commerce. Inner City Revitalisation was a tool in reversing this decline.

While each centre visited was unique they also had a number of striking similarities. In terms of urban form while the city of San Francisco was constrained by its geographical limits, Vancouver, Seattle and Portland all were quite capable of geographic expansion. However each of these authorities had adopted specific policies to consolidate their urban form. As an example Metro Vancouver 2040, the regional growth strategy for Vancouver. Its 5 key goals, were

- Create a compact urban area
- Support a sustainable Economy
- Protect the region’s environment and respond to climate change
- Develop, complete commitments
- Support sustainable transport choices

Similarly but through a different model the 26 communities that make up the Greater Portland Area had over 2 decades ago established a self imposed urban limit, and commenced on a plan to develop limited urban sprawl, manage Greenfield, develop and regenerate the inner city and suburbs of Portland. The Portland model also deliberately at the time rejected a continued motorway based solution to meet its transport needs, and pursued instead a deliberate public transport, and particularly a rail led model.

Seattle did not have as great an emphasis on city centre centralisation, though there was clear evidence of it occurring in a planned and systematic manner through a mixture of public and private initiatives.

Each of the Councils visited were, through their city planning functions directly and indirectly supporting urban redevelopment and intensification. As in New Zealand each of the planning agencies spoken to were endeavouring to find the right balance between, creating a vision, providing encouragement, using regulation, and working with the community and develop to achieve the stated goals. In all instances the clear and generally integrated approach between

the city authorities, Transit Boards and Redevelopment agencies were recognised as key elements in both planning, and bringing ideas to reality in a reasonable timeframe, and comprehensive manner. All recognised levels of community enthusiasm for the concept of consolidation and intensification, but also community resistance, often in areas of change.

San Francisco identified itself as having the second most densely populated city in the USA. Accordingly issues of density were not directly a problem. The planning department was accordingly more focussed on urban upgrading or the redevelopment of areas that previously had been used for an industrial or business purpose. The Mission Bay District was one such area, converted from previously industrial and shipping uses. The area adjoined an assisted housing redevelopment area known as SOMA (South of Market) (below 6<sup>th</sup> Street), and was linked to the development of a significant new campus for the University of California, and a Biotech hub. There was a clear strategy to link housing and lifestyle development to education and employment. This not only provided a market for housing, set a price point in the market, but also connected living and working which achieved the city's ongoing goal of reducing travel movements, and in particular motor car commuting.

In addition to this the city was focussed on improving public transport into the downtown area and reducing private vehicle trips. The city had an active policy of imposing maximum numbers of car parks on developments, but supported by enhanced public transport. The Council identified that 70% of workers used public transport to access the downtown; a mixture of BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit), underground, streetcar, buses and ferries. One of the key initiatives in the Mission Bay area was the extension of the streetcar lines into the area, which connected back to the core downtown areas and the city wide BART system.

One of the key issues for San Francisco was the redevelopment of its distinctive heritage stock. While some developers had sought to mimic the classic double bay San Francisco style building, communities were often wary of change, particularly of what they considered to be gentrification of the fringes of the downtown areas. San Francisco, like the other Councils was very supportive of Transit Orientated Design (TOD) models for development. Rincon Hill was a private (market led) development adjoining the Transbay area which was in the process of being developed by the San Francisco RDA. Rincon Hill was being modelled on the Vancouver model, that is high density podium towers (with an open skyline between them), supported by a more residential scale at street frontage. The proposal was proving controversial as it replaced a dense but lower scale residential environment already in the area. The model being adopted by San Francisco City Council involved strong transit corridors, with retail frontages, with quieter residential streets running at right angles to these.

Redevelopment in Seattle was focussed in two principal areas, the revitalisation of the central city downtown fringes and the development/redevelopment of suburban nodes or centres, along recently opened, or reinvigorated transit lines.

The Central City redevelopment was focussed on an area to the north of the downtown area generally known as the Denny Triangle, and in a new node based on the southern shores of Lake Union. The latter area is known as South Lake Union. The Denny Triangle is notable for being adjacent to the World Trade Expo site, which is the home of Seattle's well known Space Needle. From a planning perspective the area is in transition, and elements of change in the area have been stalled by the global crisis, and possibly by local political processes as well. Much of the area under change is made up of low grade business uses surface carparks, and a network of gridded streets. It lies adjacent to Route 5. There is evidence of earlier revitalisation efforts but these demonstrate little of the modern principles of urban regeneration. The housing blocks, are literally that, taking up almost entire sites and blocks, dominated by garage entrances, and having no connection to the street or to any sense of community or public life. The area is sterile.

In contrast the South Lake Union district is promoting a Vancouver style development solution, based on podium towers, to achieve market density, but with a streetscape that is intended to build and support local residents and communities. At present the model is largely that, pending both a return to market confidence, and some changes to the planning rules, to support the levels of density sought by the developer. Of note is that a large part of the area is in a single ownership allowing an integrated development approach.

There are a number of key initiatives undertaken by the City of Seattle to support this redevelopment initiative. The first is the introduction of a streetcar into the area to connect South Lake Union to the CBD. The first stage of this is in place at present, well ahead it would seem, of demand. While one terminus for the streetcar is the CBD proper the other terminus is a developing area of bars, restaurants and shops at South Lake Union, which provides a potential destination node both for residents of the Denny Triangle and South Lake Union areas. The long term plan by the city is to extend this streetcar through to the University of Washington campus. This concept parallels that also adopted in Portland when the Pearl District Streetcar connects the emerging Pearl District with Oregon State University, a Medical College and Portland City Hospital.

The other area of work being undertaken by Seattle City was a model based on Suburban villages in a hierarchy below the central city. The concept of Urban Villages was based around development/redevelopment of centres around transit lines, with a focus of growing localised employment as well as urban densities. Two models were examined. The first was a market based redevelopment on one side of the recently opened SeaTac transit line, complementing the Seattle Development Agencies assisted housing development on

the other side of the track at Rainer Beach. The model adopted by the Council promoted a well established density model, based on a low rise fringe (1-2 storey) an inner ring of 4 storey development, and a central core of up to 6 storey development. The node was planned along the transit line, with a mixture of ground floor retailing, office and upper level apartment accommodation at the core. While in the conceptual phase, the intention by the Council was to complement development with high levels of public streetscape, planting and amenities.

Unlike a number of other centres Seattle did not have legislative access to a Redevelopment Agency (as opposed to an agency that simply supported assisted housing), nor could it apply for any form of Tax Increment Financing. Of all of the Councils it was most reliant on its municipal code to give effect to its direction. Options that the Council were exploring were the use of Tradeable Development Rights, for developers providing Affordable housing, and/or amenity spaces. The tradeoff was largely in terms of development height. The Council was also seeking to use Incentive Zoning for what they identified as Workforce housing, (social housing) though at the time this had not been adopted by the Council. The plan also proposed prescriptive densities based on accessibility to Public Transport, including the waiving of any parking requirements. The intention was that developers benefited in terms of yield from development along key public transit routes. Portland City had similar provision and reported success with reduced parking standard along key light rail routes, and actual market premiums for locations along a route.

The Portland City Planning Model was based on the Metro Urban limits adopted by the City of Portland and its adjoining Councils in the 1970s. This established the metro limits for the city, and for the urban centres that support the City of Portland. Their urban limits gave confidence in the 70's to the City of Portland to pursue a rail based transit model.

Most of the City's planning has been based on retaining a strong city centre, supplemented by the revitalisation of existing nodes, and the development of new nodes based on Transit lines. In each case transport/transit solutions had been designed into the planning process. Allied to this has been the use of bus, rapid bus, and streetcar and light rail to support nodal development, increase and support higher densities, support more localised employment, and create high levels of accessibility to the City Centre.

The most successful and recognised Urban Redevelopment was the Pearl District. Its success lay in a number of elements. Firstly the entire district was passed to the Portland Development Commission, which began on the site with a largely blank canvas. The Pearl is located at one edge of the CBD, though slightly removed. The development model pursued had both PDC and private investment, including the PDC taking responsibility for parking provision. As part of the development the streetcar was introduced, based on a premise that no area would be more than one block from the streetcar line. This made the public transport system highly accessible and desirable.



Furthermore it connected the area via the city centre, to the Oregon State University and the Portland Hospital site which overcame its distance from the CBD. While initially aimed at young people, the area has been very successful with the market itself seeking to increase local density, and evidence of younger people staying on to raise families in the District.

The success of the model is now being evaluated elsewhere in the city, in areas not directly identified as blighted. In particular the role of the streetcar is being evaluated, not to connect the area to the remainder of the city, but as a “premium neighbourhood connection” ie focussed on providing a neighbourhood service, linked to the larger light rail system for connection beyond the neighbourhood.

In addition to the Central City, and near suburbs redevelopment, Greenfield areas do continue to be developed. In these the planning model, like Seattle and elsewhere, is based on a well developed TOD model which builds on multiple densities, around a linked retail/business and transit nodes. Portland has adopted a 20 minute neighbourhood; which is the time taken to cross the node at walking pace. Orenco was one example visited. These centres were still largely car based, though built along the Transit (Trimet) line. There was a mixture of density including mixed retail and apartment areas.

While in Vancouver we did not directly meet with City planning officers; the model adopted in Vancouver to promote Inner City revitalisation has been widely adopted, and discussed. An extensive meeting was held with Translink, the regional metro agency. The Translink planners described the close liaison Translink had with the City Planning Department to deliver transit services to areas identified for future intensification and revitalisation. Translink planners discussed ongoing work particularly in areas of established low density development. One criticism of the Vancouver experience was that while they had successfully attracted residents into the central city, this had not been followed by increased employment, and accordingly there was a significant amount of commuting out of downtown Vancouver.

In summary, the planning models used by the various departments were generally focussed on both revitalisation, and the development of centres that supported, even in suburban environments, high densities, around transit systems and linkages. A number of models were used but all identified the most success lay where City Planning initiatives could be actively complemented by transit solutions, or by the development actions of the Council, and or local Redevelopment Agencies. The latter often provided the land, or capital, to kickstart development, and were well versed in ongoing partnerships with the market to achieve desired redevelopment outcomes. There was clearly some “luck” in the synergies often expressed by different agencies around the design, density, and community good they are each seeking to emulate. In contrast to this, where left to the market and the regulations available through municipal codes, as in New Zealand, the

ability to achieve changed outcomes still remains problematical for each authority.

## **4.2 Movement and Accessibility**

One of the key themes of the trip was to experience and examine differing public transit solutions in each of the cities. In doing so the group travelled by bus, light rail (of varying weight), tramcar, cablecar, ferry, taxi and foot. *See Appendix 3.0: Schedule 2.* We also deliberately travelled on systems that were well established, systems that were new, and systems that were carefully linked in design and execution of growth and redevelopment initiatives.

As an overall finding public transit was not seen in any of these cities as endeavouring to remove the car from the street. All of the planners and engineers involved acknowledged the reality that the automobile provided a degree of unmitigated choice that most North Americans would not surrender willingly. The role of public transit was to provide a level of choice, reduce congestion, and improve accessibility into high density, high frequency areas (typically the CBD), deliver levels of service that equally or exceeded private car travel in, on, to and from such areas.

The keys to successful public transport are seemingly very simple, but they clearly are not easy to achieve. These are, and they are all inter-related; frequency of service, interconnectivity, ease of use and desirability. These are addressed in turn.

No one city relied on a single mode of public transit delivery. In Vancouver where the light rail system was of exceptional quality, public transit systems still only accounted for 11% of all journeys (77% car, 11% walking, 2% bike). Of the 11%, 70% were by bus, which provided the "local backbone" to the rail system. The success of the rail system was its ability to move aggregated groups of people (from buses, cars or walk points) significant distance into the CBD quickly, efficiently and safely.

The City of Portland, which claimed that 40% of all trips into the CBD were on public transit employed an integrated system of light rail, streetcar and bus services, built on a virtual hierarchy beginning with local service (bus) → high frequency bus (long distance) → rail.

The integration of modes was a significant plank, particularly in supporting rail. This was achieved both by subsidising networks (eg. bus) and increasingly by building densities in close proximity to these big people movers that reinforced the demand for their services.

A number of examples will be mentioned in varying guises through the report. Examples included the Mission Creek redeveloped area in San Francisco, which was integrated with an extended streetcar (and underground system), the redevelopment examples in Seattle, (notably

Rainier Beach) where both low income and market led intensification was specifically planned along the new Soundlink light rail line, and where an entire new redeveloped suburb, South Lake Union, was being anchored around a small streetcar line in the city centre. In Portland, suburbs such as Orenco, and the Pearl redevelopment district were anchored at the planning stage on an effective rail based public transit system. While in Vancouver, we visited Burnaby where the TriMet transit agency was based, and looked at plans to re-intensify existing communities to provide improved housing with high levels of accessibility to the rail system.

The key to each of these systems was strong ongoing destination points. These were largely concentrated on the CBD, but also connected key attractions, the Pearl District, as mentioned connected to residential areas across the top of the CBD to the University, State Hospital, and another residential development node. The Seattle streetcar was planned to link the CBD to South lake Union, and ultimately the University of Washington. In both instances the streetcars were neither fast, nor covered large distances, but they provided a convenient, cheap and distinctive mode of travel that suited the destination and users. The other aspect of each of these solutions was their capacity to interconnect seamlessly to and from different networks. This interconnectivity was captured in a number of ways. The first was in terms of timetable integration. This relied on high frequency services, as well as well timed services that allowed predictable journeys to be made (with single mode, or multimode). The ability to leave on one mode (eg. rail) and connect to a bus within minutes made the said journeys acceptable. In all of the cities this was possible (including ferries in Vancouver), and between different levels of light rail in Portland. Allied to this was the predictability of service, but also its frequency. The secure knowledge of nothing more than a 5-7 headway between services took much of the potential angst out of using public transit. This was well achieved in San Francisco for example where key bus ways had about 5 minute running headways, and real time information that predicted the arrival of the next bus, and the next bus after that – for that service. Equally in Vancouver fully automated light rail services connected frequently and seamlessly with bus lines, and ferries which provided a high level of dependability and usability.

Equally important to commuters in the physical case and reliability, was the integration of ticketing. Single tickets for multimodes allied to frequent (at stations, on streets, on bus/train/tram) ticketing machines made it comparatively simple to buy and have the requisite ticket with which to move around. In most cities there were some exceptions, but there was clearly intention to integrate systems together. Most systems required personal validation of a ticket rather than actual endorsement by a ticket collector or guard, and enforcement of ticketing was not highly apparent. With such a distinct lack of scrutiny the level of self compliance seemed high. This may also have been the result of fairly low cost travel, and possibly linked to punishment regimes if caught unticketed. This matter was specifically addressed

with Translink (Vancouver) staff whose trains for example are entirely unmanned. Staff indicated that they estimated compliance at only around 50% and that they planned to toughen ticketing enforcement. However it was acknowledged that direct income from public transit was not expected to cover costs, that many of the benefits were actually in less expenditure elsewhere in the system (eg. roads, traffic policing etc.) and that the authority was keen not to dissuade public transit use. Low cost, honesty based charging regime was a model that helped consolidate these goals.

In addition to frequently well connected services and ease of use, the quality of the experience was an important element in the success of the various networks. In each of Vancouver, Seattle and Portland the quality of the vehicles, stations, platforms was very high, and contributed persistently to feeling of safety, and desirability of use. The constant flow of people and vehicles also contributed strongly to this. In each of the cities attention to detail on train (in particular – but also bus) and on station was high. This included levels of lighting, frequency of signage (all invariably real time) route maps, ticketing machines. Most major stations and all vehicles used automated voicing systems to provide warnings and advise on journey elements (eg. next stop – next connection point). There was a high level of attention to all levels of access. This included sufficient access (especially around escalators and stairs to minimise queuing, large platform depths, plus facilities for disabled access, including automated sliding ramps on and off vehicles. Trains, buses all contained specific spaces reserved or prioritised for wheelchairs, bikes and other disabled support. In each state, by law or convention, premium seats were prioritised for the elderly. Making seats available for an elder person was uniformly respected.

All of these factors achieved one key differentiation, it made public transport respectable. This was further enhanced by rail travel per se, and our experience showed it was used by people of all ages and from all walks of life.

Most authorities acknowledged that buses remained often very much a social service form of transport but that rail attracted a level of interest and use that spanned a much wider audience. One Portland official referred to this as the magic of “sparks and steel” and identified a large degree of emotional enthusiasm by the public for rail. The “magic” of rail as many talked was offered as one reason why they worked well with new redevelopment districts and the range of people that inhabited them. Overall many streetcars operated at less than walking speed but still provided an attractive and well used way to travel.

One of the key benefits of rail identified by a number of agencies was that despite high initial capital costs, the carrying capacity of rail and the durability of both the stock and network far outweighed that of bus based systems.

The Pearl District in Portland and the proposed (partly built line in Seattle) were examples of when very small scale rail (streetcar) systems connecting directly into urban districts had both provided transit capacity to high density districts, or stimulated density. In the Pearl District, clear expectations on developers linked to the introduction of the streetcar were deliberately “ramped up”. The evidence was that the success of the district, and the streetcar meant that developers consistently wished to exceed density targets. The South Lake Union development in Seattle was equally being integrated to the CBD by streetcar, as well as through the new residential district to the South Lake Union entertainment area and ultimately to the University of Washington.

Anecdotal evidence of the desirability of appropriate public transit came from Portland, which reported business and residential premiums along streetcar routes, combined with the practical opportunity to reduce the requirement for car parking in development adjoining or in close proximity to the light rail network.

One of the key elements in the design of all of the networks was the attention paid to route origin and destination. While the central city was in each case a core focal point, all had either development key infrastructure close to such lines, or bent their Public Transit networks to connect to key infrastructure. Airports were a key example of the latter, (being quite location specific, and also dealing with a population for whom the connection between the origin and destination point was strong). The other key example in Portland, Vancouver and Seattle where connections to major sports or entertainment venues. Both Portland and Vancouver relied heavily on rail to manage people volumes around major sporting events, which allowed these to be placed away from the direct city centre, but in easy connection to the busy cafes and nightlife of these areas.

Major educational facilities (Universities) or places of employment were also favoured destination points. In both instances where streetcars operated the lines were not particularly long, but were focussed on establishing key connections.

#### **4.3 Rail links to Urban Regeneration**

In addition to light rail and redevelopment being associated with housing redevelopment and affordable housing options, each of the cities visited had policies of building their urban form around a high capacity rail network.

While not visited on the tour the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system connects down town San Francisco to a series of suburban and sub-urban nodes across the Bay, providing high speed frequent services.

A similar model was adopted for Vancouver where the placement of the rail system (notably the new Canada Line) was developed in accordance with planned intensification nodes, based on the route and

key stations. This was evident in the inner city locations, and a visit to the suburban extent of the line confirmed that planners were involved in the active investigation and intensification of living and commercial areas along the line and particularly at station nodes. Translink staff advised that planning for access to and from stations worked on a 0.8 – 1.0 km radius as an acceptable walking distance. The principal connection Translink identified regarding these distances was the need to support and make attractive the entire journey, from home to the station, at the station, and on the train. Accordingly significant emphasis was placed on the design quality of stations and information systems as it was on the line and rail journey per se.

A similar distance model was used in the Portland streetcar model which was designed so that no area in the Pearl district was more than one block away from the line. This created very high levels of accessibility.

The integration of the activities of the Seattle Housing Authority, Sound Transit, and Seattle City Council was equally high. At Rainier Beach we experienced a completely rebuilt Affordable Housing Scheme, with direct access to the principal Sound Transit light rail system. The route of this system, which connected downtown Seattle to SeaTac (Seattle International Airport) had been “bent” to take in Rainier Beach, Beacon Hill, and a number of other redevelopment and intensification areas. Complementing these two initiatives was the work of the Seattle City Council Planning Department. The planners were specifically reviewing the “private domain” side of the tracks to promote a revitalisation of the local centre, including the introduction of mixed use development, and vertically integrated retail and residential activity, supported by the light rail spine.

The process adopted by the Council was a standard planning model, but distinctly built around nodal based TOD (Transit Orientated Development) intensification on the line. Two other similar proposals around other stations on the SeaTac line were also in various stages of planning.

Portland was able to demonstrate three different solutions involving rail. The first was the Pearl District, canvassed previously. In the Pearl the introduction of the streetcar had been tagged to developers achieving maximum levels of density (currently being exceeded because of the population of the district). In this instance the streetcar provided an emotional form of public transport (an adult could out pace it over short and moderate distances), but it also had some very practical elements: it ran through the Pearl district, and beyond of outer boundaries; it brought the Pearl district traveller close to the heart of the CBD, and interconnected with the other light rail system, and it connected both of these elements to the University and the Medical (Research and Practice) facility.

During discussions with the City Planning staff the future of another line (streetcar) was being debated. Interestingly the debate revolved

around whether to focus the development of the next streetcar redevelopment, using the streetcar to connect the area to the CBD, or to use the streetcar line as a more internal redevelopment tool, but connecting it to the Central City via the principal light rail train system.

The Portland Area was interesting for Christchurch because of some significant parallels. Most significant amongst these was a self imposed urban limit to urban Portland, which having been established 25 years earlier provided a strong framework to guide both planning and styles of development. With that urban limit the Portland Authorities had deliberately designed the light rail system to run out into raw Greenfield areas, and had around these nodes built carefully orchestrated suburbs of mixed use, mixed density, and good integration between housing, car parking and rail. As part of the visit we travelled out to one such suburb, Orenco. While still in its infancy the stop locally supported a mix of apartments, attached dwellings, detached dwellings, mixed use, and retail areas in close proximity to the station. While some of the styles involved are unlikely to appeal to New Zealand home owners, the careful concentration of population around high capacity travel nodes was clearly being achieved.

The Portland Light Rail system demonstrated a high level of capacity in flexibility. Double train units with capacity exceeding 200 persons were equally at home on inner city streets, mingling with pedestrians and cars, but could, once on their own dedicated corridor, reach speeds in excess of 100 kph. This enabled them to access the outer suburbs and deliver commuters and shoppers directly into the main retail centre of the city.

#### **4.4 Urban Form and Quality**

One of the cornerstones of the various redevelopment initiatives was the strong desire by all the agencies spoken to, to create a quality of urban environment that would attract communities into the inner city. This was generated by a number of possible drivers. The first was possibly to overcome the lack of urban quality commonly associated with historic inner city living. The second was the need to match (but in a different way) the qualities private individuals placed in their own suburban sections. The third aspect recognised that as new dwellers traded larger amounts of private space for smaller private space and a more active public realm, that the quality of both needed to be heightened. This was particularly so where Councils sought to connect the streetscape directly to houses; there was a need to make both active, safe and inviting.

Levels of quality were not consistent and often depended on the drivers for redevelopment. In San Francisco there were significant differences in the urban design outcome in the SOMA District (predominantly public Housing) and the adjoining Mission Bay area (largely private). In contrast in developments such as Rainer Vista in Seattle, public and private offerings were indistinguishable.

Appendix 3.0 (Schedules 1 and 3) provide a photographic snapshot of examples of the type of commitments and elements that were encountered. It was also notable that in each city the response was unique, reflecting both the heritage, the environment, and the market which was being pitched at. The key themes that seem to come through were as follows:

Scale: Density was often achieved by a very sophisticated approach to scale. In Vancouver this was achieved by modest density (up to 4 stories) on the outside public edges of city blocks, but complemented by mid block podium towers that lifted overall density, but provided also a mix of housing styles.

In the Pearl District in Portland density was also moderated, with lower density being pursued in early stages, and high densities in later periods once the concept had been proven.

Density was also designed. In contrast to very standard blocks, the outer design and presentation of buildings often disguised completely different internal arrangements. Examples in San Francisco demonstrated this in the extreme, but it was also cleverly applied in Seattle even at suburban scale intensification. In this way design was used to “fool” the eye often about the level of density erected.

Street Scale: In each of the cities, careful attention had been given to the relationship between the built form and the scale, at the street, or where the built form interacted with people. In Vancouver this was most evident in the townhouse scale street frontages, (ie apartments directly fronting streets, combined with limited scale at the street (3-5 stories). In Portland, (Pearl) this was achieved by an overall building form that was limited to around 5-10 stories high. These examples not only served to create a more human friendly scale on the street, but also ensured that there was adequate provision of sunlight, into these living areas.

At the street level, buildings were connected to the street environment. This not only harmonised the street, but provided in CPTED language, passive surveillance of the street. Often housing frontages were separated only by small gardens, or by having the building slightly raised about the street, which provided a level of privacy while still permitting a feeling that people have a connection to the urban environment. Interesting the level of connection was far higher than we might experience in many New Zealand cities, where large walls dominated suburban frontages and cause the streetscape to become an isolated space beyond the houses.

Building form: This report has previously touched on how form was used to disguise density or building type (typically quite strong mixes of one, two, three, a larger unit types) within a single structure. (This was more evident in development funded or assisted by the RDAs.



Materials: Equally impressive was the use of materials (which differently reflected the different communities we visited) but also the mix of styles, the breakup (articulation) of the building facades, and the permanence of material, the use of glass, balconies and courtyards to provide the connected human scale to developments. While during our visit it was not possible to explore the level to which these were imposed, and being actively recognised by the market it is likely that they were the result of a mixture of design guidance, and market initiatives. While the buildings themselves contributed positively (to the urban feel), this was also evident in the spaces between buildings, and in the treatment of the public realm. In this regard the cities had very contrasting styles, though all sought in ways to breakdown the monolithic blocks, which made up their central city grids. The use of laneways, between blocks (eg. San Francisco) to provide visual and access corridors to key features (the Mission Creek), or to provide additional pedestrian only frontage, often linking to community courtyards (Portland Pearl) were generally attractive, inviting and of a high standard. Such lanes were generally a mixture of widths, supplemented with lighting, seating and planting, and generally provided direct frontage to building or individual homes.

In a number of centres the connection to pre development forms, and the use and retention of heritage stock was identified as creating identifiable character for many redevelopment areas. San Francisco was one city criticised for a lack of respect for its established urban fabric, (Mission Bay), while in contrast Vancouver's residential scaled street frontages embodied well established historic styles, and the Pearl District, protected, re used and built upon its strong earlier industrial heritage.

Parks and Public Space: At a more public scale, the use of small "inner city style" parks was also a feature of these areas. They were used to provide a green lung, for a local community. The predominant factor of the parks was their scale (generally under 2000m<sup>2</sup>) and their emphasis on passive recreation, (seating, planting, water) but often with some limited capacity for play (eg. a hard area, basketball hoop etc.). These were cleverly designed as gathering spaces. While there was a mixture of more internalised and street frontage parks, the latter were generally located in the midst of a developed area, and not at the outer edge, and consistently away from major traffic routes.

Street form: The street form generally complemented the park and urban space. Paving, lighting, planting and signage were generally of a high quality, and reflected the fact that walking was designed to be a key element of these neighbourhoods. While (surprisingly) it was only in San Francisco that we encountered substantial car less development areas, all the other cities still had high levels of vehicle access. In all cases vehicles were not directly associated with units, unless underground (Vancouver) or in the case of Portland centralised either for an entire block, or sub district. This reflected the common view that walking and public transport were sufficient modes for day to day

activity, with cars being more weekend, and destination, focussed mode of transport.

Mixed Use: A further key area of articulation was the mixture of retail, food and entertainment facilities at ground floor level throughout the areas visited. The Pearl District again was the leading example, with small dairies, newsagents, restaurants and bars scattered through the area, juxtaposed with houses, offices and professional rooms. These activities were often congregated on corners, and on the blocks that faced high traffic routes, and around entrances to apartment lobbies. However they clearly performed a very local function. They did also however reflect a more urban form of living where eating, socialising and living were conducted in the public space rather than entirely within one's home. Mixed within the local facilities were also some quite large enterprises, that "fitted" the image of the area, and the market that was available in the area. In all cases the retail enterprise subjugated their presence to that of the overall area, fitting in, rather than seeking to dominate the area by their presence.

Of the cities visited, Portland provided the most comparable urban form and scale example for Christchurch. San Francisco in contrast demonstrated a different style of urban quality, based more consciously on a need to house people, with larger less attractive developments, and certainly more anonymous environments. Seattle was an interesting contrast, caught perhaps by the global downturn. Its earlier (standing) examples of inner city regeneration had little appeal displaying a more standard monolithic form with little or no connection to the ground or public environments, which were largely car corridors (the Denny Triangle). In contrast we visited the showroom of South Lake Union whose models for the future stages of revitalisation in the South Lake Union area unashamedly parroted the Vancouver style of urban form with highly personalised street, with people scaled buildings, supported high mid block podiums, and a wide variety of market choice, supplemented with retail, food and entertainment facilities throughout the area.

#### **4.5 Affordable Housing and of Role in Regeneration**

Government assisted, or Government led housing was a significant part of market scenario in each of the four cities visited though the pressures and the drivers, as well as the tools and the outcomes varied considerably in each. As part of the visit we met with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, (SFRDA) the Seattle Housing Authority (SHA), and the Portland Development Commission (PDC). We also met with the Granville Island Development Trust, which while involved in residential housing, in a limited way was primarily focussed on assisted business investment.

In each of the metropolitan centres assisted housing was driven by a strong social agenda to assist people unable to find or fund accommodation. Its involvement and link to urban regeneration often occurred:

- (i) because established low income assisted areas were generally located in downtown, and therefore ripe for regeneration,
- (ii) involvement in affordable housing provided access to funds, land, and Federal or other agency support,
- (iii) there was a high correlation between the need for assisted housing and assisted transport as part of ensuring the mobility of the population.

One of the key goals for each of the agencies visited was to integrate affordable –private housing stock in a manner that made the former indistinguishable. Often this came about through development agreements, which integrated public and private housing together, with the agencies remaining the long term owner of the stock, and renting, or permitting private ownership of social stock, with agreed formulas for resale, (to protect market discounts) and also strict rules about who it could be sold to (SFRDA).

Mixing development proved quite successful provided the proportions were correct (15-30% only assisted). Developers were either required to develop and vest housing to the authority as a way of creating a benign manager. RDAs generally controlled the land they developed allowing them to set terms for developers, including quality, value, range of stock and placement. Where redevelopment of existing areas occurred often high density outcomes were achieved successfully without reducing the assisted stock. Rebuilding older developments provided an opportunity for smart developers to get higher yields without losing levels of service for existing housing accommodation. This enabled older inner city areas to be redeveloped at higher densities without displacing residents, as well as enhancing some of the “mix” that was being sought by the agencies.

Developers generally accepted Social Housing requirements, largely because it gave access to land not otherwise available. In San Francisco developers could buy their way out of their social housing obligations, but at a significant penalty price, which was used to provide or support social housing elsewhere.

Generally the redevelopment agencies also promoted significant other benefits to keep the market engaged. In Portland the Portland Development Commission (PDC) achieved redevelopment, social components, increased density and quality urban development by committing to the provision of quality, public spaces, central provision of car parking, urban parks, and the streetcar system as development in the area took place. Often agency investment only was committed once the market had met its targets and agreed levels of investment. The Pearl District in Portland demonstrated the success of such a model. Once established the biggest challenge to the RDAs was maintaining levels of affordability.

In most cases affordability was maintained principally by maintaining ownership of the properties to ensure that prices remained at fixed percentage of the median price. The San Francisco RDA was the most sophisticated retail model and not only had a percentage of affordable stock, but within those regime degrees of affordability. This was maintained both by strict entry and exit criteria but also by mandatory income reporting and regular reassessments of ability to pay (up to 30% of income). San Francisco RDA policies meant that individuals could eventually pay market rates or above market rates if their income enabled them to, and they wished to remain in assisted housing.

The basic model used by many of the RDA style institutions was known as Tax Increment Financing (TIF). This allowed for a defined (blighted) area to have its current value assessed, and its future value (based on a programme of public and private investment) estimated. The value of that estimated increase in value was used to bankroll bonds (loans) which provided the capital to support investment into improvement in the area. The value of the investments (in parks, paving, etc.) was matched to the assessed value gain anticipated for the area. In the San Francisco RDA model the assessed increase in value was passed to a mixture of private developers and the RDA itself. Improvements were made against a set of criteria, masterplans and detailed site by site improvements.

Appendix 4.0 includes slides from the Portland Development Agency which covers the Tax Increment Finance Model (TIF).

In addition to the TIF model other tools used by the various development agents included.

- Assumption of Planning Authority Status: such that the normal relevant City Planning rules, policies did not apply and the agency was enabled to institute and direct development directly with affected landowners.
- Forgivable Loans: usually provided to community groups to enable them to carry out community based projects in designated redevelopment areas.
- Tenancy Improvement Loans: assistance to landlords to upgrade existing residential and commercial buildings.
- Model/Block Programmes: applications by blocks of the city (private) and the provision of low interest loans to enable upgrade of building stock.
- Participation by the TLA in upgrading infrastructure and streetscape to match private developer initiatives.
- Land Purchase and Offer back: the acquisition and aggregation of strategic blocks of land and working to release land to the market to achieve shared outcomes.

One of the key features of each of the authorities visited was that to greater/lesser degrees all were mandated to play a role in facilitating development. The common model for this role was a dedicated

redevelopment agency, and sourced on a state or federal supply of capital grant, or land, or both. However in each instance the RDA worked very closely with both the relevant city council and the Public Transit Agency. This reflected a shared vision for the redevelopment of particular areas of the city, and the recognition that transit services played an incredibly important role in delivering the success of these areas. In terms of the relevant city authority action within a redevelopment area was important in getting positive regeneration occurring, but that such initiatives also had a positive stimulus affect on adjoining city areas, and that the two needed to complement each other in the provision of services, the timing and of development, and the facilitation of activities and facilities, which were beyond the immediate redevelopment brief.

Irrespective of the particular model, or of the degree of social outcome prescribed for each agency they each recognised and demonstrated a long term commitment to an area, and a long term funding involvement directly and with private developers to achieve the outcomes sought. This engagement by the agencies reflected both the recognition that their role was partly based on a social service/affordability mandate, but also that to create the confidence to invest, and the achievement from the outset of a level of quality and development, a community stake was necessary. While in the case of Portland, it was demonstrated that once successful, the level of support needed lessened, in that instance the RDA remained involved to ensure that success did not lead to a wider agenda being overtaken by market success.

In each instance the Chief Executives spoken to recognise that to be successful the agencies had to think, act and play like a developer. In the Portland example this went as far as the RDA being very selective about a small cadre of like minded developers it would deal with (despite a large number of suitors), having very open relationships with them, around funding, risk, profits, and benefits as part of doing deals with them. The RDA was staffed by ex-developers, who understood both the commercial vagaries of development, but who were also capable of working effectively with other developers; albeit with a community redevelopment mandate driving their business model.

Between the different agencies visited the primary drivers for each varied considerably. San Francisco RDA was largely a social agency, and its redevelopment effort reflected a focus on social housing and rehabilitation. The Seattle Housing Authority was also a significant social agency, but had a stronger sense of integration with the planning direction of the wider city. The Portland Development Agency did not express a strong social mandate and was more focussed on general redevelopment and renewal. There was again very close integration with the cities planning direction, and there was a consistent social element in their actions (in most cases designated blighted areas expressed some form of social deprivation, which became both part of the reason for , and part of the funding solution to raising these areas).

All three agencies had strong interconnection with Public Transit, and in particular light rail transport solutions. All expressed typical Transport Oriented Development (TOD) principles, and highlighted the need to integrate public transport, and redevelopment. This can be seen to be caused by a number of drivers:

- (i) Where there were groups of economically deprived residents, public transport was a key to delivering mobility for these groups.
- (ii) Public transport systems were identified as being more compatible with high density redevelopment objectives also associated with redevelopment initiatives.
- (iii) Public Transport options provided opportunity to progress redevelopment in forms that relied on less land being absorbed for car parking.

#### **4.6 Granville Island Trust: Vancouver**

While in Vancouver we met with the Granville Island Trust. Granville Island ([www.granvilleisland.com](http://www.granvilleisland.com)) is an artificial island built on the back of an earlier port and shipping facility that serviced Vancouver Bay (False Creek). The "island" which was reclaimed, was initially used for log and other material storage, before eventually being returned by the Port Authorities to the government of Canada with the intention of developing it as an assisted housing area for returning war veterans. A range of social and supported housing was developed by the Trust, though the focus of the Trust has shifted in recent years to establish a living "local community" on the island. Its intended purpose is to provide for a range of local artisans, and not for profit agencies, and small businesses in the heart of Vancouver City. While the focus is on creating a real community, the evidence on our visit was that it appeared to be largely devoted to supporting a burgeoning tourist trade, in local goods, produce and crafts. What was significant was that the Trust managed to achieve this in a location, which without such intervention would clearly have succumbed to high rise waterfront apartments, major malls, and waterside entertainment districts. (Granville Island is located approximately 2 km south of Robson Street, Vancouver's premier retail area.)

Granville Island Trust (GIT) presented an interesting microcosm of the type of trusts experienced elsewhere in North America. Its land base had been gifted to it by the Canadian Federal Government, together with an established grant of (Canadian) \$25m. The Trust, once established was tasked with ensuring that it created and maintained an enclave for local businesses, and artisans to survive.

The Trust's principal method was both in controlling and managing development on the island, and by providing structured rental that enabled small operators to survive. The Trust deed itself prevents large corporates (eg. Starbucks, McDonalds) or any franchised operator from having a presence on the island.

As its own development agency the Trust is not bound by the City Plan rules of Vancouver City, though the Trust were keen to point out that they did voluntarily comply with these, in the main. However, it did have a high level of autonomy, and there were a number of instances of new and historic land uses co-existing on the island. Chief amongst these was the last remaining true industrial use of the site, a cement works and concrete batching plant. The Trust manages the entire operation of the island, including infrastructure maintenance, traffic control, rubbish management and building control. Through its development plan, the Trust managed building design, materials and style. The Trust has a strong vision for the flavour of the island, and uses Character Statements to control the style, materials, form – scale of the built form, on the island. However the Trust claimed to avoid prescriptive design controls because it noted that this could lead to perverse outcomes. Its apparent success in guiding building and layout development was in the total control, as both owner, regulator, and manager of the island, its services and its tenants.

In this regard the trust paralleled the powers of the SFRDA, the PDC, both of which had the power to operate independent of the relevant City Municipal Codes. The outcome however was generally better integrated, but more flexible rules and policies, backed ultimately by the power of ownership, control and the lack of third party rights in the authorities' decision-making powers.

Two key challenges were identified by the Trust. The first was continuing to remain authentic. Despite carefully structuring rents, and selection of tenants, the Trust considered it faced the risk of losing authenticity. This, in a tour around the island seemed apparent, in that many artisans and crafts were focussed on a tourist and visitor sector, rather than a local community. Accordingly the Trust was investigating how it could support a local community to provide a level of local service that made small providers viable. While most of the housing had been intended for ex war vets, this was changing over time, and the areas around Granville Island were becoming increasingly affluent. The Trust had therefore recently begun work on developing student accommodation on the island, and expanding the presence of a university campus on the site. The intention is to allow this group to rebuild a base level community that can support a local business environment that is consistent with the Trust's overall mandate and vision for the island.

The second area the Trust was actively working towards was the introduction of a light rail or streetcar line into the island. At present access is restricted to car (or foot) and to small ferries that connect the island across False Creek to the residential areas of downtown Vancouver.

As part of the 2010 Winter Olympics, the city was laying a temporary streetcar line along the southern side of False Creek, to connect Granville Island to the large athlete village being built further up the

creek. The Trust was hopeful that this would bring not only an influx of visitors, but that the streetcar would become a permanent fixture, which would connect the island to a new permanent community, who would inhabit the sports village following the departure of the Games.

In summary, therefore Granville Island, while different from many of the other places visited, provided some valuable insight and parallels. These could be summarised as follows:

- An endowed purpose
- A preliminary funding base
- A long term vision
- A strong degree of autonomous management

It is also intended that in looking to its future the Trust was focussed on:

- Building a local community to provide a stronger day to day demand base.
- Identifying a student community as a vehicle for this.
- Focussing on developing public transport links to adjoining potential communities to facilitate future demand and connectivity.

## **5.0 Summary**

The intention at the outset of the Study Tour was to visit and experience the revitalisation effect of four North American cities. Five areas of endeavour guided the choice cities; planning approach, public transit, affordable housing, and governance – financing. The experience of the trip confirmed not only that all four are key elements in making revitalisation a success, but that the elements were almost invariably intertwined in assisting the partners to both achieve individual success, and collectively to accelerate and cement the outcome sought.

For local government there are two very clear messages. The first is that such change does not happen by itself, and that governance agencies need to be articulate in seeking change, and committed to its achievements over a considerable period of time (measured in decades, not years). The second is that to make change happen direct intervention is needed. The guide to change desired, and the more certain the outcome of the change anticipated, the greater the level of intervention required.

How local authorities go about this intervention varies considerably. In the USA and Canadian examples, the use of legislation autonomy, federal monies (affordable housing monies) regulatory control, fiscal mechanisms, infrastructure and public realm funding, and collaboration



with the Private Sector, offered a cocktail of ingredients to achieve the desired outcome.

For Christchurch it highlights a number of opportunities. Much of our planning reflects positively when compared to the vision, and design work executed by the cities visited. The real challenges and opportunities are in developing the tools and mechanisms to make these goals a reality.

It would be too simplistic to simply suggest that Christchurch adopt the modes used in the USA. In the first instance our legislative basis is different, the capital funding, particularly at State level is very different, and our development market less mature than in the USA. We possibly also face a greater hurdle in achieving intensification as there is little real history of this in the New Zealand context to date.

However the experience of the tour does provide an opportunity to explain some parallel processes that could be potentially applied in the Christchurch and New Zealand context. Specifically these are:

- The funding and incentive mechanism to stimulate investment and partnership,
- The management modes and legislative powers to achieve comprehensive redevelopment and regeneration,
- The use and development of well established social housing modes as a future regeneration tool,
- The future role of public transport in supporting revitalisation, in particular the future of rail as a key tool in generating significant modal shift.

It is recommended that the Christchurch City Council investigate a range of options in the above areas to complement, encourage, and reinforce the planning and current initiatives underway to support positive inner city revitalisation and future suburban consolidation for the city of Christchurch.

Mike Theelen

**GENERAL MANAGER, STRATEGY AND PLANNING GROUP**

June 2010