

Innovative transit-oriented developments are connecting city dwellers with a wider range of services in accessible, pedestrian-friendly spaces

# Transported to a better urban space

Arrive at any one of a growing number of innovative transit-oriented development (TOD) schemes globally and you'll quickly gather a sense of the way the real estate industry is evolving.

From a more diverse mix of uses to integrated green space and pedestrian-friendly townscapes centred round public transport hubs, the common denominator is a move towards better-connected cities.

The notion of TOD has been around for some time. "What started the whole thing off was the desire to drive economic growth," says Terence Seah, divisional director at Benoy in Singapore.

"By making cities more compact and rising to the challenges presented by growing urban populations, economic productivity has had to evolve and be maximised," he says.

Today, TODs are often driven by the need to ease congestion as well as improve urban living, with some cities more advanced than others and even established global centres subject to upgrades.

Japan leads the way in the Asia Pacific region, with a major railway company in operation for the past 15 to 20 years and developers having built housing, offices and retail around key stations.

Hong Kong and Singapore have a

similarly long track record in TOD, being served by Mass Transit Railway (MTR) and Mass Rapid Transit (MRT) systems respectively. Hong Kong's Airport Express, an MTR line linking the airport to principal urban areas of the city, began service in the late 1990s and developments have sprung up along the route.

In Singapore, a planned high-speed rail project connecting the city state and Kuala Lumpur by 2022 marks the next stage.

## Addressing mobility issues

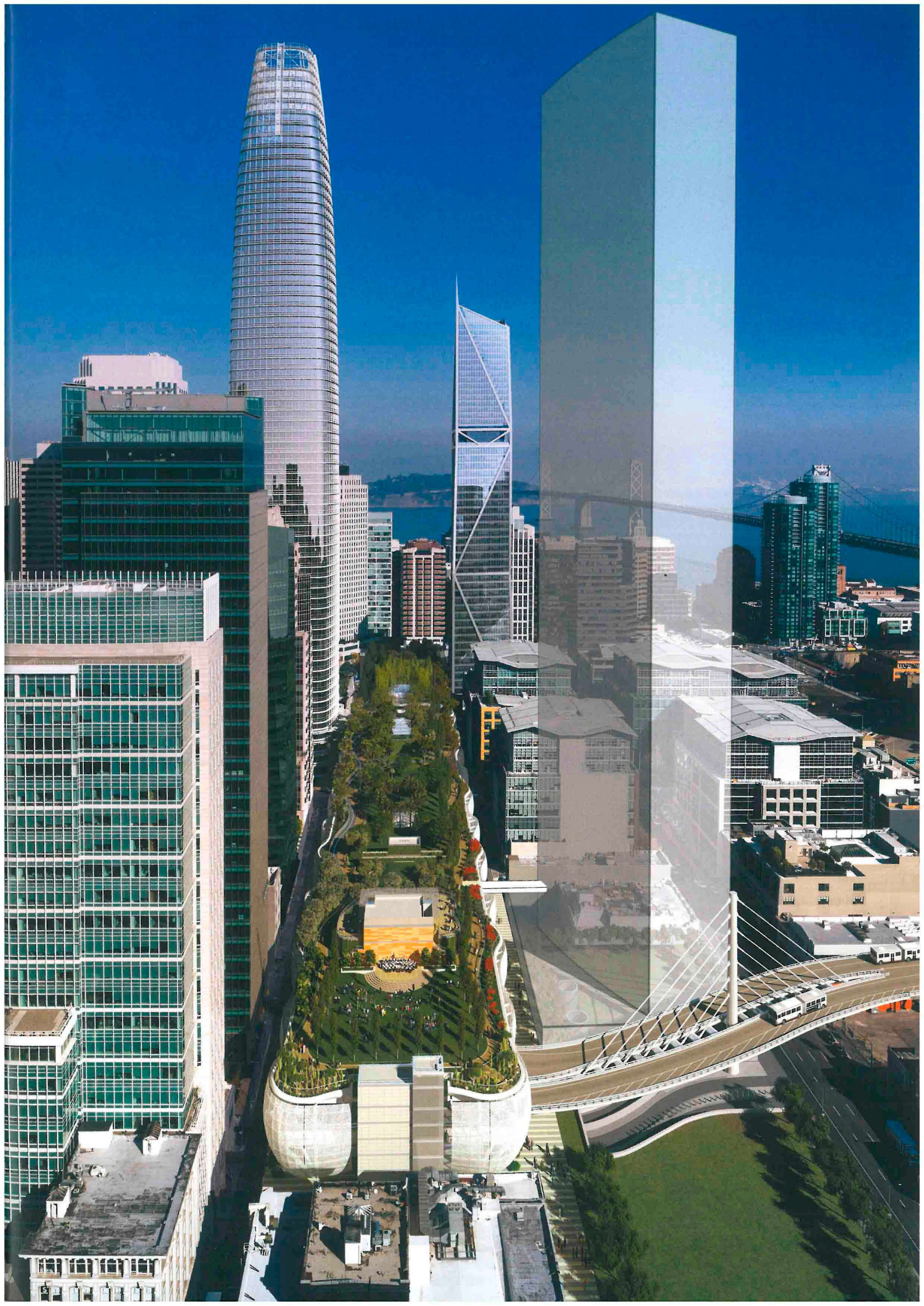
Developing nation cities such as Manila are starting to address mobility issues. "Every road and bridge that has been added is already congested, yet there is little political will to impose a congestion tax, like in London or Singapore," says Charlie Rufino, president of the Net Group, who was heavily involved in the development of Manila's Fort Bonifacio business district. He believes "a grand transportation system that is seamless and secure" must be encouraged.

Australia is doing more to improve mobility, with the Perth City Link redevelopment set to transform a network of bus and train connections into a destination featuring housing, shops, restaurants and offices.

One of the latest trends in TOD is their richer mix of elements. Seah says: "The new

**The Transbay Transit Center scheme in San Francisco is designed to appeal to the 'millennial' generation's preference for inner-city living, by clustering homes, offices and shops around a transport hub topped by a new urban park**







## HI-TECH MALLS PRODUCE NET BENEFITS

An increasingly fundamental aspect of TODs is the blending of functions, mirroring the way people live their lives. Retail plays a major part in this mix and is being shaped by new trends filtering down to real estate.

In a world where people are bent on using their time more efficiently “things that used to have just one function now have multiple functions”, says Melanie Alshab, senior vice-president of CDG Retail Management.

“Just as cell phones used to have cameras but now do many things, some malls now provide retail and medical services.”

Meanwhile, the data shed by mobile phones is becoming more commercialised. Forward-thinking landlords might use this information to interact with consumers or form an immediate response, tailoring an advert to a particular shopper’s fancies as they pass by, or knowing to summon a

security guard where a crowd has assembled.

Also, objects that were once ‘dumb’, such as a thermostat, serving a single purpose, are now ‘smart’ meaning they are connected to a network, says Alshab, referring to a concept termed ‘the internet of things’.

These models can be woven together by feeding data from a people counter at the mall’s entrance to a thermostat programmed to adjust the temperature based on the number of bodies on site, for example.

Aspects of these embryonic technologies are starting to be implemented. Chinese real estate developer Vanke teamed up with internet company Baidu to offer a service that tells customers where they are in a mall, using signals generated by phone compasses.

“We used to say the likes of changing adverts were 10 years away; now they’re more commercially available,” says Alshab.

generation of TODs are more mixed than the first generation, as developers re-evaluate the potential of these sites. Increasingly governments are realising the importance of integrating commercial needs with facilities for arts, culture and healthcare, for example, as so many people are passing through these locations.

“Creating a mini version of a city transforms these developments into a community, rather than just a transit point,” Seah adds.

### Cities vie to attract the best people

This coincides with the notion of “liveable cities”, which is coming to maturity. Over the past five years cities, rather than countries, have competed to attract the best people and because everybody is so mobile, one of the biggest draws they can provide is an interesting mix in terms of lifestyle and what the city has to offer.

The impact of demographics on cities’ development cannot be underestimated. “In

The Beach, an open-air shopping and restaurants development in Dubai designed by Benoy, has been fully pedestrianised, with roads and car parking beneath, reflecting the way that cities originally designed around the car are being reconfigured as more pedestrian-friendly spaces

## ST PANCRAS SETS REGENERATION IN TRAIN

A marker of St Pancras's success is the fact around 25% of the footfall at the London train terminal is made up of people visiting "simply because it's a great place to be", says Stuart Robinson, head of the UK planning service at CBRE.

The wider King's Cross area was regenerated as part of the St Pancras redevelopment and now draws people from the concourse through the townscape to a large open square where fountains attract families looking for a day out.

"The project's success has had a big influence on the way placemaking is viewed as part of stations' design," Robinson says.

Only in the past five years has the UK government acknowledged the regeneration benefits arising from infrastructure, which brings tax benefits and economic growth.

Some have criticised Crossrail, the new railway that will link the east of the capital with the west by 2019, for missing an opportunity to accelerate growth by connecting parts of south-east London with central London, unlocking vast swathes of industrial land in towns that currently have restricted accessibility.

However, Martyn Saunders, associate in the planning, regeneration and development team at Bilfinger GVA, says: "What Crossrail has done with the route it has got is ambitious. It's the scheme London needs to keep its world city status."



San Francisco, you have a millennial group that favours urban living more than previous generations," says Colin Yasukochi, director of research and analysis at CBRE in the US.

"Much of their preference focuses on the Bay area, where the technology industry is important and attracts a younger work force. For TOD to fit into that narrative, people expect to get anywhere they want without a car; they want restaurants and services and to bump into people in a denser environment."

Transbay Transit Center will fulfil these requirements by creating a new neighbourhood in downtown San Francisco that will include homes, offices and shops around a major new transport hub, on top of which will sit an urban park.

Formats underpinned by transport that integrate with the traditional grain of a city, such as the Westfield Stratford City shopping centre in London, which incorporates a food market and outdoor shopping, are now being emulated in China.

Says Seah: "Traditionally, schemes have

relied on air conditioning, but developers are now subscribing to the indoor-outdoor concept, including elements of high-street café culture, open-air retail precincts and large public realms, to push the development of liveable cities further."

Pedestrianised environments that are easy to stroll around and in which people take precedence over cars are increasingly desirable as part of well-connected lifestyle destinations, with developers now placing greater emphasis on creating a pleasant atmosphere in which people are inclined to spend more time.

### Open space brings energy

Paul Priest, a director at Benoy in Dubai, says: "Projects are becoming more integrated and cities better connected, with a focus on outdoor environments and communal space. Pedestrianisation is a key part of that; people are seeing the energy it brings to a community and space that allows free movement tends to be a lot more successful."

Since the downturn there has been consideration as to developments' logical and financial stability and modern cities such as Dubai, designed for car use, are being retrofitted to cater for pedestrians.

For example, new beachfront retail and dining precinct The Beach has been fully pedestrianised by positioning the car park under the development and creating a walkable, low-rise scheme that is a counterpoint to the traditional indoor model.

The real estate industry continues to advance in its pursuit of better connected cities. The concept is now well established and being applied to developments globally. Developers are replicating successful formats and features from individual schemes, while some existing projects are being improved.

Cast in the definition of what constitutes a place people want to work, live and relax, and the benchmark is likely to remain TODs that combine a mix of uses in an appealing, pedestrian-friendly environment. ►

## AIRPORTS TAKING OFF AS MINI CITIES

The evolution of airports best encapsulates the way real estate is moving towards integration of different uses.

Like other TODs, airports are responding to demand for immediacy of services and diversity of offer. Most were originally designed as transport-centric buildings with a duty free area, but airport authorities are seeking to turn vast amounts of unused space into revenue generators spanning retail, food and beverage outlets, hospitality and entertainment facilities.

Singapore airport is going one step further by converting an old airport car park into a retail destination called Jewel Changi Airport complex.

The project's aim is to target people before they move into the city itself, as well as drawing local shoppers, according to the project's interior designer, Benoy. Alan Wan, director at Benoy in Hong Kong, describes it as an "attraction and a gateway for the city".

Jewel's design captures Singapore's essence as a city by bringing indoor forestry and waterfalls into the retail, leisure and dining environment.

"Jewel embodies the way the airport experience is being augmented," Wan

says. "The scheme helps to realise the full potential of the airport site, progressing the development from a transport centre into a destination in its own right."

Not only in Asia, but in countries around the world the trend is surging for well-connected "aerotropolis" developments. These schemes are changing the way we perceive airports, as we now shop, sleep, work and eat in these destinations

Amsterdam's Schiphol airport is an example of a successful "aerotropolis": well connected to the surrounding city with offices, accommodation, restaurants and entertainment all in one spot. Such is its competence that even in the downturn, rents remained fairly high.



Jewel Changi Airport will put forestry, waterfalls and retail at the heart of Singapore's airport, reflecting the city's nature while creating a new destination for visitors and locals