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TRID in perspective

Introduction: The Transit Revitalization Investment District (TRID) Act (*P.L. 1801, No. 238)* was first passed in 2004 and took effect in 2005. The legislation's intent was to provide a means of encouraging private development near (within a half-mile of) a transit station with the aim of increasing ridership.

The first step is for the municipality to create the district adhering to the terms of the TRID legislation, spelling out the boundaries and the redevelopment projects that would be undertaken.

The costs incurred by the TRID district's municipality would include planning, loss of tax revenue and borrowing necessary to acquire and demolish structures along with cost of infrastructure to facilitate any new building. These costs would be recovered through the presumably higher taxes generated by the new structures or other taxable property within the TRID zone.

Initially it was expected that the development would be aimed at businesses and dwelling units that would create demand for transit ridership.

Initial experience

The bottom line is that during the first 12 years of the existence of the TRID law, only one TRID project statewide was adopted and built—the East Liberty Transportation Development project in Pittsburgh.

Several municipalities undertook TRID studies but never pursued actual development for a variety of reasons; mostly they were not economically justified or had local opposition. In the Pittsburgh area, Greensburg, Beaver County and Mt. Lebanon are included in this group.

In 2016, the Legislature undertook to amend the original 2004 TRID legislation by changing certain important perceived imitations (*P.L. 1160, No. 151*). First, and possibly, most importantly, the language was altered to specifically allow economic development along with the original intent to boost transit ridership.

The 2016 bill also set up a mechanism to create state funding for TRID municipalities who applied for help. Typically, the funding was to be on a matching basis. It also established a fund to grant $350,000 per year for 20 years to existing TRID projects for debt repayment assistance.

Finally, the third major change in TRID legislation was to increase the size of the allowable TRID distance from the transit facility to three quarters of a mile rather than the original legislation limit of one-half mile.

Note that the TRID law was further amended in 2019 (*P.L. 695, No. 101*) to include the use of the TRID mechanism in military installations but the 2016 version for civilian use was not affected.

Current situation

Despite a number of studies in the 22 years since passage of the first TRID legislation, to date, there are only three active or completed projects: East Liberty (the only completed project); Middletown, Delaware County (underway) and the Esplanade project (underway) along the Ohio River. The latter got underway, despite resistance from area residents, after final approval in 2025.

Moreover, Pittsburgh City Council just voted to proceed with the development of a TRID in the Golden Triangle. It is almost surely an economic development project in that transit ridership is unlikely to be substantially impacted. And there is significant public disapproval by residents and commercial users who will be impacted almost immediately after the project begins.

Comments and conclusion

There are no active TRIDS in Philadelphia County where there is massive transit ridership compared to other Pennsylvania counties. Whether one of the proposals will come to fruition in the near future remains doubtful considering the lack of any newsworthy discussion of such an event.

How long the development proposed in the recently created Golden Triangle TRID takes to actually break ground and be completed must be viewed as uncertain at this point. It still must be approved by the other taxing bodies, Allegheny County and the Pittsburgh Public Schools. It, too, is encountering resistance as many citizens are not happy about the diversion of tax revenue to pay off the debt incurred in setting up the project.

The bottom line is that for all the effort to write the legislation that establishes the methodology and requirements to create—and the implicit promises of a major boost in public transit use—TRID is an abject failure. It is a politically motivated gimmick to get more people out of cars and into public transit that has run into reality.

Two Pennsylvania counties each have one active TRID after 22 years since the TRID law was first passed in late 2004. One of those counties, Allegheny, is seeing one being built and one on the drawing board. All three are in the City of Pittsburgh. That poor result cannot possibly be what the originators of the TRID legislation imagined.

Poorly thought-out legislation that was doubled down on in 2016 when the effort to create more transit riders was replaced with a focus on economic development. The problem is all these misguided efforts to grow and to attract businesses will not overcome a tax and regulatory environment that fails to recognize the need for a pro-business economic and labor climate.

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