

# Indianapolis Star

## Light rail will move Indy forward

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There is a new way of building the Indianapolis metropolitan area that is struggling to be born. It is different than how you have built the place over the past 60 years but it is essential to your future economic development that it be encouraged.

You have been following how the bulk of the country has been building the built environment (real estate and infrastructure), which was what the market wanted during the industrial economy of the mid and late 20<sup>th</sup> century. It produced a pattern of development known as “drivable sub-urban” which gave most people what they wanted; houses on their own lots and cars to get around. It also led to land and energy usage that increased 8-12% for every 1% increase in population.

But the times, they are a changing.

Throughout the country, young “millennial” adults and empty-nester baby boomers are demanding another choice — higher-density “walkable urban” places to live, work and play.

The walkable urban development going on in Indianapolis is remarkable, as the redevelopment of five cultural districts, such as Broad Ripple and Fountain Square, demonstrate. While not yet at critical mass, downtown certainly will become a “24/7” place in the next upturn with the recent investment in culture, retail, office and housing.

But walkable urban development is not confined to the city.

The creation of Carmel Center City, anchored by the Regional Performing Arts Center, under the leadership of Mayor Brainard, shows how suburban town centers can provide walkable urban options. The Speedway Redevelopment Commission shows that walkable urban development can emerge on a brownfield site adjacent to the race track.

The pent-up demand for walkable urban development will determine where the majority of growth will go in the region over the next generation. If Indianapolis follows the lead of bellwether metros such as Washington, D.C., and Denver, there will be eight to 12 regionally important walkable urban places. Today, Indianapolis has four or five. Where will the other four to seven be?

Why does this matter? The market wants it and the knowledge economy demands it.

Ever wonder why so many of your young adults move to Chicago? If you do not build what the rising generation wants, it will leave or not be attracted to Indianapolis in the first place. Losing your young adults is not only a family affair. It will hurt the economy if people in their most entrepreneurial time of life go elsewhere to start new businesses.

Walkable urban places are more energy efficient and emit far less greenhouse gases. A soon-to-be released **Brookings Institution** study will show the intuitively obvious findings that households, relying on their cars for all trips outside their home, use four times as much energy and emit four times the carbon dioxide as walkable urban households.

What can Indianapolis do to give the market what it wants?

Build a regional rail-based transit system for a start. That is why Denver and Washington are the national models of future metropolitan development. Rail transit stations are where 90 percent of these two metro areas' walkable urban places locate. Building a complete transit system, complemented by allowing higher density, mixed-use places to be built within walking distance of the stations, will be the most important economic development initiative for your region in the early 21st century. If you do not, you will be condemned to be stuck in the 20th.

The freeway system you built in the mid to late 20<sup>th</sup> century was appropriate for the industrial economy. It is obvious that complimenting the freeways with a transit system is being demanded by the knowledge economy.

The market is demanding choice — the option of either a drivable sub-urban way of life, which you have in overabundance, or a walkable urban lifestyle, of which you have a significant deficiency. The walkable urban choices will be high density, like what is evolving in downtown, or it will be lower density, such as the Broad Ripple. It will be in the central cities, and it will be provided in the suburbs.

A recent poll by the Indianapolis Chamber showed that 71% of voters would support public funding for mass transit.

These trends are coming together at a perfect time for the Indianapolis economy. Sign up for the 21st-century knowledge-based economy.

**Christopher B. Leinberger is a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution, a real estate developer, a professor at the University of Michigan, and the author of The Option of Urbanism . He will be the keynote speaker at the Monumental Affair Dinner on Thursday evening, November 13<sup>th</sup>, sponsored \_\_\_\_\_.**