In many locations in the United States, public transit is a viable alternative to large personal vehicles. Public transit reduces congestion, and it reduces traffic crashes. In Alabama the drivers of 50 personal vehicles could all be placed in one transit bus – that would remove 50 vehicles from the road during rush hour. 500 cars could be removed with 10 buses. To date, transit has not been a widely accepted mode of travel to Alabama’s citizens due to their passion for individual travel. The existing high level of personal convenience would be lost if they abandoned personal vehicles for transit. In a typical Alabama city, it would take a very large transit system to provide a high level of service. Existing transit systems are not robust because they have small, scattered groups of transit riders, and once a rider enters a bus, travel is circuitous and time consuming instead of direct and prompt. Virtually all transit systems in the state struggle with finances because transit operations are costly and it is impossible to cover the entire cost with user fees. To summarize existing transit systems in Alabama, the user group is too small and too wide spread, convenience is low, and expectations of transit are low for both users and the general public. Transit-oriented development (TOD) solves one of the major difficulties by generating a small but densely populated cluster of transit users around each transit station. It has gained popularity as a strategy to address a number of urban problems, including traffic congestion, shortage of affordable housing, air pollution, lack of neighborhood identity, and urban sprawl. In effect, TOD encourages clusters of dense residential development around transit stations or transit pickup points. The objective of this project is to develop a primer that elected officials, planners and transportation agencies may use to visualize, design, and implement transit-oriented development patterns in Alabama. The Regional Development Commission of Greater Birmingham and the Alabama Department of Transportation will be the key players in any effort to implement TOD in Alabama, and these two agencies will be involved throughout this UTCA project.

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