



**GrowSmartRI**  
Sustainable Economic Growth  
& Quality of Place

# MEDIA RELEASE

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## **New study outlines potential of transit-oriented development to address RI's housing shortage and grow jobs where cities and towns want them**

Full report available for download at [www.growsmartri.org](http://www.growsmartri.org)

**February 12, 2019, Providence, RI** – A just published study estimates the capacity for accommodating up to 73,000 new housing units and 25,000 new jobs in transit oriented development areas located in five cities and towns across Rhode Island. Transit-oriented development, or TOD, is a type of community development that includes a mixture of housing, office, retail and/or other amenities integrated into a walkable neighborhood and located within a half-mile of high-quality public transportation.

The year-long TOD study was conducted by 40 graduate students in the Roger Williams University School of Architecture under the direction of Professor Ginette Wessel and in collaboration with Grow Smart RI, HousingWorks RI and planners in the five communities studied. Independent transit consultants Roger Leaf and Peter Brassard also provided extensive pro bono counsel to the effort. The estimates for accommodating housing and jobs are based on the highest of three density scenarios outlined by the students.

In 2016, HousingWorksRI published a report detailing Rhode Island's housing shortage and projecting the need for up to 40,000 new housing units by 2025, based on only modest population growth and the continued decline in average household size. "Due to a variety of building constraints, permits for new housing in Rhode Island are being granted at the rate of about 750 per year, less than a quarter of the rate needed to meet the demand", said Brenda Clement, Executive Director of HousingWorksRI, a housing policy research organization at Roger Williams University.

The report, [\*Evaluating the Potential for Transit Oriented Development in Rhode Island\*](#), examined the opportunities, constraints and challenges of transit oriented development (TOD) at specific sites along Rhode Island's rail corridors and/or high-frequency bus routes in Woonsocket, North Kingstown, South Kingstown, Westerly and Newport. The cities of Pawtucket/Central Falls, Providence and Warwick have already conducted professional TOD analyses, made necessary zoning changes and are in various stages of implementation.

"The study quantifies the long-term TOD growth potential in the five cities and towns that our students analyzed, consistent with local comprehensive community plans, and includes a set of state and local recommendations to realize that potential" said RWU Professor Ginette Wessel.

"We think the timing is right in Rhode Island to double down on TOD as a proven strategy for growing our economy and new housing opportunities in a sustainable way. Prioritizing TOD will capitalize on our compactness and density and respond to the strong market demand for walkable urban neighborhoods", said Scott Wolf, Executive Director of Grow Smart RI, adding that "our neighbors in Massachusetts and Connecticut are aggressively setting the table for attracting private TOD investment".

Among the municipal level recommendations are TOD district visioning and planning, infrastructure investment and zoning reform to allow greater density and mix of uses. At the state level, the focus is on assistance with infrastructure needs and improving Rhode Island's transit system with increased frequency and faster trip times. The TOD analysis comes as the state's first-ever long range transit master plan called [TransitForwardRI 2040](#) is underway. In 2018, the General Assembly approved the framework for a Municipal Infrastructure Grant Program ([H-7102](#)) but it has not yet been funded.

With significant amenities and development infrastructure already in place, including several modes of public transportation, Downtown Providence is currently dominating the 'cranes-in-the-sky' TOD activity in Rhode Island. City Centre Warwick, the 100-acre district surrounding T.F. Green Airport and the InterLink intermodal center, has seen more modest development, but is constrained by significantly lower levels of transit service at this time. In Pawtucket/Central Falls, the Conant Thread TOD District will see a new bus hub and commuter rail stop open in 2020 and 2022 respectively.

This report should be viewed as a high powered student product informed by outside transit experts, but not a substitute for professionally prepared plans developed on behalf of the municipalities that were studied. The primary purpose of the study was to quantify order-of-magnitude projected outcomes and to generate interest and discussion on the part of local and state decision makers. The next step would be to engage professional consultants to prepare and refine plans for implementation.

#### **About Roger Williams University School of Architecture, Art and Historic Preservation**

Roger Williams University is inextricably connected to Roger Williams, the 17th-century leader devoted to freedom of conscience and social justice who founded a community in Rhode Island based on those tenets. Working to strengthen society through engaged teaching and learning, the SAAHP at RWU provides rigorous professional training in design, history, planning, and technology in the M.Arch, M.S.HP, and Graduate Certificate programs. The school helps students develop critical strategic thinking and communication skills to tackle a range of issues from sustainability and urbanism to historic preservation.

#### **About Grow Smart Rhode Island**

Since 1998 Grow Smart has provided statewide leadership for diverse public and private interests seeking sustainable and equitable economic growth. It promotes such growth by advocating for compact development in revitalized urban, town and village centers balanced with responsible stewardship of our region's natural assets – farmland, forests, the coastline, and the Bay. It informs leaders, decision makers and concerned citizens about the many benefits of compact development and asset stewardship and provides research and training on proven smart growth strategies. It convenes broad coalitions that advocate policy reforms and specific projects designed to build communities where all people and businesses can thrive.

#### **About HousingWorks RI**

HousingWorks RI at Roger Williams University is a clearinghouse of information about housing in Rhode Island. It conducts research and analyzes data to inform public policy. It also develops communications strategies and promotes dialogue about the relationship between housing and the state's economic future and our residents' well-being.