

# NEW PARK AVENUE: A CORRIDOR POISED FOR TRANSFORMATION

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1.1 BACKGROUND

The New Park Avenue corridor extends between West Hartford and Hartford adjacent to a swath of industrial uses along a former freight rail line. This industrial band is generally sandwiched between low density residential and large-footprint commercial strip development. However, recent and forthcoming investments have positioned the corridor for transformation. The New Park Avenue corridor has the potential to become a walkable, mixed-use and transit supportive environment that leverages the following transit investments made by the State of Connecticut:

- The *CTfastrak* Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system, which launched in March 2015. *CTfastrak* serves communities between Hartford and New Britain along a dedicated guideway and is integrated with local and express bus service.
- *CTrail* Hartford Line passenger rail service, which launched in June 2018. The *CTrail* Hartford Line operates between New Haven, Connecticut and Springfield, Massachusetts.

The New Park Avenue corridor, depicted in the long-term potential build-out rendering (Figure 1), is served by four *CTfastrak* stations: Elmwood, Flatbush Avenue, Kane Street, and Parkville. In addition, the West Hartford Hartford Line station, currently in design, will be located adjacent to the Flatbush Avenue *CTfastrak* station with a cross-platform connection. This direct connection between BRT and rail service will create a multi-modal hub and present significant opportunities for economic growth within the station area and throughout the corridor.

In addition to these transit investments, there have been other catalytic investments in the corridor. Recent transit-oriented developments (TOD) in the Parkville neighborhood of Hartford, as well as the 616 New Park Avenue mixed-use development in West Hartford, have the potential to generate continued developer interest. Furthermore, following a recent study, West Hartford received a state grant to implement Complete Streets improvements along a portion of the corridor. These improvements, which include traffic calming measures, pedestrian infrastructure, bike lanes, and streetscaping, are a critical first step toward transforming what is currently an auto-oriented retail corridor.

Altogether, the recent and ongoing transportation investments and development activity along the corridor present a timely opportunity to realize a new vision for New Park Avenue.

### 1.1.2 PRIOR PLANS & STUDIES

The vision for New Park Avenue builds on past studies and incorporates their recommendations in the long-term potential build-out depicted in the rendering. The framework for development and improvements in the corridor incorporates elements of the following studies.

### 1.1.2.1 CTFASTRAK TOD CAPACITY STUDY

The *CTfastrak* TOD Capacity Study examined the potential for TOD along the newly opened *CTfastrak* BRT corridor in Central Connecticut. Opened in March 2015, *CTfastrak* is Connecticut's first BRT system and provides Central Connecticut with a more efficient means of transport between the densely populated cities of Hartford and New Britain. *CTfastrak* is regarded by the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) as one of the only true and highest ranked BRT systems in the United States.

Recognizing that *CTfastrak* provides a unique opportunity for creating a bus-based TOD model, the *CTfastrak* TOD Capacity Study assessed the degree to which there is a "capacity" for TOD along the corridor. It identified the extent to which the keys to successful TOD implementation were in place by examining each *CTfastrak* station area's physical suitability, regulatory environment, political willingness, developer interest, community support, interjurisdictional cooperation, and local level of TOD planning. Following an extensive evaluation of these success factors, this study outlined an implementation plan tailored to each community's needs and current capacity to carry out TOD. The New Park Avenue long-term potential build-out rendering considers the implementation strategies and recommendations for Parkville and Kane Street Stations in Hartford, and Flatbush Avenue and Elmwood Stations in West Hartford.

### 1.1.2.2 THE HARTFORD TOD PILOT STUDY

To build on the existing momentum in the Parkville neighborhood of Hartford, the Hartford TOD Pilot Study proposed a redevelopment plan for the Parkville District. The Study identified short-term redevelopment opportunities south of the Parkville *CTfastrak* station with long-term development extending to Flatbush Avenue near the Flatbush *CTfastrak* and West Hartford Hartford Line stations.

While the City of Hartford's recent adoption of transit-supportive zoning has laid the foundation for TOD, the study proposed additional actions for TOD implementation in the Parkville station area. The study evaluated both short- and long-term build-out scenarios, suggested public infrastructure investments, proposed TOD phasing strategies, identified potential funding mechanisms, and recommended planning and policy tools to generate developer interest. The New Park Avenue long-term potential build-out rendering incorporates strategic site build-outs identified in the Hartford TOD Pilot Study.

### 1.1.2.3 WEST HARTFORD COMPLETE STREETS STUDY

In March 2017, the Town of West Hartford completed the New Park Avenue Complete Streets Study. The study proposed conceptual designs for infrastructure improvements between the Flatbush Avenue and Elmwood *CTfastrak* stations. The study aimed to promote a more balanced Complete Streets design for New Park Avenue in accordance with the goals set forth in the Town of West Hartford's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). In addition, the study included a review of the zoning along the corridor and recommended potential modifications.

The redevelopment opportunities identified as part of the New Park Avenue Complete Streets Study were developed through a collaborative public process. Opportunities for TOD and public realm improvements were focused in an approximately one-quarter-mile radius around the *CTfastrak* stations. The New Park Avenue long-term potential build-out rendering considers some of the strategic sites within these TOD opportunity areas.

## 1.2 TOD LONG-TERM CONCEPTUAL BUILD-OUT

The New Park Avenue long-term potential build-out rendering (Figure 1) is an illustration of the transformative potential of TOD coupled with complete streets investments to improve the public realm. The rendering depicts a range of strategies to support TOD that fall into the broad categories of improved multi-modal connectivity and relatively denser mixed-use development. The potential long-term build-out suggests a vision that includes the following elements:

- Complete Streets improvements that link the community with transit and expand options for multi-modal transportation beyond the automobile, accommodating pedestrians and cyclists.

- A vibrant public realm with ground floor retail and active frontages where residents, workers, and shoppers frequent and may experience chance encounters.
- Redevelopment of vacant and underutilized parcels with mixed-use development and denser nodes of development around the stations.
- A context sensitive mix of uses that creates a live/work/play environment to support transit use and reinforce an active streetscape that is pedestrian-friendly. The uses encompass a range of housing, retail, and employment opportunities integrated with public amenities.
- Development densities that are relatively higher than the surrounding development to support transit use and create a continuous street wall, reinforcing New Park Avenue as a 'public space'.
- Innovative approaches to parking that minimize abundant surface parking lots and discourage use of the automobile.

By combining these elements, the New Park Avenue corridor has the potential to be transformed into a Central Connecticut multi-modal destination.

## 1.3 THE PATH FORWARD

The New Park Avenue long-term potential build-out rendering pulls together past planning efforts by the Connecticut Department of Transportation, The City of Hartford, and the Town of West Hartford to create a unified vision for the TOD potential of this corridor. While the amount and type of new development depicted in the rendering reflects just one scenario for the build-out of the corridor and actual development will be subject to market conditions, a phased approach to strategic actions can facilitate TOD and increase developer interest. These activities include public improvements to the street network, zoning modifications, procurement of funding, and interjurisdictional coordination between Hartford and West Hartford. Specific recommended steps for implementation are contained in the *CTfastrak* TOD Capacity Study, Hartford TOD Pilot Study, and West Hartford Complete Streets Study. While it may take several years to ultimately realize the full TOD potential in this corridor, the preliminary stages of many of these recommended actions are already underway. Over time, as market conditions continue to evolve, there is potential to see significant transformation of the New Park Avenue corridor.



Figure 1 - Conceptual Bird's-eye View of the Long-Term Future Build-out of the New Park Avenue Corridor  
This conceptual rendering is for illustrative purposes only and does not depict actual plans for pending development.