

Ben Lyman comments on article "Action Off the Mountains in Salt Lake City"

<http://travel.nytimes.com/2013/07/28/travel/action-off-the-mountains-in-salt-lake-city.html?pagewanted=1&ref=travel>

For those who are interested, more on Salt Lake City and transit from my perspective (I earned my degree in Urban Planning at the University of Utah):

For years prior to the advent of the TRAX (light rail) system in SLC, and even during TRAX's first few years (it may still be running to this day, I don't know), the Downtown Alliance would run a shuttle around town to pick up passengers from restaurants and transport them to event venues (opera, symphony, Utah Jazz, etc.). They would be returned to the restaurant they started at (where their car was presumably parked) after the event. Even this relatively modest "circulator" was immensely popular - I remember (with some horror) waiting on an entire restaurant full of people with scheduled pickups all within 20 minutes of each other to get to various events. Something like this could serve larger events in downtown Juneau from both restaurants and satellite parking facilities as an interim step towards a more regular circulator.

Something else that's important to note about SLC's revitalization: it has all occurred in the last fifteen years, and most of it in the last ten. When I first moved to SLC (1997), TRAX was only an idea, and I don't believe a single piece of track had been laid yet, although they were ramping up for the Winter Olympics soon enough. Even when I moved back to Juneau in 2003, the TRAX extension to the airport was little more than a vision, with high projected costs and low projected ridership. Just 12 years ago, I did an internship with a group that tried (unsuccessfully) to get the Amtrak and planned TRAX lines to intersect (they are several blocks from each other, separated by what is still not the best part of town), but now the connections between the new commuter line (Front Runner) and TRAX are being lauded (Amtrak is still on the wrong side of the redeveloped and redeveloping area from these new lines).

When TRAX was first pitched, neighborhoods fought against having stations (the sole reason for a mile-long gap between stations along the University line was neighborhood opposition). After the first two lines were constructed, communities started vying to get the next extension, and have now realized that their future can be made or broken by the alignment of new routes. That realization came only after the 2012 Winter Olympics, when all constructed systems were operational for the first time (the University line was closed during the Olympics due to security concerns, even though it had been constructed in part in order to alleviate parking shortages at the location of the Opening Ceremonies).

Rio Tinto has recognized the importance of transportation and mixed-use communities in economic development, and has been developing Daybreak ([www.daybreakutah.com](http://www.daybreakutah.com)) in phases over the last decade (Disclosure: I had the honor of working on the development of the Copperton Township Master Plan for the adjacent property, also owned by Rio Tinto - and the Daybreak concept was essentially what we proposed for Copperton, moved next door and lacking the historic village as a cultural node). Service by TRAX appears to have been a critical component of Daybreak's commercial success (judging by their marketing).

You might ask yourself why a multi-national mining company would be building mixed-use, transit-oriented development, and unless you're incredibly cynical, you'd probably get the answer wrong: Due to point-source emissions from their copper mining and processing activities (Bingham Canyon Mine), Rio Tinto has turned to supporting mixed use and transit-

oriented development in order to reduce non-point-source pollution, thereby allowing more point-source emissions before air quality thresholds are exceeded (<http://kennebecott.com/air-quality#acc-head-1>). Clearly, one lesson from Daybreak is that advocates of walkable, mixed-use, transit oriented development should look for support in diverse interests and industries.

In downtown (on the site of the new 23-acre mall described in the NY Times article that started this discussion), Zion's Commercial Mercantile Institution (ZCMI) had turned into a large (1/8 mile-long block face) monolithic building that faced the same sort of empty storefronts that we're seeing in malls in Juneau (and that are plaguing malls across the nation as shoppers turn to downtowns and mixed-use centers) by the time that I left in 2003. Initial plans by the building's owners, the LDS Church, were to redevelop an under-utilized office tower and much of the mall to residential use in order to get more customers back into the neighborhood. They subsequently razed the building entirely, but proceeded with their mixed-use concept in order to bring residents back into the downtown.

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