

National City, California

Participants

The City of National City has a population of 55,000 residents. Considered the thirteenth poorest city in the nation, it lies on the coast between San Diego and Chula Vista.

Sweetwater Union High School District, the largest secondary school district in California serves 41,000 students in grades seven through twelve, and 29,000 adult learners. Located between San Diego and the Mexico border, the district covers 154 square miles, encompassing three cities and four unincorporated communities.

Metropolitan Transit Development Board (now Metropolitan Transit System) oversees public transportation throughout the San Diego County region. Its jurisdictional area is about 570 square miles. The 15-member board consists of representatives from the San Diego County Board of Supervisors, the City of San Diego and nine other municipalities.

Featured Case Study Joint—Joint Facility Planning

In late 1997, a long-held dream came true for thousands of residents of National City. The Sweetwater Union High School District officially opened a state-of-the-art educational facility located at a central public transit hub, to provide academic and employment preparation for adults in the communities between San Diego and Mexico. The \$6.1 million school was the product of a creative partnership among the School District, the National City Redevelopment Commission and San Diego County's Metropolitan Transit Development Board

Background

Once the home to heavy manufacturing plants, National City has worked hard to change its revenue base to more environmentally friendly uses. In recent years, the City's Redevelopment Commission has created two regional shopping malls and a "Mile of Cars" – a mile of new and used car dealerships—which have significantly enhanced city revenues. The City leadership also envisioned developing themed shopping areas celebrating the city's ethnic diversity, waterfront shopping areas, and a distinctive "entrance" to the city. To meet the needs of residents, the City sought to re-develop blighted inner-city areas and expand educational services.

The Sweetwater Union High School District serves a broadly diverse student population from both the most impoverished and the wealthiest communities in the area. One in four students is an English language learner and nearly half of the students qualify for free or reduced priced meals. Academically, the district is a pacesetter for educational reform. Under the *Compact for Success*, Sweetwater has invested millions of dollars into curriculum reform and partnered with San Diego State University to guarantee college admission to all students who meet rigorous academic benchmarks. This award-winning program has received acclaim from throughout the nation as an example of how to raise the academic bar and provide the support so all students can succeed.

In the mid-1990's, the Sweetwater district faced the challenge of accommodating two growing populations of students --high school youth and adult learners— who were served at the District's single high school in National City. The District also recognized that educational programs for adult students needed to be expanded and moved to a central, more accessible location. The District, however, did not have money to purchase land for a new adult school, and only could cover two-thirds of construction costs even if land was available. Moreover, many prospective students did not have adequate transportation to get to the school

Since 1976, the Metropolitan Transit Development Board (now Metropolitan Transit System) has addressed the public transportation needs of San Diego County. Among other projects, MTDB planned, designed and constructed three Light Rail Transit lines in major transportation corridors. The agency receives funding from the California Transportation Development Act and pools these funds with other local, state and federal monies to fund all operations and capital requirements for all area transit operators.

In the mid-1990's, MTDB sought to expand the ways people could use public transportation. They wanted to expand 24th Street trolley stop in National City into a transportation hub (without losing space for parking), but needed development to draw the public into the area.

Developing the Project

The needs of the three agencies converged in one public official who served as both the Vice Chair of MTDB and Assistant Superintendent for Adult and Continuing Education for the Sweetwater Union High School District. The MTDB started preliminary discussions about creating an educational facility for adults as a “destination location” at the transit hub. They then approached the City with the idea as a potential redevelopment project, and the school district as a possible central and accessible site for a new adult school.

Negotiations among the three agencies were complex, as each agency sought to meet its own needs. To complicate the matter further, toxic substances were

“This project is unique - no single agency could have met its needs without the active participation of the other two partners.”

--Jerry Rindone,
Assistant
Superintendent,
Sweetwater Union
High School District
and Vice Chair,
Metropolitan Transit
Development Board

discovered in the groundwater at the site, which had to be cleaned up prior to any construction.

Accomplishments

Eventually, a plan was developed which addressed the needs of all three agencies. MTDB was willing to provide property it owned adjacent to the 24th Street trolley stop to the Sweetwater District for a lease of \$1 per year for 55 years. In return, it gained a site with many transit users for its hub. The National City Redevelopment Commission funded toxic clean-up efforts, provided construction funding, and gained a distinctive city entrance. (Additional development has grown up around the school since its opening.) Sweetwater gained both financing and a site for a new school which was accessible to students throughout the district. Cognizant of MTDB's need to keep an adequate parking for its transportation hub, Sweetwater designed a three-story building—one floor of underground parking and two floors of classrooms. Built in a striking hacienda style with all doors facing a central square, the facility also provides significant security to students, faculty and staff.

Sweetwater Adult School (now National City Adult School), which opened in 1997, serves approximately 15,000 students annually, ages 16 to 96, from throughout the District. It offers basic high school courses, GED preparation, English as a Second Language, adult enrichment courses and career and technical education.

Other Cooperative Agreements

- **Higher Education Center.** A higher education center at the north end of National City has also been completed. Partners included the National City Redevelopment Commission, the County Office of Education and Southwestern College.
- **Health Facility.** In nearby Chula Vista, the MTDB developed a partnership with the City of Chula Vista and San Diego County to build a health facility at another transit hub located at the Palomar Street Station.

Key Lessons

- New leadership often brings new vision.
- Public agencies can accomplish more, and use resources more efficiently when they work together.

Contacts:

Jerry R. Rindone, Principal, Hilltop High School, Sweetwater Union High School District (619) 691-5640 e-mail: Jerry.rindone@suhsd.k12.ca.us

Tom Larwin, General Manager (retired), Metropolitan Transit Development Board (619) 287-6474 e-mail: lar.11@cox.net