

# Tampa Bay Business Journal

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## Tampa's downtown analyzed by Brookings fellow

Tampa Bay Business Journal - by [Michael Hinman](#) Staff Writer

The first step to creating a vibrant downtown that appeals to the growing urbanite market is bringing the streetcar from the Channelside District into downtown, Christopher Leinberger, a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution, told developers and others in Tampa.

Leinberger addressed the future of Tampa's downtown business district at the Tampa Downtown Partnership's 12th Annual Downtown Development Forum Friday.

"What you have right now is a tourist system, not an everyday system that needs to connect with where people are," said Leinberger, who authored a study that named Tampa the worst metropolitan area for pedestrians.

"The thing that survey showed is that 65 percent of those 157 walkable urban places had rail transit," he said. "We are evolving in this country into a tale of two metro areas: those who offer walkable urbanism and satisfy the demand of half the population, and those who don't. From a pure economic development standpoint, you either give the market what it wants or they are going to go somewhere else."

### Getting rid of cars

Leinberger led a list of speakers presenting at the forum that addressed transportation, commercial office, retail development, housing and green space development. It focused on downtown Tampa, which has a tax base of \$1.4 billion, according to Christine Burdick, president of the Partnership.

Ad valorem taxes during fiscal 2007 totaled \$710.4 million from downtown, \$46 million from the Channelside District and \$644.3 million from tax incremental financing areas. At the same time, new water connections in the area generated nearly \$3 million in fees while wastewater contributed another \$809,000.

In the effort to convert downtown into a more walkable area, movement on three museums as well as the growth of the retail district -- including restaurants that now have dinner menus -- is helping, Leinberger said. But it can't stop there.

Of the top 30 metro areas in the country, only Detroit and Tampa fail to have a workable light rail system, Leinberger said. Private interests have come together in Detroit to help put such a transportation system together.

"You have to have a complex strategy in place, where you have an appropriate role of the public sector but driven by the private sector," Leinberger said. "It is private-public partnerships that lead this, and I intentionally flip that common phrase because of a belief in the 'golden rule,' where who has the gold rules. For every \$1 of public investment, there is \$10 to \$15 of private investment."

Tampa's parking requirements discourage the creation of walkable areas, Leinberger said. Development should be allowed to happen with as few abatements as possible from the government, and with that, government -- and the people it serves -- will find many rewards, he said.

Downtowns are the primary tax generators, Leinberger said, citing Philadelphia's Center City, which occupies 5 percent of the land mass but generates 60 percent of the city's tax revenue.

### **Missing out on the good stuff**

Proper transportation that encourages growth of an urban market could depend on subsidies. In Charlotte, N.C., government officials found a considerable amount of tax money to fuel a matching grant that helped build a new rail system in the city, and now there are billions of dollars lining up to invest in 35 new stations, Leinberger said.

"They just opened up their new rail line with the money you were going to have five years ago," he said, citing the Hillsborough County's decision to not participate in the matching grant program that instead diverted money to Charlotte. "You're not getting it, they got it. It was your choice, and you made the wrong one five years ago."

While suburbia came from new levels of thinking by baby boomers, the desire to get back into urban environments is part of the Generation X and Millennial segments of the population, Leinberger said.

"You have to consider this, or you're going to paint yourself into a corner," he said. "With rising energy prices and the need to deal with the climate change, if you don't do this, it's sort of like betting on the horse buggy whip 100 years ago. You would've made the wrong bet."

"It is a pretty exciting future, and that is what the future is going to be. It's up to you to take it in and run with it."

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