User’s Guide to the PSRC Forecast Products

Introduction

The Puget Sound Regional Council released an update, Maintenance Release 1 (MR1), of its forecast products package in April 2014. Maintenance Release 1 replaces the products package released in September, including both future land use alternatives: (1) the Land Use Baseline, and (2) the Land Use Targets.

This document provides a brief overview of the two datasets, discusses reasons for having two alternative products, and provides guidance on how they relate to planning projects including local comprehensive planning.

A. PSRC Forecast Products Overview

Land Use Baseline. The Land Use Baseline (originally named Land Use Forecast) is a long-range land use dataset developed using PSRC’s new UrbanSim model. It represents how the regional real estate market is predicted to respond to a specified set of regulatory land use constraints and demand for new space consistent with a regional forecast of population and employment growth. The land use constraints are expressed in the model through parcel-level residential and non-residential minimum/maximum development allowances.

For the 2013 Land Use Baseline, UrbanSim utilizes land use constraints derived from local comprehensive plan designations and/or zoning regulations in effect as of December 2012. The 2013 Land Use Baseline dataset, as such, represents how regional development may occur in response to currently adopted plans and regulations.

More information on UrbanSim can be found at: http://psrc.org/data/models/urbansim/.

Land Use Targets. The Land Use Targets (originally named Local Targets Representation) is a long-range land use dataset designed explicitly to represent local growth targets that are adopted under state Growth Management Act requirements.1 It is developed using a set of allocation “decision rules” that distribute jurisdictional growth targets to sub-jurisdictional zones based on (a) available net development capacities (similar to what is used for the Land Use Baseline), as well as (b) a series of policy-based preferential weights for certain zones, such as designated regional growth centers and other locally-defined activity centers.

The Land Use Targets utilizes local growth targets developed by counties and their municipalities to align with the VISION 2040 regional growth strategy. In counties where work to update local targets was still underway as of December 2013, the dataset utilized a series of placeholder growth assumptions that will be revised once target updates are completed. The 2013 Land Use Targets dataset represents a future land use scenario consistent with the policy direction and planning objectives established via the growth targets.

More information on the Land Use Targets allocation method can be found at: www.psrc.org/assets/9107/LUTMethodology.xlsx.

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1 Revised Code of Washington 36.70A
### PSRC Forecast Products Comparison Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What It Represents:</th>
<th>Land Use Baseline</th>
<th>Land Use Targets</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The region’s predicted development pattern based on current pre-VISION 2040 local comprehensive plans and development regulations (circa 2012)</td>
<td>A future land use and development scenario based on county/local growth targets developed to align with the VISION 2040 Regional Growth Strategy</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model:</th>
<th>UrbanSim</th>
<th>Allocation Method</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Variables:</th>
<th>- Total population</th>
<th>- Employment (by major sectors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Group quarter population (by institutional/non-institutional)</td>
<td>- Households (by income quartile)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Household population</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geography:</th>
<th>FAZ, TAZ, Tract, city/uninc’d urban/rural</th>
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<tr>
<th>Base Year:</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Interim Years:</th>
<th>Decadal through 2040</th>
<th>None</th>
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<tr>
<th>Horizon Years:</th>
<th>2040</th>
<th>2025, 2030, 2031 &amp; 2035</th>
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</table>

**How are the two products alike?** Both datasets are intended to support travel modeling applications and other planning analyses. They contain the same variables at the same reporting geographies: population, household, and employment characteristics by forecast analysis zone (FAZ), and now for the first time, jurisdiction (city, unincorporated urban, rural). Other geographies (e.g., Census Tract, TAZ) are available by request.

**How do the two products differ?** The products are generated using different models/methods, and are available for differing interim and horizon years. Additionally, the two products are aligned with different regional forecast assumptions: the Land Use Baseline uses regional assumptions derived from PSRC’s 2012 Regional Economic Forecast, while the Land Use Targets (and its underlying county/local growth targets) reflects regional assumptions derived from PSRC’s preceding 2005 Puget Sound Economic Forecast & 2006 Small Area Forecast series. (It should be noted that the 2012 Regional Economic Forecast projects a lower long-range job growth trajectory for the region due to the impacts of the Great Recession). Lastly, and very importantly, the two datasets represent distinct future land use scenarios and underlying planning and land use assumptions.
B. Why Two Forecast Products?

City and county comprehensive plans are in a transitional period. Existing comprehensive plans include land use and planning assumptions based on the previous round of growth targets\(^2\) (covering approximately the 2000s to the 2020s). A new set of growth targets (covering approximately the 2000s/2010s to the 2030s) have recently been adopted (or are being developed) and comprehensive plans will be updated to reflect these new planning assumptions.

The Land Use Baseline reflects the land use assumptions in existing, currently adopted plans and implementing regulations. Many of these plans have not yet been updated to reflect new population, housing, and employment targets as part of the 2015-2016 state-mandated local comprehensive plan update. The Land Use Targets, on the other hand, reflects recently adopted growth targets developed to align with the VISION 2040 regional growth strategy. It represents a future development scenario of how city and county comprehensive plans may be amended to accommodate the new targets.

As such, the two forecast products reflect distinctly different future land use patterns and densities. Together, they represent the range in future development outcomes that may be possible given the uncertainties inherent in forecasting. Note that a given planning project may be better served by one or the other set of planning assumptions, or perhaps both (e.g., for an alternatives analysis).

C. Using the Forecast Products

The Forecast Products can serve a wide variety of planning purposes, including comprehensive plan updates, subarea plans, utility planning, and transportation planning. Given that the two land use forecast datasets represent different planning assumptions and future scenarios, they can inform and support these planning processes in different ways. One primary planning use for the Forecasts Products is comprehensive planning under the state Growth Management Act; this is discussed in additional detail below.

**Growth Management Act Requirements for Plan Consistency.** The Growth Management Act (GMA) states that all elements of a comprehensive plan should be based on a consistent set of assumptions to meet the needs for future growth. The GMA specifically requires that the transportation element “is consistent with and implements the land use element,” and that it contains at least a 10-year forecast of estimated traffic resulting from land use assumptions\(^3\). The land use assumptions used in this transportation forecast, therefore, must be consistent with the level and distribution of growth the city is planning for with its adopted growth targets.

The Growth Management Act also requires that comprehensive plans be coordinated with, and consistent with, the comprehensive plans of jurisdictions that have common borders or related regional issues.\(^4\) The Land Use Targets, because it is consistent with growth targets region-wide, provides a resource for a jurisdiction to model planned growth in neighboring jurisdictions.

\(^2\) Growth Targets are the amount of growth a jurisdiction has agreed, through the countywide process, to plan for throughout its comprehensive plan elements over the 20-year planning horizon. *(Source: PSRC Designation Procedures for New Regional Centers)*

\(^3\) Revised Code of Washington 36.70A.070

\(^4\) Ibid, 36.70A.100
Using the Forecasts in Comprehensive Plan Updates. The two land use forecast datasets are useful resources, in different ways, for informing and supporting the comprehensive plan update process.

- **Land Use Targets:** This dataset was explicitly designed to align with jurisdictional growth targets. As such, it can provide a useful starting point for supporting a variety of technical exercises common to local comprehensive plan updates. For example, it offers TAZ-level future land use inputs for travel demand modeling applications that are consistent with (a) the primary jurisdiction’s growth targets, as well as (b) growth targets for neighboring jurisdictions and beyond.

- **Land Use Baseline:** This dataset represents forecasted outcomes based on existing land use designations and zoning. Comparing the levels and distribution of growth in the Land Use Baseline to a jurisdiction’s growth targets can illustrate the difference between (a) what the jurisdiction’s current plan is forecasted to achieve, and (b) the growth that it is required to plan for under its new growth targets. This difference could inform potential measures necessary to undertake to achieve the city’s vision under its new growth targets.

Note that jurisdictions have the flexibility to use their own future land use distributions and assumptions, or some modified version of the PSRC forecast products, so long as they meet GMA requirements for internal consistency with the adopted local growth target.

**PSRC’s Plan Review and Certification Program.** PSRC reviews local comprehensive plans to advance coordination between local and regional planning. The review includes determination of consistency with (a) regional planning and policy, and (b) state requirements for transportation-related planning. When PSRC evaluates local comprehensive plans for certification, the inputs used for a jurisdiction’s travel demand forecast are reviewed to ensure future traffic estimates and needs are based on land use assumptions that are consistent with levels of growth reflected in adopted growth targets guiding the overall plan.

**C. PSRC Support and Contact Information**

This User’s Guide is intended to provide users of the PSRC forecast products with the basic knowledge required to begin working with the datasets. During the transition to having two forecast products to choose from, many data users will wonder which is the most appropriate for a given planning application. PSRC staff are available to assist members and other users of the forecast products to work through questions and issues related to specific applications.

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