Puget Sound Regional Council

Regional Transit-Oriented Development Committee

Friday, September 18, 2026 • 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

Remote Attendance Only

Attend

- Join the meeting at zoom.com
- Listen by phone 1-888-475-4499, Meeting ID: 829 7400 9204, Passcode: 391302

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1. **Call to Order (10:00)**
2. **Report of the Co-Chair**
3. **Communications**
4. **Discussion Item: Commerce's Draft TOD Guidebook (10:10)** – Lilith Vespier, WA Department of Commerce, and Tyler Bump, EcoNorthwest

   The committee will hear from Commerce about work to develop a guidebook to support implementation of HB 1491, the statewide TOD bill
5. **Discussion Item: VISION 2050 Station Area Planning Checklist Draft (10:40)** – Shaun Kuo and Paul Inghram, PSRC

   The committee will be asked to provide feedback on VISION 2050 guidance to support station area plans
6. **Discussion Item: Regional Centers Framework Update (11:00)** – Nancy Ferber and Paul Inghram, PSRC

   The committee will be asked to discuss policy options to update the Regional Centers Framework
7. **Discussion Item: Findings from 2025 Household Travel Survey (11:30)** – Kristin Mitchell and Brian Lee, PSRC

   The committee will hear about regional travel trends from the 2025 PSRC Household Travel Survey
8. **Information Item:**
   a. 2026 Regional TOD Committee Meeting Calendar
   b. TOD on a Roll: Making the Most of New Transit Connections Flyer
   c. TOOLBOX: Local Economic Development Efforts Flyer
9. **Next Meeting: December 18, 2026, 10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**
10. **Adjourn (12:00)**

Presentations for this meeting will be available on the RTOD committee page on PSRC's website after the meeting. For more information, contact Paul Inghram at pinghram@psrc.org

Zoom connection information:

Preferred method, join online: Join using this Zoom link

Or to join by phone:

- Call 877-853-5257 or 888-475-4499
- Meeting ID: 829 7400 9204, Passcode: 391302

Sign language, and communication material in alternative formats, can be arranged given sufficient notice by calling 206-464-7090, TTY Relay 711

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Puget Sound Regional Council

September 11, 2026

DISCUSSION ITEM

To: Regional TOD Committee

From: Paul Inghram, Director of Growth Management

Subject: **Commerce's Draft TOD Guidebook**

IN BRIEF

At the TOD Committee's September 18 meeting, Commerce and EcoNorthwest will share a draft TOD guidebook and other work to support implementation of HB 1491, the state TOD bill.

DISCUSSION

In 2025, the Washington State Legislature passed HB 1491, a bill seeking to support development within walking distance of light rail, commuter rail, and bus rapid transit in select cities. The bill requires increasing allowed density near stations, reducing parking requirements, and planning for affordable housing. Cities in the central Puget Sound will need to implement the bill by 2029.

The Washington State Department of Commerce is working with a consultant team to develop a guidebook and other supporting tools to implement HB 1491, as codified primarily under RCW 35.70A.840. Commerce has issued a quick reference guide that provides an overview of requirements and is working to develop more detailed guidance for cities. The draft guidebook is now available online. Commerce is seeking feedback from the committee and is accepting comments through September 30.

Commerce staff are looking forward to hearing from the committee.

NEXT STEPS

For more information, contact Lilith Vespier (lilith.vespier@commerce.wa.gov) or Anne Fritzel (anne.fritzel@commerce.wa.gov) with the WA Department of Commerce.

Puget Sound Regional Council

September 11, 2026

DISCUSSION ITEM

To: Regional TOD Committee

From: Paul Inghram, Director of Growth Management
Shaun Kuo, Associate Planner

Subject: **VISION 2050 Station Area Planning Checklist Draft**

IN BRIEF

The committee will be briefed regarding PSRC's work to create an annotated checklist for implementing VISION 2050 through station area planning.

DISCUSSION

Planning for growth at transit stations is a critical component of VISION 2050. To support that objective, VISION 2050, the region's long range growth plan, includes an action for cities and counties to adopt station area plans:

> DP-Action-8 Center Plans and Station Area Plans: Each city or county with a designated regional center and/or light rail transit station area will develop a subarea plan for the designated regional growth center, station area(s), and/or manufacturing/industrial center. Cities and counties will plan for other forms of high-capacity transit stations, such as bus rapid transit and commuter rail, and countywide and local centers, through local comprehensive plans, subarea plans, neighborhood plans, or other planning tools. Jurisdictions may consider grouping station areas that are located in close proximity.

A station area plan is an important way to engage with communities on how best to leverage and anticipate transit investments. PSRC encourages jurisdictions to undertake station area planning in tandem with HB 1491 implementation that will require land use changes in station areas. To support and facilitate station area planning, PSRC has created a draft checklist that identifies some the key elements of station area planning. See Attachment A.

In March 2026, PSRC staff brought an outline of this checklist to the Regional TOD Committee. At that meeting, the committee provided feedback and recommended inclusion of implementation strategies that this draft has included. The checklist intends on providing jurisdictions with streamlined guidance on the elements on station area planning and present ideas to spark innovative implementation of station areas, including station area grouping. The guidance uses local case studies and numerous checklists to provide jurisdictions with more specificity in applying the document.

The checklist includes sections on:

- Defining high-capacity station study areas
- Grouping station areas
- Planning for engagement and equitable TOD
- Developing growth targets and considering regional center goals
- Including open space and parks planning
- Incorporating affordable housing strategies
- Conducting a market study or other real estate analyses
- Planning for placemaking, civic improvements
- Considering subarea utilities and infrastructure needs
- Including transit access strategies
- Considering implementation strategies, such as development agreements and community benefit agreements
- Including performance monitoring measures

The state Department of Commerce is developing a guidebook to aid jurisdictions in implementing HB 1491 regulations. The state's guidebook will be focused on the bill's requirements and best practices. This checklist neither intends to duplicate the state's guidance nor be a comprehensive set of instructions. Instead, it focuses on the elements critical to developing new subarea plans for station areas that are key to the region and work to implement the goals of VISION 2050.

Regional TOD Committee members will be asked to evaluate the draft guidance. PSRC is seeking feedback on the checklist's ease of use, helpfulness, and topics. Helpful questions to answer include:

- Does this guidance distinguish itself from guidance from Commerce? Is there anything missing from this guidance or Commerce's guidance that would be helpful in your jurisdiction's station area planning?
- Are the guidance's use of case studies and checklists actionable? Which sections are more or less actionable?

Please submit feedback to Shaun Kuo by Friday, October 9, 2026.

NEXT STEPS

For more information, contact Shaunn Kuo, Associate Planner, at Skuo@psrc.org.

ATTACHMENTS

A. Great Neighborhoods for Great Transit: VISION 2050 Station Area Planning Guide

Great Neighborhoods for Great Transit: VISION 2050 Station Area Planning Guide

Now is the time to plan!

The central Puget Sound region is making major investments in public transportation. These investments create an opportunity to build compact, more walkable neighborhoods around transit stations.

Focusing growth near high-capacity transit will be an essential part of meeting climate, mobility and growth goals. The Regional Growth Strategy chapter in VISION 2050 sets an ambitious goal of attracting 65% of population growth and 75% of employment growth to the region's high-capacity transit station areas and regional growth centers. Rail, ferry and bus rapid transit station areas are ideal for increased density, new residences and businesses — referred to as transit-oriented development (TOD).

A station area plan helps communities prepare for new or improved transit. The plan brings together community members, local governments, and other partners to decide how an area should grow. It can include a community vision, neighborhood conditions, goals, policies and implementation actions. These plans coordinate transportation, housing, jobs and infrastructure within the station area.

A robust station area plan should:

- Define the area being studied around the transit station.
- Include community engagement and equity goals.
- Develop growth targets and consider regional center goals.
- Plan for parks and open space.
- Incorporate affordable housing strategies.
- Study the local housing and real estate market.
- Plan for placemaking and other civic improvements.
- Identify subarea utilities and infrastructure needs.
- Include transit access strategies.
- Consider implementation strategies, such as development agreements and community benefit agreements.
- Include performance monitoring measures.

Many cities and counties have already created station area plans as light rail stations have opened. VISION 2050 directs development of subarea plans for light rail stations. More station area plans are being developed as the system expands and as some adapt to new state requirements. Additionally, HB 1491 directs local governments to update land use regulations in transit station areas for light rail, commuter rail and Bus Rapid Transit (BRT). Local governments are reevaluating the planning work they've completed for their station areas, especially around BRT stations, to meet the new requirements.

This guide is intended to complement upcoming TOD guidance from the Washington State Department of Commerce and aligns with the goals set forth in VISION 2050. It focuses on station area planning rather than the specific zoning and affordability requirements of HB 1491. Drawing on a wide range of national and local best practices, this guide identifies key elements to consider for a station area plan, helping jurisdictions address community and regional needs through examples and resources.

Defining high-capacity transit station study areas

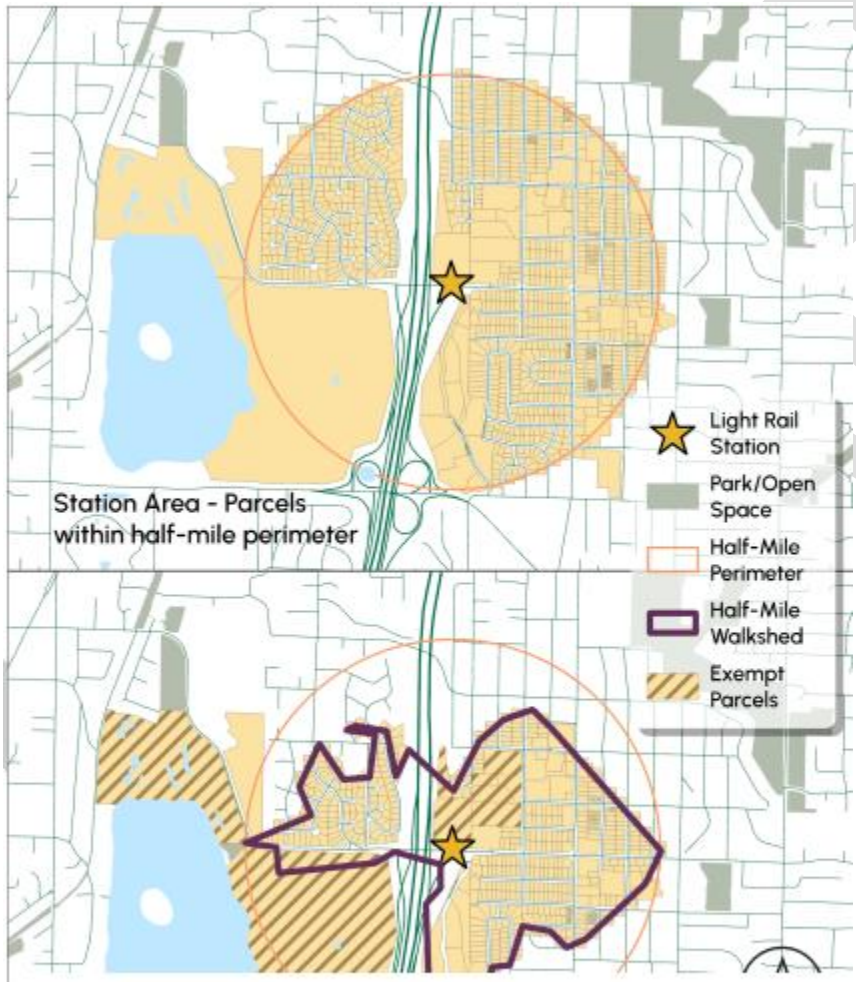
Identifying a precise study area is a fundamental step in station area planning. A station area may encompass the local neighborhood and areas of walkable access. It may also include nearby institutions, established zoning classifications, and areas required for TOD zoning by state law.

When scoping the station area(s), consider walkability, compliance with HB 1491, and other priorities for supporting development. A common technique is to map a half mile (or a quarter mile in some instances) distance from station entrances, which is a common measure of the distance people are willing to walk to transit. Note that HB 1491 applies to the "walk distance," which can be a more exact identification of the area that one can walk to access the station. A straight-line distance is also often used, and some communities use other factors, such as zoning patterns, access barriers, topography and established neighborhood boundaries. For walk distance, consider excluding areas that are inaccessible even if within a half mile.

Station area plans should be inclusive of areas around transit investments. This captures larger communities of interest, adjacent development opportunities, and establishes long-term goals for areas that may be subject to HB 1491 in the future. While a jurisdiction may consider a larger station area that includes neighborhood elements, state law has criteria and procedures for modifying those station area boundaries subject to HB 1491.

When developing station area boundaries, mapping and analysis should identify:

- High-capacity transit station locations and entrances.
- A quarter, half and 1-mile radius around transit station entrances.
- A quarter and half mile walk distance (required by HB 1491).
- Related zoning boundaries.
- Transportation infrastructure.
- Where future improvements may expand the station's walk area.
- Key neighborhood services and destinations, like schools.
- Access barriers.
- Adjacent station areas.



Example approach for defining light rail TOD areas: The below images were created to illustrate how to potentially define a TOD station area using an example approach. They do not represent a real project. The top image shows the half-mile buffer and the middle image shows the half-mile walkshed boundary.

Station area example boundaries (Washington State Department of Commerce)

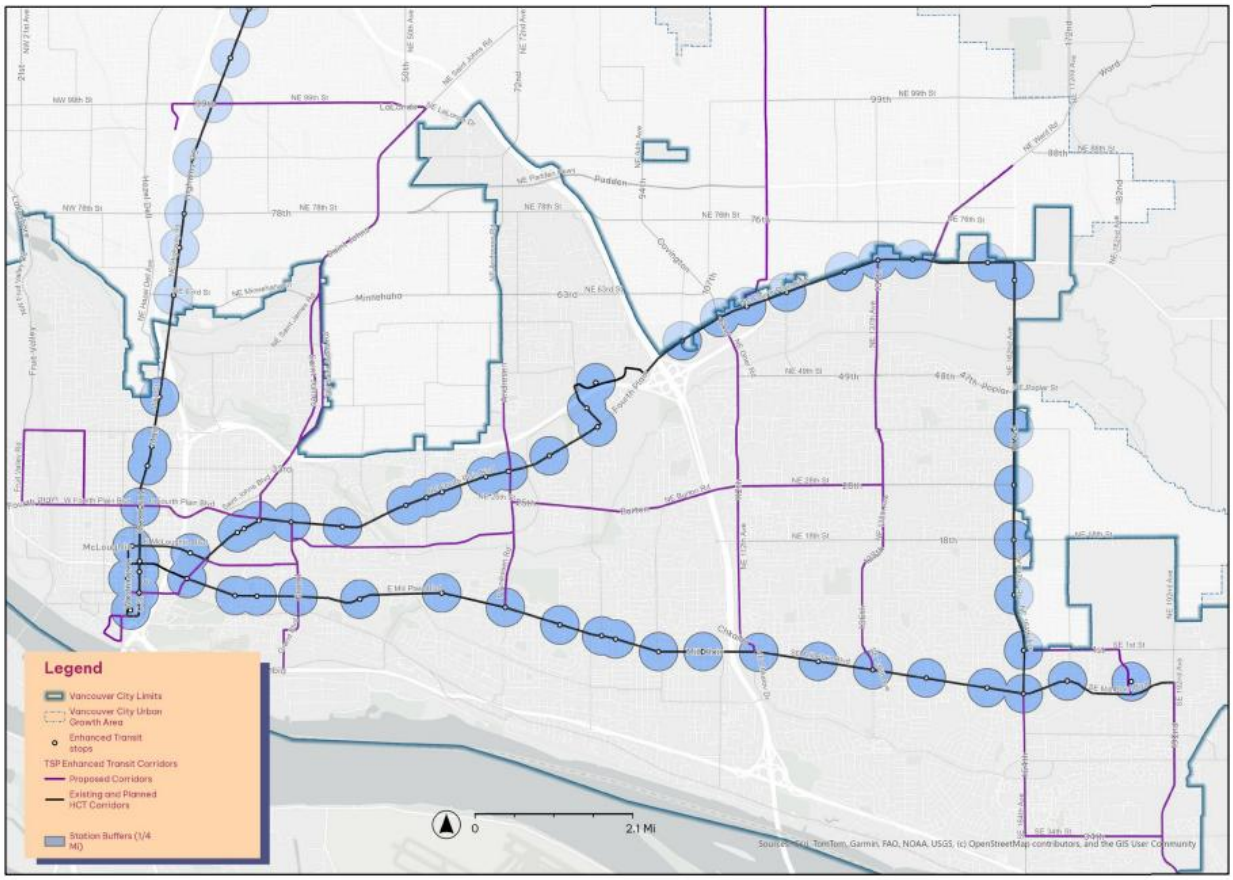
Changes to Station Areas

Plans should be monitored and updated as the station area changes. This helps the community respond to new needs and remain in compliance with HB 1491. Likely changes that could affect station areas include changes to parcel boundaries and the walkshed, as any lot within the walkshed becomes subject to the law's requirements. Parcel assembly and right-of-way vacation could occur to enlarge and consolidate lots. Walksheds can also change with pedestrian access easements, new or vacated right-of-way, and other access changes.

Local Examples

Local jurisdictions are already studying their station area boundaries. For example, Mercer Island has identified a preliminary modified station area boundary. The city identified parcels within the required walkshed around their light rail station, removed critical areas and adjusted included parcels to create a boundary that suited existing transportation infrastructure. Seattle has identified station areas and a study area for its future West Seattle stations and station study areas for its BRT stations. The city identified key community assets and included whole city blocks in the preliminary station area and study area. In Vancouver, Washington, the city has already implemented HB 1491's requirements and defined their station areas with a quarter mile distance around their bus rapid transit stations.

FIGURE 20.530.020-1: STATION AREAS OVERLAY



Vancouver's Station Area Overlay (City of Vancouver)

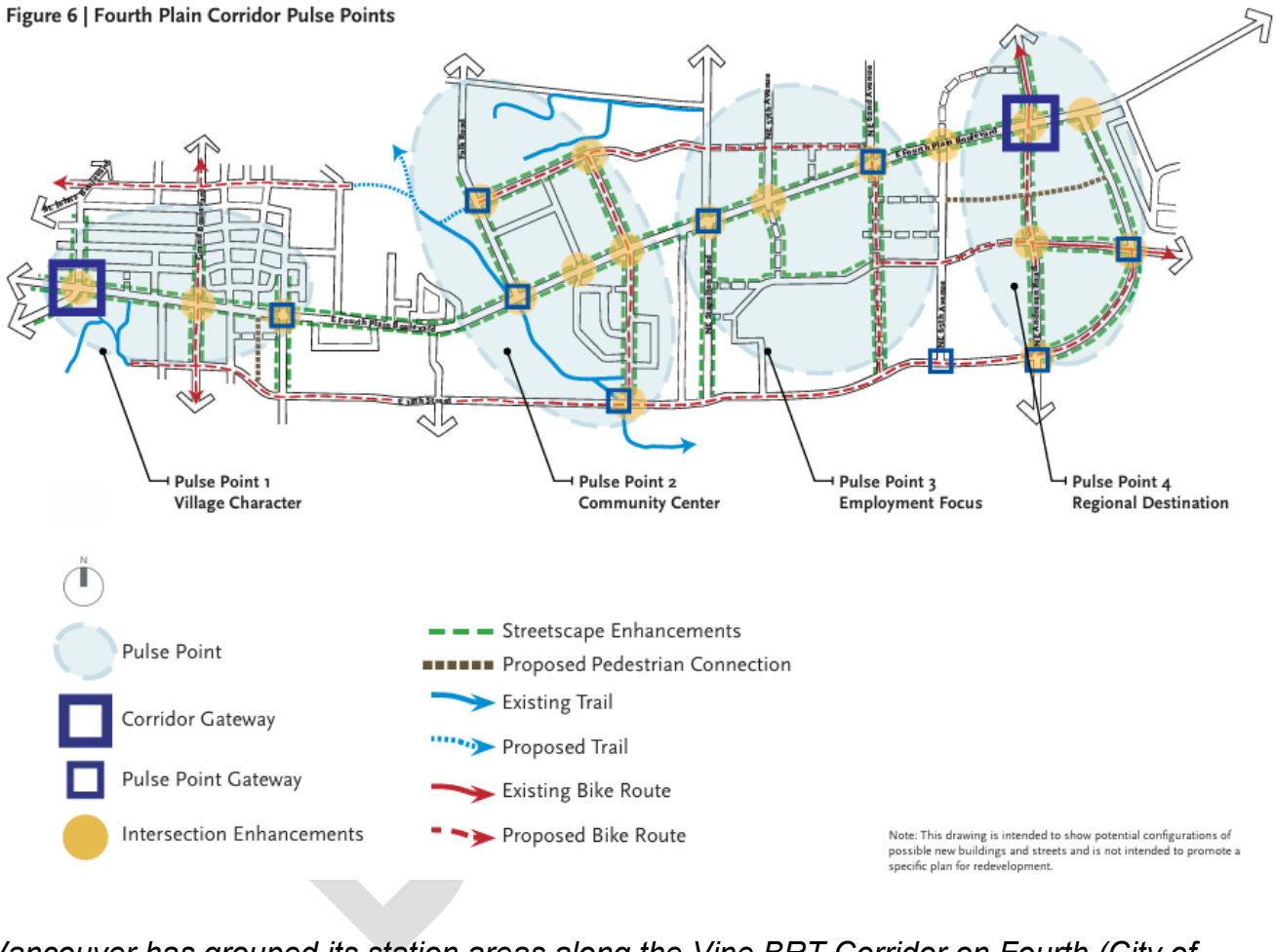
Station Clusters and Corridors

When several transit stations are close to each other, it may be helpful to plan for them as one larger area or corridor. This can be especially useful when station areas overlap. Planning for nearby stations together can help communities identify opportunities for:

- New homes
- Jobs and businesses
- Community services
- Parks and other uses

Bus rapid transit (BRT) station areas may be suited to this kind of corridor planning due to their closer proximity to each other.

Vancouver, Washington has approached station area planning by corridor. The city's Fourth Plain Corridor Subarea Plan sits on a 2.5-mile segment of the city's Vine BRT service and broadly plans around housing, land use, transportation, and public services on the corridor. The subarea plan also identifies smaller groupings – "pulse points" of stations – within the corridor. Pulse points are key areas along the corridor where the community can focus attention and investment. They are given a clear identity through land uses and urban design. For example, Vancouver has designated an employment focused pulse point due to its larger parcel sizes and existing manufacturing uses.



Vancouver has grouped its station areas along the Vine BRT Corridor on Fourth (City of Vancouver)

Spokane conducted TOD planning for its BRT Line, the City Line. In 2016, the city completed the Central City Line Strategic Overlay Plan. The plan identified land use and economic development policies and actions to enhance transit oriented-development and ridership along the then future City Line BRT. Later in 2024, the city completed the South Logan TOD Plan

that plans around four stops of the City Line and expanded the planning work to include specific transportation improvements for mobility and safety enhancements along the corridor.

Consider grouping station areas or corridor planning when areas:

- Overlap or are located close to each other.
- Share similar traits, such as existing land use or environmental factors.
- Are in the same neighborhood or share stakeholders.
- Are connected by transit or other transportation infrastructure.

Group/corridor planning guidance:

- Plan for a mix of uses in each station area grouping/corridor.
- Plan for multimodal-transportation connections between station areas.
- Limit the overall planning area to those areas with clear access to the stations, about a quarter or a half mile from station entrances.
- Consider subgroupings/pulse points along longer high-capacity transit corridors.

Avoid grouping station areas:

- When station areas have clear land use and character distinctions.
- When physical barriers make it difficult to navigate between areas and the transit station.

Plan for engagement and equitable TOD

Robust engagement during station area planning will build a shared vision to create inclusive, accessible and opportunity-rich communities.

Equitable Transit-Oriented Development (eTOD) seeks to center access to opportunity by intentionally focusing on access, inclusion and affordability for communities that have been disproportionately impacted by transportation investments.

New transit investments can bring more development and change to station areas. Residents in these areas may face more change than people in other parts of the community. They may also face a higher risk of displacement. Because of this, strong and ongoing community engagement is important. Local governments conduct outreach to current residents and consider how new developments may impact them.

Jurisdictions should consider policies and programs that can help prevent displacement. These strategies should be designed for the specific needs of the station area. One important strategy is to provide affordable housing near the station. Affordable homes with good access to transit can help current residents stay in their community and benefit from the new investments. Anti-displacement strategies should not make development too costly to build. A market study can help identify which strategies are realistic and financially viable for private development.

PSRC's guidance on Equitable Engagement for Comprehensive Plans includes community engagement. In that guidance, several strategies are relevant in the development of a station area plan, such as convening community advisory groups, providing multiple ways of participating, compensating community participants and providing feedback loops.

Key equity considerations for station area planning:

- Conduct equitable engagement practices.
- Identify housing at high risk of displacement.
- Consider displacement mitigation strategies, such as right-of-return, relocation assistance and other preferential policies for impacted individuals.
- Adopt affordable housing strategies to create housing opportunities within the station area.
- Implement business support strategies to retain local businesses.

Casino Road is an example of a neighborhood in south Everett at high risk of displacement from planned transit investments. Connect Casino Road and LISC Puget Sound have worked to center community voices in station area planning to address this threat. In partnership with Futurewise and the Housing Consortium of Everett and Snohomish County, they provided feedback based on community and stakeholder outreach to the City of Everett on Casino Road community recommendations for the last comprehensive plan cycle. The recommendations focused on affordable housing, economic development, and diverse housing options.

Develop growth targets and consider regional center goals

State law requires minimum zoned density in station areas, but actual rates of development will vary significantly between station areas. Establishing specific growth targets for individual station areas will help recognize the unique context and market conditions for the station and provide the jurisdiction with an effective way to track progress and provide a basis for capital facilities and transportation planning. Understanding development trends and future goals can

help establish areas where market demand supports planning for more capacity than the state-required minimum floor area ratio for station areas.

Growth targets are time-bound development assumptions, typically for the same 20-year period as the jurisdiction's comprehensive plan. When setting station area growth targets, consider:

- The station area's development capacity.
- The station area plan's planning horizon.
- Projects already in the permitting process.
- Development trends in similar areas.
- The jurisdiction's overall 20-year growth targets.

It is important to distinguish between growth targets and zoning capacity. Targets, or planned growth, is an increment of growth for the period. Zoning capacity is the total amount of development that could fit in an area. When zoning is limited to "just enough," it is likely to be overly restrictive. Development capacity can help achieve growth targets by providing more flexibility on the type, location and timing of actual development.

Many station areas overlap with regional centers. PSRC requires jurisdictions to adopt growth targets for these centers, which represent the share of the city's overall growth located in the boundaries of an area.

For station areas that are within or overlap a regional center, jurisdictions should consider the targets required for the type of designated center. Growth targets should include both:

- Housing or population growth
- Employment growth

Setting clear targets for both housing or population and jobs can help communities plan for balanced growth around transit stations.

Include open space and parks planning

Access to parks and open space is a top priority for many residents. To support growth within a station area, a plan should do more than just allow for higher densities. Parks and open spaces are key neighborhood amenities that attract new residents and can make an area economically viable for development.

Parks create space for outdoor recreation, exercise, nature and community events. Access to green space is important to human health. Providing parks may be especially important in transit station areas, where space can be at a premium and many residential buildings may not offer on-site open space.

When planning for parks and open space in a station area plan:

- Identify and map parks, trails and open space in and near the station area.
- Identify gaps in and opportunities for new parks and open space improvements.
- Identify ways people can reach parks and open spaces and barriers that make access more difficult.
- Consider how transit can increase access to parks and recreation for the station area.

Several local jurisdictions have plans underway for new parks in station areas, including the BelRed Neighborhood Park and City Center Park. The BelRed Neighborhood Park is a park emerging from the City of Bellevue's BelRed Subarea Plan, which identifies numerous parks to be added to the neighborhood. The plan is funded by the 2022 Levy for Parks and Open Space, which dedicates funding to acquiring park space in BelRed. City Center Park emerges from the City of Lynnwood's City Center Parks Plan, updated in 2018. In 2022, the city purchased the future site of the park with Park Impact Fees and bond financing.

Bellevue is also planning a series of trails, pedestrian connections and parks, known as the Grand Connection, to link its Downtown Station with the Eastrail trail system, Downtown Park, and Meydenbauer Bay Park. The scale of this project combines multiple aspects of station area planning, including transit access, placemaking and civic infrastructure. Funding for this project includes private donations, commitments from the city's Capital Investment Program, a potential Tax Increment Financing district, Transportation Benefit District and federal and state grants.

The path of the Grand Connection (City of Bellevue)

Incorporate affordable housing strategies

Affordable housing is critical to achieving equitable access to high-capacity transit and all the benefits of the station area. Affordable housing strategies span the range of inclusionary and incentive zoning and public or nonprofit affordable housing development funded from a range of fees and taxes. While inclusionary zoning and multifamily tax exemptions are already built into HB 1491 requirements, additional affordable housing strategies should be considered in station area planning.

A key consideration for additional affordable housing strategies is their effect on project feasibility. For example, in addition to inclusionary zoning requirements, the City of Redmond has an incentive zoning chart that awards development capacity in exchange for affordable units that exceed the inclusionary zoning requirement, affordable three-bedroom units and affordable housing fees that may be required in-lieu of producing affordable units on site.

Other examples look toward subsidy, financing and ownership models. The draft Downtown Seattle Regional Center Plan discusses working with public, private and nonprofit partners to identify funding and financing opportunities, directing more subsidies to downtown affordable

housing and supporting housing organizations that could include land trusts and cooperative ownership organizations.

PSRC's Housing Innovations Program and Housing Opportunities by Place provide an overview of housing tools and strategies.

Conduct a market study or other real estate analyses

Jurisdictions should consider conducting a market study or other real estate analysis to understand market feasibility when developing a station area plan. Understanding market feasibility will help inform overall growth goals, calibrate housing tools and programs and create shared expectations about how the station area may develop.

A market study can provide comprehensive information about residential, office, and other commercial development trends. A market study can identify properties with redevelopment potential, gather information from developers and real estate professionals, consider trends in comparable areas and identify recommendations to leverage existing opportunities. For example, Kirkland completed a market analysis for the 85th Street Station to evaluate economic and market context of the area near the station and existing zoning and development regulations.

Some cities have analyzed market feasibility for certain development types. Seattle has developed real estate feasibility reports for the Northgate and Downtown neighborhoods that evaluate the likelihood of specific building prototypes being developed under current zoning and market conditions.

Plan for placemaking and civic improvements

Zoning capacity and station access may not be enough to attract development to every station area. Civic improvements, such as plazas, community centers, libraries, schools, performing arts and convention centers, help create a civic identity for an area and can draw additional private investment. Events and conferences at civic centers can also boost ridership when centers have good access to transit stations.

In 2017, Federal Way opened the Federal Way Performing Arts and Event Center, a 716-seat, two-tiered theater with a conference center near a planned Link Light Rail station. Two feasibility studies and the inclusion of a future performing arts center in the city's 2010 updated comprehensive plan helped establish the city's intention to develop the center and guide the project to completion. The center was funded with city and state funds, county arts grants, tax

credits and philanthropy. Later in 2019, Federal Way completed a landmark Town Center Steps project that replaced a large segment of a 23-foot-tall retaining wall with a large stair structure that functions as both pedestrian access and an open space.

The Federal Way Performing Arts and Events Center (City of Federal Way)

Quincy Square by the Bremerton Ferry Terminal also provides an example of flexible event space with programming managed by the Downtown Bremerton Association. The ten-year planning effort incorporated community-led design for an inclusive public space.

Quincy Square, City of Bremerton

Alongside new civic and cultural projects, jurisdictions can consider how existing cultural assets contribute to the station area with cultural asset mapping. Through asset mapping, jurisdictions work with communities to identify valued places. This can include gathering spaces and nonprofits, as well as physical assets such as public art and landmark trees.

Asset mapping can inform urban design and public art projects. It can also help identify community partners. Many community organizations stand to benefit from enhanced transit access and may be interested in locating facilities within new developments. While asset mapping can be costly and time consuming, it mitigates cultural displacement and can help create a vibrant sense of place — attractive to investment.

As part of Seattle's ongoing Graham Street station area planning, an asset map was created through community engagement. The map identified a diverse collection of cultural institutions, religious spaces, ethnic small businesses and nonprofits. While the map highlights the unique neighborhood character, the process helped residents identify spaces that they want to preserve. Identifying valued places informed strategies for improving connectivity and creating a more vibrant public realm.

Graham Street Station Area asset map (City of Seattle)

Consider subarea utilities and infrastructure needs

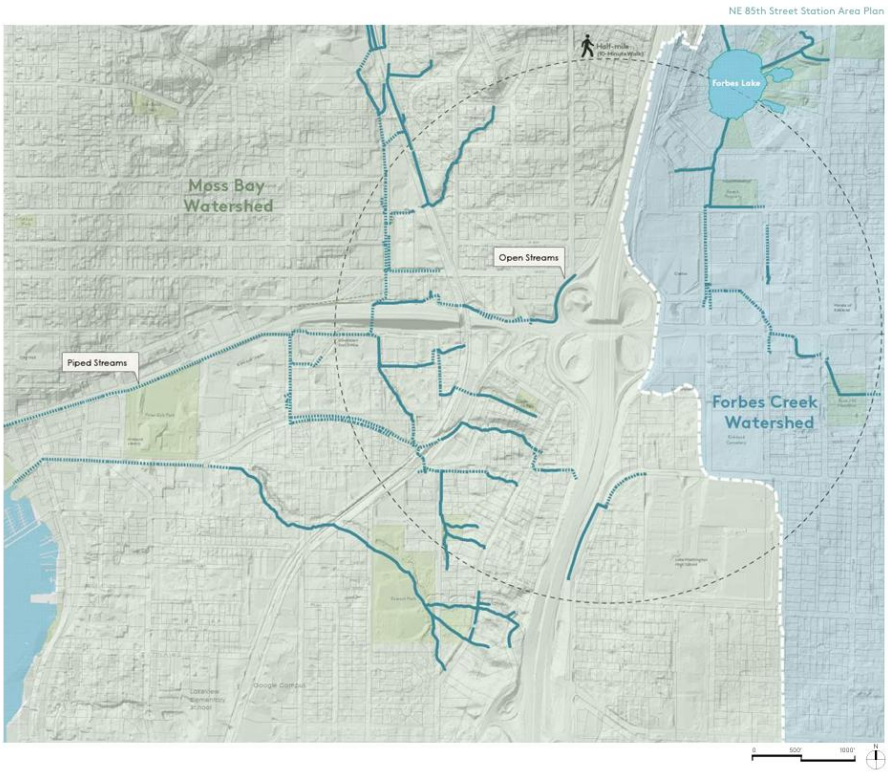
Although less visible, utilities and infrastructure are essential parts of station areas. Station areas require sufficient utility capacity to support new development, including sewer, water, stormwater and electricity. Infrastructure improvements can vary widely and are critical to supporting growth of station areas. Station areas should have a full complement of the services that would be part of any urban neighborhood and may also need improvements such as schools, fire and police services, libraries and other public services.

Jurisdictions should consider what investments in water, sewer, electricity and stormwater are needed to maintain service levels for planned growth. Some infrastructure upgrades may be incorporated into the transit construction scope, while others must be performed by the jurisdiction or completed by developers. Multi-benefit projects can be prioritized. For example, green stormwater infrastructure can provide tree canopy, enhance parks, improve urban design, achieve environmental goals and reduce burden on stormwater facilities. Infrastructure improvements can vary widely and are critical to supporting growth of station areas.

Consider capacity and planned improvements for:

- Water
- Sewer
- Stormwater (including green stormwater)
- Electric transmission (including consideration of underground lines)
- Renewable energy generation / district energy
- Waste
- Broadband
- Public services such as fire, police, and emergency services

Kirkland's NE 85th Street Station Area Plan aims to enhance sustainability while providing necessary utility upgrades by prioritizing multi-benefit projects. In their Utilities and Public Services chapter, Kirkland uses watershed characterization to identify opportunities for green stormwater infrastructure, water recycling, parks and salmon habitat improvements. The plan also maps station area water and sewer projects from their Capital Improvement Plan and identifies a set of requirements and incentives for water use, energy use and power generation in new development.



NE 85th Street Station Area Watersheds (City of Kirkland)

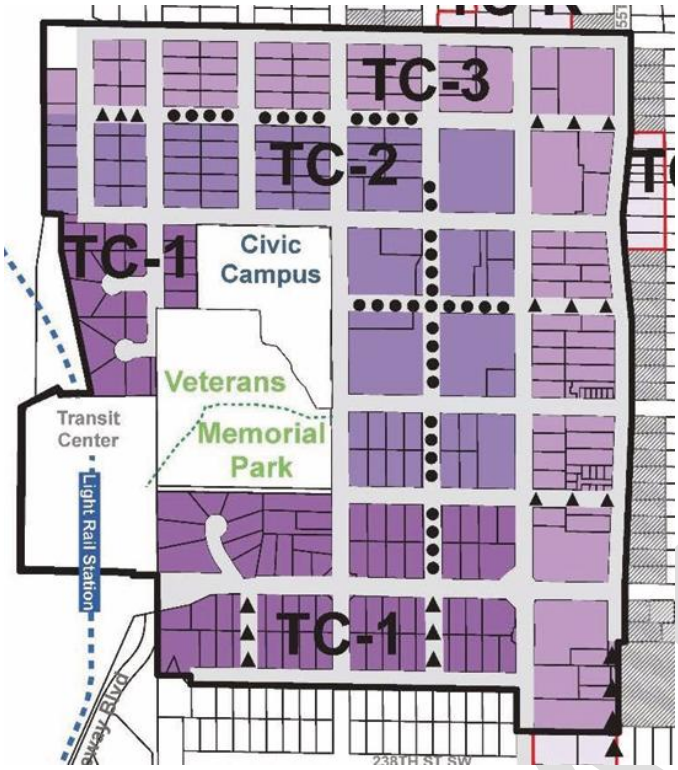
Station access is core to station area planning. Station area plans should identify improvements to transit access within and outside of the station area. Evaluate these improvement proposals for a transportation project list for the station area.

Jurisdictions in the Puget Sound often have station areas in challenging contexts that may limit access. Many of the Puget Sound area's high-capacity transit stations are located within or adjacent to freeway right-of-way, where providing safe, convenient access can be challenging. Additionally, stations may not be surrounded by a traditional grid that would otherwise provide pedestrian connectivity. Station areas should include new pedestrian overpasses and other pedestrian infrastructure to allow access to stations.

To maximize station access, an evaluation of transit access should consider a balance of the following:

- **Urban form and connectivity:** Transit-Oriented Development, walk and bike infrastructure and connectivity.
- **Transit service:** Provision of public transit of various modes and service types to connect people with places with inadequate service and boost transit service to encourage transit usage.
- **Vehicle storage:** Based on local context, consider vehicle storage and parking management adequacy. This can encompass automotive and micromobility parking and curb space management.

As transit access deficiencies are identified, develop projects to create an interconnected station area. In Mountlake Terrace's Town Center Subarea Plan, the city identifies new streets and active transportation and emergency access corridors to strengthen pedestrian access within the center.



The dotted lines are newly proposed streets, and the arrowed lines are proposed access corridors. (City of Mountlake Terrace)

When developing projects, consider project affordability and financing strategies. Cost estimates should be based on the best information available and an engineering judgement. Especially if larger capital projects are included, identify grant opportunities and stable and predictable funding sources. Plans should consider alternative transportation financing methods, such as user fees and other pricing mechanisms.

Consider implementation strategies, such as development agreements and community benefit agreements

Beyond policies in a station area plan, identifying implementation steps is key to leveraging specific opportunities and making the plan a reality. There are several tools that can be used to implement the goals of a station area plan.

<u>Development agreements</u>

A development agreement is a contract between a local jurisdiction and an entity that owns or controls property. The contract outlines obligations of both parties and includes terms that will regulate development of the property. The terms can include, but are not limited to:

- Permitted uses
- Densities
- Design standards
- Affordable housing
- Parks
- Building standards.

While voluntary, the agreement is binding for the parties and successors.

Agreed upon and long-lasting terms from a development agreement provide certainty for a developer, granting them stability to help finance the development. Local jurisdictions benefit from terms that build infrastructure, impact fees, and other mitigation measures, as authorized by state law. See MSRC's guidance on development agreements for examples and more discussion on the legal framework.

Development agreements in the central Puget Sound region are typically used for large, multi-phased projects that may also be catalysts in less developed areas. The Spring District's development agreement between the City of Bellevue and Wright Runstad is a framework to redevelop 36 acres of industrial Bel-Red into a mixed-use community. The agreement's terms require a diverse mix of uses and a park. It also implemented the Bel-Red subarea plan that required the building of new right-of-way and active transportation infrastructure. Now mostly completed, the Spring District has introduced a walkable transportation-oriented neighborhood into Bel-Red.

Community Benefit Agreements

Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) are contracts between developers and community groups. The contract outlines obligations of the developers to meet community needs. In the central Puget Sound region, CBAs emerge from scenarios that require city council approval, a review that is typically triggered when a proposal looks to vacate public right-of-way or seeks rezoning. The moment of political leverage gives communities an opportunity to negotiate for their benefit in exchange for support for the development.

Examples of local CBAs include the WSCC Community Package and Dearborn Community Benefit Agreement. The development of the Washington State Convention Center expansion required vacation of city right-of-way, requiring public benefits in exchange. In response, the Community Package Coalition, a collection of neighborhood and advocacy groups, formed and negotiated with the convention center and its development partner, resulting in an $82.8 million package that included affordable housing, park improvements and active transportation infrastructure.

Tax Increment Financing

Tax increment financing (TIF) is a property tax financing tool that local governments can use to fund public infrastructure in targeted geographic areas. The goal of TIF is to encourage private development and investment by financing public improvements. The increased assessed value of properties within designated areas is used to pay for public improvements. TIF is a relatively new financing tool in Washington but has long been used in other parts of the country.

TIF can be used to finance transportation infrastructure, utilities, parks, community facilities, and other uses prescribed under RCW 39.114.010. Explore MRSC's overview of program requirements.

Include plan monitoring measures

Monitoring the station area will show whether implementation steps, such as land use codes, are working and help identify problems that may slow development. Develop targets, such as housing and employment goals, to determine if station area objectives are on track to be met.

Data to track for implementation could encompass:

- Annual development activity
- Effectiveness of development regulations and subarea plan
- Housing affordability, affordable unit production
- Displacement impacts
- Pipeline development, market interest
- Vacancy rates
- Transportation infrastructure usage

It may be helpful to hold regular conversations with the development community and residents. These conversations can help show what is working and what may need to change.

The City of Bellevue uses a dashboard to track progress toward its community goals, such as economic performance and transportation safety, with key indicators including new business openings and weekday transit ridership. The Bellevue Performance dashboard began in 2014 and monitors progress on the city's then 20-year vision.

A similar dashboard for station area plans can help create accountability by monitoring progress toward goals and help identify and justify changes needed to reach performance targets.

Looking Forward

Station area plans can help put community, regional, and state goals into action. As new transit projects are built over the next decades, station areas create new opportunities for developing connected and walkable neighborhoods. Reaching these goals will require intentional focus, community conversations, and public investments.

Additional Station Area Planning Resources and Guides

- Draft TOD Guidebook – Washinton State Department of Commerce
- Station Area Planning – How to Make Great Transit-Oriented Places – Reconnecting America
- Station Area Planning Guide – Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority

Puget Sound Regional Council

September 11, 2026

DISCUSSION ITEM

To: Regional TOD Committee

From: Paul Inghram, Director of Growth Management

Subject: **Regional Centers Framework Update**

IN BRIEF

With regional growth center redesignation complete and the scope for Framework updates established, staff will present options for two potential areas of change: density and boundaries/connectivity. The committee will be asked to provide feedback to guide development of specific language for further review and adoption before the next new center application window opens in 2027.

DISCUSSION

The Regional Centers Framework, adopted by the Executive Board in 2018, provides direction and criteria for regional growth centers (RGCs) and manufacturing/industrial centers (MICs). The recent regional centers redesignation and monitoring process provided an opportunity to assess how well the current criteria and policies are working and identify where limited updates may be needed. In July 2026, the Growth Management Policy Board endorsed a scope of updates for the Framework.

At this RTOD meeting, staff will share recent Regional Staff Committee feedback and focus discussion on two key topics: density and boundaries/connectivity for regional growth centers. Input on these areas will help refine policy options and recommendations for the Growth Management Policy Board. If time permits, staff will also seek committee input on refining criteria around livability. Input and feedback from the committee will help refine policy options and develop recommendations for the Growth Management Policy Board.

1. Density Criteria / State TOD Bill

Staff will discuss the relationship between the Framework's existing activity unit (AU) density and new state requirements under HB 1491, which establish minimum densities

based on floor area ratio (FAR). The two approaches measure density differently. In addition to their differences, some centers face challenges in achieving the Framework's minimum 45 AU per acre planned-density target within the current planning period.

Potential areas for further consideration include:

- Continuing to use activity units as a planned growth measure
- Establishing a minimum FAR standard for centers
- Aligning the Framework's transit definition with HB 1491
- Reviewing planned growth targets for metro growth centers

Discussion question: What changes, if any, should be considered to the Framework's density measures and requirements considering HB 1491?

2. Boundaries & Connectivity

The 2025 redesignation review identified boundary concerns in seven of 30 regional growth centers. Five involved boundary shapes that make pedestrian connectivity and transit access difficult. Two involved center size, where the size is significantly larger than that of a compact center. Ideally, a center's boundary reflects both underlying land uses and the ability to connect areas in a cohesive single community, connected to transit. The review highlighted a gap in the current Framework, where existing centers are not clearly required to justify their boundaries or demonstrate connectivity except when making a major boundary change.

Potential areas for further consideration include:

- Establishing boundary criteria based on walkability and transit access, in addition to size and shape
- Considering a **½-mile network walking distance** to high-capacity transit
- Considering a **½-mile walking distance** to frequent bus service
- Addressing barriers such as highways and major arterials
- Considering how criteria could address corridors, particularly along BRT routes

Discussion questions: Should connectivity and transit access be explicit criteria for evaluating center boundaries? Is a ½-mile network walking distance an appropriate standard? How should the Framework address barriers and transit corridors?

Topic 3: Livable Communities (time permitting)

The focus of this review is to evaluate criteria and planning requirements to encourage amenities or programs that foster a sense of place and livable, complete communities. The Framework includes requiring investment in livability and walkability but, provides limited direction on how centers should demonstrate progress. Existing centers use a range of approaches, including urban design, transportation investments, parks, public programming, and placemaking.

Options include:

- Develop criteria for livability and sense of place
- Provide guidance and examples for planning for livability
- Potential tools include community asset maps/inventories, sense-of-place criteria, guidance on placemaking and placekeeping, and community-based organization input. The intent would be to create more consistent expectations while allowing jurisdictions flexibility to respond to local conditions.

Discussion questions:

Should the Framework provide specific criteria for livability and sense of place?

Should centers be expected to identify and map community assets such as parks, cultural organizations, schools, childcare, and small businesses? If so, should it be required in their subarea plan and/or checklist?

How can the Framework encourage complete communities while recognizing different local contexts?

NEXT STEPS

Staff will use input from the Regional TOD Committee, Regional Staff Committee, and other boards and committees to refine policy options and develop potential Framework amendments for further review later this year. The Framework update is anticipated for completion in 2027.

For additional information, please contact Paul Inghram, Director Growth Management at Pinghram@psrc.org 206-464-7549, or Nancy Ferber, Senior Planner Nferber@psrc.org 206-464-6179.

ATTACHMENTS

Background information:

A. Density Criteria & State TOD Bill
B. Boundaries and Connectivity
C. Livable Communities

Density Criteria& State TOD Bill

Background

The state recently passed HB 1491, commonly referred to as the TOD Bill. HB 1491 includes standards and measures for development intensity. This memo covers the relationship between PSRC's regional growth center density requirements and HB 1491, growth targets for metro growth centers, and the definition of transit service required for regional growth centers.

What does the Regional Centers Framework currently require?

The Regional Centers Framework establishes density requirements that combine population and employment. This measure is called "activity units" or "people per acre."

Regional centers are required to meet minimum existing densities. These are established as 18 activity units per acre for urban growth centers and 30 activity units per acre for metro growth centers.

Regional centers are also required to establish growth targets that meet minimum planned densities. These growth targets should establish a 20-year planning goal for the regional center through a comprehensive plan or subarea plan process. Minimum planned densities are 45 activity units per acre for urban growth centers and 85 activity units per acre for metro growth centers.

Terminology

Activity units per acre. Also called "people per acre," measures the average number of residents and employees per acre. This is a density measure used by PSRC for regional growth centers.

Floor area ratio. Ratio of a building's total floor area to the size of the parcel. This zoning density measure is used in HB 1491 (state TOD bill).

Jurisdictions must provide at least sufficient zoned development capacity to accommodate these 20-year targets. The zoned capacity should exceed the targets to provide flexibility for the type, location, and timing of actual development.

This particular method of calculating growth and density is only required by PSRC for regional centers and is not required through other Growth Management Act requirements.

What has changed that has prompted review of this topic?

HB 1491 was passed by the legislature in 2025, creating new requirements for density and affordable housing incentives near high-capacity transit. The bill requires minimum densities based on floor area ratio. Floor area ratio (FAR) is a zoning measure that establishes density for commercial and residential uses.

Many regional centers have high-capacity transit stations, including bus rapid transit, that will be subject to the requirements of HB 1491. In the central Puget Sound, about 35% of all high-capacity transit stations subject to the bill are in regional growth centers.

The bill requires density of 3.5 FAR within 0.5 miles of rail transit stops and 2.5 FAR within 0.25 miles of bus rapid transit stops. Depending on lot coverage and other site characteristics, building height will vary, but 3.5 FAR is commonly about 6-10 stories for an average urban parcel size, while 2.5 FAR is approximately 4-7 stories.

Jurisdictions in the Puget Sound region will be required to implement HB 1491 by December 2029. More information on the bill is available from the Washington State Department of Commerce.

How are jurisdictions currently meeting requirements?

All centers have adopted activity unit growth targets, as documented in the regional growth center redesignation process.

While many jurisdictions have not yet formally adopted regulations to comply with HB 1491, station areas in regional centers are more likely to already have already met the required minimum zoned density than station areas outside of centers. A PSRC analysis of density found the average planned density of high-capacity transit stations in regional growth centers to be 5.9 FAR. The average density of stations outside of regional growth centers is approximately 2.2 FAR.

Beyond walkable areas around high-capacity transit stations, the following chart provides estimates of average zoned FAR density across the full extent of each regional growth center.

Center Name	Average Zoned Floor Area Ratio
Seattle Downtown	14.5
Redmond-Overlake	12.3
Tacoma Downtown	10.4
Federal Way	10.0
Seattle South Lake Union	7.8
Redmond Downtown	7.6
Everett	6.5
Tacoma Mall	6.0
Bellevue	5.7
Seattle Uptown	5.7
Issaquah	5.6
Lynnwood	5.5
Tukwila	5.0
Renton	5.0
Lakewood	4.5
Burien	4.4
Seattle Northgate	4.4
Silverdale	4.1
Auburn	4.1
Seattle University District	4.0
Seattle First Hill/Capitol Hill	4.0
Kent	3.7
Bremerton	3.7
University Place	3.6
Bothell Canyon Park	3.4
Puyallup South Hill	3.2
SeaTac	2.7
Kirkland Totem Lake	2.3
Puyallup Downtown	2.2
Greater Downtown Kirkland	2.1

3.5 minimum FAR required for rail stations

2.5 minimum FAR required for BRT stations

Source: PSRC 2026 Future Land Use estimates

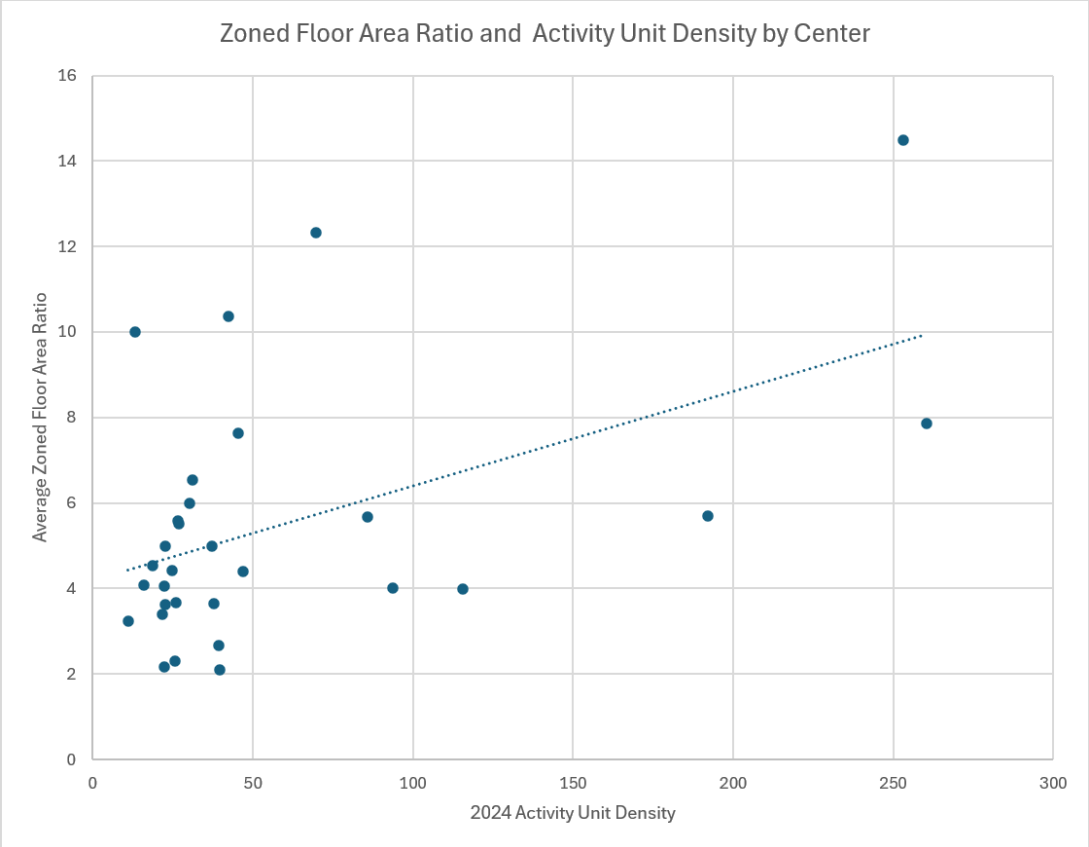
Not all regional growth centers will be required to meet HB 1491 requirements because they do not meet the bill's definition of high-capacity transit.

What does research or data indicate about current conditions or opportunities for improvement?

This analysis considers both zoned FAR density and the density of buildings on the ground today in the context of regional growth center density requirements.

Relationship between Zoned Floor Area Ratio Density and Current Activity Units

Activity units are used to establish planned growth targets for a 20-year planning period. Zoned development capacity must exceed targets to provide sufficient opportunities for actual market conditions within the center. Some expected patterns emerge when comparing current density and zoned FAR capacity. Metro growth centers with the highest current density generally allow the highest zoned FAR density. Many centers allow significantly higher density than reflected in their current estimates of population and employment.



Allowed zoned FAR density varies significantly for centers with fewer jobs and residents. Focusing on regional growth centers that are close to the density of 45 activity units per acre, these centers vary from 2.1 to 10.4 average zoned FAR density.

Center Name	2024 Activity Units Per Acre	Average Zoned Floor Area Ratio
Tacoma Downtown	42.4	10.4
Seattle Northgate	46.9	4.4
Redmond Downtown	45.4	7.6
Greater Downtown Kirkland	39.7	2.1
SeaTac	39.3	2.7

Centers at the lowest end of allowed FAR density represent a mix of centers that have added recent growth and meet PSRC center requirements (Kirkland Totem Lake, Greater Downtown Kirkland, Puyallup Downtown and SeaTac), alongside centers below PSRC requirements for existing density (Puyallup South Hill).

The data shows that they are different measurement standards. Many regional centers are likely to have met the FAR zoning requirements in HB 1491.

Conversion between Activity Unit Density and Floor Area Ratio

PSRC analyzed the estimated FAR of current development on the ground in centers. These are estimates based on county Assessor data and other information from PSRC's land use model. This FAR density data was then compared to current activity unit density in centers. This shows how much actual built density, as measured in FAR, is necessary to reach regional growth center density goals.

Centers Policy Goal	Centers Density Goal	Predicted Average Floor Area Ratio
Minimum required **current** density for **urban** growth centers	18 activity units per acre	0.29
Minimum required **current** density for **metro** growth centers	30 activity units per acre	0.57
Minimum required **planned** density for **urban** growth centers	45 activity units per acre	0.93
Minimum required **planned** density for **metro** growth centers	85 activity units per acre	1.88

HB 1491 TOD Policy Goal	TOD Density Goal	Predicted Activity Unit Density
Minimum required floor area ratio for **bus rapid transit stops**	2.5 average floor area ratio	111 activity units per acre
Minimum required floor area ratio for **rail stops**	3.5 average floor area ratio	154 activity units per acre

This analysis indicates that building to the minimum densities in the TOD bill would significantly exceed PSRC's regional growth center goals.

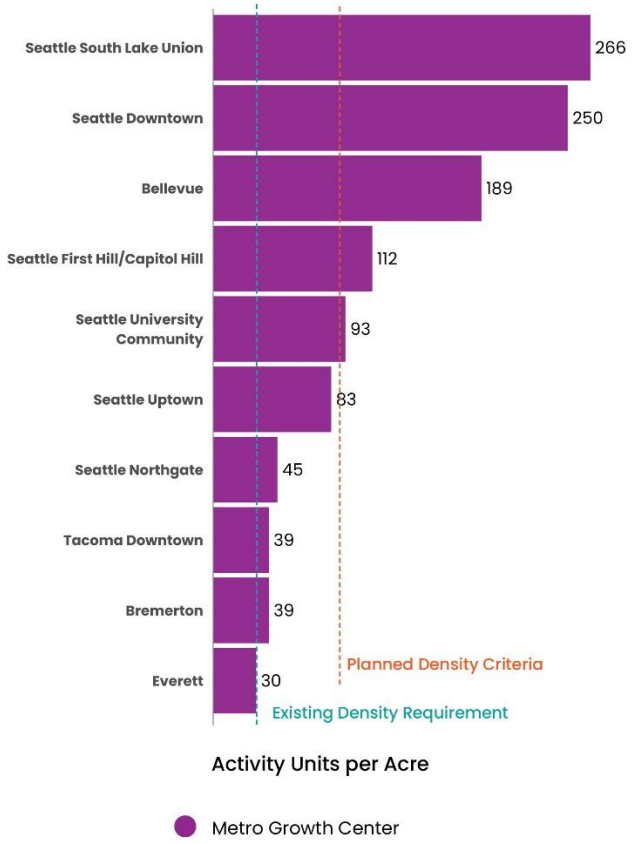
Planned Density in Metro Growth Centers

PSRC's activity unit goals for metro growth centers warrant additional review. Of the nine metro growth centers, five centers already exceed the planned density requirement, and one additional center is very close. The current planned density standard represents a meaningful planning goal for three centers (Downtown Tacoma, Bremerton, and Everett).

Based on regional policy in VISION 2050, regional growth centers should be planning for significant future growth. The density goals in the Regional Centers Framework are intended to provide a standardized, ambitious goal for future growth. Since the threshold of 85 activity units per acre was established in 2018, metro growth centers have continued to grow substantially. There is significant variation between the densest

metro growth center (South Lake Union at 266 activity units per acre) and the least dense metro growth center (Everett at 30 activity units per acre).

Metro Growth Centers: Existing Activity Units per Acre



Source: Office of Financial Management Small Area Estimates Program: 2023; PSRC Parcel Estimates

A minimum percentage growth goal could be considered for centers that have already achieved 85 activity units per acre.

Definition of High-Capacity or Frequent Transit

Both HB 1491 and the Regional Centers Framework include a minimum standard for high-capacity transit. In the case of HB 1491, the purpose of the definition of high-capacity transit is to identify areas subject the zoned density requirements under the bill. For the Regional Centers Framework, the purpose is to designate regional growth centers that have sufficient transit to support long-term growth. The transit definitions are similar but different in important ways.

The transit definition in the Regional Centers Framework includes any planned high-capacity transit stop, not only those under construction or explicitly funded. The transit requirement also includes an option to provide frequent bus service for centers that may not have planned high-capacity transit service.

HB 1491 provides a definition of transit that is mode-specific and does not include a standard of frequence. The modal definition includes “fixed guideway systems,” which includes Seattle’s trolley bus network but does not include ferries. The TOD bill only includes bus rapid transit stops under construction or any bus rapid transit service funded by Sound Transit. This is a narrower definition of qualifying bus rapid transit than provided in the Regional Centers Framework.

If the regional growth center standards were updated to match HB 1491, some centers would not have service that meets the minimum transit criteria. Those centers include Bremerton and Silverdale in Kitsap County and Lakewood, Puyallup South Hill, Tacoma Mall, and University Place in Pierce County.

What are the policy options to address this topic? Is an amendment to the Regional Centers Framework needed to address this topic?

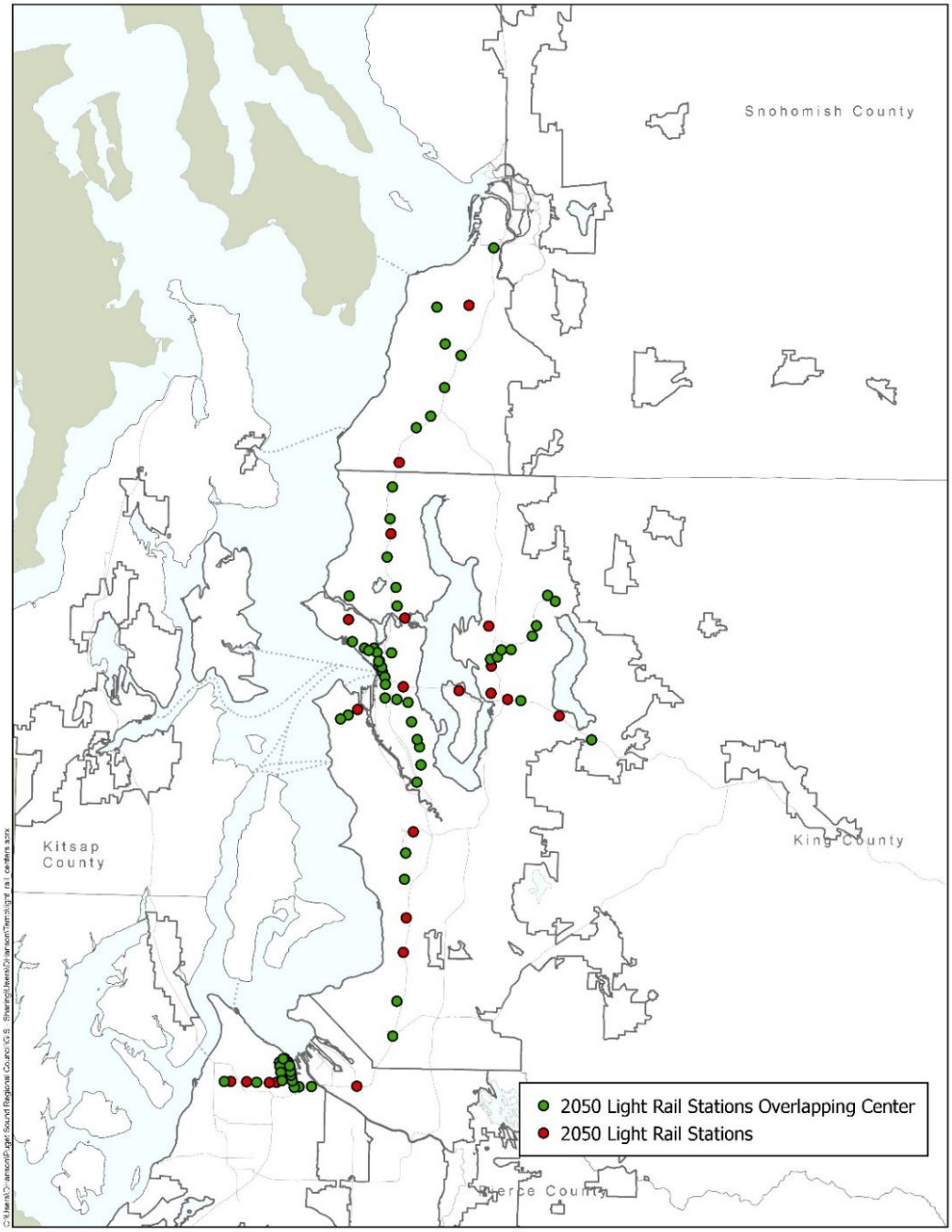
HB 1491 FAR and center targets are not fundamentally inconsistent, but they do measure different things. Most centers already have higher average FAR prior to the compliance deadline. If a center is already consistent with HB 1491, the jurisdiction may not seek changes to its subarea plan or codes. If a center must be rezoned to comply with HB 1491, it raises the possibility that the jurisdiction may seek to update its plan and code to use standards and terminology consistent with HB 1491.

Options	Issue this would address	Challenges with this option
Eliminate requirements for planned activity unit density in centers in favor of a measure of floor area ratio.	Reduce potential confusion between two different types of density measures for regional centers	This option would require additional research on appropriate FAR to support planned growth in centers
Increase required planned activity unit density	Align with higher densities required by the TOD bill	Several centers are challenged to meet the current density goals and may fall further behind if the activity unit requirements were increased
Require all centers to AT LEAST meet state minimum of 2.5 FAR	Ensure that centers, even those that are not subject to HB 1491, are more closely aligned with planned density in other regional centers	Current market demand may not support development at higher zoned density in some centers
Update minimum transit definition in the Regional	Centers that are not required to rezone based	Changes to the transit definition would affect

Centers Framework to align with HB 1491	in HB 1491 keep pace with other centers in providing density	centers in Kitsap and Pierce counties, which do not currently have funded bus rapid transit
Metro growth center growth targets above 85 AU/acre could be a minimum percentage increase instead of a fixed total	Most metro growth centers have significantly exceeded the minimum required growth target. Metro growth centers should still be expected to plan for ambitious growth.	Additional research would be required to determine a minimum percentage of planned growth

Appendix A: Relationship between light rail stations and center designation

The vast majority of existing and planned light rail stations are located in regional or countywide centers. A small number are directly outside of designated centers. While the region has goals to support long-term growth in light rail stations, many stations located in countywide growth centers or outside of centers don't meet the requirements for regional centers today given they lack density and an adopted subarea plan.



Boundaries and Connectivity

Background

The Regional Centers Framework describes centers as areas of compact, pedestrian-oriented development that provide access and mobility for people walking, biking, and using transit. Many existing centers struggle to meet the goals set out for regional centers due to irregular shapes, large sizes, and barriers to connectivity created by major roadways or superblocks. While the framework includes language to guide existing and prospective centers towards shape, size, and connectivity goals, the criteria lack objective standards. The 2025 redesignation review of existing centers identified seven regional growth centers with issues related to shape, size and connectivity and placed a condition on these centers that required jurisdictions to review their center boundaries and submit for board approval. This memo outlines options for updating the framework and accompanying documents to ensure that the boundaries of and connectivity within existing and future regional centers meet the intent of the centers framework.

What does the Regional Centers Framework currently require?

The intent of regional growth centers is to be compact, transit-supported areas for growth and development. The maximum size criterion for regional growth centers is 640 acres, equivalent to one square mile. This creates a hypothetical ideal center that is a square, one mile on each side with a transit station in the middle, where one can walk from the transit station to the edge of the center in a half mile.

The framework suggests this type of orientation, recommending that centers be nodal with a generally round or square shape and avoid linear or gerrymandered shapes that are not readily walkable or connected by transit. Further, the criteria require a justification of size and shape, though do not specify how to do this.

The framework allows for centers larger than 640 acres, if they have an internal, high-capacity transit system, which includes a streetcar or multiple light rail stations. However, the framework does not create any additional conditions for oversized centers or establish a maximum size once the exception is satisfied. For instance, at 1,385 acres, the Downtown Tacoma center is over twice the maximum size criterion.

While the eligibility criteria do not directly address superblocks or major roadways as connectivity barriers, they do require that centers should have existing bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, amenities, and a street pattern that support walkability.

What has changed that has prompted review of this topic?
In the 2025 redesignation review of existing regional centers, seven centers were redesignated with conditions related to boundaries and connectivity. These conditions allowed the centers to maintain their designated status while addressing identified boundary and connectivity issues through a future resubmittal for approval.

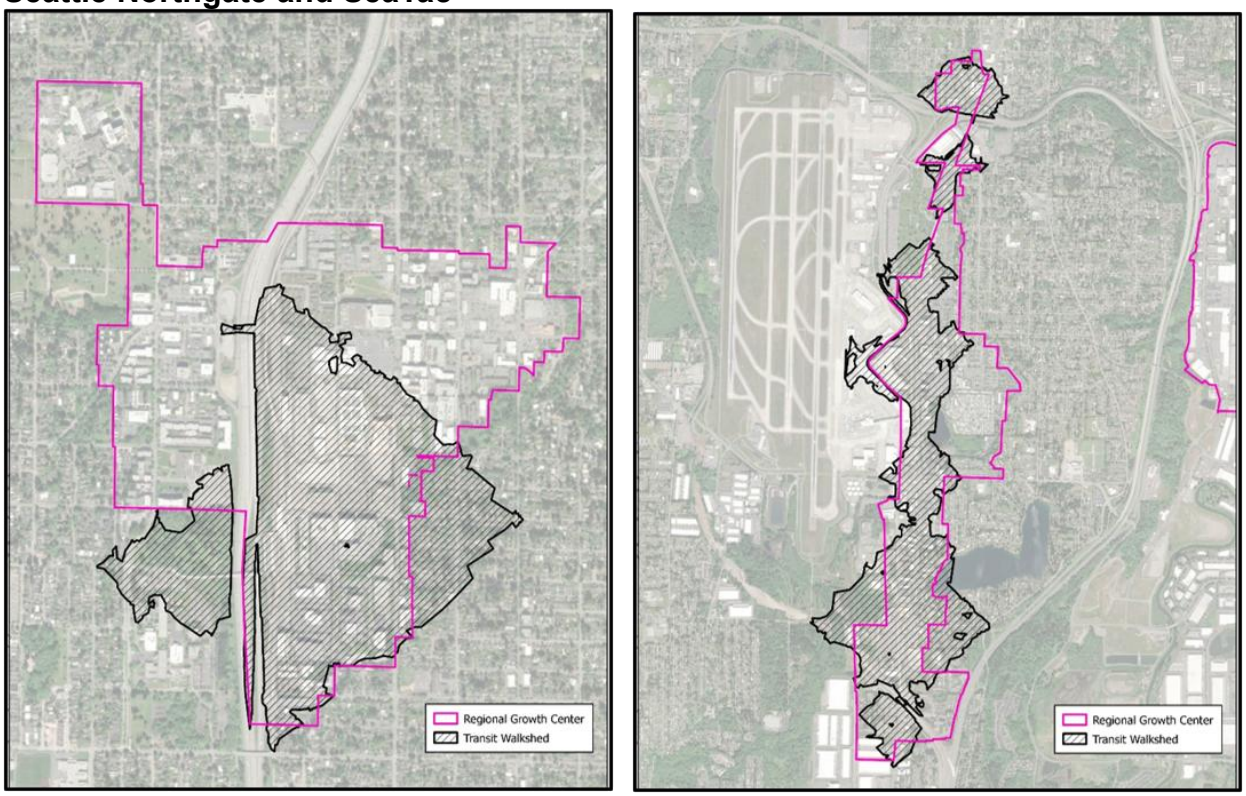
The specifics of the boundary conditions differ slightly across the centers, due to differences in center geographies, but fall into two categories. Five of the seven conditions call out pedestrian connectivity, which aligns with the overall intent of the centers framework. In addition, most of these conditions reference walking access to transit as part of the boundary condition. The remaining two boundary conditions relate to the size of the centers, which are larger than the maximum permitted for centers without an internal high-capacity transit system.

The questions of shape and connectivity are distinct from that of size. While all three topics relate to the geographic boundaries of the center, a large size does not necessarily imply a lack of internal pedestrian connectivity or an impractical shape. In fact, the two centers which have boundary conditions related to their size have shapes that otherwise would be unlikely to draw concern.

An additional challenge to connectivity in these conditions is the issue of pedestrian mobility across interstates and major arterials. For many of the centers with boundary conditions, pedestrian connectivity throughout the center is inhibited by the presence of a high traffic roadway. While proximity to an interstate highway or other major roadway may be a reason for the concentration of housing and employment, VISION 2050 goals and policies seek to address barriers to multimodal users and support the development of complete communities.

As illustrated in Figure 1, connectivity throughout the Seattle Northgate center is inhibited by the presence of Interstate 5, isolating the west and northwest portions of the center and limiting their ability to function as a single subarea. Figure 2 shows the SeaTac center, which is linear in shape and extends across nearly four miles, creating a similar challenge for cohesive subarea planning. The presence of superblocks has not been documented across regional centers, but an illustrative example is the Tukwila center, which has at its heart a superblock measuring 1600 by 1000 feet.

Figures 1 and 2: Regional Growth Center Boundaries and Transit Walksheds, Seattle Northgate and SeaTac



What does research or data indicate about current conditions or opportunities for improvement?

Many peer agencies that designate centers do not have firm criteria on size or shape of centers, allowing for local decision making to drive the process for center boundaries. Many agencies allow and even encourage corridor-based centers, especially when supported by transit. Nearly all peer agencies have centers with major roadways, including interstate highways, and none were identified with guidance to avoid or mitigate the connectivity impacts related to the roadways.

Connecting center shape to transit access may be an effective way to manage size, shape, and connectivity. The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) designates two types of Priority Development Areas (PDAs), which function similar to centers:

- Transit-Rich PDAs are areas around a high-capacity transit station
- Connected Community PDAs have existing density and offer basic transit service with planned housing and job growth and policies to reduce VMT

The shape and size of PDAs relate directly to the availability of transit service within the area. Transit Rich PDAs must have at least 50% of area within ½ mile of a high-capacity

transit stop like rail, ferry, or frequent bus. Connected Community PDAs must have the entire area within ½ mile of a bus stop with peak service of 30 minutes or less.

Transit-rich PDAs are similar to regional growth centers. The centers framework could apply a similar standard to regional growth centers, requiring that a certain percentage of the center area be within walking distance of high-capacity transit. Using ½-mile walk distance for light rail stations and ¼-mile walk distance for BRT stations, we find that 19 of the 30 regional growth centers have at least half of their area within walking distance of a high-capacity transit station. Table 1 lists the regional growth centers and the percentage of their acreage within the walkshed of existing or planned high-capacity transit. The metric ranges from 99% (Seattle South Lake Union) to 0% (Lakewood, Puyallup South Hill, Silverdale, and Tacoma Mall).

Table 1: Regional Growth Centers by percentage of area within transit walkshed

Regional Growth Center	Total Acres	Acres of Walkshed in Center	% of Center in Walkshed
Seattle South Lake Union	360	358	99%
Seattle Uptown	333	313	94%
Seattle First Hill/Capitol Hill	918	841	92%
Seattle Downtown	952	866	91%
Tacoma Downtown	1,385	1,237	89%
Bellevue	410	347	85%
Federal Way	219	174	79%
Kent	292	218	75%
Auburn	355	263	74%
Seattle University District	753	553	73%
Puyallup Downtown	215	149	69%
Greater Downtown Kirkland	564	386	68%
Burien	419	282	67%
Seattle Northgate	412	272	66%
SeaTac	885	541	61%
Redmond Downtown	509	298	59%
Renton	606	349	58%
Redmond-Overlake	863	464	54%
Tukwila	882	449	51%
Everett	661	301	46%
Lynnwood	776	330	43%
Kirkland Totem Lake	842	255	30%
Issaquah	466	132	28%
Bremerton	592	114	19%
University Place	481	59	12%
Bothell Canyon Park	563	60	11%

Lakewood	337	0	0%
Puyallup South Hill	845	0	0%
Silverdale	718	0	0%
Tacoma Mall	575	0	0%

What are the policy options to address this topic? Is an amendment to the Regional Centers Framework needed to address this topic?

Options	Issues this would address	Notes
Clarify how jurisdictions plan for center shape and size to support transit access	Ambiguity in framework requirement.	All jurisdictions should include at least some discussion in their subarea plan of how the boundary was determined.
Require centers to have a certain percentage of their area within walking distance of existing or planned high-capacity transit	Connectivity within centers, large centers, unusually shaped centers	In addition to the 640 acre maximum
Require centers to identify gaps in pedestrian connectivity and include projects to improve connectivity	Connectivity within centers, superblocks, major roadways	Use PSRC's Transit Access Tool – Urban Form and Connectivity metrics
Require new centers to exclude major roadway crossings and prohibit superblocks	Address superblocks, connectivity	

Conclusion

By clarifying the requirements for boundary justification and establishing objective criteria, jurisdictions will have a predictable pathway to designation and redesignation. The proposed framework updates will strengthen the process for managing centers and encourage planning for centers to optimize access to transit investments.

Livable Communities

Background

VISION 2050 encourages future growth in regional growth centers that are intended to be dense, walkable, and mixed-use areas. One of the Regional Centers Framework criteria for centers is local investment to create a walkable, livable center. As the Puget Sound region considers its approach to growth while maintaining a high quality of life for all residents, investment in livable places that have room to grow is a major purpose of regional centers.

When reviewing regional centers, the Growth Management Policy Board has regularly emphasized the importance of supporting livability and a "sense of place," ensuring that regional investments create complete communities. While the framework identifies livability as an objective for regional centers, evaluating how individual centers are working towards this goal is difficult without clear criteria. This memo outlines options for clarifying criteria and providing guidelines for supporting livability in centers.

What does the Regional Centers Framework currently require?

The Regional Centers Framework establishes similar eligibility and designation criteria for both existing and prospective regional growth centers that address topics related to livability and sense of place. The key areas where the topic is addressed include:

Local Commitment

The framework requires that centers document a history of and intent to continue investment in center livability and walkability. The consistency tool elaborates on this requirement as a "list of specific transportation investments and programs and other public infrastructure investments."

Regional Role

The framework requires that centers have a clear regional role as an important destination for county and evidence of market potential to support the center's planning target for jobs and population. The consistency tool does not provide additional detail on how a center's regional role should be justified. While the regional significance of a place doesn't necessarily connote livability, the significance of a neighborhood or destination may be strongly related to its identity or sense of place.

Land Use and Development Patterns

The consistency tool includes several items which are not described in the framework but provide detail on how subarea plans may incorporate policies to support livability into their center plans, including:

- Establish design standards for pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development and other transit-supportive planning that orients land uses around transit. Eliminate superblocks through innovative site design and public/private partnerships.

- Increase access to opportunity, including employment and education opportunities and improved neighborhood quality of life.

How are jurisdictions currently meeting requirements?
Jurisdictions throughout the region conduct subarea planning to establish a vision for locally significant places within their community.
Existing center plans address livability through a variety of techniques. Many plans use urban design principles, such as architectural standards, branding, and wayfinding as the primary method of improving identity in centers. Others include lists of transportation investments either by reference or discussed proposed investments in the plan text. A small number of plans include discussion of other investments in the public realm, which may include parks, open space, and public programming.

With respect to sense of place, center plans also illustrate a mix of strategies, from simply stating that the downtown is a "primary urban center" (Bellevue Downtown), providing data on concentrations of employment and transportation connections (Bothell Canyon Park), or documenting key assets and community institutions (Auburn). For metro growth centers, often the central business districts of a major city, the regional role of the center is clear. Smaller urban growth centers may articulate a vision for a livable center and document concentration of employment or housing, but a clear identity for some centers is still being developed.

Some jurisdictions conduct placemaking efforts and support livability outside of the subarea planning process, often aligned with economic development projects. For instance, the city of SeaTac created a Tourism Destination Development Plan (PDF), which guided the city's investment to launch pop-up beer gardens and watch parties during the 2026 FIFA World Cup as part of a broader placemaking effort. In Lynnwood, which has become a hub in Snohomish County as the current northern terminus of the Link light rail and provides access to new Community Transit BRT routes, the city has created a vision (PDF) supported by a marketing plan to emphasize how the city's strategic investments in parks and multimodal infrastructure will create a walkable downtown for the city.

What has changed that has prompted review of this topic?
The Growth Management Policy Board and Regional Staff Committee members recommended sense of place and livability as an area for improvement as PSRC staff conduct a review of the Regional Centers Framework. Board and committee members recommended including criteria that encourage regional centers to be more than just jobs and housing and to encompass complete communities, with childcare facilities, parks, schools and other key amenities.

What does research or data indicate about current conditions or opportunities for improvement?
Examples from PSRC guidance documents, partner agencies, and other peer regions provide some strategies for improvement in encouraging livable places. PSRC's guidance for Transportation Projects Supporting Growth in Centers (PDF) highlights

examples of how jurisdictions can integrate their development of transportation project lists with center planning. The guidance document provides an illustrative example of placemaking on a commercial corridor through multimodal transportation improvements that create a pedestrian friendly environment and support broader job growth and economic development goals.

As another example, Sound Transit, in partnership with Lynnwood, Everett, and Snohomish County, developed a TOD Toolkit to guide the development of transit station areas along the planned extension of light rail to Everett. The toolkit emphasizes the importance of "placekeeping" as distinct from placemaking, recognizing the value and contributions of the people and institutions that live and work in a place today. Key policy considerations include highlighting social infrastructure in planning, promoting the retention of unique aspects of existing communities such as small businesses, cultural organizations, and public art, and engaging directly with impacted residents and businesses.

Finally, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council has a resource on cultural asset mapping, which highlights how the tool may be used to plan and implement a community vision. This asset-based approach can be used in both established and emerging centers to identify existing strengths and resources in a community and build upon a center's sense of place and enhance livability. The asset-based approach stands in contrast to a deficit-based approach that focuses on identifying and servicing needs, which is common to many planning practices. Community assets can be listed, described, and/or mapped to understand the center's role in the larger community and how it might be enhanced in the future.

In summary, these examples demonstrate the value of deep engagement with community and recognition of social infrastructure to create a sense of place. Some combination of these strategies may be considered to enhance the framework's guidance of livability.

What are the policy options to address this topic? Is an amendment to the Regional Centers Framework needed to address this topic?

The existing centers framework is largely aligned with the goals and intent of livable communities and developing or maintaining a sense of place. However, given the lack of specificity provided in the consistency tool, local planners approach the issue with a wide range of strategies.

Options	Issues this would address	Notes
Include additional requirements on "sense of place" in the consistency tool	Clarity between framework goals related to sense of place	

Options	Issues this would address	Notes
Require center plans to include maps or inventories of community/cultural assets	Demonstration of regional/local significance of center Documentation of the variety of local resources	PSRC should provide a guidance document on this topic
Require centers to provide a letter(s) of support from a community-based organization (CBO) that provides services in the center	Demonstrated community buy-in to center success and vitality	Provide a definition of CBO that clarifies the difference between a local government or partner agency and a CBO

The centers framework and associated documents would be improved by including examples of how jurisdictions are documenting and improving their strategies to create livability.

Conclusion

The existing centers framework provides objectives, policies, and guidance for centers to encourage livability in areas planned for growth. However, the topic is subject to interpretation and the outcomes for existing centers are varied. In recognition of this, the GMPB directed staff to explore strategies for incorporating planning for livability into the framework update.

Many existing centers create a structure for livability by assessing the social infrastructure of their center as they would physical infrastructure: documenting existing conditions, identifying gaps, and creating plans to address the gaps. The centers framework can standardize and encourage this type of subarea planning across all centers, while still allowing for flexibility to meet local conditions, through an update to the framework and consistency tool that elaborates on the best practices in planning for livability.

Puget Sound Regional Council

September 11, 2026

DISCUSSION ITEM

To: Regional TOD Committee

From: Kristin Mitchell, Associate Planner
Brian H. Y. Lee, Ph.D., Program Manager – Data Solutions and Research

Subject: **Findings from 2025 Household Travel Survey**

IN BRIEF

Staff will present insights from the 2025 Household Travel Survey data.

DISCUSSION

PSRC conducted the second year of an eight-year, four-wave Household Travel Survey (HTS) Program in 2025. The survey collects activity and travel data from the region's residents. The 2025 survey follows the 2023 survey and the six-year, three-wave HTS program in 2017, 2019, and 2021. This data resource supports agency planning work, including the development of PSRC's regional land use and travel forecast models, and the monitoring of behavioral trends.

Data from the 2025 HTS wave has been published on the PSRC Data Portal. In this Regional TOD meeting, staff will provide insights from the 2025 data.

NEXT STEPS

Staff are preparing for the 2027 Household Travel Survey.

For additional information, please contact Brian Lee, Program Manager – Data Solutions and Research, at blee@psrc.org, or Kristin Mitchell, Associate Planner, at kmitchell@psrc.org.

2026 Regional Transit-Oriented Development Committee Meetings

January

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Meeting adjusted for Juneteenth

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Puget Sound Regional Council

TOD on a Roll:
Making the Most of New Transit Connections

The region has been on a roll opening new transit stations, fulfilling a decades-long promise to connect communities with high-capacity transit. Join community leaders to hear highlights of recent TOD opportunities and discuss what's next. A webinar will highlight recent work to support transit-oriented development. In-person walking tours will feature work in Shoreline and Redmond to improve transit access, provide more housing, and connect neighborhoods.

Friday, October 16, 2026

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.
Zoom – Virtual Event
Register for the webinar

1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Shoreline TOD Walking Tour
Register for the tour

Friday, October 23, 2026

1:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.
Marymoor and Downtown Redmond Walking Tour
Register for the tour

Free to attend. Space limited for walking tours.

Learn more about the event at psrc.org.

TOOLBOX SERIES

TOOLBOX: Local Economic Development Efforts

Time: 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.

Date: September 25, 2026

Registration

This TOOLBOX session will highlight a variety of economic development efforts from across the central Puget Sound region. PSRC staff will provide an overview of the Regional Economic Strategy and share key takeaways from a review of local comprehensive plan economic development elements. Staff from jurisdictions around the region will then highlight local initiatives related to placemaking, arts, public-private partnerships and regional collaboration.

SPEAKERS

- Puget Sound Regional Council
- City of North Bend
- City of Shoreline
- City of Lakewood

Participants will be eligible to claim one AICP CM credit.

Puget Sound Regional Council