

## Equity and Access to Opportunity in the Regional Centers Framework

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VISION 2040 anticipates that a significant share of future growth will be focused in regional centers. As increasingly important focal points for investment and activity, the centers represent a crucial opportunity to address equitable access to affordable housing, services, high-quality transit, and employment, as well as to build on the community assets currently present within centers.

The Stakeholder Working Group received comment letters from interested parties, including members of the Working Group itself, that urged incorporation of strong measures to address equity and social justice in the Centers Framework Update. (See [correspondence](#) from Puget Sound Sage, Transportation Choices Coalition, and Futurewise.)

### VISION 2040

**MPP-H-5:** Expand the supply and range of housing, including affordable units, in centers throughout the region.

**MPP-H-6:** Recognize and give regional funding priority to transportation facilities, infrastructure, and services that explicitly advance the development of housing in designated regional growth center. Give additional priority to projects and services that advance affordable housing.

Consistent with VISION 2040 and the Growing Transit Communities Strategy, provisions related to affordable housing are included in the alternatives that have been forwarded to the Growth Management Policy Board. Additional equity measures were also discussed by the Working Group, with a recommendation for continued exploration of these issues by the GMPB. These topics include:

- **Affordable housing and displacement.** Meeting the housing needs of a full range of households in centers is particularly challenging. Factors such as high land prices, market demand, and construction costs constrain the ability to provide housing that is affordable to low- and even moderate-income households. Centers face a particular shortage of larger units that may accommodate families. At the same time, many existing residents, including low-income households and communities of color, may be at risk of displacement due to redevelopment and market pressure on rents. A greater understanding of these challenges and risks may be needed to inform regional and local plans, implementation strategies, and performance benchmarks.
- **Transit-dependent populations.** Many people, including low-income, elderly, disabled, and young people, do not have ready access to a private automobile and thus must rely on transit to meet daily mobility needs. With major transit investments serving regional centers, it is important to maintain access for transit-dependent populations. Potential strategies could focus on preserving and increasing affordable housing opportunities within walking distance of transit, providing convenient feeder transit service to HCT stations, and addressing pedestrian access and safety around transit stations.
- **Access to employment opportunities.** Regional centers are expected to accommodate a significant share of future employment growth. VISION 2040 includes policies that support the ability of disadvantaged populations to share in the region's economic future. The board may wish to consider steps local governments and other public agencies can take to link residents of centers and nearby communities with family wage jobs in centers.

- **Equitable community engagement.** Public input is essential to community planning processes, including planning for regional centers. Communities of color, immigrant communities, and low-income individuals face barriers in actively participating in the planning process. The board may wish to consider how to incorporate equitable community engagement strategies that enable all groups to participate on an equal footing in community planning decision making.

There are several approaches to addressing these issues through a regional centers framework that the Growth Management Policy Board may wish to consider. These include potential actions undertaken by PSRC and actions by local governments that contain regional centers.

**Options include the following:**

**As part of the Regional Centers Framework update, complete an equity assessment of the centers alternatives and undertake additional stakeholder engagement.**

This could include:

- Targeted consultation with community organizations representing historically underrepresented populations
- Assessment of the equity impacts of the centers framework alternatives (the King County Equity Impact Review tool is a model approach that could be used)

**Develop analyses, data, and best practice guidance on regional and local approaches to equitable centers**

This could include:

- Guidance on best practices for local governments and transit agencies in identifying and serving transit-dependent populations within and with access to centers
- Assess at a regional scale relative risks of displacement of low-income populations from existing or potential new centers (the GTC People and Place Typology analysis provides one such model).
- Research approaches to providing access to employment opportunities, such as priority hire models to promote training and career opportunities in construction trades (including [Seattle's Priority Hire Ordinance](#) or other similar approaches). Share these models with other local governments and potentially inform future review of PSRC policies.
- Involve affected communities in developing guidance on strategies to further social equity in regional centers, including tailored approaches to reaching out to diverse community groups.

**Develop performance measures and monitor progress for centers individually and regionally**

This could include:

- Affordability goals or targets for centers
- Track availability of affordable housing in centers
- Displacement and preservation measures
- Other benchmarks or performance measures, as appropriate

**Enhance the equity requirements for centers through eligibility requirements or through subarea planning to include additional analyses, policies, and implementation strategies**

For regional growth centers, this could include analyses, policies, or implementation strategies related to:

- Overall social equity impacts
- Transit-dependent populations
- Equitable access to employment opportunities
- Fair housing practices
- Displacement of affordable housing and small businesses

For manufacturing and industrial centers, this could include analyses, policies, or implementation strategies related to:

- Equitable access to employment opportunities, including priority hire and apprenticeship programs
- Environmental justice and health disparities related to impacts of industrial activities
- Transit access to employment areas

**Address equity and social justice more broadly through updates to jurisdiction-wide or regional plans**

Concerns about affordable housing and access to opportunity are applicable to other areas in the region and are not isolated to designated centers. The board may wish to consider whether some equity strategies may be more appropriately addressed at the citywide or regional scale through future updates to VISION 2040 or other planning efforts.

Please see the [compilation of comments](#) to the Stakeholder Working Group for specific comments and recommendations on equity the framework.