



Project Summary:

The Puget Sound Regional Council will work with its members and other partners to evaluate the regional centers framework and recommend structural changes to recognize both regional and subregional¹ centers using consistent designation criteria and procedures. If adopted, the new centers framework would inform future regional and local planning and investments.

Guiding Principles:

The project will be guided by the following principles. The new framework and procedures should:

- Support the Growth Management Act and VISION 2040
- Focus growth consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy
- Recognize and support different types and roles of regional and subregional centers
- Provide common procedures across the region
- Guide strategic use of limited regional investments
- Inform future planning updates at regional, countywide, and local levels

Background:

Role of centers. Centers are the hallmark of VISION 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy. VISION 2040 calls for the creation of central places with a mix of uses and activities. *Regional growth centers* are locations of more compact, pedestrian-oriented development with a mix of housing, jobs, retail, services, and other destinations. The region’s plans identify centers as areas that should receive a greater proportion of the region’s population and employment growth than other parts of the urban area, while providing improved access and mobility—especially for walking, biking, and transit. *Manufacturing/industrial centers* are locations for more intensive industrial activity. Both regional growth centers and manufacturing/industrial centers are focal points for economic development and transportation infrastructure investments. The region has designated 28 regional growth centers and eight regional manufacturing/industrial centers.

**Updated in October 2016 to reflect revised project dates*

¹ VISION 2040 defines “centers” as “A defined focal area within a city or community that has a mix of housing, employment, retail and entertainment uses. It is pedestrian-oriented, which allows people to walk to different destinations or attractions. Regional centers are formally designated by the Puget Sound Regional Council.” For the purpose of this scope of work, “subregional centers” refer to central places not currently designated at the regional level. It includes countywide centers identified in countywide planning processes, local centers identified in local comprehensive plans, and other central places that have been the subject of planning and investment and/or have experienced significant population and/or employment growth. The Framework Development stage is expected to define formal criteria to identify subregional centers in the region, including both growth centers as well as manufacturing/industrial centers.

Subregional centers, including downtowns in suburban cities and other neighborhood centers, also play an important role in VISION 2040's Regional Growth Strategy. These, too, are strategic locations for concentrating jobs, housing, shopping, and recreational opportunities. VISION 2040 calls for each of the region's cities to develop one or more central places as compact mixed-use hubs. However, there is currently no regional coordination for the designation of, or investment in, subregional centers.

Why update? The current VISION 2040 Centers Framework designates regional growth centers and regional manufacturing/industrial centers. The regional centers have been integral to regional planning for over 20 years, and the majority of current centers were designated prior to criteria in place today. The region's elected leadership determined that it is time to assess the current framework, including procedures for designation, existing designated centers, and the role of central places currently not currently recognized at the regional level. There are many subregional centers, including those designated through countywide planning processes that play an important role in meeting local and regional planning objectives. Adopted regional policy and recent reports and recommendations² direct PSRC to work with member jurisdictions and other partners to develop a common framework and procedures to recognize subregional centers at the regional level. Furthermore, recent regional planning initiatives, including the Growing Transit Communities Strategy (2013) and the Industrial Lands Analysis (2015), and interest in emerging employment centers and military facilities, combined to instigate the update.

What will this improve? A new framework that includes both regional and subregional centers could better reflect the diversity of center types and functions in the region and may provide better support to subregional centers that help meet regional and local planning goals. Common designation criteria and procedures would improve overall consistency and coordination of centers planning. Broadening the framework to include more center types would also encourage additional jurisdictions to be active participants in the regional planning process.

What is the relationship to existing and future regional policy? This project builds on adopted regional policy in VISION 2040 and its local implementation through countywide planning policies and comprehensive plan updates. The project assumes that the central tenets of VISION 2040's development policies and the Regional Growth Strategy—that growth should be focused in walkable, compact and transit-oriented urban communities, and that the region consists of different geographies of varying scales—will carry forward into future plan and policy updates. The project will develop recommendations for a new centers framework that, if adopted, would be implemented through future plan updates, including the update to Transportation 2040 (2018), and the updates to VISION 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy (2020).

What will recommendations include? This project will develop recommendations for consideration and possible action by the PSRC. The recommendations will likely include eligibility criteria, designation procedures, and administrative procedures for a new centers framework. Recommendations will also likely include how the new framework should be implemented, which could include recommended changes to multicounty planning policies and countywide planning policies, re-designation of existing regional centers into the new framework, changes to the policy framework for regionally managed federal transportation funds, and changes to other regional plans, policies, and procedures.

² VISION 2040 MPP-DP-12, DP-Action-5; Regional Centers Monitoring Report – Recommendations 1 (Market Study) & 10 (Countywide Centers); Growing Transit Communities Strategy – Actions 1.6 & 5.2

Process and Timeline:

This work will proceed in five phases: Initiation, Research, Framework Development, Approval, and Implementation. These phases, with respective key questions, products, and tasks are detailed below.



Phase 1 INITIATION

SPRING 2015

PRODUCT: Develop detailed Scope of Work that defines the project’s key products and processes

PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT:

- Seek GMPB direction on draft scope of work and guiding principles (APRIL 2015)
- Solicit input from key PSRC committees³ and countywide groups⁴ on draft scope (APRIL-JUNE 2015)
- Seek Board⁵ action to proceed on final scope of work (JULY 2015)

KEY TASK: Create external Technical Advisory Group to provide technical and policy guidance to RESEARCH and FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT phases of work.

PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT :

- Solicit a small number of representatives from key PSRC committees and countywide planning groups to serve on Technical Advisory Group. Ensure geographic representation. (APRIL-JUNE 2015)

KEY TASK: Create internal Interdepartmental Staff Team members to provide assistance during RESEARCH and FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT phases of work

PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT :

- Convene staff representatives from across PSRC departments, including growth management planning, data and systems analysis, transportation short-term planning (project selection), transit planning, and economic development, to serve on an ad hoc internal staff team

Phase 2 RESEARCH

SUMMER - WINTER 2015

KEY QUESTIONS: The following key questions will guide the RESEARCH phase of the project.

- What are the current planning frameworks for centers at the regional, subregional, and local levels? How do these frameworks compare in their designation criteria and procedures? How are centers geographically distributed throughout the region? How do the centers relate on measures of social

³ Key PSRC committees will include, at minimum: Regional Staff Committee, Transportation Operators Committee, Regional TOD Advisory Committee, and Regional Project Evaluation Committee

⁴ Key countywide groups will include, at minimum: Inter-Jurisdictional Team (King County), Kitsap County Planning Directors Forum, Growth Management Coordinating Committee (Pierce County) and Snohomish County Tomorrow Planning Advisory Committee

⁵ The Growth Management Policy Board (GMPB) will have primary responsibility for providing policy direction in developing this framework. The Transportation Policy Board and Economic Development District Board will be briefed and will provide input during this process. If GMPB recommends changes to the centers structure, the Executive Board will have final authority to adopt.

equity and environmental justice? How have other regions planned for centers, and what can we learn from their experiences?

- How are these frameworks used to focus growth and inform investments? How do these frameworks correlate to actual growth patterns and infrastructure investments?
- What market demand exists to add new centers in the region? What market, built form, and locational characteristics indicate likely success of potential centers of different scales? What strategies may help maximize demand in centers?

PRODUCT: Develop comprehensive Background Paper that includes: description of existing designation criteria and procedures for regional and subregional centers; evaluation of existing regional centers, including equity analysis; discussion of lessons learned from peer regions; inventory of subregional centers identified by various local planning processes including countywide processes, comprehensive plans, agency long range plans, planning on and adjacent to military facilities and tribal lands, and results and recommendations of the Industrial Lands Analysis and the Growing Transit Communities Strategy; analysis of state and regional investments in regional and subregional centers including regionally managed federal transportation funds and regional transit investments; analysis of population and employment growth trends in regional and subregional centers; identification of common and unique successes and challenges experienced by existing regional centers; and identification of key issues raised by the analyses, and key considerations for the development of a new centers framework.

PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT:

- Listening sessions in four counties - held in Bellevue, Tacoma, Everett and Bremerton (*OCTOBER 2015*)
- Additional listening sessions with relevant subregional committees and stakeholder groups, such as military communities and the Regional Equity Network, as appropriate (*FALL 2015*)
- Work with interdepartmental staff team and Technical Advisory Group on data collection and analysis for Background Paper (*JULY-DECEMBER 2015*)
- Seek guidance from Technical Advisory Group on draft Background Paper analyses and findings (*JANUARY - MARCH 2016*)
- Disseminate Background Paper to key PSRC committees and countywide groups (*MAY/JUNE 2016*)

PRODUCT: Produce a Centers Market Study that includes: identifying detailed market indicators and preferences for locating in centers; estimates of demand for mixed-use centers in the region; recommended strategies to improve market strength; and guidance for local market studies.

PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT:

- Issue RFP for Centers Market Study and retain consultant team (*JULY-AUGUST 2015*)
 - Assist consultant team in data collection and analysis, including the convening of focus groups to discuss market conditions and strategies in regional and subregional centers (*AUGUST-DECEMBER 2015*)
 - Seek guidance from Technical Advisory Group or other external evaluators on draft Study analyses and findings (*JANUARY - JUNE 2016*)
 - Disseminate Study to key PSRC committees and countywide groups (*FALL 2016*)
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KEY QUESTIONS: The following key questions will guide the FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT phase of the project.

- Would a refined regional centers framework that recognizes different tiers of centers better implement VISION 2040 by supporting central places that accommodate the region's growth?
- What is the right mix of center types for the region and what role do they have in supporting the region's growth strategy? What locations could be better supported through a formalized designation?
- How should a new centers framework strike a balance between supporting growing communities and maintaining balanced geographic distribution?
- How should a new centers framework address central places in areas over which local governments do not have jurisdiction, including military installations and tribal lands?
- How should a new centers framework interface with the regional geographies and growth allocations in VISION 2040 and through CPPs?
- How should a new centers framework address currently designated centers that do not meet the designation criteria adopted in 2011, or new designation criteria recommended in the new framework?
- How should a new centers framework inform transportation and infrastructure investments, including regional transit investments and regionally managed federal transportation funds?
- How should a new centers framework inform the updates to regional plans, and other policies and procedures?

KEY TASK: Carry out a Board Engagement Process through at least two in-depth board work sessions, hosted by the Growth Management Policy Board but open to other board members, to provide guidance on the composition and the work program of the Stakeholder Working Group and the broader FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT phase recommendations. Work with GMPB co-chairs and staff to structure the work sessions. Invite members of PSRC Growth Management Policy Board, Transportation Policy Board, Executive Board, and Economic Development District to participate in the work sessions.

KEY TASK: Create external Stakeholder Working Group to provide guidance to FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT phases. The stakeholder working group will include Technical Advisory Group members and other stakeholder interests, such as military communities, identified through outreach to GMPB and committees. Ensure both topical and geographic representation, consistent with board direction.

PRODUCT: Develop a Recommended Framework to recognize regional and subregional centers according to common criteria and procedures, based on findings from the RESEARCH phase and guidance from a stakeholder working group. Develop Implementation Recommendations on how the Recommended Framework should guide existing and future regional and local plans, policies and procedures.

PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT:

- Solicit input from key PSRC committees and countywide groups on RESEARCH phase findings, and on stakeholder working group composition and process (*JANUARY- MARCH 2016*)
- Get board direction through structured engagement work sessions for GMPB and other board members following the January and February GMPB meetings (*APRIL - JUNE 2016*)
- Convene stakeholder working group process to develop recommendations for a new centers framework and its implementation, based on research findings and board direction. In order to

develop recommendations in a four-month timeframe, the working group will have a limited number of intensive charrette-style meetings as well as broader committee input through stakeholder open houses, in addition to regular meetings *(JUNE - DECEMBER 2016)*

- Solicit input from key PSRC committees and countywide groups on draft Recommended Framework and Implementation Recommendations *(FEBRUARY - MARCH 2017)*

IF RECOMMENDATIONS FORWARDED FOR BOARD APPROVAL...

Phase 4 APPROVAL

SPRING – SUMMER 2017

KEY QUESTIONS: The following key questions will guide the APPROVAL phase of the project.

- How would the Recommended Framework and Implementation Recommendations better implement VISION 2040 and other regional plans and policies?
- If approved, how and when should the new centers framework be implemented?

PRODUCT: Executive Board approval of new Centers Framework with common Designation Criteria and Administrative Procedures. The recommendations will include many different components, including new designation criteria and administrative procedures, as well as recommended changes to multi-county planning policies, countywide planning policies and the policy framework for regionally managed federal transportation funds. The board may recommend implementation of some of these components immediately, and others through future processes, such as the 2018 update to Transportation 2040 and the project selection process, and the 2020 update to VISION 2040.

PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT:

- Seek GMPB input and recommendation *(JANUARY - MARCH 2017)*
- Seek Executive Board input and possible action *(APRIL - MAY 2017)*
- Others steps to be determined

Phase 5 IMPLEMENTATION

2017-2020

KEY QUESTIONS: The following key questions will guide the IMPLEMENTATION phase of the project.

- When should changes be implemented?
- Others, to be determined

PRODUCT: Update regional and countywide Plans, Policies and Procedures according to new centers framework and based on Executive Board direction.

PROCESS & ENGAGEMENT:

- Seek county-level recognition of new framework and identification of centers
- Re-designate existing regional centers into new centers framework
- Update other regional plans, policies and procedures per Executive Board direction, including the 2018 update to Transportation 2040 and the 2020 update to VISION 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy
- Amend the policy framework for regionally managed transportation funds through the 2018 Project Selection review process
- Other steps to be determined

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