

Tacoma Downtown

The City of Tacoma is the region’s second most populous city and Pierce County’s seat. Tacoma’s location halfway between Olympia and Seattle provides it access to many modes of transportation, natural resources, economical power sources, and a deep, sheltered harbor, all of which have contributed to Tacoma’s development as a successful industrial, commercial, and trading center. The modern city has its beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century, when it was designated as Northern Pacific Railroad’s western terminus for its transcontinental railroad in 1873. The city itself was incorporated in 1884. Tacoma continues its tradition as a hub for trade, with the Port of Tacoma among the most important in the nation and the Pacific Rim. Regional shopping centers such as the Tacoma Mall have emerged to provide goods and services for the city and the region, while the emphasis in downtown has changed to professional offices, international finance, government, education, and cultural facilities. The city has many historic neighborhoods and a number of colleges and universities.

The Downtown Tacoma regional growth center includes a wide variety of commercial, industrial, residential, institutional and civic uses. Downtown Tacoma includes several city, county, and state government offices, as well as hospitals and schools, including the University of Washington - Tacoma, and Bates Technical College. Community shopping is important to Downtown Tacoma, and is supported by numerous businesses and offices. The Tacoma Dome and Tacoma Convention Center accommodate a variety of events and exhibits, and cultural opportunities are offered in facilities like the Tacoma Art Museum, the Washington State History Museum, Broadway Center for the Performing Arts, the International Museum of Glass and the Children’s Museum, all within easy walking distance of each other. Refurbished historic theaters such as the Rialto, Pantages, Temple, and Theater on the Square provide both entertainment and a sense of Tacoma’s rich history. The remodeled Union Depot Federal Court Building, the Old City Hall Historic District, and the Union Station Warehouse Historic District also contribute to the character of the center. Downtown Tacoma includes a large number of small blocks, creating a fine-grained street network that is easily accessible to pedestrians as well as cars.

Acreeage, Density & Mix of Activity

Tacoma Downtown is among the largest regional growth centers in terms of total gross acreage (1,424 acres) with a net developable acreage of 807 acres (57% of gross acres). In terms of its role in the city overall, Tacoma Downtown contains 4.3 percent of the city's land area, 7 percent of the population, 9 percent of the housing, and 33 percent of the employment. Compared to centers as a whole, Tacoma Downtown has a large number of total activity units (44,862), with

2010 Summary Statistics

| Land Use | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| Gross acreage | 1,424 |
| Average block size (acres) | 3.5 |
| Average parcel size (acres) | 0.2 |
| Mix of Uses | |
| Population/Employee ratio | .42 : 1 |
| Population+Employee/acre | 31.5 |
| Population | |
| Total population | 13,360 |
| Population density/acre | 9.4 |
| Change (2000–2010) | 2,308 |
| Housing | |
| Total housing units | 7,990 |
| Housing unit density/acre | 5.6 |
| Change (2000–2010) | 1,600 |
| Employment | |
| Total employment | 31,502 |
| Employment density/acre | 22.1 |
| Change (2000–2010) | 101 |
| Transportation | |
| Housing access to transit | 93% |
| Employee access to transit | 97% |
| Work-based mode share | |
| SOV / HOV | 71% • 8% |
| Walk & Bike / Transit | 9% • 12% |

Urban Amenities

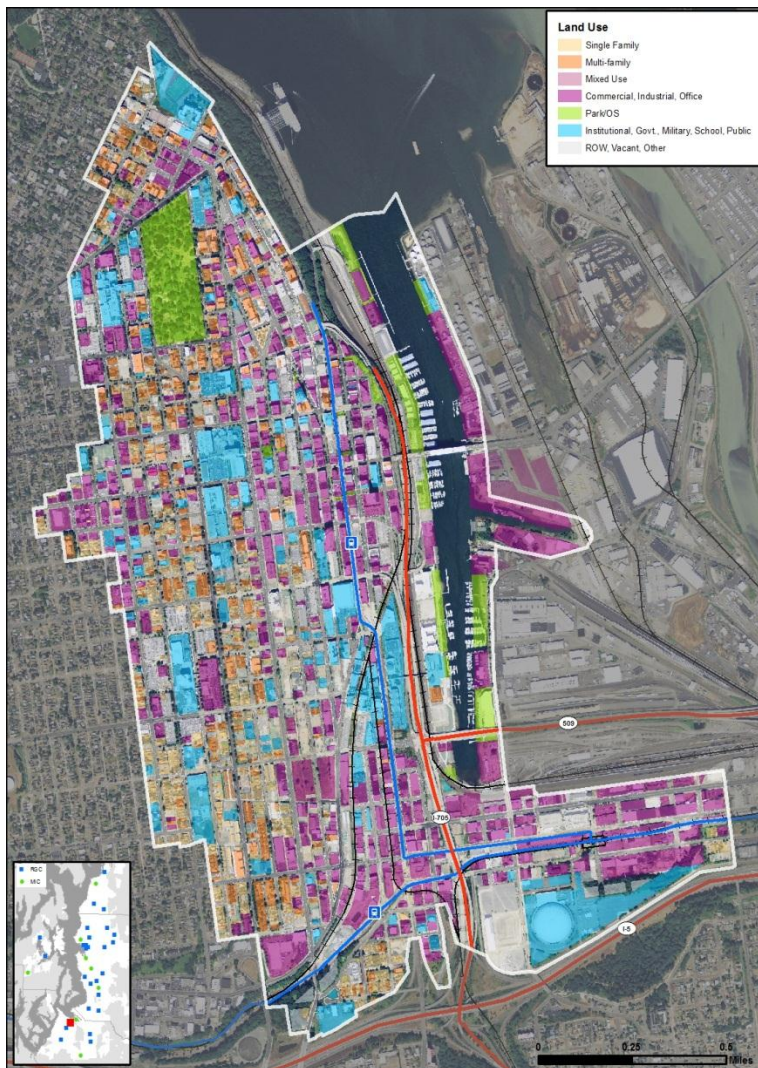
| Food & Drink | |
|---------------------------------|-----|
| Restaurants | 67 |
| Grocery | 12 |
| Cafes & Bars | 26 |
| Home Supplies & Services | |
| Pet Supplies | - |
| Laundry & Haircuts | 14 |
| Home supplies | 2 |
| Clothing & Shoes | 2 |
| Banks | 24 |
| Arts & Recreation | |
| Spectator Sports | 1 |
| Fitness & Outdoors | 7 |
| Electronics & Toys | 2 |
| Bookstores & Libraries | 2 |
| Arts & Culture | 13 |
| Public & Civic Services | |
| Social Services | 41 |
| Schools & Childcare | 17 |
| Police, Fire, Postal, City Hall | 4 |
| Pharmacy | 3 |
| Healthcare | 112 |
| Residential Care Centers | 7 |

mostly employment-oriented activity (70% jobs/30% residents) and a moderately high density of activity (31.5 units per gross acre).

Urban Form

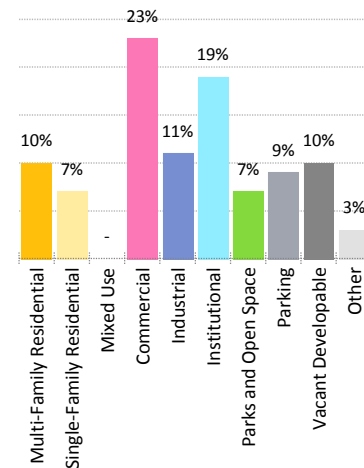
Tacoma Downtown's average parcel size is 0.2 acres, which is significantly more compact than the 1.1-acre average size for growth centers. Tacoma Downtown provides a walkable pedestrian environment, with a nearly complete network of sidewalks (94% coverage) and small blocks with a 3.5 acre average size.

The presence of amenities is an important aspect of urban form. Tacoma Downtown has a moderate set of urban amenities (355 total amenities / 0.25 amenities per gross acre). Public/Civic Services (48%) and Food/Drink (34%) represent the largest amenity categories, with specific concentrations in Healthcare, Restaurants, Social Services, and Cafes/Bars.



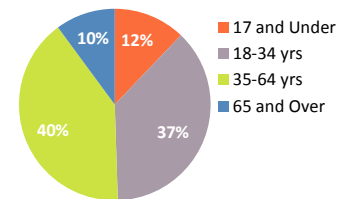
Current Land Use

(807 net acres)



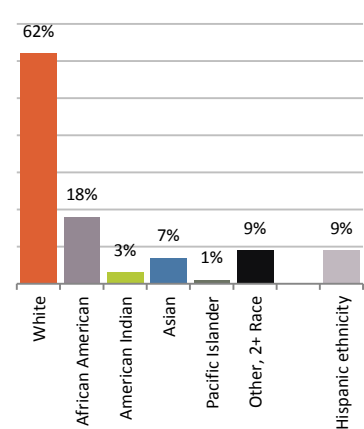
Age of Residents

(13,360 residents)



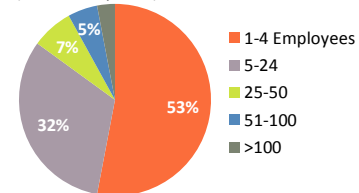
Racial/Ethnic Composition

(13,360 residents)



Size of Businesses

(1,304 workplaces)



Land Use

The major land uses in Tacoma Downtown are commercial (23%), institutional (19%), industrial (11%), and vacant developable (10%). About 53 percent of the center’s 807 net acres are in employment-related use. Approximately 17 percent of the land in the center are exclusively residential uses.

Demographics

The total population in Tacoma Downtown is 13,360, and has grown by 2,308 residents over the past 10 years. The center has more working age residents than the region as a whole, with a moderate share of youth (12%) and a small share of seniors (10%). The age of residents is evenly mixed among 18-34 and 35-64 (77% for both age groups combined). At 38 percent, Tacoma Downtown's racial diversity is greater than the region's 27 percent share of non-white residents. The groups with the highest shares in Tacoma Downtown are White (62%), African American/Black (18%), and Other (9%). Nine percent of residents identify as Hispanic.

Employment

The total employment in Tacoma Downtown is 31,502, increasing by 101 jobs over the past 10 years. The major industry sectors are Services (69%), Finance, Insurance and Real Estate (10%) and Government (10%). Some of the largest employers in this center are Multicare Health System, Franciscan Health System, and Davita.

Housing

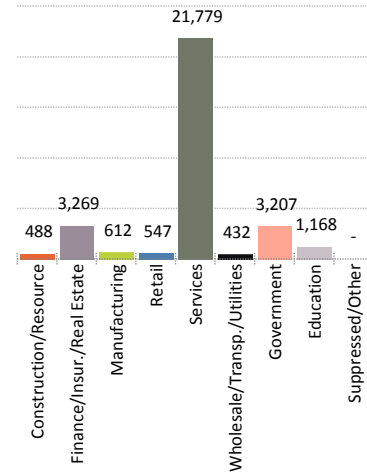
Tacoma Downtown has 7,990 total housing units, with a density of 5.6 housing units per gross acre. Over the past 10 years, housing has grown by an impressive 1,600 units (25% increase). Based on Census Block Group data, Tacoma Downtown has a large share (34%) of single family and 2- to 4- unit multifamily dwellings and a significant share of units 5- to 19- and 20+ unit multifamily (65%). In terms of unit affordability, Tacoma Downtown’s owner-occupied housing tends to be significantly less expensive than the region as a whole (based on Census Block Group data). The center's share of units under \$300,000 is 66 percent, whereas the region's share is 38 percent. The center's share of units over \$500,000 is 11 percent, whereas the region's is 25 percent.

Transportation

For work-based trips, the Tacoma Downtown regional center's travel characteristics are somewhat different from the region as a whole, with fewer single-occupant vehicle (SOV) and slightly more transit and walk/bike trips. The region’s SOV share is 76 percent, while the center's share is 71 percent. The region's non-SOV mode share is 24 percent, with 10 percent in transit and 5 percent in walk/bike. The center’s non-SOV share is 29 percent, with 12 percent in transit and 9 percent in walk/bike. The total daily trips from Tacoma Downtown are highly focused on destinations in regional centers (32% of all trips); this includes trips that stay within the center (25%) and trips that go to other centers (7%).

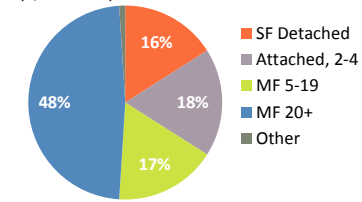
Jobs by Sector

(31,502 jobs)



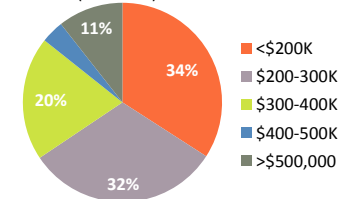
Housing Units, by Type

(8,495 units)

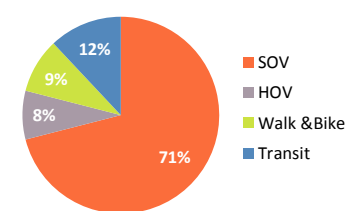


Value of Owner-Occupied Units

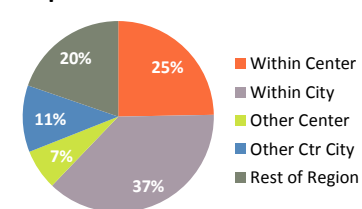
(950 units)



Mode Shares



Trip Destinations



In terms of employee access to transit, Tacoma Downtown has complete access, with 97 percent of employees within a 1/4 mile walk to a transit stop. For residential, Tacoma Downtown has very good access with 93 percent of housing units within a 1/4 mile walk. For the 1/2 mile walkshed, the center has complete levels of residential access to transit (100%).

Plan Overview

Tacoma adopted a new Downtown element into its comprehensive plan in 2008. The element builds upon *Destination Downtown* (completed in 2001), policies in the comprehensive plan and various studies. The Downtown element is extensive and includes an introduction section that describes its relationship to the city's other plans. The plan divides downtown into districts with development concepts and supportive actions and policies for each district. The plan is structured around themes of a healthy, balanced economy, achieving vitality downtown, sustainable city, and city of the arts. Goals and policies supporting each of these themes are provided. Chapters of urban design and the performance of the city and street typologies are also included.

Comparison to Center Plan Checklist

The city's primary center planning document was reviewed to evaluate the extent to which the plan addresses topics in the PSRC Regional Center Plan Checklist. This policy-level review of the current plan is intended both to provide preliminary assessment of consistency of the plan with center guidelines and to evaluate the Regional Centers Checklist for any potential improvements.

Many aspects of the Regional Growth Center Plan Checklist are well addressed by the Downtown element. A strong vision statement is included. The element includes policy to maximize local arterials for alternative storm water treatment, plans for a green street demonstration project, and policy that green streets should be considered as redevelopment occurs. The element includes policy to integrate climate strategies into downtown land use standards, and policies to implement and maintain design standards for pedestrian-friendly, transit-oriented development. Policies promote housing choice downtown and livability. An excellent economic development section is included that describes the economic and residential role of downtown, along with key sectors and strategies for business retention and expansion downtown. Transportation 2040 Physical Design Guidelines are addressed, including design for pedestrians and bicycles and provision of open space. Policies encourage development of integrated, multimodal system, and the element discusses the city's relationship with transit providers to encourage transit use and mobility. The street typology includes transit priority corridors, and policies emphasize creating a set of "complete streets" to support all modes of travel.

The plan addresses many of the existing expectations of the Regional Growth Center Plan Checklist, though there are a few topics that the subarea plan does not address or that could be strengthened in future updates. The element doesn't include a market analysis, and more detailed information could be provided about housing implementation strategies. Residential and employment growth targets have not been established for the duration of the planning period, though the element references a 2010 goal for new housing units. Specific mode split goals for the center have not yet been established. Finally, the subarea plan does not specifically deal with capital facilities and their financing.

Planning Challenges & Implementation Strategies

As noted by the city in its September 2009 presentation to the Growth Management Policy Board, as well as a 2011 survey, the Tacoma Downtown center's challenges include upgrading aging infrastructure, retaining and expanding existing businesses, balancing new development with historic preservation, providing neighborhood service retail, and enhancing overall livability and regional visibility. The lack of strong market demand, fragmented parcel ownership, enhancing bicycle and pedestrian facilities, and securing funding for local transit and mobility connections were also identified as issues for the center.

Tacoma has employed strategies to address challenges and plan for the success of its Downtown regional growth center. Regulatory mechanisms include increased allowed building height, reduced or eliminated parking requirements, and incentive zoning. To facilitate development, the city is also developing Planned Action Environmental Impact Statements for the three sub-areas that comprise Tacoma’s downtown regional growth center.