



# Incorporating Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Into Comprehensive Plans

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The central Puget Sound region is making unprecedented transit investments that provide an opportunity to enhance our communities and create compact, walkable and transit-served neighborhoods. The Regional Growth Strategy 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 the region’s growth centers. This represents a renewed focus on locating growth near current and future high-capacity transit facilities and will be an essential part of meeting regional climate, mobility and growth goals. Rail, ferry and bus rapid transit station areas are ideal for increased density, new residences and businesses—referred to as transit-oriented development (TOD).

This guidance summarizes key TOD elements to consider in local planning for transit station areas. A wide range of communities in the central Puget Sound region have transit today and more will have transit in the future. While TOD efforts are often focused around high-capacity transit, such as light rail and bus rapid transit, all communities can benefit from focused planning to support transit. TOD planning happens in stages and these considerations can be applied at multiple points throughout the planning process.

## **This guidance highlights five focus areas:**

- Defining Station Area(s)
- Planning for Growth
- Mitigating Displacement
- Supporting Transportation Projects to Enhance TOD
- Subarea Planning

VISION 2050 includes new policies and actions on displacement risk, access to opportunity and transit-oriented development to improve and support equitable development. This guidance focuses on essential steps to plan for TOD in comprehensive plans, including examples from local communities and other resources from across the country.

Transit-oriented development (TOD) is the development of housing, commercial space, services, and job opportunities near public transportation. Such development is intended to reduce dependency on automobiles, as well as to improve mobility and access between residences, jobs, and services.

# Considerations When Planning for TOD

Growth in compact urban communities, especially near transit stations, supports substantial social, environmental, economic and health benefits.

Many communities with existing and planned high-capacity transit are appropriate for accommodating population and employment growth—allowing more people to benefit from these central places and the places connected to them. Public engagement underpins all planning and is particularly important for areas expecting to grow and change. Strategies for [equitable public engagement](#) should inform all steps of the TOD planning process.

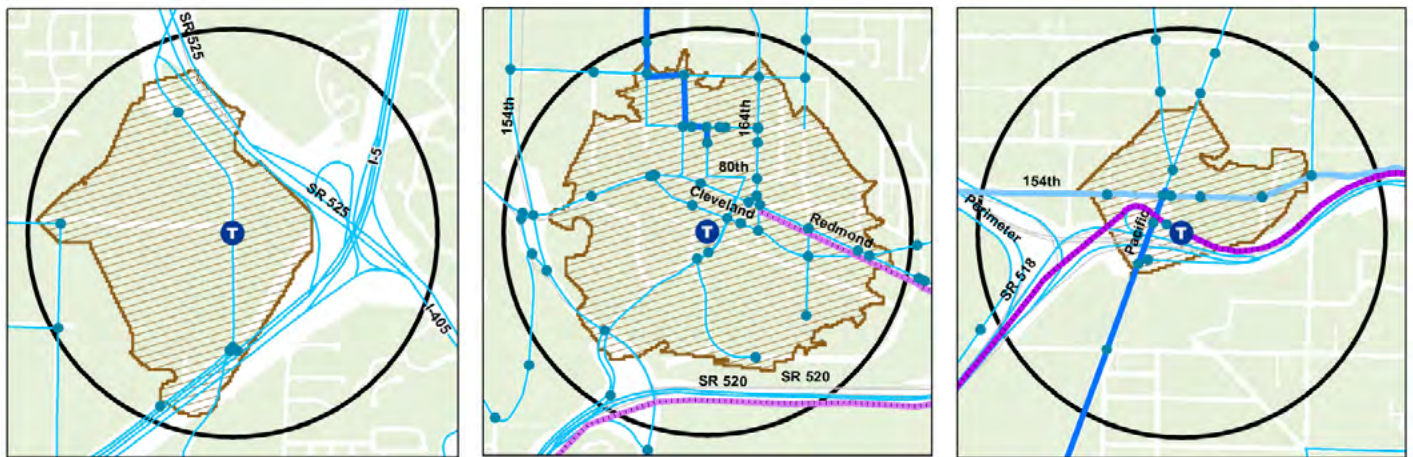
To maximize the benefits of the region’s transit system, VISION 2050 encourages growth to be focused in transit stations areas and developing station area plans. Planning at the local level will better define how jurisdictions can promote walkable neighborhoods around these stations. Partnering with transit agencies can benefit communities and align interests and investments to create and enhance TOD opportunities.

For jurisdictions with existing or planned high-capacity transit investments there are several things to consider when planning for TOD.

High-capacity transit includes light rail, streetcar, commuter rail, ferries, and bus rapid transit.

## Defining Station Area(s)

**Identify station areas around existing or planned transit stations.** The comprehensive plan should show the geography of the station area or areas and provide policy direction for station area planning, either contained in the comprehensive plan itself or through subsequent station area or subarea plans. Defining station areas provides guidance on where density should occur, areas to focus policy or programmatic tools, and areas within easy walking distance to transit.



PSRC’s Growing Transit Communities work differentiated between a 1/2 mile buffer (dark blue circle) and 10-minute walkshed of existing and future transit station areas.

Pictured from left to right: Alderwood Mall, Downtown Redmond, Tukwila International Boulevard Station

[VISION 2050](#) (DP-Action-8) calls for each city or county with a [designated regional center](#) and/or light rail transit station to develop a subarea plan. Cities and counties with other forms of transit are also encouraged to plan for these areas. During the planning process, comprehensive plans should identify the transit service and investments in the station area and assess how well those investments support TOD. Multiple transit stations located near one another could be considered for combining into one larger subarea.

Walkability should define the transit station area. Research shows that people are willing to walk twice as far (10 minutes, or up to a half mile) for high-capacity transit as for bus or streetcars. The walkshed shrinks to a quarter-mile buffer (or about a five-minute walk) for buses or streetcars with closely spaced stops and for bus rapid transit with more spread-out stops. In reality, street grids and physical barriers (such as topography or freeways) affect walksheds. A network buffer predicts a more accurate walkshed. With additional street connections or observed development patterns, the station area could change over time.

### Guidance for Implementation:

- Collaborate with local transit providers to use current route and stop data.

- Identify transit stops and group stops that are near other transit hubs.
- Consider transit service levels in addition to stop locations. Stop locations with greater service levels should be prioritized for growth.
- Use topography, street and sidewalk network information to determine accurate walksheds.
- Consider surrounding land uses and land use regulations.
- Engage with community members to provide education on growth and collaboration on station area goals.
- Identify strategies to enhance the pedestrian experience and safety so walking is an attractive option.

### Resources:

[TOD 202: Station Area Planning](#), Reconnecting America and the Center for Transit-Oriented Development. Guidebook used to promote best practices in TOD through details about the scales of development likely to occur in different places, as well as station area planning principles and TOD plan checklists. Includes eight typologies to help understand planning considerations for different types of places.



## Planning for Growth

**Establish goals for station areas** to attract significant growth to transit station areas, provide housing affordable to a full range of incomes, and increase equitable access to opportunity for current and future residents, employees and visitors.

There is a positive relationship between density and transit ridership. People who live near transit are more likely to use it, and frequent transit options provide more opportunities for people to get to and from work and other destinations near the station. Higher densities in transit station areas bring more origins and destinations within easy access, especially within a half-mile walk of the station.

The examples below highlight how a community's goals can align with planning for growth around transit station areas.

### Guidance for Implementation:

- **Goal: Housing Options at a Range of Income Levels**

Although jurisdictions do not typically build housing, zoning and development regulations play a significant role in whether and how much housing is built as developers respond to growth. Provide data on existing housing supply and assess housing needs in each station area. Evaluate the presence or need for housing at various income levels. Establish a goal of increasing affordable housing units to meet existing and future needs, along with identifying policy tools and implementation actions. Reduce parking requirements and other regulations increase the cost to produce housing if possible. Provide options and flexibility to incentivize housing production. Consider inclusionary zoning requirements.

- **Goal: Mix of Uses**

Development with a mix of retail services, jobs, housing and other uses can attract a critical mass of people and activity. Station area planning should allow for a mix of uses. Provide incentives for complementary land uses. Compact development shortens the distance people must travel to reach their destinations and supports more ridership to bolster frequent transit service.

- **Goal: Walkability**

Incorporate a goal for a safe and welcoming environment for walking, cycling and transit. Identify existing connectivity gaps in the pedestrian and bicycle network in stations areas; consider funding or providing development incentives to developers who include mobility improvements that address these gaps. Target specific areas to focus a mix of uses in stations areas to increase active ground floor uses as the market allows. Provide flexibility in the code to adapt as the market for ground floor uses improves.

### Resources:

- PSRC Housing Innovations Program: [Housing in Centers and Near Transit, Build Community Support for Affordable Housing](#)
- [PSRC Guidance on Equitable Engagement in Comprehensive Plans](#)

## Determine how transit station area growth relates to overall city and unincorporated growth.

The Regional Growth Strategy has an ambitious goal of attracting 65% of population growth and 75% of employment growth to the region's growth centers and high-capacity transit station areas (MPP-RGS-8). This is a regional goal. Each individual jurisdiction has their own established goals for growth that will vary by type of transit being planned for and the location. Focusing significant amounts of this growth around transit stations can help jurisdictions achieve their local goals for growth, walkability and a mix of uses while providing transportation options for more residents, employees and visitors.

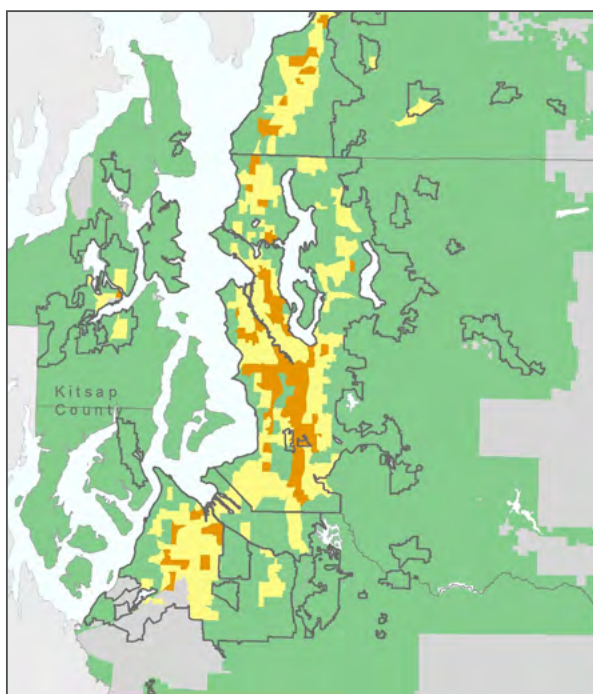
### Guidance for Implementation:

- Consider how growth will be distributed in your community. Does your jurisdiction have multiple centers and/or transit station areas? If so, how will growth be distributed among these and the rest of the jurisdiction?
- What level of growth is appropriate for the transit serving each station?

## Mitigating Displacement

**Evaluate transit station areas for their potential physical, economic and cultural displacement of residents and businesses.** Planning for a balanced distribution of affordable housing choices and jobs is critical to the success of the Regional Growth Strategy. Skyrocketing housing prices have displaced residents, particularly in major cities and near job centers.

The [displacement risk mapping tool](#) identifies areas where residents and businesses are at greater risk of displacement. As more people and jobs move into these communities, it is important that current residents and businesses have the option to remain and thrive and take advantage of new amenities and services. This tool can be used by jurisdictions as they update local comprehensive plans and subarea plans. Targeted policies, programs, and outreach could help identify community-based solutions, offset unintended consequences from growth and development, and prevent future displacement.



### Resources:

- [PSRC Displacement Risk Mapping webpage](#)
- PSRC Housing Innovations Program: [Mitigating Displacement](#), [Tenant Protections](#)
- [Small Business Anti-Displacement Network Toolkit](#)
- [Urban Displacement Project – Cultural and Commercial Resources](#)
- **MPP-DP-23** Evaluate planning in regional growth centers and high-capacity transit station areas for their potential physical, economic and cultural displacement of marginalized residents and businesses. Use a range of strategies to mitigate displacement impacts.

## Supporting Transportation Projects to Enhance TOD

**Prioritize funding to transit station areas.** While regional funds—both for transportation infrastructure and economic development—support designated regional growth centers and manufacturing/industrial centers, subregional funds should also be prioritized for high-capacity transit stations of all types that support TOD and have a station area or subarea plan.

Focusing growth and planning transportation investments in the different types of centers and transit station areas has significant regional benefits, including supporting multimodal transportation options, compact growth, housing choices near jobs, climate goals and access to opportunity. While PSRC’s federal funding is focused on regional centers, VISION 2050 supports directing county-level and local funds to countywide centers, high-capacity transit areas with a station area plan, and other local centers (MPP-RC-8).



VISION 2050 recognizes that a significant portion of existing and future housing growth will need to be affordable to residents with lower incomes. Transportation improvements can support this additional growth, especially through improving transit service and increasing the transit network. Access to transit near existing and planned housing growth is important as residents with lower incomes depend more on public transit, biking and walking as their main modes of transportation. Many existing and planned high-capacity transit stations will require additional transportation connections to allow people to safely and conveniently access transit, along with maximizing new development opportunities.

### Resources:

- **MPP-RC-7** Give funding priority—both for transportation infrastructure and for economic development—to support designated regional growth centers and manufacturing/industrial centers, consistent with the regional vision. Regional funds are prioritized to regional centers.
- **MPP-RC-8** Direct subregional funding, especially county-level and local funds, to countywide centers, high-capacity transit areas with a station area plan and other local centers. County-level and local funding are also appropriate to prioritize to regional centers.

### Incorporate identified multimodal transportation projects into the Transportation Element.

Jurisdictions should incorporate multimodal projects that support transit access, including projects identified in separate subarea plans.

### Resources:

- City of Redmond Transportation Master Plan, [Chapter 7 Transportation Facilities Plan](#): Includes a project list that connects local policy strategies with specific projects.

## Subarea Planning

**Consider developing a separate element or subarea plan.** Subarea plans provide an opportunity to conduct detailed planning around a smaller geographic area and provide strong guidance on how a jurisdiction wants this area to grow. They help cities and counties plan for their success and create great, livable neighborhoods in areas experiencing large amounts of change. The plans can include specific goals and policies for topics such as land use, housing, transportation and economic development and explore more detailed actions like a Planned Action EIS, form-based code, placemaking and urban design. Plans also provide an opportunity to identify transportation and other infrastructure projects to support growth and mobility around the station area.

### Resources:

- Bellevue Station Area Planning (light rail): <https://bellevuewa.gov/city-government/departments/transportation/projects/east-link-light-rail/station-area-planning>
- Bothell Canyon Park Visioning (Regional Growth Center, bus rapid transit): <http://www.ci.bothell.wa.us/1176/Canyon-Park>
- SeaTac Angle Lake Station (light rail), Adopted July 2015: <https://www.soundtransit.org/sites/default/files/seatac-angle-lake-station-area-plan.pdf>
- Snohomish County Light Rail Communities planning (light rail): <https://snohomishcountywa.gov/4068/Light-Rail-Communities>
- Sumner Town Center (commuter rail, downtown), Adopted 2018: <https://sumnerwa.gov/town-center-plan/>

**Include implementation actions to develop future subarea plans.** The comprehensive planning process is a great opportunity to include policies that support future work on subarea plans.

The [Transit Supportive Planning Toolkit](#) provides guidance on developing plans that support transit.

### Guidance for Implementation:

- Coordinating land use and transportation by promoting compact and equitable development around transit.
- Supporting multimodal mobility by working with transit agencies and strengthening multimodal transportation options that encourage alternatives to driving alone.
- Connecting people to transit by providing access to, from and within transit station areas for transit, pedestrians, bicycles and motorists.
- Working with applicable transit agencies to identify other supportive transit investments and other opportunities for partnership, such as the availability of surplus public land.

### Resources:

- PSRC Housing Innovations Program: [TOD Overlays](#), [Planned Action EIS](#), [Form-Based Zoning](#), [Parking Reductions](#)
- PSRC [Transit Access webpage](#): Includes Checklist, Toolkit and Assessment

## What about other transit in your community?

Additional transit in the region, including frequent and local bus service, also provides valuable connections. Local bus service and other mobility options link residents to the regional high-capacity transit network and to local destinations. Supporting all types of transit by making it attractive to use and providing safe and convenient options for walking and biking will give more residents affordable and sustainable access to jobs and services throughout the region. Local transit nodes can also be great places for development. Many of the same considerations listed above can be applied to additional modes.

## Future Work and Implementation

Plans require active implementation to be successful. Developing clear action steps and measuring outcomes is important for supporting local and regional goals.

VISION 2050 calls for PSRC to work with transit agencies and local jurisdictions to develop guidance for transit-supportive densities. In addition, PSRC staff are available to provide technical assistance for the development of local plans.

PSRC will work through the [Policy and Plan Review Process](#) to encourage the above recommendations to be addressed in comprehensive plan updates in cities and counties with high-capacity transit station areas. The [Plan Review Manual](#) provides details on the policy and plan review and certification process, background and framework.

Visit PSRC's [TOD webpage](#) for more information and resources.

