Puget Sound Regional Council

Transportation Projects Supporting Growth in Centers

Introduction

VISION 2050 seeks to prioritize transportation investments in centers to support growth and leverage major transit investments (see MPP-RC-7 – 9). Regional growth centers play a critical role in accommodating new population and employment growth. Planning by cities, counties, and the region can take advantage of new growth and direct it to our region's growth centers to create walkable, transit-oriented communities where everyone has access to opportunity.

Transportation projects can support this growth to advance regional goals for housing affordability, mobility options, and access to opportunity for all the region's residents. Transportation investments can help people access amenities that centers have to offer, supporting growth in residents and jobs.

The Regional Centers Framework includes an implementation task to review and develop policy guidance on types of projects that support development in centers. The purpose of this guidance is to highlight transportation planning and project development that supports centers and catalyzes growth. This guidance is intended to be used to develop and prioritize transportation projects that support growth when developing local Transportation Improvement Programs (TIPs), subarea plans, and comprehensive plan project lists.

This guidance focuses on projects that support the region's mixed-use regional growth centers[1], which attract many visitors, residents, and workers and serve as major hubs in the region's transportation system. Many aspects of this guidance may also be applicable to other mixed-use areas in the region, such as countywide centers, local centers and high-capacity transit areas planned for growth and investments.

[1] Manufacturing/industrial centers are also crucial areas of investment for the region's transportation funding. However, based on the distinct needs of these centers, the project development goals for manufacturing/industrial areas are not included in this guidance.

About this Guidance

Part 1 Centers Planning & Transportation Projects hones in on the development and prioritization of a transportation project list in local planning. While project lists may look different based on the jurisdiction, prioritizing projects in local plans is important for focusing investments at both the local and regional levels.

Part 2 Projects that Support Growth focuses on desired transportation project outcomes. This includes illustrative projects, highlighting how they can support desired outcomes. This section can be used to develop projects that meet the needs of different centers.

Figure 1: Illustrative image of street with multimodal improvements | Photo: City of Seattle

Part 1 Centers Planning & Transportation Projects

PSRC requires a center plan for all new and existing regional centers. The center plan, which can be an element of a comprehensive plan or a stand-alone subarea plan, is reviewed for certification concurrent with the designation or review of existing regional centers. Per the Regional Centers Framework, jurisdictions with existing regional centers are expected to have center plans consistent with VISION 2050 by 2025, when PSRC will conduct centers monitoring.

Center plans are reviewed for consistency with VISION 2050, Growth Management Act requirements for subarea planning, and established criteria in the Regional Centers Framework (2018). The planning tools for center plans indicate what policies from VISION 2050 should be reflected in center plans.

Project Investments to Implement Centers Planning

VISION 2050 calls for jurisdictions with regional centers to use planning tools that shape future transportation investments:

- **Mode split goals** (DP-Action-9). Mode split goals are a quantitative policy statement used to plan for and encourage a shift away from single-occupant vehicle travel in favor of other modes, such as transit and non-motorized travel options like walking and biking. Establishing explicit goals for future mode split should shape transportation priorities. Mode split goals for centers should be accompanied by explicit policies stating the types of approaches and actions that jurisdictions will take to implement the goals.

- **Tailor concurrency standards for centers** (MPP-DP-54). VISION 2050 includes a policy for jurisdictions with designated regional growth centers to tailor their concurrency programs for their centers. Tailoring level-of-service standards and fee structures to allow additional vehicle delay in and around centers can avoid unnecessary and costly investments that prioritize vehicle capacity over investments and right of way for active transportation or transit.

The VISION 2050 Consistency Tool for Regional Growth Center calls for the identification of planned transportation investments, programs, and resources. These transportation investments are to include transit, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities, and projects to eliminate superblocks and promote safety and connectivity. These project lists can be varied but can be used to prioritize projects and relate project benefits to other goals in local subarea plans.

Types of projects that support center growth:

- Projects that create network connectivity, including addressing gaps in the nonmotorized network and breaking up superblocks
- Projects that prioritize active transportation
- Projects that calm traffic and reduce speeds, creating safer environments for all
- Projects that improve transit service, frequency, and reliability

PSRC's Transportation Element Guidance provides additional information about multimodal investments and planning for transit. PSRC has also published resources on transit access that identify programs, actions, and investments to support transit.

Example Center Planning

City of Burien – Urban Center Plan

Burien's Urban Center Plan was adopted by the Burien City Council on March 2, 2020. The plan guides future growth and includes policies and strategic actions to build on existing strengths and guide growth and change to reflect the unique character of different places in the center.

The plan's policies aim to support the vision for the Urban Center as a mixed-use downtown that blends art and creativity, diversity and resiliency, and green and connected places. Policies provide the framework and are guiding principles to support the city's comprehensive plan.

The plan looks to the city's commitment to having a safe and efficient transportation system for all users, including motor vehicles, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians. The transportation portion of the center plan is based primarily on the city of Burien's Transportation Master Plan (2012) and Burien's Downtown Mobility Study (2015). These two documents work together to identify projects and goals for the city related to transportation. The city's mode share goal for the center encourages a decrease of single-occupant vehicle travel, supporting making other modes of transportation more inviting. This is reflected in the center plan's adopted policies. Example policy and strategies are available below.

> Policy 6.2 Encourage multimodal connections.
>
> Strategy 6.2.4 Develop crosswalk guidelines as part of street design standards update. The crosswalk standards would be used to develop standards on where to install a new crosswalk, and what type of pedestrian treatment is most appropriate.
>
> Strategy 6.2.5 Calm traffic to a desired speed that respects all modes of travel through the design of travel way and intersections. Provide trees in medians and along sidewalks to maximize sense of enclosure and calm. Explore traffic calming elements such as bulbouts, chicanes, and limited access streets for transit and bicycle traffic.

Silverdale, Kitsap County – Silverdale Transportation Implementation Strategy

Silverdale's Transportation Implementation Strategy was a technical analysis project completed in 2018. The project was designed to prioritize a Transportation Implementation Strategy for Silverdale, implemented through the County's Transportation Improvement Process and associated recommended financial strategies.

The strategy laid out a set of potential transportation improvements for the Silverdale Regional Center. Potential improvement ideas were developed from multiple sources including public comments at three open houses, ideas from prior studies and a project working group composed of local Silverdale residents, Kitsap Transit and Kitsap County staff. A technical analysis was performed to evaluate the benefits, potential impacts and costs of proposed improvements, including safety benefits, roadway circulation benefits, non-motorized benefits and project implementation costs. The outcome of this analysis was the development of a prioritized list of improvements with a phased implementation strategy that allows for funding discrete stand-alone projects as funding becomes available.

The investment goals and guidelines developed from public input and the project working group included:

- Invest in the transportation corridors with the highest needs for additional multi-modal capacity, circulation, mobility and safety improvements
- Provide multi-modal capacity for the expected growth
- Prioritize improvements that address immediate short term needs and provide the foundation for longer term improvements that address expected growth
- Provide strategies that move projects forward and allow flexibility to deliver different sized projects that provide incremental benefits
- Provide a list of projects and priorities that can be carried forward into the county's Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
- Provide strategies that implement the vision of complete streets within Silverdale

Part 2 Projects that Support Growth

Project Development

There are many ways that jurisdictions can develop transportation projects that support local needs. Thinking about the performance of centers and future growth is a good starting point for prioritizing projects and their elements. Every decision that's made has a role to play in achieving the region's goals for growth in centers.

Existing local policies found in the comprehensive plan or center plan set a foundation for project development. Regional and county plans are also useful in identifying broader priorities. For example, regional policy support for improving safety may lead a city to prioritize projects that make it safer for people to make more trips by walking or biking.

Below are some considerations to make when developing and prioritizing a project list, as well as scoping the design of projects.

- Understand where growth is planned and how it aligns with the Regional Growth Strategy.
- Conduct a policy analysis to determine the priorities of local, county, and regional plans.
- Identify existing gaps in the transportation system supporting the center, including sidewalks, bicycle facilities, transit, and roadway networks.
- Identify mobility and accessibility improvements that could enhance user experience.
- Equitably engage with community members to determine current and future community needs.
- Tailor the project to provide needed benefit based on existing conditions.

Desired Transportation Project Outcomes

Transportation projects support growth in centers in many ways. Examples of five potential outcomes of transportation projects that are consistent with regional policies and goals are highlighted below. Each potential outcome includes suggestions on how to relate the outcome to the project benefits, a sample transportation project, and how the project may achieve each outcome. Keep in mind that transportation projects can achieve multiple outcomes and the list below are examples.

Support housing production and quality of life for people living in centers

Centers and transit station areas are the focus for accommodating additional population growth, and 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.

Creating project benefits

The items below are suggestions for identifying transportation projects that can benefit a center's housing production and growth.

- Consider the housing growth targets for the center. What investments are needed to support planned growth?
- Evaluate the zoning in proximity to the proposed project.
  - Is the project in proximity to dense, mixed-use areas that are likely to generate significant use of the project?
  - Has the jurisdiction adopted regulatory incentives to encourage affordable housing near the project?
  - How will future residents in the areas benefit from or be impacted by the project?
- Evaluate what permitting data the jurisdiction has to demonstrate the type of building permits that have recently been approved and recently built projects.
- Evaluate how the project could support people living in the center and encourage future growth.

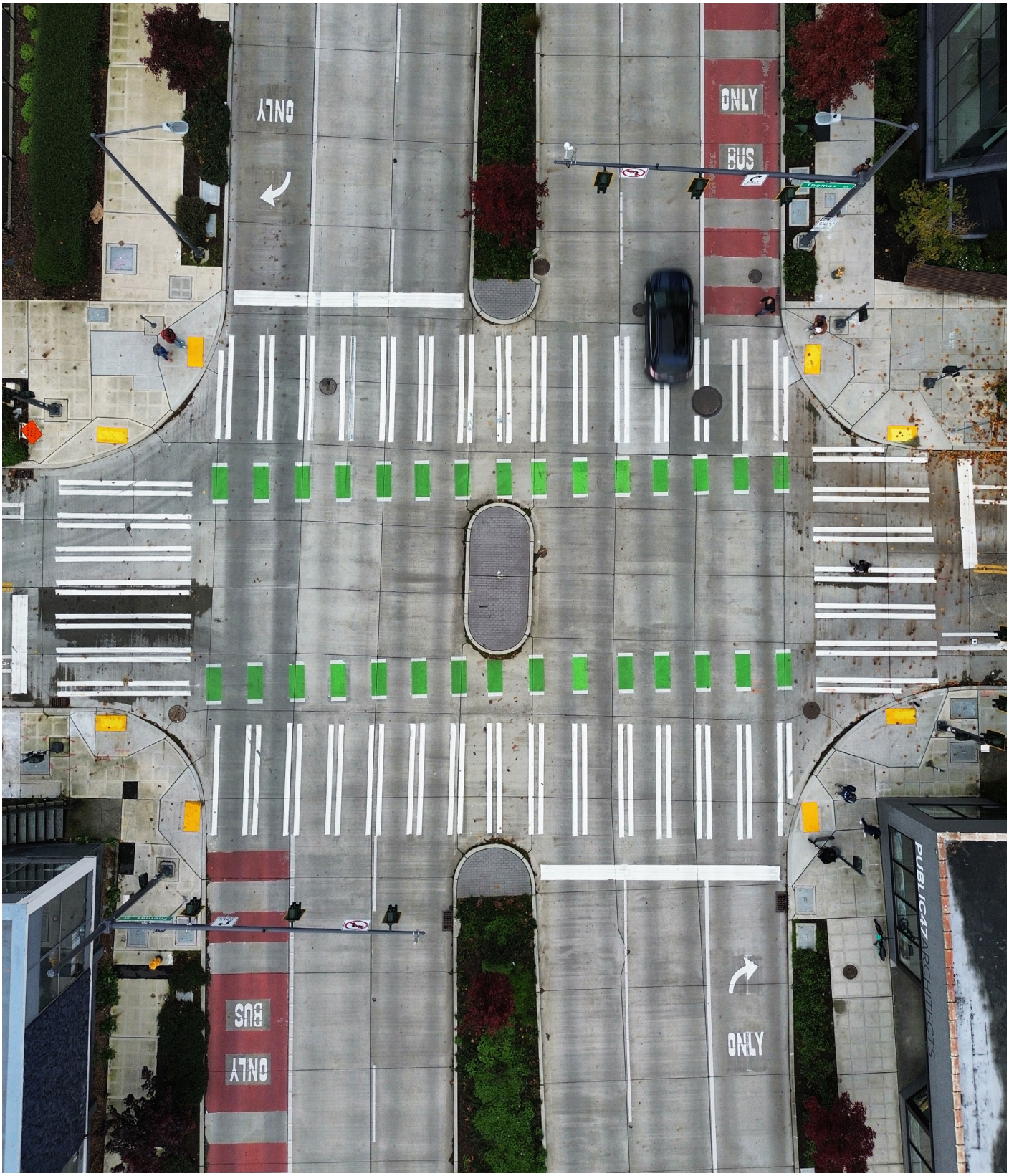

Figure 2: Illustrative image of street with multimodal amenities in South Lake Union, Seattle | Photo: City of Seattle

Illustrative Project: Adding Multimodal Amenities to Slow Vehicle Traffic and Increase Walkability

This example would transform an existing wide, busy road into a multimodal street near a high-capacity transit station. The updated street would have a two-way, separated bikeway and new, widened sidewalks with buffer from vehicle traffic. Other enhancements to improve the pedestrian and bicyclist experience include curb bulb-outs, on-street parking, enhanced pedestrian crossings, a raised mid-block crosswalk at a busy intersection, and pedestrian amenities.

The roadway is in a regional growth center, three blocks from a new light rail station. This center is planned for large amounts of population growth which will take place in multifamily developments that have retail spaces on the first floor. Due to the project's location, the blocks along this street are a prime place for redevelopment and added density. The new multimodal street will calm traffic to make walking and biking more pleasant. This, in turn, will allow more residents and visitors to visit the new retail spaces, walk for daily trips, and connect to regional transit.

In turn, project improvements may increase the share of multimodal transportation and significantly reduce vehicle speeds and modal conflict in the center. This will help the city move closer to its mode split goals for the center.

Encourage transit use

VISION 2050 and the Regional Growth Strategy emphasize transportation investments that provide and encourage alternatives to single-occupant vehicle travel and increase travel options, especially to and within centers and along corridors connecting centers (MPP-T-12). Projects can support centers and transit stations by improving intermodal connections (e.g., between autos, ferries, commuter rail, high-capacity transit, bus, carpool, bicycle, etc.), or facilitating connections between separate operators of a single mode (e.g., two transit operators). Continuing to provide a range of travel modes and decrease single occupant vehicle trips also helps achieve greenhouse gas emission goals.

Creating project benefits

The items below are suggestions for identifying transportation projects that can help encourage transit use.

- Consider existing mode split and adopted mode split goal
- Evaluate single-occupant vehicle trip share along the corridor or in the project area
- Analyze transit usage, including current transit service, average daily transit ridership, and daily peak period transit trips
- Consider planned improvements to intermodal connections
- Evaluate existing travel time/reliability of different modes
- Evaluate existing and planned transportation demand management strategies

Figure 3: Illustrative image of bus only lane in South Lake Union, Seattle. | Photo: City of Seattle

Illustrative Project: Adding transit amenities and improving reliability

This project includes multiple improvements to an existing arterial running through a regional growth center. The newly widened road will allow for transit improvements, such as transit prioritization and stop amenities to support a new bus rapid transit (BRT) line connecting multiple centers to one another and the region's light rail system.

Currently, it takes the existing local bus up to 30 minutes to travel the 3 miles between centers. With these project improvements and enhanced BRT amenities, transit travel time will decrease during peak periods. Transit prioritization allows bus riders to enjoy faster travel speeds than drivers in peak periods.

Bus stop amenities and other project improvement, such as sidewalks and lighting, will make this area more pleasant for people walking to bus stops and other destinations.

Resources:

- PSRC's Community Data Profiles
- PSRC's Household Travel Survey data

Make it easier to get around the center

Regional growth centers and transit station areas are compact, mixed-use places where residents and visitors can walk and use transit. Some of these areas across the region have been developed in an auto-oriented land use pattern and will need to establish or complete street networks that foster walkability and multimodal connectivity. Transportation improvements should work to improve local street patterns – including their design and how they are used – for walking, bicycling, and transit use to enhance connectivity and physical activity.

Creating project benefits

The items below are suggestions for identifying transportation projects that consider a jurisdiction's existing centers planning and how to foster walkability and multimodal connectivity.

- Evaluate existing inventory and gaps in pedestrian and bicycle network
- Evaluate existing travel time and reliability of different by mode
- Consider potential travel time and reliability improvements by mode
- Consider existing and planned transit services
- Evaluate existing mode split and adopted mode split goal

Illustrative Project: Breaking up a superblock and increasing walking paths

Figure 4: Illustrative image from Northline Village development in Lynnwood, WA. | Photo: Northline Village

This project completes a new grid street and sidewalks in the heart of a regional growth center. This center is suburban in nature with large (600 foot) block sizes, surface parking lots, and limited existing density. The project is part of the city's goal to take the existing 600-foot "superblocks" and divide them into more urban-scale 300-foot blocks, to provide access to future low/mid-rise development and multimodal transportation. This project is within ¼ mile of future high-capacity transit and would serve as a primary route to access the station.

The center currently has 8,500 residents and is planning for 12,000 in 2044. The surrounding zoning is mid-density mixed-use, and the city is currently working through a number of building permits for housing projects on the surrounding blocks.

Adding a new street and breaking up the existing superblock will provide new opportunities for existing residents and new residents to walk around to the many amenities nearby and to have a more direct walking path to the future high-capacity transit station. For residents accessing the station it can reduce the walk time by up to 5 minutes. Adding additional street frontage also provides new development opportunities for ground floor retail in the center.

Support travel options for commuters

Centers and transit station areas are important places for existing and future employment. The Regional Growth Strategy calls for 75% of regional employment growth to be in these areas. Employees need to be able to travel safely and reliably to and from work. Transportation projects should support the retention of existing jobs and businesses and the establishment of new jobs, including those in the industry clusters identified in the adopted regional economic strategy. Transportation projects can support this employment by connecting these jobs more efficiently to the transit network, improving mobility and reliability, and supporting walkable areas where workers can support other parts of the economy.

Creating project benefits

The items below are suggestions for identifying transportation project that can provide more travel options for commuters and increase economic activity in the center.

Consider:

- Mode split goals for the center
- Job growth targets
- Zoning designations - Proximity to dense, mixed-use areas that are likely to generate significant use of the project
- Permitting data – building permits approved/recently built
- Identify major employment centers
- Economic development plans/policies
- Metrics that indicate improvements are needed for concurrency

Figure 5: Image of people at Northgate Link Light Rail Station

Illustrative Project: Placemaking on a Commercial Corridor

Figure 6: Illustrative image of multimodal street improvement in Seattle First Hill/Capitol Hill

This project supports economic development in the main commercial corridor of the center. It includes the construction of a mutimodal promenade, including curb bulb-outs, enhanced pedestrian crossings, and a raised mid-block crosswalk to enhance walking and biking in the center. These enhancements, along with improvements for planned transit will increase multimodal transportation options and create a sense of place for the commercial corridor.

The zoning on this street allows for commercial uses to support the large job growth of 8,000 workers anticipated in the center. These varied uses, including office space and retail, will help support the economy of the center and keep jobs and spending local. Creating a friendly pedestrian environment will encourage workers and residents to take short trips within the center instead of traveling elsewhere, supporting more jobs to be located here, and improving employee retention. This will also help the center reach its mode split goal of 60% non-SOV travel by encouraging more trips by walking and biking.

Illustrative Project: Increasing Uses on Corridor Connecting Centers

Figure 7: Illustrative image of transit improvement on corridor connecting to Redmon Overlake

This project is on a corridor leading into a regional growth center. The improvements on this corridor will connect the center's residents to other regional amenities and make it easier for people who work in and visit the center to get there. This project includes widening the street to support transit improvement for an upcoming BRT line and bicycle improvements. It also includes new sidewalks, illumination, landscaping, and traffic signalization improvements.

The center is planning for 2,000 additional jobs by 2044. While there are many people who both live and work in the center, many people still commute from outside. To facilitate these commute patterns, and increase mobility options, these improvements will increase the efficiency of transit, provide safer pedestrian amenities, and support increased non-SOV mode share.

Provide transportation options for underserved communities

Centers and transit station areas represent a crucial opportunity to address equitable access to affordable housing, services, high-quality transit, and employment, as well as to build on existing community assets. These areas encompass some of the region's most diverse communities, and prioritizing transportation projects in and connecting to centers can help advance racial equity. Transportation projects should benefit historically underserved and marginalized populations, in particular those areas defined as one of PSRC's six equity focus areas: people of color, people with low incomes, older adults, youth, people with disabilities, and people with limited English proficiency.

Creating project benefits

The items below are suggestions for identifying transportation project to support a jurisdiction's existing centers planning and foster improved transportation options for underserved communities.

Factors to consider:

- Potential user groups and demographic data in the center
- Safety data on recent crashes
- Existing inventory and gaps in pedestrian and bicycle network
- Existing and planned transit services
- Opportunity mapping (PSRC's Housing Opportunities by Place tool)
- Engagement during project development/letters of support from community groups

Illustrative Project: Safety and Mobility Improvements in Station Area

This project constructs safety and mobility improvements for people walking, biking, and using transit directly surrounding a light rail station area in a regional growth center. The project provides many mobility improvements, including bicycle lanes, buffered sidewalks, reduced crosswalk distances, and other safety features such as lighting and intersection improvements .

This center has a high share of households in the "Extremely Low" or "Very Low" income categories and a higher share of households without vehicles than the rest of the county. In the past 5 years, there were 8 reported collisions between a driver operating a vehicle and a pedestrian or a bicyclist. Today, there are no existing bicycle facilities, and many streets lack sidewalks. Community groups have called for safer facilities, especially as the center continues to grow and even more residents and visitors are accessing the center's amenities.

Resources:

- PSRC Displacement Risk Mapping and Opportunity Mapping
- PSRC Community Data Profiles
- PSRC Project Selection Resource Map