



## Urban Corridors Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

### 1. What are Urban Corridors?

Urban Corridors are the major arterials on our street system and the compact mixed land uses that surround them.

Urban Corridors are envisioned to gradually redevelop into area with:

- Well-designed buildings that front the street with street-level windows and welcoming entrances
- Wide sidewalks, street trees, landscaping and benches that make the street safe, comfortable and interesting
- Retail businesses, restaurants, and other commercial uses mixed with libraries, schools, clinics and other services that meet the daily needs of and provide jobs for nearby residents
- Frequent and convenient bus services that makes the bus more appealing than driving
- Streets that are human scale and oriented towards people, not dominated by cars
- Vehicle traffic that is slow but moving, so that the presence of traffic has a low impact to people on the sidewalk and in the buildings
- A mix of residences including apartments, townhouses, and small cottages at a density that supports the nearby businesses
- Carefully designed streets and buildings off the corridor that help to transition from the mixed, active areas to quieter residential neighborhoods

Urban Corridors are an integrated land use and transportation concept. The Urban Corridors approach is key to the region's ability to avoid sprawl and reduce dependence on the auto. These areas allow people to live in attractive urban neighborhoods where they can walk or use transit to get to work and to meet their daily needs. The concept relies on building walkable streets and investing in a quality transit service. This type of transit is not possible without the mix of compact land uses. Our Urban Corridors are the only places where we can reasonably reduce car trips. A reduction in vehicle use is central to our region's sustainability efforts.

### 2. What is the basis for the Urban Corridors concept?

The Urban Corridors concept first appeared in the 1993 Thurston Regional Transportation Plan, where it was then incorporated into Olympia's 1994 Comprehensive Plan. The concept originated as a regional strategy to redevelop the old highways dominated by low-density, strip commercial development, and move toward less auto-oriented land use patterns.

Today, major arterial streets in our region are lined with low-density residential and office uses with typical strip commercial development. Individual, randomly spaced driveways into each business interrupt the flow of vehicular and pedestrian traffic, and the typical pattern of buildings set back behind parking lots makes pedestrian access difficult and uninviting. The

disjointed signage, landscaping, and building designs are also often unattractive. As a result, these areas have limited appeal as places to live, work, and shop.

The Urban Corridors concept is a strategy to make more efficient use of this existing infrastructure, to reduce environmental impacts associated with auto use and sprawl, and transition unattractive and underused land uses to maintain and create a more livable community. The concept is not unique to Olympia; it is a key part of the Thurston Regional Transportation Plan (RTP).

*Note:* Both the 1993 RTP and 1994 Comp Plan used the term “High Density Corridors.” For the Comp Plan Update, staff changed the term to “Urban Corridors” to be consistent with the term now used for regional planning purposes. For Olympia, this change also helps to distinguish the Urban Corridor planning concept from the zoning designations High Density Corridor 1, 2, 3, and 4. Although related to Urban Corridors - just as any designation on the Future Land Use map relates to zoning - HDC zones have a different geography than Urban Corridors.

The basics of the regional strategy are captured in the 1994 Comprehensive Plan, as well as Olympia’s draft Comprehensive Plan Update. The general policy direction to support the Urban Corridors concept includes:

- Reducing dependence on motor vehicle use. Reduced vehicle use has social, environmental and economic benefits.
- Well-planned density leads to efficient provision of public services – water, sewer, emergency services, waste collection and transportation.
- Targeting density allows the preservation of rural and natural areas.
- Transit can absorb a great share of future trips that would otherwise be made by car. The best quality transit in this community already exists on our urban corridors. There is potential for these corridors to absorb more residents and employees if they are well designed and people can take the bus, walk, bike, as well as drive.
- Urban Corridors integrate transportation and land use planning goals: an efficient way to locate new growth and create land use patterns that support walking, biking and transit. Well-designed, dense, mixed land uses provide an opportunity to create social interaction, community identity and a healthy economy.
- Good urban form and multi modal streets are needed to make dense areas pleasant and function efficiently.

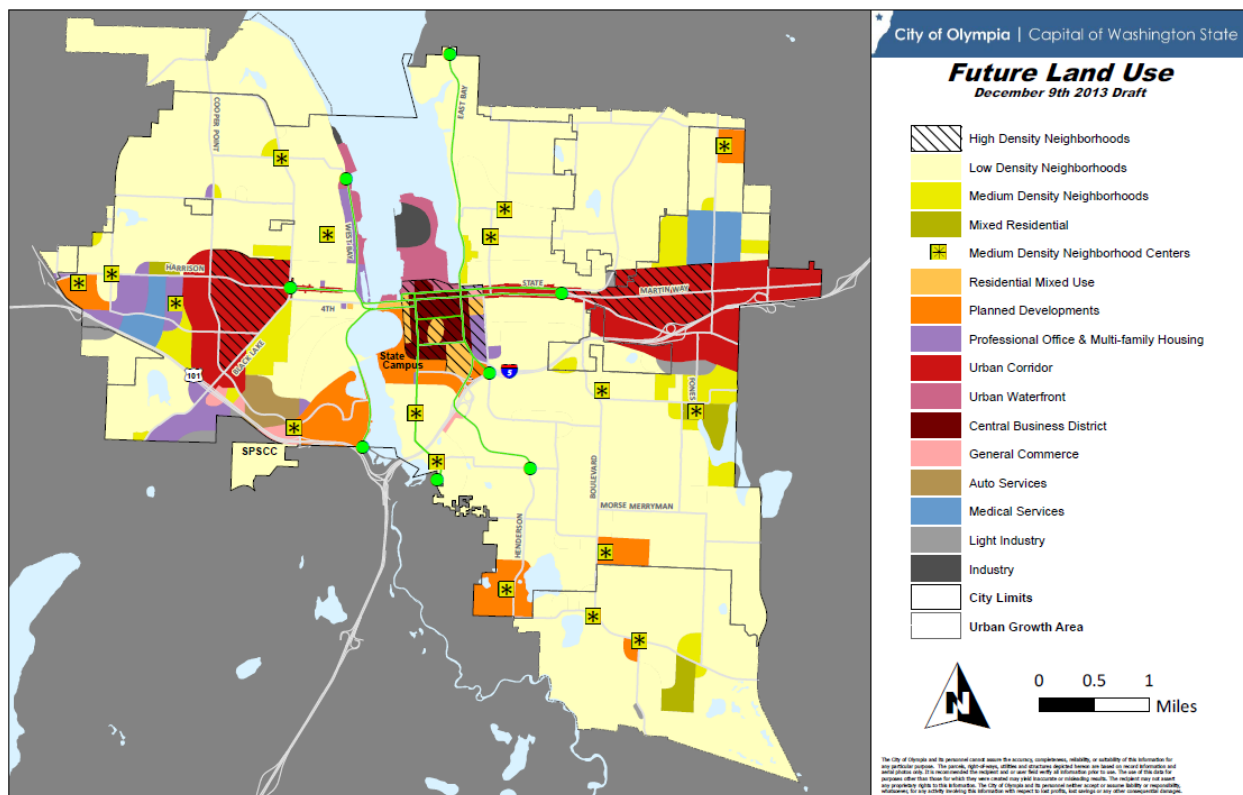
A recent intent of regional policymakers is to identify select districts along the urban corridor where jurisdictions will work extra hard to attract growth (the Planning Commission identifies such nodes in their Urban Neighborhoods proposal.) The old HDC concept seemed to imply a rather homogenous distribution of growth throughout each corridor.

### 3. How does the land use designation “Urban Corridor” in the Comprehensive Plan influence zoning regulations?

Land use designations are shown on the Future Land Use (FLU) map, and have corresponding definitions, goals and policies in the Land Use and Urban Design chapter of the Comprehensive Plan. The Future Land Use Map is a requirement of the Growth Management Act. It shows the approximate locations of various residential, commercial, industrial and mixed use land uses in the city and its growth area.

The FLU is not a zoning map; this map, along with related goals, policies and definitions provide guidance for establishing zoning and other regulations, to ensure land use and development is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. The entire Plan is considered when establishing zoning; for example, affordable housing, walkable design and economic vitality policies – to name just a few – are considered when establishing zoning for downtown housing.

This is what the current draft Future Land Use map looks like (Urban Corridors are in red):



The draft plan recommends a more flexible format for the FLU that our current “mirrored maps;” it collapses the 34 existing land use categories into 14. There is more flexibility within this future land use scenario since a range of potential zoning districts may be compatible with each land use designation. A FLU-Zoning cross-walk has yet to be adopted; this is on the Planning Commission’s current work plan for 2014.

**4. If more than one zone fits within the land use designation where my house is, does that mean I could automatically be rezoned to another compatible zone?**

No. No matter what, any rezone requires a public hearing and decision by the City Council. In evaluating rezones, the City refers to:

- 1) The Land Use Designation descriptions in the Land Use chapter of the Comp Plan.
- 2) The rest of the goals and policies in the Plan. These provide additional considerations to apply concerning various uses and locales throughout the city.
- 3) The specific purpose statements of each zoning district in Title 18 of the Municipal Code, which in some cases provides more criteria for where to locate the zone than provisions in the Comprehensive Plan.
- 4) The public

**5. Why does the Future Land Use map in the draft Comprehensive Plan Update look so different than the Future Land Use map in the existing Comp Plan?**

Currently, each time the City considers a rezone, it must also consider a Comprehensive Plan amendment to change the Future Land Use (FLU) map. This is because the City's Zoning Map mirrors our Future Land Use Map (FLU); each of the 34 land use categories on the FLU has an almost identical zoning district on the Zoning map. The FLU proposed in the Plan Update has a different format, with the 34 categories reduced to 14 more general ones. If this type of FLU map is adopted, rezones consistent with the FLU will not require a Comp Plan amendment, but will still require a rezone process.

**6. Are all areas identified as Urban Corridors expected to develop in the same way?**

The proposal in the Comprehensive Plan Update is for the Urban Corridor areas to look and feel different as they extend from the arterials into the neighborhoods, as well as along the corridors themselves. PL13.5 in the draft plan describes a transition from high intensity land uses along the arterials to less intense land uses as you move one quarter mile from either side of the arterial.

The draft plan also outlines 3 different categories for the corridors, as described in PL13.7:

PL13.7 - Designate different categories of corridors generally as follows:

- 1) Areas nearest downtown along Harrison Avenue east of Division Street and the upper portions of the State Street/Fourth Avenue corridor to the intersection of Martin Way and Pacific Avenue should blend travel modes with priority for pedestrian, bicycle and transit systems. These areas should provide for a mix of low-intensity professional offices, commercial uses and multi-family buildings forming a continuous and pedestrian-oriented edge along the arterial streets. There shall be a 35' height limit if

any portion of the building is within 100' from a single family residential zone, provided that the City may establish an additional height bonus for residential development.

- 2) The area along Harrison Avenue west from the vicinity of Division Street to Cooper Point Road -- and the portions of Martin Way and Pacific Avenues from Lilly Road to the intersection of Martin Way and Pacific Avenue – will transition away from cars being the primary transportation mode to a more walkable environment, where bicycling and transit are also encouraged. Redevelopment of the area will create more density and new buildings that gradually create a continuous street edge and more pedestrian-friendly streetscape.
- 3) The outer portions of the urban corridors west of the vicinity of the Capital Mall and east of Lilly Road will primarily be accessed by motor vehicles with provisions for pedestrian and bicycle travel; gradual transition from existing suburban character is to form continuous pedestrian-friendly streetscapes, but more regulatory flexibility will be provided to acknowledge the existing suburban nature of these areas (see Capital Mall special area below).

## **7. What is the Urban Corridors Task Force?**

For several years, regional policy makers have been pursuing strategies to achieve the Urban Corridors vision. Little redevelopment has occurred as envisioned in the plans from the early 1990's and they sought to understand why. Thus, the Urban Corridors Task Force (UCTF) was formed, and composed of policy makers from Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) and the Transportation Policy Board, citizens and business representatives.

From 2009 through 2011, the UCTF worked to establish an understanding of conditions along the region's key urban corridors, to identify and understand barriers to achieving adopted land use visions, and identify potential opportunities for addressing those barriers. Members looked at the relationship between transportation and land use in these corridors, and the market factors that influence the viability of infill and redevelopment projects in this region. As a result, the UCTF produced a list of measures for cities to pursue to achieve the urban corridor vision.

## **8. What are “nodes”?**

Referred to as “Corridor Districts” in TRPC’s *Revitalizing Urban Transit Corridors* report, nodes are specific, strategic locations guided by detailed plans and a focus on innovative development strategies. Vibrant and full of activity, nodes would offer a full range of services and activities to support nearby neighborhoods. The idea is that over time, nodes develop their own strong sense of place and local identity; residents within a ½ mile radius would travel to these nodes without ever having to get in a car.

While the entire corridor may take decades to redevelop, quicker results may be realized by focusing on one or more nodes which would then serve as examples of what is possible. Nodes

are not necessarily large; although, according to the report, in order to support neighborhood-scale retail and services, a minimum of 3,500 households with a half mile radius would be needed.

The Planning Commission's Urban Neighborhoods proposal identifies three high-density areas, which could be considered "nodes" or areas to contain a "node."

### **9. What are Focus Areas? How do they relate to the concept of nodes?**

The Comprehensive Plan draft outlines "focus areas," which are select areas of Olympia, both in and out of the Urban Corridors, identified for further study and planning in cooperation with property owners and residents. The three "focus areas" within the Urban Corridor are described in the next question; two focus areas, *West Bay Drive* and *Auto Mall*, are not within the Urban Corridor. Focus areas are places where multiple planning issues and opportunities exist, and further study will help to guide land use development and public services.

Staff did not propose these areas as "nodes," although a node could be located within a larger focus area, a node would be a more specific location where development is guided by detailed plans and partnerships; and efforts related to a specified node would include developing incentives and strategies to spur a specific type of development.

### **10. What Focus Areas identified in the Comprehensive Plan draft are in the Urban Corridor, and why?**

Three focus areas within Urban Corridors are identified in the Comprehensive Plan draft. These focus areas, which are identified on the Transportation Corridors Map and described in the Land Use & Urban Design Chapter, are:

- **Lilly-Martin Area:** This area contains much of the last remaining "greenfield" in Olympia – undeveloped land - where infill can occur somewhat easier than redevelopment. The area holds potential because of its proximity to one of our region's major employment sectors, health and medical services, and the related opportunity to increase housing and services in the area.
- **Pacific-Lilly Area:** This area between Martin Way and Pacific Avenue is the only focus area identified in the 1994 plan, where it is referred to as the "Stoll Road Area." This area has frequent transit service, and a large amount of commercial uses, with low amounts of housing. The potential to shape the commercial areas as redevelopment occurs can lead to a greater mix of uses. The criteria described in policy [PL15.4](#) arose out of the public process associated with previous comprehensive planning efforts.
- **Capital Mall Area:** This area has been identified as having one of the best resident-job matches in Thurston County: in this area, a large number of people live close to where they work. It has ideal conditions for achieving a vision for bustling, mixed-use urban centers.

Actions are needed to improve the density and mix, and enhance the street system for more modes.

These areas are within the same or similar proximity to the High Density Neighborhoods identified by the Planning Commission in their recommendation.

### **11. What is the density needed to support fixed route transit service along the corridors?**

There is no simple answer. To create and sustain efficient transit service depends not only on residential population and employment near or along a corridor, but also other factors such as street design, mix of uses and street connectivity that help influence the use of transit. Industry experience and research suggest residential densities in the range of 4.5 to 7 units per acre, typically within a ¼ mile of a service route, represent a minimum threshold for sustaining service. This also represents a point at which an overall mode shift away from driving can begin to increase exponentially.

Sustaining demand for transit service tends to increase more dramatically between 20 to 40 households per residential acre. Today, the densities in most Olympia neighborhoods, outside of downtown, fall well below this range (see Olympia's Transportation Mobility Strategy.) However, areas designated for transit-supportive growth could reach this threshold quickly with new infill development. Efforts to promote infill development, even at modest densities, could have exponential impact on increasing transit and non-motorized travel use.

The current approach in the existing comprehensive plan is to set transit-compatible urban densities so that new development fills in already-developed areas. The currently adopted plan recommends setting a minimum density of approximately 7 units per acre (equivalent to roughly 14 to 20 persons per acre) and a minimum of 15 units per acre in other areas along or near a corridor. (Density targets were removed by the Planning Commission in their draft.)

Beyond population and employment density, other factors include:

- **Design** is especially important as it relates to pedestrian access and safety. Street design, security, lighting, building design and orientation to the street affect whether transit stops are inviting to use and safe to get to. Even at high density areas, people will not use transit if it is difficult or dangerous to access a bus stop.
- **The mixture of uses** in an area can influence the attractiveness of transit. If transit brings people to locations where more than one function is possible, transit is all the more attractive for that trip.
- **Street connectivity** is important to transit access and operations. Street networks and connectivity to transit supportive corridors provides customers direct walking or biking

routes to bus stops. Transit operators can create more efficient options for routes, too, including high-frequency service (15 minutes or better) where demand is warranted.

While the City does not operate bus service in Olympia, it can directly influence its success. City land use policies and ability to attract infill development ultimately drive the demand for transit service and shape a transit-supportive less auto dependent environment. Improving transit service options will require dense, mixed-use corridors with pedestrian-friendly access to transit stops and stations.

### **12. Can we have nodes without density in between?**

It is not essential that the entire corridor be fully developed in order for the nodes concept to work. However, the function and efficiency of the corridors will increasingly improve as the mix and density of land uses increases between these nodes. Overall, the corridor will benefit from compact mixed land uses along the length of the corridor.

### **13. How do Urban Corridors relate to Strategy Corridors?**

All of Olympia's Urban Corridors are "Strategy Corridors." The Strategy Corridor concept is identified in the [Thurston Regional Transportation Plan](#) .

Strategy Corridors are places where road widening is not a preferred option to address congestion problems. This may be because the street is already at the maximum five-lane width, or that adjacent land uses are either fully built out or are environmentally sensitive.

In Strategy Corridors, a different approach is needed to maintain mobility into the future. Actions to reduce auto trips, such as building sidewalks, streetscape improvements and bicycle facilities, and improving the bus services, will relieve traffic congestion and increase capacity on these corridors.

Efforts to increase the density and mix of land uses will also be important to the success of Strategy Corridors. It is easier to get people out of their cars when housing is closer to jobs and services. Trips are shorter and more easily made by walking and biking. Transit is frequent and inviting for longer trips outside the immediate neighborhood.

### **14. How do Urban Corridors relate to Bus Corridors?**

All Urban Corridors are Bus Corridors. The Bus Corridor concept was introduced in the [Olympia Transportation Mobility Strategy](#) and builds on the region's Urban Corridor and Strategy Corridor policy approach.

Bus Corridors are major streets with high-quality, frequent transit service. The system of bus corridors would allow people more spontaneous use of transit. The first priority for Bus



Corridor development will be along Strategy Corridors, where transit is expected to help resolve traffic and capacity issues.

Building Bus Corridors is a major new commitment to direct more trips to transit. The City and Intercity Transit will jointly invest in these corridors. Intercity Transit will provide fast, frequent and reliable bus service along these corridors.

Along these corridors, the City will provide operational improvements, such as longer green time at traffic signals so that buses are not stuck in congestion. The Smart Corridors project underway in Lacey, Olympia and Tumwater is beginning to make these signal improvements.

Attractive streetscapes, pedestrian crossings and sidewalks will enhance people's access to transit. The mix of land uses and increased densities along Urban Corridors will be crucial to the success of these bus corridors.

#### **15. Of the Urban Corridor Task Force recommendations, what has been done so far?**

- On February 25, 2014, the Olympia City Council adopted a joint resolution to support *The Sustainable Development Plan for the Thurston Region*. The other cities and towns within Thurston County have or intend to also sign the resolution this year. The Plan includes the following goal:
  - By 2035, 72% of all (new and existing) households in our cities, towns, and unincorporated growth areas will be within a half-mile (comparable to a 20-minute walk) of an urban center, corridor, or neighborhood center with access to goods and services to meet some of their daily needs.
- On January 31, 2014, a joint Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater Planning Commission meetings on Urban Corridors was held in the Thurston Regional Planning Council boardroom.
- In November 2012, the Cities of Olympia, Tumwater and Lacey passed a joint Resolution accepting the recommendations of the Urban Corridors task force and committing to take a leadership role in implementing the recommendations and integrating the recommendations into local comprehensive plans.
- The Cities of Olympia, Tumwater and Lacey are participating in a [HUD Sustainable Communities Challenge grant](#) being administered by TRPC. The grant explores tools to encourage infill and redevelopment in three districts along urban corridors. The district Olympia is addressing the Martin Way District, west of Lilly Road. Tumwater is addressing the Brewery area, while Lacey will look at its Woodland District. The project began in 2012, and Olympia's portion is currently underway.
- [Smart Corridors](#) is a regional project to install transit priority equipment at traffic signals along 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, State Avenue, Martin Way, Pacific Avenue, Capitol Way and Downtown. Equipment will be installed in 2013. In 2014 or 2015, Intercity Transit will

begin to benefit from these operational changes; buses approaching a signal will trigger the signal to extend the green time. Olympia's share of the cost of this project is nearly \$1 million, the majority of which is paid for with Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Funds.

**Additional Information:**

- Enger, Sue. December 4, 2012. *The Density Transportation Connection*, MRSC Insight. Online: <http://insight.mrsc.org/2012/12/04/the-densitytransportation-connection/>.
- Owen, John & Easton, Greg. June 2009. *Creating Walkable Business Districts*. Online: [http://www.trpc.org/regionalplanning/landuse/Documents/UCTF/Creating\\_Walkable\\_Neighborhood\\_Districts.pdf](http://www.trpc.org/regionalplanning/landuse/Documents/UCTF/Creating_Walkable_Neighborhood_Districts.pdf).
- Thurston Regional Planning Council. August 31, 2011. Notes and materials from the August 31, 2011 Urban Corridors Task Force Work Session. Online: <http://www.trpc.org/regionalplanning/landuse/Pages/UCTF-Aug30,2011PresentationMaterials.aspx>.
- Urban Corridors Task Force. Additional Resources. Online: <http://www.trpc.org/regionalplanning/landuse/Pages/UCTFAdditionalResources.aspx>.
- City of Olympia Urban Corridors webpage (please use 'Search.' No URL at time of printing.)