

# Regional Transportation and Land Use Planning

*How the Portland metropolitan region became a national model for innovative and effective land use and transportation planning.*

## Just like other cities

Until the late 1960s, Portland was just like other American cities its size. It grew up around a streetcar



system, which then faded away as automobiles came to dominate urban transportation. Faced with

low-cost, widespread auto use and starved of capital, transit declined rapidly. Aggressive highway building—as an outgrowth of the Interstate Highway program initiated in 1956—became the logical solution to the growing region's transportation needs.

With growing auto use came growing congestion. By 1959 the local governments, under the coordination of a new regional planning agency called the Columbia Region Association of Governments (CRAG), initiated the first

comprehensive analysis of travel demand in the region. Its Portland-Vancouver Metropolitan Area



Transportation Study (PVMATS), completed in 1966, assumed no constraints on highway travel—a common approach for its time. By 1971, it had produced a Transportation Plan for 1990, recommending 54 major new highway projects, many of them freeways and expressways to be “superimposed on the existing street network.”

process, the Metro Council adopted the *2040 Growth Concept* that focused dense urban growth in the central city and a hierarchy of regional and town centers connected by highways and high capacity transit. The growth concept also identified areas for transit station communities and main streets that create a better environment for pedestrians and transit.



## Essential to the region's livability

The Portland metropolitan area has become a national model for innovative and effective land use and transportation planning—helping our region grow quickly while helping keep our communities and natural environment healthy and strong. As the public transportation provider in the region, TriMet plays a leading role in

these efforts. The region's light rail system has helped spur \$8.3 billion in transit-oriented development along MAX lines. Much of this development mixes residential with retail and other commercial use, creating communities where people can live, work and play. That has helped enrich our cities and neighborhoods while protecting them and our natural environment from sprawl, traffic congestion and associated air pollution.

Metro has authority to review local comprehensive plans to ensure that they meet the goals of the *Region 2040 Plan*. Metro identifies targets for local governments, including the 25 cities within its boundaries. Local zoning authority, however, establishes the actual land use pattern in a community.

## Implementing the transportation system

Metro's *Regional Transportation Plan* (RTP) implements the transportation elements of the *Region 2040 Plan*, following policies contained in the plan. All major transportation decisions in the Portland region are made by the Joint Policy Advisory Committee on Transportation (JPACT), made up of local elected officials and agency heads. JPACT allocates federal funds to both highway and transit projects and provides the forum where the region's balanced approach to transportation is hammered out. After the planning phase is complete, TriMet moves projects into design, construction and operation and is the project owner.

Autos also frayed the fabric of the city. The grand Portland Hotel, completed in 1890, was demolished in 1951 to make way for a parking lot. In 1972, air pollution from cars in downtown Portland violated federal standards one day out of every three.

## Transit in trouble

Meanwhile transit ridership continued to fall. From a high of 160 million rides during World War II, transit ridership fell to 16 million in 1969. That year, the Rose City Transit

Company, facing bankruptcy, demanded a major fare hike and threatened to discontinue all service.



In response, the Oregon Legislature passed House Bill 1808 in 1969, allowing establishment of public transit and transportation districts and providing them with the power to raise revenue through a payroll tax. The Portland region, which stretches into Multnomah, Clackamas, and Washington counties, formed the Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District of Oregon, or TriMet, to take over the struggling local bus companies, including Rose City Transit in the city and the Blue Lines in the suburbs, and to provide public transit service throughout the new district.

## Re-thinking the transportation problem

In the early 1970s, the region and the state experienced a revolution in how they envisioned their future. In 1971, the Oregon Legislature set the stage with Senate Bill 100, establishing the country's first statewide land-

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use planning laws to protect the state's livability and rural farmland by preventing unchecked sprawl. Two years later, the State adopted the Land Conservation Development Commission's 14 statewide planning goals and required cities and counties to develop comprehensive plans to meet those goals.

## Downtown Portland focuses on transit for revival

Portland civic leaders seized the opportunity to refocus investment in the central city. The 1972 Downtown Plan declared Portland would first decide the kind of place it wanted to be and then invest in appropriate



transportation infrastructure, rather than letting cars dictate urban form. It envisioned a walkable "24-hour downtown"

with housing and abundant ground-floor retail to revive the central city. The Plan established SW 5th and 6th avenues as the office and retail spine for downtown. It also designated 5th and 6th avenues as primarily transit streets for buses and the streets on either side of 5th and 6th as primarily auto access streets. This set the tone for development of a balanced regional transportation system.

### Public transportation steps forward

By 1973, the newly-formed TriMet had completed an *Immediate Action Plan* and a *1990 Master Plan* to reverse public transportation's decline in the region. The plans supported concentrating transit service in downtown Portland on bus-only transit malls along S.W. 5th and 6th avenues and also recommended building a series of suburban park-and-ride lots to attract auto

users to the bus system and developing transitways in major corridors to enhance bus service. Light rail is mentioned only briefly, but was not recommended for further consideration.

### The move to a balanced transportation system

In May 1973, Governor Tom McCall appointed a task force to create a new transportation plan for the Portland region. Their groundbreaking 1975 *Interim Transportation Plan* said the region should scale back highway building to a handful of basic needs and develop a balanced transportation system that included a network of transitways in major travel corridors, focusing first on the Banfield Freeway corridor.

Equally important, the plan suggested future development and land use in the region should be tied to corresponding transportation development. Portland became the first major urban area in the U.S. to adopt such a philosophy.

In 1974, public opposition to the planned Mount Hood Freeway crested as studies showed how the project along the Powell Boulevard corridor would destroy



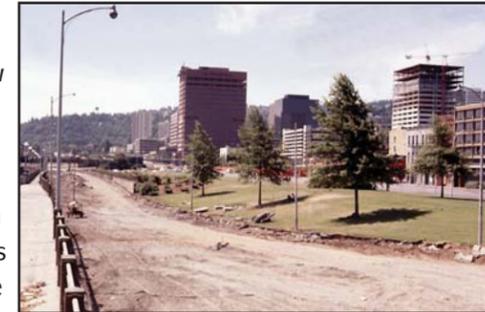
southeast Portland and Gresham neighborhoods at a cost of over \$400 million in 1972 dollars. That year, the Portland City Council and the

Multnomah County Board officially rejected the project and began considering other ways of providing access in this east-west corridor—reflecting the region's new approach to land use and transportation.

## Investing in a livable city

By the late 1970s Portland had begun to transform as it embraced regional land use and transportation planning to promote and preserve its livability:

- In 1976, Portland replaced a four-lane downtown expressway with today's Waterfront Park.
- By 1977, the new Transit Mall on SW 5th and 6th avenues became the



- focus for downtown redevelopment, as envisioned in the *Downtown Plan*. The region studied transit options for the Banfield (Portland to Gresham) corridor, and light rail emerged as the preferred alternative over the bus transitway initially proposed.
- In 1981, the City of Portland rejected plans to build a 10-floor parking garage in the heart of downtown, ultimately choosing to construct Pioneer Courthouse Square—

today often referred to as "Portland's living room"—in response to community demand.



### Beginning the light rail network

The Federal Aid Highway Act of 1973 made it possible for states to transfer funds from unneeded freeway projects to other transportation projects, including transit. In 1977, Oregon asked to transfer funding from

the discontinued Mount Hood Freeway project to the Banfield Light Rail Project. Receiving federal approval in 1980, this landmark decision—brokered by the Mayor of Portland, the Governor and the head of the Oregon Transportation Commission—marked the beginning of a light rail network that has served as a catalyst and focal point for development throughout the region, and has emerged as the backbone for the regional public transit system.

### Adopting a 50-year land use and transportation vision for the region

Affirming the region's new direction in 1978, voters replaced CRAG with the Metropolitan Service District, now known as Metro. This new elected regional government was given expanded powers and responsibilities to plan for the region's future. A year later Metro established the region's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) as required by the Statewide Planning Law to contain sprawl and provide cost-effective urban services and transportation within the boundary. By 1983 it had adopted a new *Regional Transportation Plan* to guide investments in the region's transportation system.

In 1992 voters approved a new charter for Metro, strengthening its land use responsibilities and authority, and directing it to prepare a vision to guide the region's growth for the next 50 years. The *Region*

*2040 Plan* was created to guide growth for the entire region, analyzing several growth scenarios and their implications for transportation, housing, urban services, the environment, land use, parks and open space, and other key indicators. In 1994, after an extensive public

