

Downtown Bellevue Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center Plan

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

In the past few decades, Bellevue has evolved from a bedroom community to a major regional center. In the process it has become the second largest employment center in King County and the economic hub of the Eastside. The strong local economy has led to the creation of a dynamic Downtown that is one of the chief Urban Centers in the region. Past land use decisions have funneled the city's share of regional job and housing growth into Downtown Bellevue, evolving the downtown into a center of economic and human activity.

With this growth comes the challenge of moving people and goods amid increasing traffic congestion. The need to support and encourage alternatives to driving alone has long been recognized in Bellevue and throughout the region and state. The downtown's first development-conditioned transportation management programs (TMPs) were implemented in the early 1980s, and other transportation demand management activities followed, including passage of the state Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) law in 1991. Under the CTR law, employers work to achieve specified targets for reducing the number of drive-alone commute trips by their employees. The CTR law affects larger employers, generally those with 100 or more full-time employees at a worksite.

These and other previous trip reduction efforts on the part of employers, the city, transit agencies, and others have already reduced dependence on the single-occupant automobile in the Downtown. However, additional trips will need to be reduced downtown to retain mobility in the face of continued growth. The 2008-2011 Downtown Bellevue Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center plan provides a customized downtown-wide trip reduction program to meet this challenge.

The new state Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center (GTEC) program is a component of the 2006 revision of state CTR law. The state allows jurisdictions the option of designating and planning for GTECs in areas of dense population and employment, with potential state funding for implementing the plans. The goal of the state's GTEC program is to improve access to dense employment and population centers while increasing the portion of people not driving alone during peak periods on the state highway system.

Under this GTEC plan, the city of Bellevue has set goals and targets designed to maintain or improve transportation access and increase the proportion of non-drive-alone travel as the Downtown continues to grow. In contrast to the base CTR program, the GTEC program extends to downtown workers and residents in their entirety—not just larger employment sites. These goals and targets are designed to support achievement of local and regional goals for transportation and land use.

Bellevue faces obstacles in reducing single-occupant-vehicle travel and maintaining mobility in the Downtown. Bellevue's downtown street grid was laid out in the 1950s. Following innovative theories of the time, circulation was based on 600-foot-long "superblocks," and the primary transportation objective was easy automobile access. Today, this large grid remains. The resulting lack of connections creates challenges for nonmotorized travel and general circulation in the Downtown, although the situation has been improved with completion of missing links in the street grid, mid-block pedestrian routes, and an east-west pedestrian corridor that transects the downtown. Other access challenges in the downtown are its square shape that is difficult to

fully serve by transit; wide arterials that are daunting for pedestrians to cross; and sidewalks directly adjacent to traffic lanes.

To its credit, Downtown Bellevue boasts a transit center with abundant service, generally pedestrian-friendly urban design, innovative architecture and public art, and a downtown park, library, and other urban amenities that give it a sense of identity and place. The city's Downtown Implementation Plan seeks to create a place that is "viable, livable, and memorable," and a combination of public and private efforts are continuing to lead the Downtown successfully in that direction.

1.2 Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center (GTEC) Planning Process

The state law, rules, and guidelines for GTECs specify that GTEC plans are to be certified for compliance with regional growth management strategies by regional transportation planning organizations, and then forwarded to the state for approval and funding determination. These regional and state activities will occur in late 2007 and early 2008, following plan development in the first half of 2007. This plan comprises the city's application for GTEC certification to the Puget Sound Regional Council.

As a first step in developing the plan, in early 2007 the city of Bellevue identified stakeholders and a process for plan development that would allow the stakeholders to work together to produce an effective plan. A GTEC project team was set up that included representatives from the city, the downtown transportation management association ("TransManage"), and the King County Metro Market Development group. TransManage, an arm of the Bellevue Downtown Association, works with the employer, property manager, employee, and resident communities in a face-to-face manner and thus provided the perspectives of these groups to the team. King County Metro staff contributed their expertise on developing markets for non-drive-alone modes. The project team met several times from February through May 2007 to discuss the vision, goals, objectives, process, targets, and various plan elements.

Throughout plan development, the city performed outreach to the business and employer community by presenting and receiving feedback at two TransManage Advisory Board meetings. This advisory board includes members of the business community, Bellevue Downtown Association board members, an employee transportation coordinator, and transit agency representatives. In late May 2007, the city distributed special GTEC informational flyers to the members of the downtown community—employers, property managers, and residents—plus hand delivery to many employers for distribution to their employees. The flyers provided information about the plan, and opportunities for input, including a City of Bellevue Downtown Open House and Transportation Commission and City Council briefings. The city posted information and a preliminary draft GTEC plan on its website and provided a special email address and phone number for comments and questions. As a result of these efforts, city staff received and evaluated more than 40 comments.

The city reached out to other jurisdictions by conducting an Eastside jurisdiction meeting in April 2007 to share information and brainstorm insights and ideas. This was in addition to ongoing county and regional coordination meetings, as well as informal coordination. Also, the city worked with transit agencies to acquire transit information.

1.3 Downtown Bellevue Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center: Vision, Goals, and Objectives

The vision for Downtown Bellevue as a GTEC draws from the Downtown Implementation Plan and other plans and policies for the Downtown.

Vision of Downtown Bellevue as a Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center:

- *A viable, livable, memorable, accessible, pedestrian-friendly area;*
- *Serving as the symbolic and functional heart of the Eastside region;*
- *Containing a dense, compact mixture of jobs and housing;*
- *Supported by a viable network of transportation infrastructure and services in order to move more people with fewer cars;*
- *Resulting in a human-scaled, active environment.*

The goal for Bellevue's GTEC defines the future condition that needs to be achieved in order to produce the GTEC vision.

Goal of Downtown Bellevue Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center:

To evolve an environment supportive of non-drive-alone travel and grow the non-single occupant vehicle travel market, in order to reduce the single-occupant vehicle rate and vehicle miles traveled in Downtown Bellevue and thereby preserve mobility and livability in the face of future growth.

Objectives for Bellevue's GTEC describe methods for achieving the goal and vision. They reflect working partnerships between the public and private sectors, provision of a supportive plan framework and environment, and interacting with downtown commuters and employers to promote awareness of alternative travel options.

Objectives of Downtown Bellevue Growth and Transportation Efficiency Center:

- *To utilize public/private partnerships in order to market and promote multiple transportation options across all non-drive-alone modes.*
- *To increase awareness of travel options via marketing, outreach, and incentives.*
- *To provide incentive programs that are attractive to the downtown work force and population.*
- *To provide a framework of city and transit agency plans, policies, regulations, urban design guidelines, transit service, and infrastructure that supports alternative modes.*
- *To supply pedestrian and transit amenities that enhance the environment and encourage non-drive-alone travel.*
- *To address barriers to changing travel modes, such as parking issues.*
- *To maximize use of the regional high-occupancy vehicle system by downtown commuters.*
- *To work toward clearly defined single-occupant vehicle and vehicle miles traveled reduction targets.*
- *To measure progress toward targets during plan implementation in relation to overall market indicators.*
- *To serve as a model for other communities.*

1.4 GTEC Benefits

Development of a GTEC plan consolidates and strengthens the city's work to provide and market multiple travel options. If people have more choices for travel modes and are made aware of them, they retain greater ability to travel in and within downtown. Shifting trips to modes other than the single-occupant vehicle can lessen negative impacts of the automobile, including traffic congestion and poor air quality, and can reduce parking development costs. In short, GTEC efforts can make it possible for more people to access and move within downtown, making it a more convenient, lively, and human-scaled place in which to live, work, and visit.

1.5 Downtown Bellevue GTEC Targets and Planning Horizon

Targeted Population. The State's base CTR program is targeted toward larger employers, generally those with 100 or more full-time employees who are scheduled to arrive at work between 6:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m. The GTEC provision, however, is designed to go beyond this designated employer population by providing for a customized trip reduction program that is tailored to a particular community and addresses populations not served by the base CTR program.

For Downtown Bellevue, this emphasis is quite beneficial. Approximately 98 percent of downtown employers have fewer than 100 employees; this represents 81 percent of all downtown employees. A 2006 downtown transportation demand management market analysis showed a relatively low awareness of alternative transit options on the part of employers with fewer than 100 employees. Reaching out to reduce trips among the smaller employer population is an effort that Bellevue has already begun, and the downtown GTEC will provide a means to strengthen this effort.

A secondary focus of the GTEC will be residents of downtown. The downtown residential population has increased rapidly since the mid-1990s. As of 2007, there are 5,000 residents downtown, and their numbers are expected to increase to 14,000 by 2020.

In addition, the downtown employs a large number of retail workers. Bellevue contains one of the largest downtown regional centers in the state, and retail workers will continue to constitute a significant portion of downtown employees over time. However, due to commute times that do not always line up well with transit service, higher job turnover, and other factors, retail workers are less likely to shift to non-drive-alone commuting. Further, it makes sense to focus mode shift efforts on workers traveling primarily during peak commute times when the transportation system is under the greatest pressure. Retail workers will be considered in trip reduction programs because of their high numbers downtown, but not to the same degree as those working in other employment sectors.

GTEC Targets and Measuring Progress. State rules require that GTECs set a target for reduction of the single-occupant vehicle (SOV) rate for workers and/or residents of the GTEC. This target is required to be more aggressive than the base CTR program SOV reduction target, which is 10 percent by 2011. "More aggressive" can be defined as an absolute number of single-occupant vehicle trips and vehicle miles reduced than would occur under the base CTR program.

The city's GTEC target is based on applying the 10 percent rate to all employees downtown and deriving the absolute number. This amounts to approximately 5,000 additional persons not driving alone by 2011, as opposed to approximately 1,000 under the base CTR program.

1.6 Proposed GTEC Program Strategies

In order to meet this more aggressive target, the city proposes a number of strategies for the GTEC. These can be divided into three categories: plans, policies, and regulations; transportation infrastructure and service improvements; and marketing, incentives, and commute services.

Plans, Policies, and Regulations. In order to create a livable community and gain maximum efficiency out of the transportation system, transportation demand management and trip reduction efforts have been an important focus of the city for a number of years. Therefore, the city's planning and policy framework to support GTEC goals is largely in place. The GTEC planning process included a review of these plans and policies.

Transportation Infrastructure and Service Improvements. The city has long recognized the need for sufficient transportation infrastructure to support multiple travel options, and projects to improve sidewalks, pedestrian circulation, and transit efficiencies have been undertaken for many years. Two pedestrian and bicycle improvements to improve access to downtown are included in the city's 2007-2013 Capital Investment Program. In spite of these improvements, some gaps in pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure have been identified and recommended for completion in Chapter 2, Background and Gap Analysis.

Transit service and infrastructure is key to reducing drive-alone trips. King County Metro and Sound Transit provide extensive service to the Downtown, as is warranted by its density and large employment population. Chapter 2, Background and Gap Analysis, has identified gaps in transit service needed to support the GTEC. This GTEC Plan includes a recommendation that the city continue its ongoing work with transit partners to provide service as needed.

Marketing, Incentives, and Commute Services. These activities provide a means to inform, increase awareness, and induce the willingness to give another travel option a try. The intent of this element of the GTEC plan is to work in partnership with employers, property managers, and employees (as well as the secondary target of residents) to identify what marketing and incentive activities would be attractive to them.

Bellevue's strategies will emphasize small employers, support carpooling and vanpooling in addition to other modes, and promote the FlexPass (or comparable future product). Bellevue has identified a package of marketing, incentive, and service strategies including the following (described further in Chapter 4, Strategies):

- FlexPass incentives and promotion
- Carpool, vanpool, and Vanshare promotions, such as enhanced ridematching and incentives for adding riders
- Free commute program consulting services offered to employers
- Customized building-wide programs or events offered to property managers
- Branded portfolio of services and incentives promoted to small employers
- *In Motion* residential-based trip reduction program
- Transit route promotion

- Various programs offered to help mitigate I-405 construction
- Parking issues inventory – catalog of issues for non-drive-alone commuters
- City of Bellevue transportation demand management (TDM) brand, identity, and website update
- Review/update of the city’s building Transportation Management Program code

1.7 Key Funding and Service Partnerships

Bellevue’s GTEC plan relies on extensive partnerships with other agencies. The transit systems run by King County Metro and Sound Transit are key to providing safe and reliable options to driving alone. These transit agencies are recognized as strongly significant in contributing considerable resources toward the common goal of increasing ridership and reducing the drive-alone rate.

TransManage, the Transportation Management Association arm of the Bellevue Downtown Association (a not-for-profit entity), provides services regarding multiple travel options to Downtown residents, employees, employers, and property managers. Often in a liaison role between government entities and the private sector, TransManage “eases the way” in promoting alternatives to driving alone and implementing various incentives provided by agencies. TransManage also provides management services for development-conditioned Transportation Management Program (TMP) buildings in the downtown. Building owners pay a fee for this service that is considered part of this GTEC plan. In addition to TMP services, TransManage’s role in the GTEC will be to implement many of the marketing and incentive programs that are included in the plan.

The Market Development group at King County Metro has been working in close partnership with City of Bellevue staff to increase and promote multiple travel options in the downtown. They share with the city of Bellevue and the Bellevue Downtown Association/TransManage a desire to maintain vitality and mobility in the downtown. King County Market Development passes through federal funds for downtown trip reduction efforts.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) is constructing capacity improvements to I-405 near Downtown Bellevue beginning in 2007. As part of this work, WSDOT has set aside construction mitigation funds to be spent promoting non-drive-alone travel options in the downtown. Thus, WSDOT is a significant financial partner in the GTEC plan.

This comprehensive package of funding and service partnerships is leveraged by local funding provided through the City of Bellevue Capital Investment Program.

1.8 Relationship to Commute Trip Reduction Plan

The GTEC plan is a component of the State Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) law that focuses on the downtown and enables a customized trip reduction program for the full employment and resident population. Bellevue is also updating its local Commute Trip Reduction plan, which defines the city’s policies and programs for implementing the State Base CTR program. (The base CTR program generally affects worksites with 100 or more full-time employees that are scheduled to arrive at work between 6:00 and 9:00 a.m.) In sum, the GTEC provides an opportunity to reach a broader population in an area where trip reduction efforts can benefit both Bellevue and the region.

2. Background Information and Gap Analysis

This chapter of the GTEC plan describes how the city sees the future of the downtown, and how the GTEC vision is integrated into that downtown vision. It describes the city's existing planning, policy, and regulatory framework for the GTEC. It also reviews existing and future baseline transportation conditions that are pertinent to the downtown GTEC, including transportation infrastructure and transit service. This chapter identifies transportation infrastructure and transit gaps and areas for improvement regarding support of GTEC goals. A compilation of specific Comprehensive Plan policies that relate to transportation demand management is included as Appendix A.

2.1 Downtown Bellevue Description, Boundaries, and Eligibility for GTEC

Downtown Bellevue consists of approximately thirty 600-foot blocks, plus four smaller blocks, and contains approximately 410 acres. The downtown contains two percent of the city's land area and 75 percent of the city's zoning capacity. The specific boundary of the Downtown Bellevue GTEC matches the city's Downtown Subarea boundary. See Figure A.

Figure A. Downtown Bellevue GTEC Boundary (Downtown Subarea)

